

The Sovereignty of God

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Opening Prayer

Come to us, Holy One, even in our times of resistance. Work within and through us, even when we wrestle with doubt and despair. Enlighten and guide us, even in our darkest hours. Bless us and call us by name, even when we reject your presence. Hold us and love us, even when we try to run away. When we feel beat down by the world, and are weary with fatigue and sorrow, nourish us with your mercy and your grace. Fill us with your love, that we may go forth with confidence and faith. In your mighty name, we pray. Amen.

OT Reading Exodus 33:12-23 (ESV)

12 Moses said to the Lord, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' **13** Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." **14** And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." **15** And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. **16** For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"

17 And the Lord said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." **18** Moses said, "Please show me your glory." **19** And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. **20** But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and

live.” **21** And the Lord said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, **22** and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. **23** Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”

Intro

Last week, we ended our look at Romans eight. In it, Paul showed us how we, as Christians, should be following the Spirit of God that is in each of us instead of following our own human nature. Paul ends chapter eight telling us that nothing can separate us who are in Christ Jesus from the love of God.

In the next three chapters, Paul is concentrating on the rejection of Jesus by many of the chosen people of Israel.

Most of the Jews rejected Christ and relied on what they felt was their birthright to save them. In fact, Paul was getting a lot of push back from Jewish people who believed that their election as a race was assured. Paul was upsetting their apple carts not only because he was saying that God would reject Jews, but also by saying that God was going to accept the Gentiles. To the Jews, this was utter and complete blasphemy. They did not think they had to worry about things such as sin or even the work of the Holy Spirit, they had the law and the ability to sacrifice to remedy any laws they broke. The fact that Paul was saying otherwise was causing them to reject his teachings outright and their rejection - not of him, but of Christ - is breaking his heart.

Romans 9:1–5 (ESV)

God’s Sovereign Choice

9 I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— **2** that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. **3** For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. **4** They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. **5** To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

Is there anyone that you love so much that, were it possible, you would give up

your own salvation to be assured of theirs? Is there anyone that you love so much that you would go to hell for eternity if they would accept Christ?

That's what Paul is saying here. He hurts so badly over the rejection of Christ by the Jewish people that he wishes that he were cut off from Christ for their sake. He then lists the advantages and privileges they have as Israelites.

They had the adoption as son's of God - the invitation by God Himself to be God's family.

Only the Jews had seen God's glory when God's presence was with them in the cloud and the fire when they were in the wilderness.

God entered into covenants with the Israelites when He gave the promised lands to Abraham and a dynasty to David.

They were the only people given the privilege of knowing God's law and God's way of worship in the tabernacle and the temple. And only to them had God made promises for the future of mankind

They have the patriarchs, the fathers, the great leaders that God had given them and above all of those things, the son of God, the Savior, Jesus Christ who is God over all came from their people. God chose them to bear His son!

They had all of these advantages but were rejecting the messiah and Paul was beyond sorrowful because of their rejection of Christ.

Romans 9:6–13 (ESV)

6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, **7** and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." **8** This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. **9** For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son." **10** And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, **11** though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— **12** she was told, "The older will serve the younger." **13** As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Paul says here that heredity is not enough. Ishmael was as much Abraham's son as Isaac, but it was Isaac that was the child of the promise that God made to Abraham. Paul continued his point by talking about Jacob and Esau, the sons of Isaac. There was no stain on either of them and Esau should have been the chosen son by being the first born, but God chose Jacob. Even though God had chosen Israel as a people, He reserved His right to choose individuals.

Now as Christians and, possibly, especially as people who believe in personal freedoms, we understand this better than the Jews did. But for the Jews, this was not a welcomed teaching. In their thinking God chose them all, lock, stock, and barrel so Paul is trying to show them that all along God has retained His right to choose and He is not going against any of His promises when He does so.

Romans 9:14–24 (ESV)

14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! **15** For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." **16** So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. **17** For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." **18** So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

19 You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" **20** But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" **21** Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? **22** What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, **23** in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— **24** even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

Much of what we've talked about over the last few weeks has been about our choice; our choice to choose to follow God or self. In these verses, Paul is talking about God having the freedom to choose. The Jews felt that God had committed Himself to the Jewish people and had given up His freedom. Paul is telling them here that God not only chooses, He is free to select and reject whom He chooses. Just as He chose to use Pharaoh to show His power, so He can use anyone. He can even, in verse 24, choose Gentiles.

Paul is trying to make the Jews see that they don't control God and God isn't being unjust by not automatically choosing them just because of their bloodline. God doesn't work like that. As God told Moses in Exodus 33, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and compassion on whom I have compassion." Salvation is not a human right as willed by man. Salvation is of God and is dependent on His mercy.

In verse 19, Paul addresses a complaint that if all of this is true, if humans are merely puppets acting on the whims of God, how can God punish them? Paul says that God is sovereign over man and just like the potter chooses what the clay will become, God has the power and right to decide what happens to people. Unlike a lump of clay, we do get to choose but if we choose to reject, God has the right to give us our choice. If Israel continues to harden their hearts against God just like Pharaoh did then they must be prepared to accept his fate.

Romans 9:25–33 (ESV)

25 As indeed he says in Hosea,

"Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,'
and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'"

26 "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,'
there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"

27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, **28** for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." **29** And as Isaiah predicted,

"If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,
we would have been like Sodom
and become like Gomorrah."

30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; **31** but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. **32** Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it

were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, **33** as it is written,

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;

and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

God, through His prophets, had told the Israelites that He would call the Gentiles unto Himself. He had told them that He would reject all but a remnant of the Jews and only that remnant would make them any different from the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Paul is trying to get his people, the Jewish people to see that God is sovereign. He created the world, He created each person. The Jews don't get to decide who is acceptable to God, only God decides that.

There are those who use this part of Romans to make their argument for predestination but I see it as exactly the opposite. Paul is telling us how God is dealing with Israel even as the Jewish people reject Christ. He deals with them with mercy as opposed to the wrath they deserve.

This same grace God gave to the nation of Israel as a group is now available to Gentiles as a group, but it is up to each individual - whether Jew or Gentile - to choose for themselves whether to accept grace through Christ.

While Paul was absolutely talking to the Jews here, there is much that we, as Christians, can take from this text. The biggest point being that, when it comes to others, we don't get to decide who is acceptable to God.

We live in such a divisive age. We, just like the Jews that Paul was writing to, want to set the rules for who is worthy and who is not. The Jews thought that by their birthright alone, the Kingdom of God belonged to them. But they didn't understand and I'm afraid that there are many of us that misunderstand as well. Many Christians think that since they call themselves Christians, are in church most every Sunday,

