

The Sovereignty of God In Salvation

An Exposition of Romans 9: God's Free and Sovereign Grace

Romans 9: Outline

- 9:1-3:** Paul's sorrow over Israel's present rejection of Christ
9:4-5: Paul enumerates Israel's privileges and blessings
9:6-17: God's sovereignty in salvation and judgment explained in the cases of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, and Pharaoh
9:18-21: God's mercy and judgment according to His own sovereign purpose; humanity's lack of right or power to find fault with His decisions
9:22-24: God's grand design in dispensing judgment and mercy
9:25-29: Prophetic predictions of Gentile salvation and Jewish defection
9:30-33: The point: Gentiles attained righteous by faith; whereas Israel stumbled in pursuit of righteousness by works.

Question #147: Read Romans 9:1-33 slowly and thoughtfully. Then list the primary distinctions you see Paul making between Israel and the Gentiles. _____

Romans 9:1-5: ¹I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness 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.

¹I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, ²that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.

Paul expresses His deep sorrow over Israel's rejection of Christ. Note the context of the passage which carries over from Romans 8:28-32. In these verses Paul described the salvation of called and elect *individuals*. Thus, we can affirm that Romans 9 is speaking of the salvation of individual Jews rather than of *corporate* calling or privilege. (See also 9:30-32.) Commentator **Albert Barnes** writes, "*The chapter, therefore, has not reference to national election, or to choice to external privileges, but has direct reference to the doctrine of the election to salvation which had been stated in chap. 8. To suppose that it refers merely to external privileges, and national distinctions, makes the whole discussion unconnected, unmeaning, and unnecessary.*" ³³

³For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,

Paul's sorrow is so severe that he is willing to trade his faith for Israel's acceptance of Christ. Here is the deep and godly compassion of a man who believes in God's sovereignty through and

³³ (from Barnes' Notes on Romans 9, Electronic Database Copyright © 1997, 2003, 2005, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc.)

through, and yet struggles in his own finite mind to understand God's purpose in Israel's rejection of Christ.

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.

Here Paul emphasizes that in spite of Israel's great privileges, they are lost—unsaved. This is the reason for his deep sorrow. In the rest of this chapter, he will show that salvation is rooted in divine privilege extended to individuals solely by God's sovereign free grace and received solely by God-given faith. Salvation is not according to works (vv 11, 16, 31-32) nor according to man's will (v. 16), but is wholly God's doing (vv 8, 11, 15-18, 21-24, 28-29).

Question #148: Is Paul speaking of individual Jews in Romans 9, or is he addressing the nation of Israel as a whole? Support your answer with scriptural evidence. _____

Question #149: What specific aspects of Israel's peculiar relationship with God intensifies both Paul's grief over their unbelief and their own culpability in rejecting Jesus as their Messiah? _____

Romans 9:6-9: ⁶But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; ⁷neither 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 a word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son."

⁶But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel

God's promises to Israel have not failed but are being realized even now by those God has called.

⁷neither 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 a word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son."

Salvation is not based on direct physical descent from Abraham, but on God's choice. Although both Isaac and Ishmael were Abraham's physical sons, only Isaac was the child promised by God, born wholly by God's will, power, and purpose. Ishmael was the child of short-sighted human effort, born out of frustration, fear, and unbelief. Together, they picture the biblical truth that salvation results from the choice, power, and action of God, not from the plans, decisions, and efforts of people.

Romans 9:10-13: 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, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might 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."

¹⁰**And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac;**

Paul goes on to affirm God's sovereignty in salvation by demonstrating that believing parents do not necessarily produce believing children. Jacob and Esau were the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah, but only one was chosen by God for His redeeming privileges.

¹¹**for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might 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."**

Before the twins were born, before they had done anything good or bad, God purposed to choose the younger for salvation and pass over the older. His choice was obviously not based on any works done by the twins, but resulted from His sovereign decision to accomplish His predetermined purpose. (See also Romans 11:5, Ephesians 1:4-6, 1 Thessalonians 1:4, 2 Timothy 1:9.)

Question #150: Explain in your own words how the conception of Abraham's two sons and God's words to Rebekah concerning her twins picture the nature of salvation. _____

Question #151: What implications for the nation of Israel do you see in Romans 9:6-13? _____

Question #152: In your own words, summarize the teaching of each of the following passages:
Romans 11:5: _____

Ephesians 1:4-6: _____

1 Thessalonians 1:4: _____

2 Timothy 1:9: _____

Question #153: How do the passages cited in **Question #152** support Paul's teaching in Romans 9:6-13? _____

Romans 9:14-15: 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."

¹⁴**What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!**

At this point, Paul anticipates his reader's likely reaction to the unsettling truth that salvation is by God's choice, not human effort or will (vs 11, 16, 31-32). Unsaved sinners naturally seek to usurp God's absolute sovereignty and typically believe that *they* control their own destiny. If Paul had presented salvation (as it is often presented today) as if it were based on man's will rather than God's sovereign choice, he would have not have needed to bring this up. But because he presented salvation truthfully, he had to address their expected response—accusing God of being unjust. Rather than argue the point with them, however, he simply affirmed the righteousness of God in exercising His sovereign prerogative.

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."**

God bestows His mercy and compassion freely (i.e., under no obligation or compulsion). He calls specific sinners to salvation "in order that [His] purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of [their] works" (v. 11). If His choice of sinners to be saved was based on *anything* they had done to earn it, it would no longer be gracious, but merited. (Recall the definition of grace: "unmerited favor" or "favor against merit.") Paul further expounds this theme in Romans 11:

Romans 11:6-8: ⁶But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, **otherwise grace is no longer grace.** ⁷What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but **those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;** ⁸just as it is written, "**God gave them a spirit of stupor, Eyes to see not and ears to hear not, Down to this very day.**"

God, by His own will, showed mercy to Isaac and not to Ishmael; by His own choice, He blessed Jacob rather than Esau. Neither Isaac nor Jacob were more deserving than their brothers of God's favor. God's choice was motivated *solely* by His own will; it was not based on either man's heritage, works, or desires (this theme is continued in Romans 9:16-18).

Question #154: How does the utter sovereignty of God's grace (seen in His utterly sovereign choice of individuals of salvation) impact you at this point in your study? Honestly record your reactions. Then spend some time in prayer, asking God to help you rightly understand and submit to His truth recorded in Scripture. _____

Romans 9:16-18: 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.

¹⁶So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

Consider the word “*it*” in verse 16. To what does “*it*” refer? We must answer this question by considering the **context** of the verse. The paragraph in which verse 16 is located begins at verse 14 and runs through verse 18. Please pause and read those verses carefully. Paul, in this paragraph, makes the point that God is not unjust because His choice of those who will be saved is based on His mercy and compassion rather than human merit. Paul affirms this same truth in verses 8 and 11. In verse 8, Paul said that God’s choice doesn’t result from human lineage, and in verse 11, that God’s choice isn’t motivated by human works. Thus, we see from **the context of verse 16** that “*it*” refers to God’s dispensing of mercy and compassion to “the children of the promise” rather than to “the children of the flesh.” He does this in accordance with **His purpose** rather than who people are or what they have done. We can also sense **the importance of this point** from the fact that Paul chose to **make this point** three times in two paragraphs.

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.”

Paul reasons that God’s doing as He willed with Pharaoh was not unjust but His privilege and right. His purpose was to make His name famous by exercising His righteous power to judge Pharaoh as well His ability to harden Pharaoh’s heart in order to accomplish His purpose (Numbers 14:15; Ezekiel 20:9,14,22; Psalm 46:10).

Proverbs 21:1: The **king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD;** He turns it wherever He wishes.

¹⁸So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

Paul re-asserts (see v. 15) that God dispenses His mercy to whomever He “desires” or wills. Most of us gratefully acknowledge that statement. But we may balk the next statement: “He hardens whom He desires.” When we find ourselves resisting this truth, we do well to ask ourselves: Who are we to charge God with injustice? Who is powerful enough to overrule His sovereign authority? In what court could we arraign God for wrongdoing and bring Him to trial?

Question #155: Summarize in your own words what Scripture clearly teaches about God’s sovereignty in Romans 9:16-18.

Given that God Himself is the Author of Scripture, do readers of Scripture have the option of rejecting any of its teaching as untrue?_____ Thus, if this passage is troubling for you, please spend a few moments in prayer asking God’s Holy Spirit to help you understand, appreciate, and affirm the truth of His Word.

Romans 9:19-21: 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?

¹⁹**You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?”**

Paul again anticipates an argument from those who would hear his words and charge God with injustice. He expects some to ask: If God dispenses His mercy and executes His judgment on vessels He sovereignly created for those very purposes, how can He righteously reward or blame them for their actions? Paul’s *anticipation* of such questions affirms that he is indeed teaching God’s absolute sovereignty in salvation. Paul would have had no need to address this anticipated argument if he were reasoning that the dispensing of God’s mercy in salvation came as a result of man’s will or that it was withheld because of man’s stubborn rejection.

²⁰**On 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?**

Paul shuts the mouths of any who would dare challenge the design and purposes of God. He reasons that God, as the Creator, has the sovereign prerogative to do as He pleases with what He has made.

²¹**Or 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?**

Paul affirms that just as a potter has a “*right over the clay*” to make vessels destined for honorable or common use, God has the ultimate right to determine the destinies of the people He creates. The potter’s clay is analogous to people. Those created for “*honorable use*” will receive the privileges of eternal salvation; whereas those created for “*common use*” are “*prepared for destruction*” (vs 22-24). God, in His goodness and mercy, creates both kinds of people with no humanly discernable differences. We cannot tell by looking at or speaking to someone whether that person was created for honorable or common use. Thus we freely proclaim the gospel of salvation by grace to faith to *everyone*, without any attempt to distinguish between the two types of vessels. Dear reader, if you have not received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, we earnestly plead with you to hear and heed these words: *Now* is the day of salvation; the free offer of the Gospel is extended to you! Why will you be destroyed? Repent and trust Christ by faith and you *shall* be saved!

Question #156: What objection does Paul anticipate in Romans 9:19-21? _____

How does He answer this objection? _____

Question #157: Explain in your own words how the Christian’s great privilege of evangelizing the lost is wholly consistent with the truth of this passage. _____

Romans 9:22-24: 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 in order that He might 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.

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?

Here is the second point of Paul’s answer to the objection anticipated in verse 19. You will recall that his first point was *the potter has a right over the clay*. And here Paul explains that God has at least four reasons for exercising His right to permit sin in His creation:

- To demonstrate His wrath
- To make His power known
- To exercise much patience with the vessels of wrath
- To make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy

This passage teaches that God is sovereign over evil as well as good and uses evil to accomplish His good and righteous purposes. God will do as He pleases with the wicked, and He will do it to glorify Himself by revealing His goodness to His chosen vessels of mercy. This answer to the objection in verse 19, “Why does He still find fault?” is a clear statement of God’s free sovereign right (or prerogative) to do as He pleases with His creation.

23And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy

God demonstrates His wrath, power, and patience with the wicked to make known or to *display* “the riches of His glory” to His chosen “vessels of mercy.” When God’s vessels of mercy (those who are redeemed) consider the destruction of the wicked, they will stand in awe of God’s wrath, power, and patience. The Bible plainly declares that God’s purpose in the destruction of the wicked is to display His glory.

which He prepared beforehand for glory, 24even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

The vessels of mercy God “prepared beforehand for glory” comprise His church: the saved, the elect, the called (the foreknown remnant of Jews and those foreknown among the Gentiles.) The Bible plainly declares that God *predestines* these vessels of mercy for salvation by working according “to His own purpose and grace” (2 Timothy 1:9) to prepare them for *glory*. Second Peter 1:3-4 affirms that those who have been called “by His own glory and excellence . . . become partakers of the divine nature.” What a cause for rejoicing!

Question #158: For what purposes does God endure “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction”?

Question #159: In your own words, explain why these are good and right purposes.

Romans 9:25-29: ²⁵As He says also in Hosea, “I will call those who were not My people, ‘My people,’ And her who was not beloved, ‘beloved.’” ²⁶“And 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.” ²⁷And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved; ²⁸for the Lord will execute His word upon the earth, thoroughly and quickly.” ²⁹And just as Isaiah

foretold, "Except the LORD of Sabaoth had left to us a posterity, We would have become as Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah."

²⁵As He says also in Hosea, "I will call those who were not My people, 'My people,' And her who was not beloved, 'beloved.'" ²⁶"And 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."

Paul here affirms that Hosea's prophecy is fulfilled in God's choosing certain Gentiles to be saved and called "My people . . . sons of the living God." They receive this new identity because of their faith in Christ, not by becoming Jews.

²⁷And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved; ²⁸for the Lord will execute His word upon the earth, thoroughly and quickly." ²⁹And just as Isaiah foretold, "Except the LORD of Sabaoth had left to us a posterity, We would have become as Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah."

Conversely, Israel (known as the sons of Israel) did not receive the promised blessing of salvation as a nation. Only a remnant of Jews believed in Jesus Christ along with many Gentiles. Here the point of Romans 9:6-7 is re-affirmed:

Romans 9:6-7: ⁶But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For **they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;** ⁷**neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants,** but: "Through Isaac your descendants will be named."

Jacob was chosen over Esau "in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand" (Romans 9:11). Were these choices of God, made apart from human works, unjust? "May it never be!" Paul affirms (v. 14). Then he reminds his readers of *God's explanation* of how His sovereignty works in salvation: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (v. 15). Paul understood that God chose some for salvation and passed over others (vs. 16-18), "in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He **prepared beforehand for glory**" (v. 23). And here he re-affirms what he has already taught: that only a remnant of Jews will be saved, and that only by the mercy of God. If God had not graciously "left to us a posterity," the Jews would have been destroyed as completely as Sodom and Gomorrah.

Question #160: Do you see how Paul strengthened His argument in verse 27-29 by seeing God's choice of a remnant out of the midst of Israel's utter rebellion against God? In your own words describe this.

Romans 9:30-33: 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."

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.

What an amazing contrast we see here! The Gentiles did not seek righteous standing with God by their own merit but received it *by faith*. Israel, however, sought righteous standing with God by boasting in their *heritage* as Abraham's seed and their own futile efforts to keep the Law—and were corporately cut off from the blessing of salvation. They failed to glorify their merciful God by humbly acknowledging their dependence on Him by faith and trusting in Christ's righteousness alone for justification in God's sight.

They stumbled over the stumbling stone,³³ just 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."

They stumbled by rejecting Christ the Messiah, who alone merited the righteousness of God for sinners. Here is the reason for Paul's great sorrow and unceasing grief for his kinsmen (vv. 2-3).

Question #161: Describe the "stumbling stone" and "rock of offense" that tripped up so many Jews _____

Is that same stone still causing people to stumble? _____ What is the only way to avoid falling over it? _____

God is Sovereign in the dispensing of His grace

Simply put, God determines who receives grace and who does not. If this were not true, humanity would be sovereign in this matter and could rightfully boast. Grace would play no part in salvation because the faith to believe would not be *freely* bestowed on whomever God wills to have mercy: **"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy"** (Romans 9:15).

Luke 4:25-29: ²⁵"But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; ²⁶**and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.** ²⁷And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and **none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.**" ²⁸And all in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; ²⁹and they rose up and cast Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff.

God's sovereignty is seen in many places in the Bible and concerns broader matters than salvation.

1 Chronicles 29:11-13: ¹¹Thine, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Thine is the dominion, O LORD, and Thou dost exalt Thyself as head over all. ¹²**Both riches and honor come from Thee, and Thou dost rule over all, and in Thy hand is power and might; and it lies in Thy hand to make great, and to strengthen everyone.** ¹³Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name.

Exodus 4:11: And the LORD said to him, **"Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"**

Isaiah 45:7: The One forming light and creating darkness, **Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.**

Question #162: Explain in your own words why it is *good* that *God determines* who receives grace and who does not. _____