

Mom hears the door slam and the sound of her sixteen-year-old daughter running up the stairs. Mom stops what she was doing and listens more carefully. Was that a sob?

As she heads to the stairs herself, she can hear the door to her daughter's room slamming. This can't be good, mom thinks to herself. Her daughter had been at a school dance, and Ryan, the object of her biggest crush yet, had taken her to it. She had left the house giddy and nervous, but already, as mom climbed the stairs, she could hear that her daughter was, in fact, crying. The sob that forced its way out as she ran up to her room had been followed by a flood of tears.

Mom stood outside the door for a couple of minutes, not knowing whether she should knock or just let her daughter cry it out. Wondering wasn't necessary for long, though. Her daughter somehow knew she was there, and she got up to let her in.

"He used me, Mom," she said between heaves. "He used me. He doesn't care about me at all. It was so obvious. He only took me to the dance because he wanted to make Sarah jealous. I feel so stupid."

Breaks your heart, doesn't it? No one would ever want their child to go through something like that. People want to be loved, truly loved. They don't want to be objects, something that someone else deceptively uses to get at another person that they actually care about. That's a disgusting use of emotional manipulation, and it really hurts.

So what if I told you that God was using you to make someone else jealous? Did you understand that as I read from Romans 10 and 11 just now? *"I will make you [the Israelites] envious by those who are not a nation [Gentiles, non-Jews]; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding."*

There's no doubt about it. The words are very clear. God is using Gentiles like me and you to get at the Israelites. Paul was seeing more and more Gentiles come to faith in the one, true God, and he had to ask: *"Did God reject his people?"* Did he reject his chosen ones? No. They were still his chosen ones, and the rest of the nations in the world were not. He was using the Gentiles, Paul

was saying, in attempt to get to the Jews.

And Paul was not the first one to say it. He was actually quoting from a song that God gave Moses to sing aloud right before he died, right before the Israelites entered the Promised Land. The song predicted that the Israelites would fall away from God. Like a wife who would become ungrateful toward the husband who loved her, like a wife who took her husband's loving and abundant care for granted, Israel would be (in Moses' words), *"filled with food"* and become *"fat and sleek."*

That's what the song says. I'm just quoting it. God could see this sad future so clearly that, even as he prepared to shower his joyful and (currently) obedient people with blessing upon blessing in their new home, he spoke of Israel's future rebellion in the past tense: *"He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock his Savior. They made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols. They sacrificed to demons, which are not God—gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear. You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth"* (Deuteronomy 32:15-18).

And because they would make him jealous by running after false gods, God would teach them a lesson, he said, by taking the blessings that were normally theirs as his own, special people on earth and showering them upon other people scattered throughout the world. *"I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding."* Those others are the mix of peoples gathered around the Word of God here this morning. God is using you to get to them.

How does that feel? Does it upset you? Does it make you mad to hear that God is using you in this way? Do you feel something like the teenage daughter from the story I told a moment ago? Do you feel like he doesn't really care for you, that this is all just a show to make his chosen people jealous?

Well don't feel like that. The story I told earlier is not a true parallel to the way in which God is using all the Gentiles who are here to get to the descendants of Abraham. It's just not the same.

And how is it different? Well, for one, this is not a boyfriend-girlfriend situation here. This is the relationship of God to all the creatures that he made in his image. This is the relationship of God to those that he created to enjoy a life of service to him as he serves us with all our needs. Those two aren't really the same.

For another thing, the boy in that story didn't really care for that poor girl. He only cared about the other one. That is so not true with you and God. God doesn't just want Israel to be saved. As Paul wrote to the young pastor Timothy, "*God our Savior wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth*" (1 Timothy 2:3,4). He doesn't just want them. He wants you and he wants them. So he'll love you with every ounce of love with which he loved Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and the Apostle Paul. And he hopes that the sincere love he shows to you will also remind the Israelites of the sincere love he showed to them—and make them want him back!

Actually, the key to understanding what makes this using and loving different from the using and loving of sinful humans is the big Bible word used four times at the end of our text: *grace*. Surely you remember hearing that word before. *Grace*.

When I say that God is both loving you and using you to get to his lost people, I'm talking about the same kind of love that Paul is talking about. I'm talking about *grace*. *Grace* is not the love of boyfriends and girlfriends. Boyfriends and girlfriends get together because they find one another attractive. When they get serious, they get exclusive. The message is, "I find you so attractive that I don't want to date anyone else. I'm most attracted to you." That's why a girl involved in a story like the one I told before would be so brokenhearted. Being used like that is to feel as though the boy has just said to you, "I only want you here because I'm really attracted to her, not you." That is cold and sick.

The difference with that special love called *grace* is that attractiveness doesn't enter into it. *Grace* is a love that is undeserved. *Grace* is a love of commitment that is not based on the attractiveness of the other. It is the only love with which God can love our race, because we are all sinners. By the rightful judgment

of his own Word, the expression of his heart to the world, he hates sin. He hates disobedience. He hates rebellion. Yes, he even says in his Word that he hates sinful, disobedient and rebellious *people* (Isaiah 61:8; Jeremiah 12:8; 44:4; Hosea 9:15; Amos 5:21; Zechariah 8:17; Malachi 2:16)!

But his chosen he has chosen. Do you understand? He chose his Old Testament people to be his own. They did not deserve it. They were not less rebellious or more noble than the other nations of the world (Deuteronomy 7:7; 9:4-6; Ezekiel 20:44). Nonetheless, he chose them. He called them his own, and he will not go back on his Word!

Likewise—and I do mean, "in exactly that way"—he chose you. He has chosen you and loved you with the same eternal love: *grace*. If he did not choose you as he chose them, how could his relationship with you drive them to the kind of jealousy he wants, the kind that reminds them of God's promises to them and makes them long to rejoice in the comfort of those promises once again?

He loves you because he loves them and wants them. But it's the *same love* with which he loves them, not a pretense or a ruse. Therefore, although I can say that he loves you because he loves them and wants them, it is also true that he loves you because he loves *you* and wants *you*. That is the love of *grace* that finds no righteousness in you just as it found no righteousness in them (otherwise, Paul says, "*grace would no longer be grace*").

"*I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means!*" He can't and he won't. He is perfectly righteous. He is perfectly faithful. He has always reserved a remnant of his people, as Paul both indicates and himself exemplifies. He does not change his mind. He still shows his *grace* to them, still seeks and redeems them.

And the same is true for you: Used for their sake, but truly loved. He has sought you. He has paid for all your sins. He has called you his own in baptism. "*Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God*" (1 Peter 2:10). Now live as people of God, holy and noble, as together we prepare for the day when all his people will be gathered to his side, to live with him in perfect righteousness and joy forever. Amen.