

Romans 9 • The Sovereignty of God

Introduction

Is there a “limit” to God’s authority? It may sound absurd to even pose the question, but many people don’t question God’s existence but whether or not He’s a “loving” God as they try to understand how He works, why He “allows” sin or sinful behavior, and even why Christians often suffer the same effects of all people in the course of man’s treatment of man. Why does God “choose” people or even nations? Is He fair? Paul speaks to these issues in the example of God’s calling and dealings with the nation Israel.

¹I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, ²that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. ³For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, ⁴who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, ⁵whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

⁶But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; ⁷nor are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants, but: “THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED.” ⁸That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. ⁹For this is the word of promise: “AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON.” ¹⁰And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; ¹¹for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God’s purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, ¹²it was said to her, “THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER.” ¹³Just as it is written, “JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED.”

[Read v.1-5]

Q: What is Paul’s response when he speaks of his kinsmen, the Israelites?

A: He grieves for them. He is not mad at them, nor does he judge them; he grieves for them that, even though they are “enemies of the Gospel” they are still God’s chosen people.

“From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;”

– Romans 11:28

Application: How do we respond when people, like our own relatives, reject the gospel?

Q: What was the unique privilege of the Israelites in God’s plan (v. 4-5)

- They were specifically chosen from among all the peoples of the world and adopted into God’s kingdom
- They witnessed God’s glory and received His covenants
- They were made care-takers of the law and revelation
- They were the object of His promises

Application: If the Jewish nation of Israel is so special to God, how ought we as Christians to consider them? Should we judge them or pray for their salvation?

[Read v.6-13]

Q: What does Paul mean when he says in verse 6, “But it is not as though the word of God has failed...”?

A: It means that just because the nation of Israel has not received the Messiah, it doesn’t mean that God’s Word will not come about. Their hearts were hardened so as to eventually help them see who Jesus is.

“For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,

*‘THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,
HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.
THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,
WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.’*

From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

--Romans 11:25-29

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Q: In verses 7-8, who are the true descendants of Abraham, and why?

A: The true descendants are those whom God chooses, and they are those who are descendants of the promise made to Abraham regarding Isaac, a promise accepted by Abraham on the basis of faith. Therefore, the spiritual descendants of Abraham are those who have been justified by faith, not the flesh.

Q: In verses 9-13, why was Jacob chosen and not Esau?

A: The key is verse 11. It all amounts to God's choice. The statement, "...not because of works but because of Him who calls" clearly states that it is purely God's choice because being God, the Creator, He has the right to choose.

Q: Some say that predestination is based upon the fact that God, being omniscient, knows ahead of time who will be "good" and who will be "bad" and therefore He chooses on the basis of His foreknowledge. What's wrong with this?

A: It takes away from His sovereignty and **right** to choose. It would make His choice dependent upon man's actions.

Application: *With this in view, how should we look upon our own salvation?*

[Read v.14-18]

¹⁴What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! ¹⁵For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." ¹⁶So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. ¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." ¹⁸So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

Q: Why does Paul raise the issue that he raises in verse 14?

A: He is addressing questions that might be raised about God's fairness.

Q: In verse 15, what is the nature of the answer to his own question?

A: The point here is that **NO ONE** was worthy of being chosen by God, but out of His **mercy**, He chose some.

Q: In verses 16-17, what does God's choice depend upon? Man or God?

A: Obviously the choice depends solely upon the sovereignty of God. The example is Pharaoh. The indication is that Pharaoh was raised up for the purpose of God's showing mercy to Israel as a witness to all the world.

Q: What question of fairness does this action by God obviously bring?

A: That if God actually hardens people hearts, and raises some up like He raised up Pharaoh, what chance did they have to receive mercy? This is a critical question because it raises the issue of God's justice. Is He just and fair if He hardens someone's heart? Attempting to answer this question has spawned many heresies regarding the attributes of God.

Application: *What emotions do you feel when you realize that God may have actually raised up someone like Pharaoh, hardening his heart. Are there others? Relatives? Neighbors? Our children? If you do not experience an emotional response to this or if it doesn't raise questions in your own mind, you're the exception. Paul knew that, which leads to the following verses.*

¹⁹You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” ²⁰On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? ²¹Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? ²²What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? ²³And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. ²⁵As He says also in Hosea,

“I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT
MY PEOPLE, ‘MY PEOPLE,’
AND HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED,
‘BELOVED.’

²⁶AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE
WHERE IT WAS SAID TO THEM, ‘YOU
ARE
NOT MY PEOPLE,’
THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS
OF THE LIVING GOD.”

²⁷Isaiah cries out concerning Israel,
“THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF
ISRAEL BE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT
IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED;
²⁸FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD
ON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND
QUICKLY.” ²⁹And just as Isaiah foretold,

“UNLESS THE LORD OF SABAOTH HAD
LEFT TO US A POSTERITY,
WE WOULD HAVE BECOME LIKE
SODOM, AND WOULD HAVE
RESEMBLED GOMORRAH.”

[Read v.19-29]

Q: What is the bottom line of verses 19-21?

A: God, being God—the Creator—has the right to do what He wants. Who are we to question His judgment? The bottom line is that we reach a point that has no final answer; that is, a final answer which God has revealed to us. It is the same theological problem we have with evil. The bottom line is that we just have to trust God, which is the essence of faith—trusting God when we don’t understand, but from the position of recognizing the difference between Him, the Creator, and us, the created.

Q: Verses 22-23 offer some consolation. What is it?

A: That God didn’t need to show mercy at all! That He has shown infinite patience with mankind, and has in His sovereignty arranged it so that some of these vessels may be glorified.

Q: Therefore, what’s the significance of verse 24?

A: That we who have been chosen and saved are to be glorified! That is what we must dwell on; not the questions about God’s wisdom.

Q: What is the theme of verses 25-29?

A: God has a plan that goes beyond Israel.

³⁰What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; ³¹but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. ³²Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³just as it is written,

“BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE,
AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.”

[Read v.30-33]

Q: What is the plan?

A: That Gentiles are included in His plan and they are included, not because of the Law or because of their ancestry or because of their inherent righteousness, but because of **faith**. This confirms the point that our righteousness is to be based upon faith, not upon the Law.

Q: Who or what is the “stumbling stone” for Israel?

A: It's Jesus, that He is the Messiah. (See 1 Peter 2:6-8).

“For this is contained in Scripture:

'BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER STONE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.'

This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve,

'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER STONE,'

and,

'A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE';

for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.”

--1 Peter 2:6-8