

# Romans 11:23 in the Navajo Bible

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Áádóó Jew dine'é danilíinii da'oosdláadgo aghááh nídabididootsihgo át'é, háálá Diyin God aghááh nídabididootsihgo yíneel'á. (Romans 11:23)<sup>1</sup>

And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. (Romans 11:23)<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Romans 11:23 is talking about the Jewish people, which rejected and crucified Christ. The question Paul raises is whether it is still possible for his countrymen, the Jews, to be saved. The above verse says that they can be. What it doesn't say is that they will be. The proof that Jews who accept Jesus can be saved is Paul; the proof that not all Jews will be saved are those who opposed him. There are lessons in this for us.

The English translation quoted above (NIV) says "if they do not persist in unbelief" they can be saved; the Navajo says *da'oosdláadgo* ("if they believe"). Thus, to an extent the two agree, but there is a different emphasis. What does the Greek say? It, like the English, employs a double negative (*ean mē epimenōsin tē apistia* "if they do not persist in unbelief"). And if they *do* persist in unbelief? What then? There is a theology that says they will be grafted in again and saved whether they believe or not, whether they particularly want Christian salvation or not, because their salvation is an act of God. They have nothing to do with it themselves. Is this true?

## Discussion

I have heard radio preachers say, There is no sin God can't forgive, implying that there is no sin He *won't* forgive. This sounds like a strong argument. If God can do all things, surely He can forgive all sins. And in one sense this is true. No sin we confess is too great for Him to forgive. But there's one sin He cannot forgive.

And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.<sup>32</sup> Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (Matthew 12:31-32)

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<sup>1</sup> Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> English Bible quotations are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

How does one blaspheme against the Holy Spirit? Surely not merely by saying an unfortunate word in an unguarded moment. More is involved than that. So how does one place a sin outside the scope of God's ability to forgive? The answer is: By not confessing it. The sin God cannot forgive is the sin we don't confess. He's not going to forgive any sins we want to keep. What could forgiveness possibly mean in a case like this? That God accepts sin? He accepts sinners, but nothing will ever make sin acceptable to God because sin separates Him from His people.

Here is a possible context for the words of Joel, "And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved" (Joel 2:32). This Old Testament passage is quoted twice in the New Testament – by both Peter and Paul (see Acts 2:21; Rom 10:13). Calling on the name of the Lord involves reaching out to Him from our hearts. Anyone who does this will never be sent away empty. Having quoted Joel, however, we must make some distinctions, because Jesus tells us,

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)

If what Joel says is right and what Jesus says is also right, then clearly there are some distinctions we must make. Calling on the name of the Lord, as Joel says, is not the same as saying, "Lord, Lord." What Joel describes comes from the heart. Anyone who does this will be saved. On the other hand, just saying the words, "Lord, Lord," is quite another matter. Jesus warns that it is possible to invoke God's name without really wanting His influence in our lives. It's possible to appear right without being right. Salvation depends on more than saying certain words or making certain claims.

Consider another passage. Speaking of the holy city that comes down from God out of heaven after the millennium, John says,

Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:27)

What a shame that God arbitrarily chose to write down some people's names, but not others! But is this really arbitrary? Could there be some other factor to consider? Could this other factor have something to do whether we have confessed our sins, or chosen to keep them?

Obviously many people will be inside the city who have done many shameful things. If this were not so, no one from earth would be inside the city. However, not everyone will be inside the city, because John says, "Nothing impure will ever enter it." The dividing line between these two classes of mankind is that the one group has put their sins away, laying them on Jesus, while the other has not. All were impure at one time and all have done what is shameful, but the one group has allowed the Holy Spirit to remove their impurities, while the other group chose instead to keep them. There is nothing at all arbitrary in God's decision to save some and reject others.

There is a theology which teaches that confessing, and responding, and following, and persisting are good, perhaps, but ultimately irrelevant. They are irrelevant if nothing can change the outcome once a person utters a formula of words indicating that they accept Jesus and salvation. Whatever its other strengths or weaknesses, such a theology is clearly dangerous if it makes us feel that it doesn't matter how we live and whether we confess our sins to God.

## Conclusion

It is true that God can forgive any sin – if we will confess it. But we must confess! The way we respond to God is important. We must continue responding to God from your heart. It is true that He will never leave you (see Hebrews 13:5), but this does not mean you will never leave Him. It can happen. So don't let it.

If anyone comes to God asking for forgiveness, s/he will be forgiven. Our God will not turn anyone away. If you have sinned and think you might have committed the unpardonable sin, you have not yet committed the unpardonable sin. That frightful condition is not characterized by feelings of despair, or remorse, or the fear that God can no longer forgive. It is characterized by the absence of feeling – the absence of any sensibilities toward God. The Holy Spirit's voice can no longer be heard because it has been consistently repulsed. If you are still capable of feeling guilt, that's the work of the Holy Spirit in your life and you are still a candidate for the kingdom. You can still come to God and He will freely forgive you. It matters a great deal – on the level of life and death – whether we confess our sins to God or do not.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Any theology which teaches that there is a level at which confession doesn't matter is not a biblical theology. Forgiveness is not an arbitrary act on God's part. He can forgive any sin we confess. The only sin God can't forgive is the one we won't confess.