

A disowned person may be left with a wound that reaches their very core: *If even my own parents or friends don't want me, who will?* Behind every story of disinheritance, estrangement, or the abandonment of parental rights is a sobering truth: *Human love, even at its best, has limits.* Patience runs out. Hopes collapse. Forgiveness has a breaking point. Expectations harden into resentment. Even the strongest bonds can bend and break.

But here is some good news: *The Bible asserts that God doesn't love this way.* Right in the middle of a difficult theological discussion to the Christians in Rome, the apostle Paul makes an audacious, unambiguous, and uncompromising claim. "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew" (Romans 11:2). Then, he says something even more astonishing. "The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). *Irrevocable.* I love that word! God's claim on our lives is not subject to performance reviews or good grades. They are not dependent on our behavior. They are not undone by failure, or stumbling, or wandering. God's claim on us is *irrevocable*.

Paul is writing about Israel, God's chosen people; the nation that received God's covenant, God's promises, God's law, and God's prophets. These people carried the story of salvation through centuries of faithfulness and failure, wandering and return. The people of Israel experienced God's faithfulness to them and they knew all about God's assurance of their salvation; yet many in Israel did not embrace Jesus as the promised Messiah. The early church wrestled with this deeply. Some asked, "Has God moved on? Has God replaced Israel? Has God rejected Israel because they stumbled? Is the covenant cancelled? Is the story over? Has God disowned God's people?"

Paul's answer is immediate and emphatic: "By no means!" (Romans 11:1). He leaves no ambiguity here: God has not and will not disown God's people? Why? Because the covenant God made with Israel is not fragile like a human promise. It doesn't depend on human performance. It isn't invalidated by wandering or unbelief. God's love story with Israel is not broken, even if Israel is struggling to receive it. This is why Paul reaches for the strongest word he can find: "Irrevocable," a legal, covenantal term meaning untouchable, non-reversible, guaranteed. The gifts and the calling of God remain even when people fail, resist, or forget.

Paul's larger point is that if God doesn't give up on Israel, God won't give up on us. If God's covenant love for Israel is irrevocable, then God's covenant love for *us* is equally irrevocable. Paul's logic is clear: Israel stumbled, and yet God still holds, pursues, and loves them; so then, our failures cannot make God give up on us. Our doubts cannot sever God's covenant, undo God's grace, exhaust God's mercy, or outlast God's patience. Paul knows

that we give up far more easily than God does. We lose patience and run out of hope long before God does. Some of us carry old guilt, regrets, and failures that still ache. Some of us look back on decisions we wish we could undo. We worry that we've disappointed God too deeply or too often. Paul reminds us that we cannot out-sin God's love. God is not walking away from us or slamming the door in our faces. We grow weary of ourselves long before God grows weary of us.

Paul then shifts the spotlight: if God does not reject us, why do we sometimes reject God? He acknowledges this tension openly. "For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that [God] may be merciful to all" (Romans 11:32). In other words, every human being wanders from God at some point. Everyone stumbles in keeping God's commands. Each one of us can be unfaithful, inconsistent, or resistant to God's grace. We know how to break trust, drift away, or damage a relationship. We can strain the bond or live as though we don't care. God lets us choose; but choosing to turn to our own way like stray sheep (Isaiah 53:6) is not a good idea.

We ignore God at our own peril. Yes, God is forgiving, loving, and reluctant to renege on a promise; but often, the choices we make have *unintended consequences that God will not erase*. Grace is not cosmic bubble wrap. God doesn't box us up with spiritual packing material so that no matter how wildly we hurl ourselves at life, we bounce off unharmed. Parents will love and forgive you when you ignore their warnings and jump off the garage roof with a bed sheet as a parachute, but the fractured wrist still goes into a cast. God forgives sinners faster than we forgive ourselves, but God doesn't always cancel out the laws of consequence. Some lessons require X-rays and stitches.

Our disobedience is not the end of the story: God's mercy is. God's faithfulness outlasts our unfaithfulness. The Bible is full of moments when Israel walks away, but God stays. Israel worships a golden calf, yet God renews the covenant (Exodus 32). Israel clamors for a king like other nations, and God accommodates their desire while still guiding them through it (1 Samuel 8). David's failures are grievous, yet God refuses to revoke the promise that David's line will endure (see 2 Samuel 11-12). The prophets rage against injustice and idolatry, but their sermons always end in hope (see Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Micah, Hosea). Jesus weeps over Jerusalem's refusal to receive him, yet he still goes to the cross for the very people who reject him (Luke 19:41-44).

We falter; God remains. We wander; God waits. We break covenant; God keeps covenant. We forget God; God remembers us. This is especially meaningful for those who know the pain of fractured relationships. We've all been disowned in one form or another: a child

who stopped calling, a sibling who cut ties, a marriage that couldn't be saved, a friendship that withered. Disownment leaves a wound because it strikes at our sense of belonging. Disownment whispers, "You are no longer mine." God affirms, "You are always mine!"

Romans 11 is, in part, God's declaration that the children of God are treated better than the way human beings treat each other. Where people grow tired, God persists. Where people close a door, God leaves it open. Where people withdraw affection, God deepens it. Where someone says, "We're done," God says, "I am not finished with you." This is why Paul dares to claim: "The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." Irrevocable is Paul's antidote to the fear that we can out-sin grace, outlive mercy, or outlast God's patience with us. You may let go of God, says Paul, but God will never let go of us.

Paul insists that God will never disown us. God's love has no limit, and God's mercy has no expiration date. God will not un-claim God's children, or erase our names from the family story, or revise the covenant to exclude us. Even when we resist, wander, deny, question, or rebel, God's answer is unchanging: "I have not rejected my people." This isn't sentimental optimism, it is covenant; a covenant stronger than regret and more durable than our worst mistakes. When Paul says "irrevocable," he means it. There is no clause, no footnote, no fine print, no hidden exception for prodigals, skeptics, failures or latecomers. Nothing you have done or had done to you, nothing you regret, nothing you fear, nothing you wish you could fix can overturn that word: *irrevocable*. This is God's word spoken directly into the places where we fear abandonment most. "I will never disown you, never give up on you. You belong to me, and my love for you is irrevocable."

Prayer: Gracious God, we thank you that your promises never end and your love never fails. You do not reject the people you chose, and your gifts and your call can never be taken away. When we wander and fall short, you meet us with mercy. Forgive us for the times we doubt your goodness or think we have fallen too far to be reclaimed. Remind us that your call is final, and your grace is stronger than our mistakes. When we feel lost, weak, or disobedient, break through our walls with your healing light. You bind us all in our common brokenness so that you may pour out your endless mercy on everyone. Thank you for holding us, forgiving us, and never letting us go. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Sources

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God's Disownment Policy

Sunday, August 16, 2026

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Comedian Rodney Dangerfield often complained that he got "No Respect." His jokes suggested that his parents didn't want him and went to great lengths to avoid him or get rid of him.

"When I was a kid, my parents moved a lot — but I always found them."

"My old man took me to the zoo. He was hoping my real parents would claim me."

"When my parents divorced, there was a custody fight over me. No one showed up."

"One time my family played hide and seek. They found my mother in Pittsburgh!"

"I asked my old man if I could ice skate on the lake. He said to wait until it warmed up."

To *disown* someone is to claim no connection to that person or to refuse any responsibility for them. Disowning may mean cutting ties with a family member, so they are no longer treated as part of the family. Disownment is *emotional*. Parents or children or friends quietly withdraw from the relationship. They stop calling, stop asking, stop trying. The connection, while not formally broken, is functionally gone. They say in their hearts, "I'm done. I can't do this anymore." Sometimes this comes from *exhaustion*: years of worry, conflict, or bad behavior that drain hope dry. Or it may come from a *hurt* so deep that one doesn't know how to keep loving. And sometimes it comes from *disappointment*: a child does not live up to a parent's expectations, so both parties just give up, frustrated.

Disownment can also be *legal*; formal and explicit. A loved one is cut from the will or written out of inheritance, and the law no longer recognizes them as part of the family. Their identity is erased in the most literal way. In a worst-case scenario, families are faced with a loved one who poses a threat to their very lives, a person with severe emotional issues that trigger anger and violence, and the family simply cannot manage the chaos. They may not be formally disowned, but a family may decide to remove themselves from that person's day-to-day care.

These are distressing scenarios. There are too many heartbreaking stories of people disowned because of whom they married, their career choice, life decisions they made, their political views, or because they got into some kind of trouble or were ill with an addiction. Some are disowned because of beliefs, or because they dared to confront a dysfunctional or abusive family situation. Some are disowned because of misunderstandings which are never resolved.