

Romans Study Session 15 - Romans 9

Paul begins a new topic tonight. Chapters 1-8 all revolved around the universal condemnation of mankind due to sin and the justification made available by the offering of God's only Son, Jesus Christ, on our behalf. Especially in chapter 8 we saw that brilliance of God's plan for mankind as Paul described the gift of the Holy Spirit and His ministry among those who believed in Christ for justification. If you remember, in chapters 1-4, Paul discussed the ethnic Jews and the Gentiles separately, in some cases. Then in chapters 5-8 there was no discussion of Jew or Gentile at all. Now, as we get into our next section of Scripture in chapters 9-11, Paul is going to bring those differences back into the discussion. In many of your Bibles, you will see a heading for chapter 9 that says, "Solicitude for Israel". A solicitude is a state of being where one is anxious or concerned about something or someone. In this case, this is a good title for this chapter as Paul is going to discuss his spiritual concern for the ethnic Jews. This follows the last discussion in that Paul has explained God's grand plan of salvation for mankind and the blessings it brings with it but then he is saddened when he considers the spiritual state of the vast majority of the ethnic Jews as they have not been open to the gospel message.

Chapters 9-11 deal with the problem Israel poses. The ethnic Jews have certain advantages in coming to God. Paul detailed these in chapters 2-4. But now Paul is obliged to express his concern over his people and expose their failure and guilt despite being God's chosen people. Those who had been under divine instruction for centuries in preparation for the coming of the Messiah failed to receive Him when He arrived. In these three chapters, Paul is going to answer two big questions. 1) Has the purpose of God been frustrated? 2) What does the future hold of the ethnic Jews? What we are going to see in chapter 9 is that the unfaithfulness of Israel to God in the Old Testament has its parallel in the rejection of God's Son in Paul's time. Israel has not changed and this is a concern for Paul. Can the stubbornness of mankind thwart God's eternal purposes? Why are those who were chosen by God in the past largely ignoring and rejecting Jesus Christ when they are those who know the Old Testament and thus the prophecies pointing to Him as the Messiah? In this session (chapter 9) we'll see three big thoughts Paul explains. 1) Paul's sorrow over Israel's condition, 2) God's choice of Israel was based upon God's election, not Israel's merit, 3) God has freedom to act in His own sovereign right. Let's start with the basis of Paul's concern for Israel.

[Romans 9:1-5]

Q: What is Paul expressing in these verses? (*concern, anxiety, grief, sorrow, etc.*)

Q: To what extent was Paul concerned over the Jews? (*v.3 - if possible that he could be separated from Christ so that they would come to know Him.*)

The wording of the phrase "For I could wish that I myself were accursed" is speaking of something that is impossible. It could be translated, "I was on the verge of wishing" or "I was at the point of wishing". Because Paul had left Judaism behind, this was necessary for Paul to express as many might have charged him with being insincere. If he could sever himself from Christ so that the ethnic Jews, those fellows of his race, could inherit Christ, he'd do it. Yet as

we know from chapters 5-8, this is impossible.

Q: Who are the brothers Paul is referring to in v.3? (*ethnic Jews, not Christian brothers - he is speaking of a bond of race, not bond in Christ*)

Yet there is more than just blood cited here by Paul. He is speaking of the blood of the ancestors but also their common spiritual heritage. It is important to note that Paul uses the term “Israel” through most of this section rather than his usual term “Jew”. The term Israel stresses the covenant aspect of the race of people called Jew as being different from everyone else on earth. To call them Jew is to call them a race of humans with no distinction from any other ethnic race.

Q: What are the elements of the common spiritual heritage of the Jews Paul mentions in this passage? (*vv.4-5 - belong adoption as son, the glory of the covenants, giving of the Law, temple services, the promises of God, the fathers of their race: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, these are ancestors in the flesh of Christ.*)

This is an impressive list of advantages the Jews had in coming to know God. Each of these things was something the Gentile world did not have. God gave Israel these advantages so that through these and His blessings upon them, the world would come to know Him, too.

There is debate over this is actually one covenant or multiple covenants mentioned here. That isn't the important point. There were three covenants God made with His people in the Old Testament: one with Abraham, one with Moses for the Law (the big one), and one with David. It's what the covenants signify that's important. Covenants imply divine initiative. God took the initiative to enter into a relationship with His creation, man, and it was not done by mutual agreement. God took the initiative to establish a relationship with mankind. God showed His love and concern for us through these covenants. These covenants revealed to us God's true nature but also His desire for us to have a relationship with God. Covenants with God are the terms of how humans related to God.

The last advantage noted dealt with Christ. Christ, in the flesh, or concerning His physical genealogy, was descended from the fathers, He was truly the Son of God and only in His earthly origin can it be said He came from the patriarchs as He is God over all and came for all mankind. In this vein, there is a dispute over the reading of the end of v.5. The better reading is “*the Christ according to the flesh, who is God over all, the blessed forever, Amen.*” The NASB and other try to make this a doxology but in doxologies, the word “blessed” comes before the person being praised and a doxology would be out of place in a passage dealing with Israel's failure to recognize the Christ. This accomplishes two purposes of Paul: 1) he highlights the blindness of Israel but 2) it also keeps the Gentiles from gloating over Israel's fall due to Israel being the source or spring by which God brought the Messiah into the world. (*Keep in mind the tension and often animosity between Jews and Gentiles in the ancient world, even in the church body - just look at the four day war to know that there is still animosity between ethnic Jews and their neighbors.*)

So to sum up this passage, Paul was concerned about Israel missing out on Christ, who was rightfully theirs due to their unique relationship with God. This is what leads to the question,

Is God's purpose frustrated or possibly even abandoned due to Israel's rejection of the Messiah? Keep in mind, this passage truly centers around Christ and the Jews rejection of Him.

[II Corinthians 3:5-18]

Q: In Romans, what Paul describes as blindness, in Corinthians Paul calls veiled. What is it that takes away the veil? (*II Cor. 3:16 - when a person turns to the Lord*)

God's choice of Israel was based upon His purpose, not merit.

For the rest of the chapter, Paul is going to use analogies and illustrations from the Old Testament to make his point. It is easy to get off track and see the illustrations as the main point. Don't do it. The main point Paul is making is to answer the question of whether or not God's purpose was frustrated due to Israel's failure in dealing with their relationship with God, especially concerning the Messiah. To answer this question, Paul needs to get into God's nature and His sovereignty and how He uses it in accomplishing His will.

Also, before we get started on this, there are some general comments that need to be made concerning God's will. God has a will, a plan. He acts according to His will. His will always will be accomplished in God's timing. He set it up before the foundations of creation and whatever His will is, will happen because it is based on His wisdom and power to accomplish what He has set to happen. This is God's perfect will. Things like the birth and death of Jesus are examples of God's perfect will. He does not consult man on these things and we have no input as to their execution. However, God also has a permissive will. This is what God desires or wants to happen but does not force it to happen. This is where the real of the various "gray" areas of our faith exist. These are things in which God has given us free will to exercise and by the exercise of our free will, we show whether or not we are trusting in God and love Him. Salvation is an example of God's permissive will. I Timothy 2:2-4 states clearly (along with many other verses in the New Testament) that it is God's genuine desire for no person to perish in hell but for all to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. However, since He has given man free will in this matter, it shows us where our hearts lie in relation to God.

[Romans 9:6-13]

Q: If there is failure with God's plan, as seen from man's perspective, where is the fault? (*v.6 - with men*)

Q: What does Paul mean when he says that "they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel"? (*Israel is the covenant name that God gave to Jacob. Not everyone who descended physically from Jacob is part of God's family of faith.*)

To further clarify this thought, Paul further explains that everyone descended physically from Abraham is automatically a member of the family of faith. Paul is referring to Ishmael, who was Abraham's first born son through the slave woman, Hagar. Yet, Ishmael, who was biologically descended from Abraham was cast out from the family as he was not the child of

promise from Sarah. Only Isaac was the child of promise.

[Galatians 4:21-31]

Q: Why was Isaac rather than Ishmael the child of promise? *(Ishmael was the product of human effort and wisdom. There was nothing divine about his conception. If Ishmael was the child of promise, we'd all be under the law of some kind or another and our salvation would be based upon our works - our own abilities rather than anything dealing with God. Isaac on the other hand was the result of divine intervention in the life of both Abraham and Sarah. Furthermore, Isaac was the son who God had chosen to play a role in bringing about the nation of Israel and eventually the Messiah. Thus our salvation is based upon God's grace - not our works.)*

Q: According to ordinary human expectations, which of Isaac and Rebekah's twin sons should have received the blessing and the birthright of the first born? *(Esau)*

These two were twins, born nearly at the same time. As Paul noted, neither child had done anything of merit by birth to distinguish him from the other so that one would be inherently be the child by which the line of Abraham would be named.

Q: Why do you think God upset the natural order by having the older serve the younger? *(It served His plan but also it showed His sovereignty over the natural world. He intentionally upset the normal pattern of the culture to prove He was sovereign over His plan for mankind.)*

Verse 13 is a quote from Malachi 1:2-3. God did not hate Esau as we would think the word would imply. This is hyperbole and is similar to the same way Jesus used the word "hate" in Luke 14:26-27. It is a comparison. Jesus was saying that compared to a disciple's love for Him, the disciple's love for his family should appear as hatred. Yet, we know Jesus never advocated for hatred of another person. In the same way, God chose Jacob and by comparison to this love of being chosen as the brother the line of Abraham would continue, God hated Esau. Though we know from Genesis that God loved Esau and blessed him mightily throughout his life. "Hate" is simply saying that Esau was not God's sovereign choice for fulfilling God's purpose of creating a race of people who would be related to Him by faith and eventually usher in Christ, the Savior for all mankind.

So here is the meaning of these two illustrations in context of Paul's main thought. When it comes to God's plan, God does not wait on timing or merit or achievement to make His selection. He has the elements of His plan selected already as He is out of the normal stream of time. God's "love" for Jacob is due to what God had planned for Jacob within His purposes. Keep in mind that Paul is speaking on a national level here. He's not talking about individuals though they are the illustrations he's using. (This is where many people go wrong in interpreting this passage as they miss the forest for the trees. They focus on the illustrations and forget what the truth that Paul is attempting to illustrate.) The real thrust is still how did the Israelites miss the Messiah and did this permanently thwart God's plan?

Q: So from this passage what are some things we can say about God's plan? *(God makes the*

plan. God's makes them without regard for our cultural or social expectations. God makes them without our input at all. God ensures that His plans succeed. more possible)

Now we'll move onto Paul's last theme in chapter 9 which is God is free to act according to His sovereignty.

[Read Romans 9:14-18]

There might be a charge leveled against God that He is unjust on the grounds that He acted unjustly towards Esau. He didn't give Esau the chance to prove himself worthy or whatever. To demonstrate that God is never unjust, Paul goes farther back in Israel's history to the incident of the golden calf (Exodus 32-33). In this episode of Israel's history, God had recently freed Israel from slavery in Egypt and had moved the people into the wilderness by Mount Sinai. Once there Moses went up the mount to get the Law from God, while he was gone, the people began to wonder what happened to them. They asked Aaron to make a new god for them as they didn't know what had happened to Moses. Aaron made a golden calf for the people to worship. God was so upset with the people that He threatened to wipe out the entire nation of Israel and make Moses a great nation - in essence transferring the promise from Abraham to Moses. Moses interceded on behalf of the people by praying to God and reminding Him that if He wiped out the entire nation, the other nations would not fear God but rather begin to think that He lacked the power to fully deliver His people. He would appear weak before the watching world. Moses' words found favor with God and that's when He told Moses, *"I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show compassion to whom I will show compassion."* (Exodus 33:19). God's mercy and compassion spared the nation from divine destruction. Thus mercy and compassion do not depend upon human desire but rather upon divine action. Mercy is like grace in that it stands opposed to human effort and will where salvation is concerned. Like mercy, grace is free because God is not bound to show this mercy to anyone (though He offers it to everyone).

Q: What is the demonstration of God's mercy depended upon? (*v.16 - upon God's sovereign will to show mercy*)

The thought then moves from Israel's leader in Exodus to Israel's oppressor in Exodus: Pharaoh in v.17. The phrase "I raised you up" is not speaking strictly to Pharaoh's emergence in history. Rather it is a reference to God's providence in sparing his life up to that time. Pharaoh deserved death for his oppression of God's people and insolence, but his life was not taken during the series of plagues so that the full extent of the hardness of his own heart could be seen and the glory of God enhanced when He delivered His people from Pharaoh. God can be glorified by those who resist and oppose Him as well as those who trust and serve Him. Notice how Paul ends the thought about Pharaoh in v.18. Since God is emphasizing the truth about God being free to act according to His sovereign will, Paul omits the details of how Pharaoh hardened his own heart.

Many people miss the point of this passage and try to make it about predestination (trees instead of forest again). They say that since God hardened Pharaoh's heart, Pharaoh had no choice but to act according to God's desires and thus prove he was not chosen by God for

salvation. However, this misses the entire point of the passage (and the next one). The point is that Pharaoh did harden his own heart and due to that hardening, God gave him over to the continuing hardening of his heart. This is the same process seen in Romans 1:24, 26, 28 where God gave them over to the lusts of their hearts, the degrading passions of their flesh and the depraved mind they so desperately wanted to possess. Those who reject the revelation of God are to be abandoned to greater excess of sin and its consequences. Remember, how this passage is about the question, “Did Israel’s rejection of the Messiah condemn God’s plan to the garbage can of history?” It did not. In the same way, Pharaoh’s wickedness did not condemn God’s plan to bring His people into the Promised Land in His time. All Pharaoh’s disobedience and hard-heartedness did was multiply the glory of God when He executed His plan to deliver His people. The example proves the “positive” side of God’s sovereignty while Pharaoh proves the “negative” side of God’s sovereignty. In other words, God’s plans and purposes will happen despite human support or opposition.

Q: What does this passage teach us about God’s glory? (*He’s going to be glorified because He is sovereign over everything, other answers possible*)

This shows us the meaning of these illustrations Paul used to get his point across that God is sovereign over His own plan. No man (or race of men) can thwart His eternal plan. Just as Pharaoh could not change God’s plan but indeed, ended up giving greater glory to God than had he agreed to release God’s people initially, God’s plan is not abandoned or hindered by human effort or will. In the case of the example of Moses’ intervention of behalf of Israel, their disobedience did not hinder God’s plan but rather became an opportunity to witness God’s great mercy.

Now we get to the section of this passage the usually trips Christians up. Remember, it’s based on the same question as before. Can the rejection of God’s plan ruin God’s plan? To answer this Paul continues by reviewing God’s sovereign activity and gives it as a problem. (Remember how Paul likes to state something then bring up the objection to the truth.) If God acts unilaterally, according to His own will and purpose, does this not remove all basis for judgment, since man is not in a position to resist God’s will? Why should man be blamed for anything?

[Romans 9:19-29]

Paul begins by pointing out how inappropriate it is for the creation to be talking back to the Creator (v.20). In what universe does man have the necessary wisdom to judge the actions of the Almighty? The ridiculousness of the situation is brought forward in v.21 when he points out that the inanimate clay does not get to instruct the potter what to make of it. The potter has the right to make whatever He desires from the clay in His possession. To this he uses two words that are important to understand: noble and common. While some clay is made into decorative and valuable items prized for their beauty and decorative function, those of common use are actually more essential to the household, even though they are not admired, such as a plate, fork, trash can, basin for holding water, etc. Pharaoh was useful in fulfilling God’s purpose. If he was not, he’d never have appeared in Scripture.

Verse 22 has a critical phrase we need to interpret correctly to get the meaning of this passage. That phrase is “prepared for destruction”. Again, this is not teaching predestination. Rather God shows mercy through His patience to the objects of His mercy and furthermore God is patient in regards to the objects of wrath in that He stands ready to receive such a one on the condition of repentance. **[II Peter 3:9]** So prepared for destruction points to a ripeness of sinfulness that leads to judgment unless there is a turning to God. Yet, God is not responsible for the sinful condition of the sinner. The preparation for destruction is man’s work who allows himself to deteriorate in spite of the knowledge of his conscience and revelation of God. (Few people ever saw God’s glory and revelation of His power more than Pharaoh, yet in all of that, he remained an object of wrath prepared for destruction due to his hardened heart - that he hardened. His sin was on himself, not God. **[James 1:13-15]** gives the clear teaching on God’s role in temptation. Also, those Paul has in mind as objects of wrath are those of Israel who have remained opposed to the gospel. (Remember, that’s who Paul is really talking about - Israel and their rejection of the gospel.) **[I Thessalonians 2:14-16]**

On the other hand, there are object of mercy who see the glory of God. Again, these objects of mercy are prepared by the condition of their own hearts before God. Now we see that both Jews and Gentiles are “prepared” to accept the gospel.

Q: In v.24 do you see any thought that would be revolutionary to a first century Jew? *(yes - the thought that the Gentiles would be included in the objects of God’s mercy. The Gentiles were not actually a race of people but actually just masses of humanity are called by the sovereignty of God to being included into the people of God.)*

[I Peter 2:6-10]

Q: For those who believe in Christ, what are they now according to the I Peter passage? *(a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, proclaimers of His excellency, living in light instead of darkness, those who have received mercy)*

These things were the original calling of Israel by God. However, now under grace, this is who anyone who believes in Christ. This is their new race and status. This was revolutionary to both first century Jews and Gentiles.

Verses 25 &26 are quotes from Hosea concerning God’s plan to include the Gentiles in His people. In Hosea 2:23 God declared His freedom to call others to be His people, too. In Hosea, God originally declared Israel “not My People” (Hos. 1:9). However, He reversed this decision in 2:23, the part quoted here. It was originally spoken to comfort and restore Israel to her status of God’s people, yet by Paul’s use of it here, it implies that God had more in mind than just the restoration of Israel but rather the restoration of all people who turned to Him for their salvation. So God is free by His sovereignty to extend mercy beyond the ethnic blood line of Israel to the Gentiles. This is the meaning of this section of Scripture.

Then this section closes with another view of God’s mercy towards Israel. Though their numbers were great, God, through the judgment upon them by the Assyrians, would reduce them to a mere remnant of what originally existed.

Q: How is God's mercy seen through this judgment? in v.27? (*God's mercy spared them and He did not allow them to be wiped off the planet as He did with Sodom and Gomorrah.*)

Q: Who was Paul concerned about when he wrote this passage? (*ethnic Israel*)

While the gospel message has not penetrated the hearts of most of ethnic Israel, some, a remnant have accepted the message, Paul being one of them. So now there is a remnant of Israel in the church - which is God's people under grace. If God had been truly unsparing in judgment, the Jews would have been wiped out like Sodom and Gomorrah, yet His judgment was tempered with compassion and thus the remnant of Jews in the church is proof of this compassion.

Now Paul closes with God's freedom to act according to His own sovereign will by opening salvation to all mankind.

[Romans 9:30-33]

Q: Who actually attained a righteous standing before God? (*v.30 - the Gentiles*)

Q: How did the Gentiles attain their right standing before God? (*v.30 - they pursued God by faith*)

Q: What did Israel pursue? (*v.31 - a law based righteousness*)

Q: Did Israel succeed in arriving at a law-based righteousness? (*v.32 - no, because they didn't pursue it by faith*)

So now Paul is discussing the one part of God's plan, His will, that man can thwart and this is because it deals with mankind's response to God's invitation to come to His mercy and grace. If a person pursues God through their own works based on the Law, it is impossible to come to God. That was covered back in chapters 2-4. However, if a person pursues God through faith in Jesus Christ, then that person will arrive at the righteous standing they seek because faith in God's plan is the only thing that is capable of bringing salvation.

Now those who were under the Law, Israel, would say that Christ died needlessly or as a martyr to a useless cause because they don't see God's plan in action. They, instead are depending upon their works and self-righteous deeds of the flesh to earn a right standing before God. **[Galatians 2:21]** Christ the cornerstone of our faith but He is also the stumbling block to all who attempt to gain a right standing before God without faith in His Son, who is God's plan for the salvation of mankind. So while man cannot thwart or frustrate the will of God, man can oppose it and reject it so that he doesn't gain the right standing before God that those who accept it by faith receive without any works. This links back to the very beginning of the chapter where Paul was expressing his sincere and heavy concern for his brother Israelites because they were largely choosing to not only reject Christ but also oppose Him.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?