



Lesson 11 August 13th, 2016

Living Under God's Mercy

Study Scripture – Romans 9:6-18

Background Scripture – Romans 9:6-29

Key Verse:

Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Romans 9:18

INTRODUCTION

“That’s not fair” is a phrase that is heard sooner or later when children gather to play or engage in just about any activity. There is a presumption of fairness it seems on the part of everybody and this trait does follow into adulthood on the part of many people. The Apostle Paul recognized the trait and as he explained God’s sovereignty, election and justification of sinners through faith in Jesus Christ, he anticipated objections to his teaching; among the objections the question, is God fair? The Apostle will address these questions and objections throughout his letter to the Roman Church and his arguments though squarely based on the Scriptures do leave many readers with some sense of unease and an enduring tension in the text itself.

Romans chapter 9 presents some ‘hard’ truths about God, for many want God to be someone other than whom the Bible reveals Him to be. They want God to be an equal-opportunity Savior, who loves everyone just “the same”. They want Him to be what they consider “fair,” giving everyone what they define or consider an “equal chance” to be saved, and they want salvation, at least in some small way, to be linked to something in them.

Paul however, shows in this chapter and consistent with the rest of Scripture that God has not “granted” salvation equally to all people. He has always made choices, not only between nations, but also between individuals.

We encourage you to prepare your minds to face some of the toughest questions a person can ever face when that person begins to think about and examine carefully the actions and the workings of God. Many have bitterly accused God of unfairness and denounced Him when they examine and try to explain God’s action, and in this chapter the Apostle Paul faces squarely the questions raised.

The Lesson Study Topic points us in the right direction as it puts the Lesson in the context of who God is, and whether we are ready and willing to let God be God, to look at God’s historic actions to men and His mercy, before we can even appreciate the matter of who chose whom!

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A few Dictionary definitions of “mercy” will help us in this regard. These definitions should put you in the right frame of mind and make you begin to remember just who you really are.

Note carefully what God’s mercy consists of, the many facets in it, and the many benefits when you live under God’s mercy.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “mercy” as follows:

1. Compassion or forbearance shown especially to an offender or to one subject to one’s power: lenient or compassionate treatment.
2. A blessing that is an act of divine love or compassion
3. Compassionate treatment of those in distress.

The ATS Bible Dictionary:

The divine goodness exercised toward the wretched and the guilty, in harmony with truth and justice. Psalm 85:10. The plan by which God is enabled to show saving mercy to men, for Christ’s sake, is the most consummate work of infinite wisdom and love.

Easton Bible Dictionary

Compassion for the miserable. Its object is misery. By the atoning sacrifice of Christ, a way is open for the exercise of mercy toward the sons of men, in harmony with the demands of truth and righteousness.

International Standard Encyclopedia

“Mercy” is a distinctive Bible word characterizing God as revealed to men....

In the Old Testament it is most often the translation of *chechedh*, “kindness”, “loving-kindness” but *rachamim*, literal, “bowels” (the sympathetic region), and *chanan*, “to be inclined to”, “to be gracious”, are all translated “mercy”; *eleos*, “kindness”, “beneficence”, and *eleeo*, “to show kindness” are the chief words rendering “mercy” in the New Testament...

1. Mercy is

- (a) An essential quality of God (Exodus 34:6,7, Deuteronomy 4:31, Psalm 62:12, etc.). It is His delight (Micah 7:18,20; Psalm 52:8); He is “the Father of mercies” 2 Corinthians 1:3, “rich in mercy” (Ephesians 2:4), “full of pity, and merciful” (James 5:11).
- (b) It is associated with forgiveness (Exodus 34:7, Numbers 14:18, 1 Timothy 1:13,16)
- (c) With His forbearance (Psalm 145:8).
- (d) With His covenant (1 Kings 8:23, Nehemiah 1:5), with His justice (Psalm 101:1), with His faithfulness (Psalm 89:24), with His truth (Psalm 108:4), mercy and truth are united in Proverbs 3:3; Proverbs 14:22).
- (e) It goes forth to all (Psalm 145:9).
- (f) It shows itself in pitying help (Exodus 3:7; Ezra 9:9).

As we look at this thorniest of subjects, the doctrine of election or what some call predestination, which is guaranteed to raise blood pressures, and which has been the cause of major divisions in the Protestant world, we must remember that Romans 9 follows chapters 6, 7, and 8.



The Apostle is not changing the subject from the Christian and how he develops in his Christian life as he learns to walk in the Spirit. He had stressed that the life we inherited from Adam was as far as God was concerned, a useless and worthless thing. It was of little value for it did not produce anything lasting. One writer summarizes the ideas in the previous chapters for us as follows:

“The first eight chapters made the powerful case that the news from heaven is the best possible news. The tragedy was a lot worse than we thought; we had no idea how desperate our condition was. There are no mitigating circumstances, no way out. The race is destined for death and hell and deserves it, and it cannot answer the problems on its own. And yet God acted graciously in Christ who is our substitute. By his stripes we are healed, and by his Spirit we are empowered. The news is so gloriously good that it defies description. The end of Romans 8, for instance, reminds us, “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave himself up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? We are more than conqueror...nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”. Such good news!”

But the Apostle Paul now uses the nation Israel to illustrate the great themes he had developed and emphasized, though it might appear that the sudden change had to do with a brand new topic.

The Apostle now answers the question as to how true the good news of Romans 1-8 is and whether or not God has kept His promises to Israel, and the unique nature of these promises. He therefore points to Israel as being what one writer calls **“the prime example of unavailing privilege”**.

To them were given

- (1) A Sonship relationship to God. They were the only nation to whom God said as in Psalm 2:7 *“Thou art my son”*.
- (2) They had the glory, and were protected by the visible *Shekinah glory*
- (3) They had the *covenants*, agreements God made with men, the Jews.
- (4) The *law* was theirs. The character of God was revealed in the Ten Commandments.
- (5) They were given the *worship* the divinely prescribed Temple rituals.
- (6) They were given the *promises* of the kingdom glory. They would be the head of the nations and the world would be ruled from Jerusalem, their capital.
- (7) The *patriarchs*, the fathers were all Jews.
- (8) Most importantly, as one scholar reminds us, God chose to enter the human race in the person of Jesus Christ, as a Jew.

The problem was that Israel misunderstood the basis of salvation. The basis the Apostle set forth is **“unpredictable election”**.

This issue has split the Christian church and is thought of under the debate between Armenianism and Calvinism. As we summarize the key points in this debate, let us state clearly



and firmly that holding the Arminian or the Calvinist beliefs will not determine your salvation. Those who are Arminian, having their beliefs as well as those who have Calvinist belief can be saved.

Clearly, however, the Christian community has now shifted its belief structure and instead of being Calvinist is now mainly Arminian in its position. One writer comments on this:

“The average Christian today might claim to be Calvinist, but they function as a “practical Arminian”. While many Calvinist pastors still ascribe to the Calvinist shibboleths, in their practical theology, they are functioning Arminian”.

ARMINIANISM AND ITS BELIEFS, ITS POSITIONS

- (1) Free-will or human ability. **Human nature was seriously affected by the Fall, but man is not spiritually helpless. Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it, choosing good over evil in spiritual matters. God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe but does not interfere with man’s freedom. The sinner needs the Spirit’s assistance, but has the power to cooperate with God’s Spirit and be regenerated, or resist God’s grace and perish.**
- (2) Conditional election. **“God’s choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world was based upon His foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew would of themselves freely believe the Gospel. Election therefore was determined by or conditioned upon what man would do.**
- (3) Universal redemption. **Christ’s redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone. Only those who believe on him are saved. Christ’s redemption become effective only if a man chooses to accept it.**
- (4) The Holy Spirit can be effectually resisted. **The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation. He does all that He can to bring every sinner to salvation. But inasmuch as man is free, he can successfully resist the Spirit’s call.**
- (5) Falling from grace. **Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep up their faith.**

CALVINISM’S FIVE POINTS

- (1) Total inability or total depravity. **At the Fall, man lost the ability to believe the Gospel as he became dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God, having a deceitful, desperately corrupt heart. His will is not free but is in bondage to his evil nature, and so he cannot choose good over evil in the spiritual realm.**
- (2) Unconditional election. **God’s choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in His own sovereign will. His choice of particular sinners was not base on any foreseen response of obedience on their part, such as**



faith, repentance etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual He has selected. Those whom God sovereignly elected He brings through the power of the Spirit to a willing acceptance of Christ.

- (3) Particular redemption or limited atonement. **Christ’s redeeming work was intended to save the elect only, and actually secured salvation for them. His death was the substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners, and secured everything necessary for their salvation, including faith which united them to Him.**
- (4) The efficacious call of the Spirit or Irresistible grace. **In addition to the outward general call to salvation (which is made to everyone who hears the Gospel) the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation. The external call (which is made to all without distinction) can be- and often is- rejected; whereas the internal call (which is made only to the elect) cannot be rejected; it always results in conversion.**
- (5) Perseverance of the saints. **All who are chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and thus persevere to the end.**

This might sound like “dull theology”, but these views determine what Churches in one form or other believe and what they do. Of course, as you look around, you will see a mixture of these views, often one contradict or inconsistent with another, without the holders of the views being aware of the logical inconsistency in their views.

Your belief in free will, the extent of the effect of the Fall and sin on men, your belief in your human capacity to obtain salvation by taking the first step toward God of your own free will after God first prompting you with “prevenient grace”, so that the decisive thing is the will of man, not the will or decree of God, will have an effect on your life. It might lead to less dependence and trust in God, and more reliance on your self-effort.

Note however that many prominent evangelists and preachers such as John Wesley, Dwight Moody, of the 19th Century, and Billy Graham of recent times are Arminian.

Churches such as the Methodists, the Free Will Baptists, the churches of Christ, the General Baptists, the churches of the Nazarene, the Seventh Day Adventist Churches, the Wesleyan Church, the Salvation Army, Conservative Mennonites, the Amish, as well as others hold to Arminian positions.

As such therefore, we cannot say that only those with Calvinistic beliefs are saved and others are not. So be careful how you judge.

Note however that there is a strong Biblical inclination to state that God has not given everyone what some consider to be an equal chance to be saved and when God saves someone, it has nothing to do with anything good in that person. Rather, it depends totally on God’s



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purpose according to His choice (9:11). *“So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.”* (9:16).

Paul further squashes the idea that God has to have is is bound to have mercy equally on everyone; he adds *“So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.”* (9:18),

Paul anchors his argument by referring back to the multi-generational saga that began with Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, where God made certain promises to that patriarch. Those promises included the assurance that Abraham’s descendants would become a great nation and a blessing to *“all families of the earth.”* Generation one featured Abraham, his wife Sarah, and handmaid Hagar.

The second generation featured Isaac (son of Abraham and Sarah) and Ishmael (son of Abraham and Hagar). As a matter of interest, Abraham later married another wife, Keturah, and had six sons by her (Genesis 25:1-2), but these do not figure into Paul’s discussion here.

The third generation spotlighted Isaac’s two sons, Jacob and Esau and here God’s promises were passed down only through one son Jacob whose name was changed to *Israel* (Genesis 32:28), and the promises eventually extended to his twelve sons.

The point was, God’s choice to bless through Abraham was solely His own and the promise was passed on particularly to single individuals by God’s choice only and sometimes against what would be considered the normal course (9:12). At the time of the enactment of the Covenant, Abraham slept while God passed through the parts of the lined up carcass of the sacrificed animal.

The descendants of Isaac, Jacob and Esau, were born of the same mother and father at the same time. But God chose Jacob and rejected Esau while they were still in the womb, before either of them had done good or bad. God’s reason for doing this was (9:11), *“so that His purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls.”*

Paul backs up his point with two Old Testament references, *“The older will serve the younger”* (Gen. 25:23); and, *“Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated”* (Mal. 1:2b-3a). He was making the point that God’s word to Israel had not failed, because God always accomplishes His purpose through His free choice of a remnant according to His grace.

interestingly from the human point of view Esau was a kinder, more deserving, rugged, father loving and serving, eventual ready to forgive the brother who robbed him, attractive person than the wily, scheming, conniving Jacob the Supplanter who knew every trick in the book. But even though Esau was not chosen by God, God blessed him tremendously and made him the wealthy and powerful father of many peoples.



Unit 3 – Life on God’s Terms; Living Under God’s Mercy

The question of the place of Jews and Gentiles in God’s great plan of salvation was of particular importance to the church in Rome, because that church was comprised of Christians of Jewish and Gentile backgrounds, and there appears to have been some friction between the two groups (11:13-24). God’s promises to the nation of Israel appears to have been a point of contention; probably touted by some Jewish Christians while those of Gentile background might have been dismissive of the promises to Israel because of Christ (Rom. 11). Paul condoned neither position.

To this point in his letter and argument, it appears that God’s people Israel was somehow “shunted aside” and the natural question that arose was what about the promises to Abraham and the patriarchs? Either Paul’s gospel was wrong or God’s promises had failed! Paul’s response will in a very direct way raise the issue of the sovereignty of God in salvation. This is a matter that move some people to question God’s ‘fairness’ and even ask, is there unrighteousness with God?

Let us follow as the Apostle resorts to the Scriptures to unequivocally establish the sovereignty of God in salvation. Noteworthy even today and among Christians the issue is a matter of disquiet with many.

THE TEXT

Verses 1 - 5. In these first five verses Paul began by baring his heart to show his love for the Jews as some might have seen his abandonment of Judaism as a rejection of the race. The Apostle expressed his "sorrow" and "grief" over Israel's condition with regard to their relationship with God. Even after saying the Spirit would never let him lose his way he was willing to give up his salvation in exchange for saving his people. What a great love!

We can hear echoes of Moses self-sacrificing wish for the Israelites' salvation (Exod. 32:30-35) as Paul expressed a similar sentiment. Paul then listed some of the wonderful blessings Israel had enjoyed through God’s election and gracious dealings with the nation over the centuries but which they had presently forfeited in their rejection of Messiah.

Verse 6. Paul now moved quickly to squelch the idea that God’s ‘word’ or His promise had somehow failed or gone off-course. The fact is, in no sense can the word of God fail!

Job 42:2: *“I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.”*

Psalm 22:28: *“For the kingdom is the Lord’s and He rules over the nations.”*

Psalm 33:10-11: *“The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation.”*

Psalm 103:19: *“The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all.”*

Psalm 115:3: *“But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.”*

....to mention just a few texts.



... *they are not all Israel.*

Paul announces a major principle to which he earlier made reference, Romans 2:28, 29; 4:16, 17 (see Luke 3:8). Here he probes deeper with the declaration that just being of *the seed of Abraham* (a physical descendant) does not make a person one of his *children* (a spiritual descendant). In other words, belonging to Israel in a physical sense is not the same thing as belonging to Israel in a spiritual sense. Having the DNA of Abraham in one’s genes does not mean a person is a guaranteed heir to the promises. Having the blood of Abraham coursing through one’s veins does not automatically convey to such a person the faith of Abraham and his relationship with God.

Paul will now cite three illustrations to show that God’s election was and is totally of His own volition and not necessarily corporate. Paul will show that God choose Isaac, not Ishmael (9:6-9); Jacob, not Esau (9:10-13); and Moses, not Pharaoh (9:14-18).

Verse 7. The Apostle begins to illustrate the principle from verse 6 with a reminder of the case of Isaac and Ishmael. Even though God promised to bless Abraham's descendants, it was only one main branch of his family ('through Isaac') that He singled out for special blessing. God's special, elective purpose applied only to Isaac and his line of descendants (Gen. 18:10-14). This reference to God's choice of Isaac over Ishmael is the first of three Old Testament illustrations of God's sovereignty. The other two are Jacob/Esau (vv. 10-13) and Pharaoh (vv. 14-18).

Verse 8. ... *children of the flesh* ... The fact that not every physical child of Abraham was his promised heir is evident from the Old Testament itself. Only Isaac was the child of *the promise*, the son of faith (Genesis 21:12). Ishmael was Abraham’s son through the bondwoman Hagar by an act of unbelief. Ishmael and his descendants were “*children of the flesh*” (9:8).

Abraham and Sarah did not trust God’s promise of many descendants, so they devised a plan to provide a son through their own actions (Genesis 16:1-4). This did not nullify God promise, despite Abraham and Sarah’s unfaithful act. In their old age, they miraculously received their promised son, Isaac (Genesis 21:1-3). Ishmael had the DNA of Abraham, but not God’s promise to that man. Through only one son did the promise flow, and that son was Isaac. Claiming Abraham as a physical ancestor does not make one his spiritual heir.

... *children of the promise*... those born supernaturally!

We are reminded here that being in right standing with God is not a matter of biological connections or family trees (Matthew 3:9). Rather, it is a matter of the condition of one’s heart. Those who come to Christ in faith are the true children of Abraham (Galatians 3:7).

One writer provides some useful insights to Paul’s arguments: “**First, some claim that in Romans 9 Paul is not dealing with God’s choice of some for *salvation*, but rather for *service*. But, Paul’s deep grief (9:1-5) was over the fact that most of his fellow Jews**



were *not saved*, not that they were not serving God. The terms that Paul uses in our text show that salvation is the issue. “*Children of God*” and “*children of the promise*” (9:8) invariably refer to salvation (Rom. 8:16, 21; Phil. 2:15; Gal. 4:28). “To call” (9:11) always refers to God’s effectual call to salvation.

Another argument is that Paul is talking here about *nations*, not about *individuals*. Somehow, this is supposed to soften the “unpleasant” notion that God chooses individuals to salvation. But if God chose Israel as a nation, but did not choose any other nation (Deut. 7:7-8; Ps. 147:19-20), then all the *individuals* in other nations were excluded from the covenant promises. While Malachi 1:2-3 in its context refers to the nations that came forth from Jacob and Esau, it went back to God’s choice of Jacob and rejection of Esau *as individuals* while they were still in the womb. We might ask, if it’s supposedly unfair of God to choose one individual and reject another, isn’t it *more* unfair to choose one nation and reject all others? But the problem that Paul is addressing here is, why are many individual Jews, who are a part of the elect nation of Israel, not saved? His answer is that God didn’t choose everyone in Israel to be saved. He later (11:5) refers to the “true Israel” as “a remnant according to God’s gracious choice.”

Verse 9. Here Paul reminds us of *the word of promise* given by God (Genesis 18:10, 14). The promised son was Isaac, born in Abraham and Sarah’s old age (17:17; 18:13; 21:5). The birth of Isaac was understood by this couple as a fulfillment of God’s promise.

God did not choose to bless Isaac, after his birth, only because he was Abraham’s son. Rather He promised Abraham, before Isaac’s birth, that He would provide and bless a son for the patriarch supernaturally (*‘at this time’*). His unusual birth confirmed God’s choice of Isaac, as the channel of special blessing, to his parents.

Verse 10. In this verse we see another illustration of God’s sovereign choice as the Apostle moves to the next generation. There are two sons at issue in this situation also, the twins Esau and Jacob. There are no competing mothers this time (Genesis 16:4-6), only competing sons. Only one of these two was to be the heir of the promise to Abraham and to Isaac (26:2-5).

Verses 11. God’s clear choice of Jacob rather than Esau shows He does choose some and not others. In this example Paul will address some counter arguments that might have been made.

While some might suggest that Isaac was obviously the natural son through whom blessing would come, since he was the first son born to both Abraham and Sarah that was not true of Jacob.

Furthermore, Esau and Jacob both had the same mother as well as the same father, so that was not a factor, as an objector might claim it was in Isaac and Ishmael’s case.

Also, Jacob and Esau might have normally shared the firstborn privilege, since they were twins. One conception produced both of them. However, God chose Jacob even though Rebekah bore Esau before Jacob. As in the case of Isaac, God made a choice between them before their birth.



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Their birth was also supernatural since their mother was barren. God chose Jacob before he had done anything good or bad or manifested a character worthy of God's special blessing.

Just as God’s primary promise was not extended to both Ishmael and Isaac, such was also the case for brothers Esau and Jacob. Paul gives no explanation, he merely lays out a stark fact: God made a choice between those two before they were even born. God’s decision was made before they had proven themselves by doing *any good or evil*.

... *Not of works, but of him that calleth* ... Paul stressed a vital point here: God’s choice was not made on the basis of *works* on the part of either Jacob or Esau. This fact is applicable in two ways in the Roman situation that Paul was addressing.

First, neither Jews nor Gentiles can earn God’s favor. He did not choose the nation of Israel for any reason other than His own purposes. In fact the prophet told Israel that they were the weakest, least attractive, and humblest of nations but God still chose them. His plan was for a certain nation to be the recipients of His divine law and to be the nation to usher in His promised Messiah. That nation came into being through the call of Jacob, not Esau (Genesis 28:13-15).

We may note that when it came to sin, neither son was more righteous than the other. Jacob took advantage to cheat Esau out of both his birthright and his father’s blessing (Genesis 25:29-34). Esau chose wives that grieved his parents (26:34, 35); he also plotted murder against Jacob (27:41). But he forgot that and seemed to have forgiven Jacob, but Jacob still did not quite trust him, and went to live in the opposite part of the land away from him.

Verse 12. ... *the elder shall serve the younger*... a partial quotation of Genesis 25:23.

This prophecy went against prevailing cultural norms, which dictated that the older son held the primary position as heir. (Compare God’s later declaration in Deuteronomy 21:15-17.) Normally, this also should have been the case with twins Esau and Jacob, even if Esau was *the elder* by no more than a few minutes.

This is an epic prophecy about much more than the sibling rivalry we read about in Genesis 25:29-34; 27:1-41. These sons of Isaac became the patriarchal ancestors of two nations or peoples: those of Edom (of son Esau; Gen. 36) and Israel (of son Jacob; Gen. 49:1-28). Although blood kin, these two nations ended up being in constant conflict to this day! (Numbers 20:14-21; 1 Chronicles 18:12, 13; 2 Chronicles 21:8-10)

The rift between the people of Israel/Jacob and Edom/Esau never healed (Psalms 137:7; Isaiah 34:5). The reversal of Esau and Jacob’s positions regarding pre-eminence, astounding at the time, was in the deliberate plan of God.

Verse 13. ... *as it is written*... means the Scriptures.

Paul did a fast-forward from the book of Genesis some fourteen hundred years later, to quote Malachi 1:2-3 to show the result of God’s promise being directed through Jacob rather than



Esau. Malachi prophesied after some Jews had returned from Babylonian captivity to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple. His prophecy pictured Edom as a place of “*waste for the dragons of the wilderness*” (1:3) and promised that God would never allow that nation to rebuild (1:4). This justified Malachi’s historical verdict: God had loved Jacob (Israel) but hated Esau (Edom).

It is important to note however there is no personal animosity with God. One writer explains the word meaning in this very difficult passage:

“In the New Testament comparing the two passages in which the term hate is used, in Luke the Lord Jesus speaks about hating father, hating mother otherwise you cannot be a disciple. But in Matthew, in a parallel passage, he speaks about loving more. For really this expression to hate is an Hebrew idiom. It really means, “I prefer Jacob to Esau so far as my plan and purpose is concerned”.

And in Genesis 29, in the context of this very story, the word hate is used in that sense. In ancient times, if a Hebrew man went to adopt a son out of a family in which there were two sons, and he adopted only one of them, he was said according to Hebrew idiom to love one and to hate the other. So when we read here, “*Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated*”, he means nothing more than, “Jacob have I elected in my sovereign plan and purpose. Esau I have not elected in my sovereign plan and purpose”.

There is some difficulty in harmonizing the sovereignty and human responsibility. All men, including Esau and Jacob were sinners, but different kinds of sinners. Esau could not blame God for his sins and what happened to him and his descendants afterwards.

Although it took centuries for God’s promise to be fulfilled, it proved sure and trustworthy. In Paul’s day, Edom was called *Idumaea* (Mark 3:8) and was but a shadow of its ancient self, lending further support to Paul’s illustration. God had chosen to favor Israel, even in the midst of Roman occupation, while Edom languished.

It is important that we emphasize this word meaning so that no one can misunderstand God. ... *Jacob have I loved, but Esau...* One writer notes with regard to this statement: **God chose Jacob to inherit the blessings first promised to Abraham. . . . If God's love of Jacob consists in his choosing Jacob to be the 'seed' who would inherit the blessings promised to Abraham, then God's hatred of Esau is best understood to refer to God's decision not to bestow this privilege on Esau. It might best be translated 'reject.'** "Love' and 'hate' are not here, then, emotions that God feels but actions that he carries out.

The strong contrast is a Semitic idiom that heightens the comparison by stating it in absolute terms. The Hebrew idiom means, 'I preferred Jacob to [over] Esau'. This "love" equals "elect" equation is also clear in Genesis 29:30 and 31. In verse 30, we read that "Jacob . . . loved Rachel more than Leah." In the next verse, we read that "Leah was hated."

Verse 14. ... *Is there unrighteousness with God?...*

Paul pauses here in his history lesson to ask a difficult question, which was likely on some minds. The question of fairness always arises whenever someone makes a choice to favor one



person or group over another. The apostle knows that his insistence on God's initiative in determining who should be saved or elected or favored and who rejected (see vv. 10-13 especially) will meet with questions and even objections.

In this case does all this mean that God is unrighteous? The Apostle first flatly denied the charge that God is unjust:

"There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!"

God cannot be unjust because He is God. This is unthinkable for the apostle and is similar to his question in Romans 6:1, *"Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?"*

This is called the *reduction to the absurd* argument, the answer to which is obvious. To charge God with being unjust or unrighteous is preposterous. God is the one who defines justice and righteousness! However difficult it may be for us to understand the history of Isaac and Ishmael, of Jacob and Esau, there can be no question about the God’s integrity (Deuteronomy 32:4).

Verse 15. *... I will have mercy on whom...* Paul begins to refute the charge of unrighteousness with another hard statement; a quote from Exodus 33:19.

He moves from the time of Malachi (v. 13) to the time of Moses, a jump backward of about one thousand years. In so doing, Paul quotes a word from the Lord to Moses (Exodus 33:19), which was delivered as the people of Israel were camped at Mt. Sinai.

The dialogue occurred in the context of Moses’ personal relationship with God, for Moses had found favor with the Lord (Exodus 33:17). Moses had begged the Lord to accompany Israel as it prepared to depart for the Promised Land, thereby revealing His presence to the other nations. The divine response reminded Moses that God alone decides which nation(s) He will favor. Israel had done nothing to deserve special treatment from God, for they were a stubborn lot (Exodus 33:5). It was God’s decision.

Verse 16. *... So then it is not of him that willeth ...* Paul now makes a most crucial point as he draws a conclusion. His historical examples show that God’s favor is not contingent on human desires (*willeth*) or human exertions (*runneth*).

We cannot wish for God’s graciousness and cause it to happen. We cannot work for God’s favor and find it as a reward. It is up to God to show mercy to us (Ephesians 2:8-9). Paul has shown decisively in Romans 1-3 that no human is deserving of mercy, otherwise it would not be mercy! The only reward we earn for our lives of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

It is not man's desire or effort ("man who wills or . . . runs") that causes God to be merciful, but His own sovereign choice ("depends . . . on God who has mercy"). God is under no obligation to show mercy or extend grace to anyone. If we insist on receiving just treatment from God, what we will get is condemnation (3:23).



Verse 17. ... *have I raised thee up...* with reference to Exodus 9:16, Paul continued his lesson on God’s graciousness. The point at hand involved Pharaoh, the man who held the people of Israel as his slaves in Egypt. He was reluctant to free his workforce of slaves as Moses demanded. God then sent a series of plagues on Egypt.

Despite the great suffering these caused, Pharaoh refused to listen to Moses. It was just before the seventh plague that Moses delivered the words Paul quotes here, declaring that Pharaoh’s power had nothing to do with him as a man. Rather, power had been given to him by the Lord. Pharaoh was an instrument in the divine drama that was orchestrated by the God of the universe for the purpose of declaring His name *throughout all the earth*, through the new nation of Israel.

One writer notes: **“God did not mean that He had created Pharaoh and allowed him to sit on Egypt’s throne, though He had done that too. This is clear from Exodus 9:16, which Paul quoted.**

The NASB translation makes this clear by translating Exodus 9:16, “. . . for this cause I have allowed you to remain.” Pharaoh deserved death for his opposition and insolence. However, God would not take his life in the remaining plagues, so that his continuing opposition and God’s victory over him would result in greater glory for God (Josh. 9:9; Ps. 76:10). Here is another example, similar to the one in verse 15, of God not giving people what they deserve—but extending mercy to them instead.”

Verse 18. . *Therefore hath he mercy ...* Paul conclusion here contains both some of the most comforting and most chilling words in all the Bible.

First, Paul reminds the reader that the mercy of God is at His initiative. What comfort in knowing that we serve a merciful God! We can leave behind any attempts to earn His favor and simply serve Him out of love and gratitude.

Second, we are reminded that the purposes of God can require the hardening of people like Pharaoh. This is the chilling part. Why would God use Pharaoh in this way? This might seem unfair to some. For a better understanding we must read the larger account of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart in the Book of Exodus. There we will find that it speaks not only of God’s hardening Pharaoh’s heart (Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 14:4), but also of Pharaoh’s hardening his own heart earlier (8:15, 32). Pharaoh was a willing, stubborn, arrogant partner in his own hardening.

In chapter 1 the Apostle spoke of the way God gave people over to their own evil desires as a form of punishment for their sins. This is how God hardens people’s hearts. In Pharaoh’s case we see this working out clearly. God was not unjust because He allowed the hardening process to continue. His justice demanded punishment.

Note that neither here nor anywhere else is God said to harden anyone who had not first hardened himself. God’s hardening, then, is an action that renders a person insensitive to God and his word and that, if not reversed, culminates in eternal damnation. Paul’s point was simply



that God can freely and justly extend mercy or not extend mercy to those who deserve His judgment.

CONCLUSION

Christians should joyfully submit to the truth of Romans 9 because it is God’s revelation of Himself, and we should not grudgingly accept who He is, but rejoice in who He is. The more that we see Him, and learn of Him, the more we should rejoice.

Romans 9 might contain some hard truths but we should rejoice in them as Paul use these same truths to explain why our salvation is secure and certain.

We can be certain that God’s word cannot fail because He always accomplishes His purpose through His free choice of a remnant according to His grace.

The secular mindset in the world and in the modern church seems to naturally gravitate to any concept where there is a great deal of emphasis on man and his decisions. Do not fall into that trap of Satan. One writer has observed:

“Sometimes we are tempted to act as if God is helpless without us and our work. We lean toward pragmatism and are constantly looking for “what works best” as if methodology were more important than the message. Since we believe that all men can be saved, we tend to assume that if they aren’t saved, we have not packaged the invitation (or the message) right. We especially love management, leadership, programs, marketing, and research data. We tend to focus more on the “potential convert” than on the eternal gospel. Arminiasm easily leans toward a NIKE mentality-- “just do it”. We are somewhat less inclined to pray in order to move God to “do it”.

Just like Pharaoh we are entirely capable of maintaining an unrepentant spirit even though we see the evidence of God’s mercy in His Word and in our lives. God’s use of Pharaoh’s evil heart is no excuse for Pharaoh’s actions. While we may stand in wonder at the purposes of God in the history of Israel, we must also stand in awe of God’s willingness to show mercy to us, rebellious sinners who do not deserve His favor.

It is however quite appealing for those living in habitual, flagrant, wicked, continual sin, in open opposition to the commandments of God to believe that once they are “saved” they will always be “saved” and go to heaven. But be warned. God does not accept that life style. He did not accept it from unbelieving and rebellious Israel and He will not accept it from you.

Some however are content to feel simply that it is possible to apostatize and leave the family of God, or to simply accuse those who are in sin of never having been a Christian in the first place.



Unit 3 – Life on God’s Terms; Living Under God’s Mercy

But for those who profess to be believers, the Scriptures make plain that believers are to be witnesses to carry the Gospel. How can they hear without a preacher, says the Scripture?

There has to be a consistent, unwavering, missionary, Gospel spreading activity. Believers are to themselves stand out as a light in a dark place, and show the nature of God to all.

Only God knows those whom He has chosen. Our task is not to elect members of the Body of Christ but to encourage, warn, spread the good News, and snatch those in the fire as “a brand from the burning”, and to share what God has given us with those in need, to visit those in prison, to help the sick, and the suffering.

As children of God we have to show the kind of mercy that He has shown to us. The Scriptures use the term “mercy” in relation to man as well as of God, and God requires us to show mercy to man and to beasts (Deuteronomy 25:4, Psalm 37:21, Psalm 109:16. We are told

“Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful”. Luke 10:30.

We are also given a promise

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy”.

Remember “mercy” is associated with forgiveness.

Remember Job had questioned why God isn’t more like us and why He did not explain Himself. Why, he asked, is God the way He is?

But when he finally encountered God he could only withdraw his complaints:

“I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear;

But now my eyes see Thee;

Therefore I retract,

And I repent in dust and ashes”.

No matter what the different philosophies say, remember that God is not like us and we will never be God. But we will be His children and a part of His family. That will be most glorious.. He is Creator and He has made man and the universe in His way which is perfect.

So we encourage you not to try to fight Him. Instead do what you can to encourage love for God, appreciate your life, your breath, and the gifts He has given to you.

As you look at your weakness, and the constant failure of the loud and the proud among and around you, be more humble for as you mature spiritually, you will become more and more certain that you do not deserve anything, and you will therefore be more grateful for what God has given you.

Just note that if you are troubled and your mind is telling you something strange is happening, and the plans you are making on your own do not seem to be working out the way you want,



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and you hear the whispering voice of the Holy Spirit speaking and calling to you, accept that you are elected by God even if you are not presently on your best behaviour. Simply respond. Tell Him to speak Lord, for your servant is hearing you.

He will answer, and He will keep you. You cannot keep yourself, but He can keep you, and take you through all the ups and downs of life. He will give you the gift of faith, and in the end give you the fullness of eternal life.

