

## Romans 9

The emphasis of chapter 9 is the sovereignty of God; chapter 10 will highlight the responsibility/free will of man.

When we say that God is sovereign, we mean that He is in charge of the universe and that He can do as He pleases. In saying that however, we know that, because He is God, He will never do anything wrong, unjust or unrighteous. Therefore to say that God is sovereign is merely to allow God to be God. We should not be afraid of this truth or apologize for it. It is a glorious truth and should cause us to worship.<sup>1</sup>

**Why does Paul have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in his heart (v. 2)?** Paul realizes that a large segment of his people is separated from God's love. Unbelieving Israel has rejected God's Messiah.

**What desire does Paul express (v. 3)?** Paul says he himself is willing to trade places with his fellow Jews if that could somehow bring them to salvation. Even though he was designated by God to be "the apostle to the Gentiles," his heart was still in Jerusalem. But when it came to ministering to them, the Jews were Paul's worst enemies. They considered him a traitor. He ministered to Gentiles and taught freedom from the Law of Moses. They harassed and persecuted him from town to town, stirring up lies and violence against him. Yet he still loved them passionately.

Paul lists the blessings and privileges God has bestowed on His people culminating in the great gift of the Messiah (vv. 4-5). **What point is he making?** They have this wonderful spiritual legacy as the chosen people of God and the trail clearly leads to Jesus as their Messiah. It breaks Paul's heart that they refused to believe, that they were blind to the truth.

**How is Jesus described (v. 5)?** He has a human ancestry and yet is God over all. This is a clear affirmation of the dual nature of Christ - both His humanity as well as His deity.

**What was Paul teaching regarding God's Word and the people of Israel (v. 6)?** The Jews failed to respond to the gospel of Christ but that did not mean that God's Word had failed. The problem was not with God's Word but with the heart of men who refused to believe. Just because a person is born into the nation of Israel does not mean that he is an heir to the promises. Who your ancestors are is no guarantee of a place in God's family.

**What example does Paul give to prove his point (vv. 7-9)?** Not all of Abraham's descendants became Abraham's (spiritual) children. For example, Ishmael was just as much a son of Abraham as Isaac was; but Ishmael was a son according to the flesh, and Isaac was a son according to the promise (*At the appointed time I will return and Sarah will have a son*). The line of Isaac was singled out for blessing based on God's sovereign, elective purpose.

**What further example does Paul give to illustrate God's sovereignty (vv. 10-12)?** God's sovereign choice even extended to within the line of Isaac when God chose Jacob (the younger) over Esau and He did so even before the twins were born (Genesis 25:23). God's choice was not based on the performance of Jacob or Esau. The choice was made before they were born and was based on the sovereign design of God. God does not watch to see how people develop and then elect them on that basis.

**What did Paul mean by the way he differentiated between Jacob and Esau (v. 13)?** God's choosing and rejecting was described in relation to the line of promise. God "hated" Esau in regard to inheriting the covenant, not in regard to blessing in this life or the next. Actually, Esau was a blessed man (Genesis 36). God's love for Jacob was a higher choice, or was a form of lesser love for Esau. In the same way, Jesus told his disciples that they had to "hate" their families to follow Him (Luke 14:26). He meant to love less than; it was a priority of love issue. They had to prefer or choose Jesus as a priority over their parents.

**Was God unjust in choosing Isaac over Ishmael (v. 14-16)?** No way! This is not an issue of justice but one of sovereign prerogative as God's words to Moses indicate. God cannot be unjust because that would run contrary to His nature. As the sovereign God, He has the right to show mercy to whomever He chooses on the basis of His gracious will. He is not under obligation to show mercy to anyone. No one can deserve or earn His mercy.

God is never *less* than fair with anyone, but fully reserves the right to be *more* than fair with individuals as He chooses.

**Who did God use as an illustration of this principle (vv. 17-18)?** God allowed Pharaoh in the days of Moses to rise to power so that God could show the strength of His judgment against Pharaoh, and thereby glorify Himself. Sometimes God will glorify Himself through showing mercy; here God will glorify Himself through a man's hardness and God's subsequent victory over him (Joshua 9:9; Psalm 76:10). God works sovereignly but never arbitrarily or unjustly.

Paul's point was simply that God can freely and justly extend mercy—or not extend mercy—to those who deserve His judgment. The reconciliation of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility is beyond our power to comprehend. The Bible states and emphasizes both, and then leaves them. We shall be wise if we do the same.<sup>2</sup>

Paul next imagines someone asking, "If it is all a matter of God's choice, then how can God find fault with me? How can anyone go against God's choice (v. 19)? I am nothing more than a helpless pawn on the divine chessboard of life." **How does Paul answer (vv. 20-21)?** In the first place, it is presumptuous for human beings, the objects of divine judgment, to sit in judgment on their Judge ("talk back to God"). Judging is God's prerogative, not ours. Creatures have no right to question or complain about their Creator's behavior.<sup>3</sup> God is not answerable to man for what He does.

If the potter approaches a formless pile of clay on the floor, does he have the right to pick up a handful, put it on the wheel and fashion a beautiful vessel of His own choosing? He would be just and fair if he left it alone. But He has the power and authority to make one vessel for noble purposes and another for common use.

**What character traits of God are in view (v. 22)?** Patience, mercy, justice, etc.

**Who are the objects of His wrath (v. 22)?** The unsaved who will suffer eternal judgment. God has patiently endured their attitude of hostility but their judgment is imminent. In that sense they are preparing themselves for judgment by storing up God's wrath against themselves. Paul does not say that *God* has prepared them for destruction. Those vessels do an adequate job on their own.

If God chooses to glorify Himself through letting people go their own way and letting them righteously receive His wrath so as to make His power known, who can oppose Him?

**Why did He endure (v. 23)?** To glorify Himself in the eyes of the objects of His mercy, i.e. believers. The ultimate reason for his patience is to lead them to repentance (2:4).

**Who are the objects of His mercy (v. 24)?** Both believing Jews and Gentiles.....sovereignly chosen by God to display "the riches of His glory." And if God wants to show mercy to the Gentiles as well as the Jews (of course, never being *less* than fair to either), who can oppose Him?

**What did the Old Testament passage from Hosea teach (vv. 25-26)?** Gentiles ("not My people") are called by God and grafted into covenant relationship to become "sons of the living God." These passages from Hosea 2:23 and 1:10 declare God's right to choose and show the mercy of God. God's calling of the Gentiles should not have come as a surprise to the Jews. It was clearly foretold in the Old Testament.

**What is the message from Isaiah (vv. 27-29)?** In His judgment against rebellious Israel, God, in His mercy, will preserve a remnant of faithful Jews. If He had not been merciful, He would have destroyed Israel as completely as He had annihilated Sodom and Gomorrah. Israel's disobedience cannot nullify God's determined purpose for the nation.

**How does Paul compare Jew and Gentile (vv. 30-33)?** The Jews pursued righteousness by observing the Mosaic Law (by works) rejecting Jesus as Messiah instead of responding to Him by faith. Consequently Jesus became a stumbling stone in their failed pursuit of righteousness. They stumbled over the obstacle in their path which they did not see, i.e. the concept that God's righteousness must come as a gift through Jesus Christ and not by works through the law. In contrast, believing Gentiles came to God through faith, and received the prize of righteousness which had eluded the Jews. Israel is responsible for her present condition.

---

<sup>1</sup> Believer's Bible Commentary, William MacDonald, 1995 Edition, (published by Thomas Nelson Publishers), p. 1714

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Romans, 2017 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 148

<sup>3</sup> Ibid