20240623 Romans 9 – God is Sovereign

Have you ever had a trailer hitch on the back of your truck and as you walk around the truck you forget that it is there? WOW! That can really bust up your knees and shins more than you can imagine. That’s what a stumbling block is. It is something that gets in your way and causes you to trip up. It is something that you’ll trip over again and again. The Bible speaks often about Jesus being a “stumbling block” to the Jews. They just couldn’t get over the idea that the Messiah would end up being crucified. This is because their idea of Who God is and how He operates didn’t fit into what they thought God should do. We get in real trouble when we think we can outthink God. I often tell this congregation, “It is such a relief when you realize that you are not God.” In these next three chapters, Paul will discuss the Jews and their relationship to Jesus.

As we discussed this passage this past week, Sandy had a good summary: “I think what Paul is trying to get across in chapters 9, 10, and 11 is a call to all of the Christians at Rome, (both Jews and Gentiles), to reach out to the non-Christian Jews and bring them into the kingdom. In the very first verse of chapter nine, he states that if he could save the Jews by being condemned, he would do it. Then he spends the next three chapters saying why and how much he would like them to be saved.”

This is a great shift in Paul’s conversation. In review, he started the letter by saying that the judgment of God is deserved by all of mankind. In Romans 1-5, Paul explains our identity in Christ. Chapters 6 and 7 talk about the ongoing sin problem in the life of a believer and the positive role that the law can still have on our Christian walk. In chapter 8, Paul explains that the victory we can have over sin can come only through the power of the Holy Spirit. Last week, I ended the sermon briefly by mentioning Romans 8:28-29. It uses some new language, about “being called” according to God’s purposes. This is Paul turning the discussion from sin to the unique status of Israel in the plans of God. Here is a summary of chapters 9, 10, and 11.

**Chapter 9** **– Sovereignty of God** - Why were the Jews chosen of God? Is this fair? What about Israel’s rejection of Jesus, and how does God use this for a positive purpose? What, in fact, does it mean to be a real Jew? Is being a Jew merely being a descendant of Abraham? What did Hosea and Isaiah have to say about “another people” being brought in as “children of God?” Who is the “rock of offense,” and why did God allow Him to be rejected? Does God want anyone to perish? If so, should we believe that God is good?

**Chapter 10** – Do Jews need the gospel, or is there another path for them? Will Israel reject Jesus and the Gospel forever? The answer will be an emphatic NO. At the end of time, all of Israel will be saved (Zechariah).

**Chapter 11** – Has all of Israel rejected Christ? Again, the answer is NO. There has always been a faithful remnant. What does it mean to be a remnant? Does Israel still have a special place in God’s plan? The answer is a resounding “yes.”

Chapter nine lays out God's sovereignty. It doesn’t really speak to the heart of God. God’s sovereignty is something that can bother us as human beings. It seems arbitrary. Paul speaks of God's sovereignty in general to all of mankind and to Israel in particular in some of the last verses of Chapter 8.



These verses have two statements that have been used by those who promote the idea that God has purposely damned some human beings and saved others: (1) “called according to His purpose,” and (2) “those whom He foreknew he also predestined.” God has a sovereign right to choose whom He will to do whatever it is that He wants done. In fact, I believe that He has a purpose for each of our lives.

Some hold the viewpoint of “limited atonement.” This means some believe that God died for some of mankind but not for all of mankind. I think the discussion in Chapter 9 is not about salvation at all, but about God’s right to be God and to sovereignly choose a role for each of us as we live out our lives.

**Israel’s Rejection of Christ**

***9 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. 3For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, 4who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. (Romans 9:1-5, NKJV).***

He says he has sorrow in his heart for his kinsman the Jews. He says he wishes that if it were possible, he would be lost if his brethren could be saved. It shows just how much Paul loves His people, the people of God. He lists beautiful benefits that came in and through Israel:

The Jews were the first “adopted” by God as His own.

The Jews were God’s “glory.”

The Jews were participants in a covenantal relationship with God.

The Jews were instrumental in receiving and disseminating the law.

The Jews were devoted to “avodah” – service, work, labor, worship.

The Jews were the first recipients of God’s ***chesed.***

**Israel’s Rejection and God’s Purpose**

***6But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, 7nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.” 8That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. 9For this is the word of promise: “At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.” (Romans 9:6-9, NKJV).***

Paul says this rejection wasn’t God’s fault. He makes a strange statement that not all Israel is “of Israel.” This is a transitional statement from “status as a birthright” to “status based on grace.” Just because you were born with those promises doesn’t mean you’re a recipient of those promises. Faith is the key in making one a recipient of the promises of God. Faith is the mechanism by which God’s grace is dispensed. The blessings don’t come merely from being born with Jewish blood and being a physical offspring of Abraham. Remember the distinction we spoke about when studying Genesis. The sons of the flesh were born through Ishmael. That means Ishmael was born through human effort. In conceiving Ishmael, Abraham and Sarah were trying to help God out with His promises, and they created a real mess. But the second son, Isaac, was the fulfillment of the promise of a child to Sarah. Isaac was born supernaturally to Abraham and Sarah way after they had reached childbearing years. Isaac was a miracle, and so are we! Every believer is born through a supernatural work of God. “To those who believed He gave the right to become the children of God” (John 1:12). The point is that Isaac and Ishmael were chosen by God for their respective roles. God intended the promise to come through Isaac. In human terms, the firstborn received the blessings, but Paul is explaining that God did it His way, and it was God’s choosing to bring Messiah through Isaac, the son of promise.

***10And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac 11(for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), 12it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.” 13As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.” (Romans 9:10-13, NKJV).***

Don’t read this thinking God HATED Esau like we think of hatred. Paul is saying simply that God chose a favored path for Jacob and chose by His own sovereign choice to do a work through Jacob. Why did God choose Jacob? Was it because Jacob had earned or deserved God’s favor? The answer is a resounding NO. Jacob was a deceiver and a cheat. He was a liar who had stolen his brother’s birthright. God did not choose Jacob because he was somehow better. God chose to use Jacob so that God’s purposes in election might stand (Romans 9:11). As humans, we don’t understand this, but we must realize that God has His purposes in what He does, whether we understand them or not. I think it's important to take Paul for what he is saying and not try to read some soteriological message into what he is saying (meaning look at what He is doing for Jacob and don’t infer it to the lives of millions of other people and whether or not they are saved from eternal damnation).

**Israel’s Rejection and God’s Justice**

***14What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.” 16So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.*** [Mercy is not getting what you deserve.] ***17For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.” 18Therefore, He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. (Romans 9:14-18, NKJV with author’s notes in brackets).***

A few years ago, we had a member here at the Grove who got into a discussion one morning with Rabbi Daniel. He was trying to state that God only elects a certain number of people to be saved. As I said before, this is what is called “limited atonement.” That means it is a belief that God will only save certain people and that He has predetermined before time to send others to hell. Rabbi Daniel was quick to correct him from a Jewish perspective. I clearly remember him saying, “God hardened Pharoah’s heart not as to salvation, but in order that God’s glory might be declared in all of the earth. That is what the text says.” God did not harden Pharoah’s heart disabling the potential possibility for Pharoah to have a relationship with the God Who is. He hardened it so that Israel might be saved miraculously and so that God’s glory would be displayed in all the earth.

***19You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” 20But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?” 21Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? (Romans 9:19-21, NKJV).***

We must always rely on the whole counsel of God’s Word when reading passages such as this. Scripture is filled with verses that not only speak to the sovereignty of God to do as He wishes with His creation, but scripture is also filled with the necessity of decision-making by human beings. We should be careful to state that God is sovereign to do as He wills, but we should be reticent to say that a duty is not imposed on humans to make a choice to believe. What does the scripture say? It says that Abraham believed, and God reckoned it to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). It doesn’t say and God reckoned Abraham as righteous independent of Abraham’s exercise of faith. We are saved by grace, but the mechanism that releases the grace of God is belief. It is saying AMEN to Who God is and what He has said that He will do! This passage explains this beautifully by reminding us that God is like a potter, and we are like clay on the potter’s wheel. God forms us, shapes us, molds us, and fires us in the kiln of life to use however He chooses.

***22What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (Romans 9:22-24, NKJV).***

What do these words mean? Paul is saying that maybe God made some that He had to tolerate just for an opportunity to show His mercy. Maybe God put all of this together the way that He did so that the Gentiles could experience His mercy.

***25As He says also in Hosea:***

***“I will call them My people, who were not My people,
And her beloved, who was not beloved.”
26“And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them,
‘You are not My people,’
There they shall be called sons of the living God.” (Romans 9:25-26, NKJV).***

Paul is saying that there will be a people who will be called God’s people that were never in fact considered “His people.” (Spoiler alert: that’s you and me.) There will be some who will be loved that were never loved, and they will in fact be called “sons of the living God.” The disciple John said it clearly in the following verse. *“****12****But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:****13****who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12-13, NKJV).*

***27Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel:***

***“Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea,
The remnant will be saved. 28For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth.”***

***29And as Isaiah said before:***

***“Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah.”***

**Present Condition of Israel**

***30What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; 31but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 32Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. 33As it is written: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” (Romans 9:27-33, NKJV).***

Paul summarizes it all here at the end. He says that the Gentiles who were never interested in righteousness have now chosen righteousness through faith. Ironically, Israel, who had always pursued righteousness, missed the mark because they tried to do it through human effort instead of by faith. And why?

They just couldn’t get past the stumbling block. They continue to walk around the truck and run into the Reese hitch repeatedly.

Here are three passages I want to quote that help us deal with these challenges of whether God predetermines that some are destined to fry in hell.

Remember, in this chapter Paul is not speaking about the heart of God. He is speaking about the sovereignty of God. Listen to a few passages that speak to the heart of God. We need to just trust the scriptures that speak to the heart of God. When I went to seminary, I hoped to learn the answers to such questions as: Why do bad things happen to good people? I heard all kinds of things and none of them were better answers than I had thought up during my lifetime. I came away from the discussion choosing to believe that God is good. That’s what I chose to hold fast to. Scripture tells us that we CAN trust the heart of God.

***9****The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us,****not willing that any should perish*** *but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9, NKJV).*

God is patient towards us and He is not willing that any should perish. He desires a relationship with each and every one of us! Then we remember when Abraham was worried about his nephew Lot being killed when Sodom and Gomorrah were about to be destroyed. He speaks to the Lord.

***25****Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You****! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?****” (Genesis 18:25, NKJV).*

Abraham declares that even when we don’t understand everything, we can choose to believe that God works in conformance with His character. Lastly, the Prophet Ezekiel tells us that God has no pleasure in seeing the wicked die.

***23Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” says the Lord God, “and not that he should turn from his ways and live?*** *(Ezekiel 18:23, NKJV).*

Scripture is clear that God doesn’t will for some to be damned and others to be saved. He is not willing that ANY should perish. His desire is that all would come to repentance and enjoy a relationship with Him.

***16For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16, NKJV).***

“Whoever believes” means that anyone who believes should not perish but have everlasting life. That whoever includes you and me.

Let us choose today to believe that God is good and He desires the best for His creation.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.