

Romans 9:1-33 “The Sovereignty of God”

As we continue our study today in the book of Romans we might benefit from just understanding that this book of the Bible is kind of broken into different sections...I believe you could say that the first section covers Romans chapters 1-8 which we just concluded last week...and then you could say that chapters 9-11 are really teaching us about how God is not yet finished with Israel and that He will complete the promises that had been made to them in the past...and then in chapters 12-16 we'll get into the practical application of our Christian faith and how we should live as believers.

We have just finished looking at the incredible gift of salvation that is available to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and we had some awesome promises at the end of chapter 8 as Paul was telling the Roman believers that there is not one thing in all the universe that can separate us from the love of God and that we who are in Christ are more than conquerors.

I think you and I should be reminded of these things regularly, for in our own strength and mental capacity we are going to find ourselves falling short of the glory of God and there are times we may FEEL condemned as we go through life as a believer...Remember that in Christ there is therefore now no condemnation.

As we come to chapter 9 in our study of the book of Romans I have decided to take a look at the full chapter to attempt to keep things in context and give an overhead view of the truths that we find in these verses.

I will readily admit that some of the verses here in this chapter are difficult to process and think through and understand but I think if we remember the character of God and the totality of scripture that we'll move through here without too much difficulty.

I will say when we finish this chapter that you may have some questions...Don't feel bad if you do because everyone in this room has questions about God's sovereign choice and how His election of humanity and especially of the nation of Israel works out.

One final reminder and then we'll get into this but listen to what Paul said over in Romans 8:29-30 which says ²⁹ **For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.** ³⁰ **Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.** We talked about this last week and we went over 5 words that are found in the text and we said that 4 of those words are not all that hard to work through...We all agree that God has known us from all of eternity, that He has called us, that He justifies and He glorifies us...the real difficulty we have when it comes to understanding to these words is with the statement that says He predestined us and that's what Paul is going to be working through a little more as we look specifically at chapter 9 of Romans.

I believe we must keep in mind as we look at these chapters that **God is God and we are not**...As such His ways are far beyond our ways, He does things that we can't comprehend as He watches over the affairs of men...We might remember that God has His hand on the governments of this world, and He can place people in positions of

power and use them however He desires...the Bible even says in Proverbs 21:1 the following when it says The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.

Ok, we ready? Let's look at verses 1-3 as we begin today which say 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, I believe as Paul was writing this letter to the church in Rome and as he was writing about all of the blessings that those who believe in Christ have, that in the back of his mind and deep in his heart he was constantly thinking of his fellow countrymen...and as he did so his heart broke...We are told here he had a great sorrow and a continual grief in his heart meaning it was an emotion that never let up and it all centered around the Jewish people and the fact that they didn't know the Lord.

He even goes so far as to say he wishes he himself might be cut off that they might come to Christ...and of course Paul could never do this...but here he expresses his deep concern for his countrymen.

This is similar to what Moses experienced when he was travelling with the children of Israel and they had made the terrible choice to make the golden calf and they had worshipped it in the desert while Moses was on the mountain receiving the 10 commandments...The Lord at the end of this scenario told Moses he was going to wipe out the Israelites and He would start a new work with Moses...

Moses though had the following to say from Exodus 32:30-32 which says ³⁰ Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” ³¹ Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! ³² Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.”

I think you and I can probably relate to this to some extent when we think about those in our families that do not know Jesus and there is an ache in our hearts every time we think of them...You and I should pray for them as we think of them, we should look to the Lord to work in their hearts.

Paul continues to speak of his fellow countrymen in verses 4-5 which say ⁴ who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; ⁵ of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

Here we have multiple blessings listed that the people of Israel had been given. To them was the adoption and this is really speaking of how the Lord had called Abram when he was in the land of Haran and had told him that he was to leave his family and go to a land that was promised to him...we might keep in mind that while living in Haran with his family we learn in the scriptures that they worshipped idols...Abram was not a saint before God called him but was instead part of a family that was into idolatry. We learn this in Joshua 24:2 .

We also see here that to Israel was given the glory...what does that mean? Well I think of the shekinah glory of God that led the people while they were in the desert...Remember the cloud by day and the fire by night? Or we might think of the glory of God that appeared to them at the tabernacle or even when Moses requested to see the glory of God and the Lord put Moses in the cleft of a rock and passed by and Moses could see the backside of the Lord.

To the Israelites had also been given the covenants and there are many of them in the Old Testament...you might think of a covenant as a legal agreement that was made...I think of the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant and the Davidic covenant that were given to people on behalf of the nation of Israel.

And then we are told that the Israelites had received the law and of course we know that Moses had received the 10 commandments while up on the mountain with God. This receiving of the law also included the laws and regulations that are found in the first 5 books of the Bible.

They had also been given the service of God as the tribe of Levi was called to serve as priests in the house of God...The Israelites of all people on the earth were called to be representatives of the Lord.

We also know the people of Israel had been given many promises...Just think of all the promises God made to His people in the Old Testament...they were to be blessed but sadly they were disobedient which led to difficulty and judgment coming upon them in many forms.

The fathers also came out of Israel and this is referring to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the 12 sons of Jacob who became known as Israel.

And then above everything else the Messiah the Savior of the world came from the people of Israel...you might notice that in speaking of Christ there is a direct statement that Jesus is God in verse 5 as it says that Christ came, who is over ALL, the eternally blessed God...You might mark that for use with Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons.

So Paul as he is thinking of the people of Israel and just desiring deeply within his heart that they would know the Lord is here recounting the many blessings that the people of Israel enjoyed...and yet with all those blessings available to them they had rejected their Messiah and as such were really cut off from the true blessings of knowing their Father in heaven.

Before we move forward here I just want to remind you that Paul has just said in chapter 8 to all believers that God is going to keep them, that He is going to work in them all things for His glory, that there is nothing that can separate us from His love and so much more.

There may be some that heard what Paul said about the Gentiles and how they have come to faith and they may have looked at the Jewish people and said wait a minute...God spoke all kinds of blessing over them also and look at where they are in life...Some might even say that God's previous words to Israel didn't come to pass...

I believe Paul has this in mind as he gives us what we have in verses 6-9 which say this 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.”⁸ That 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.⁹ For this *is* the word of promise: “At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.”

The point Paul is going to make and begins to make here is that God's promises are not void and we'll see that God is not finished with His people Israel...some had the false idea that all of Israel would be saved and we should keep in mind that a common thought among those who were Jewish was that if a person was born of the family of Abraham they were automatically considered righteous in the eyes of God.

Paul here let's the reader know that there is a distinction that God makes between those who are simply related to Abraham physically and those who are of the promised seed of Isaac...Now I don't want to lose you here but if you think back to Abraham's life you might remember that he had more than one son...His first son born of the flesh but not of the promise was Ishmael...If you remember Abraham and Sarah had tried to “HELP” God out by having the servant of Sarah have a child on behalf of these two and when the child was born they claimed it as their own.

This was clearly not God's intention and in the end the two did have their own son whose name was Isaac...It was this son Isaac that received the blessings of God.

I think what Paul is speaking to here is the simple fact that just because you are related to Abraham doesn't mean you are saved...Jesus had to deal with this as well when He spoke to the

Pharisees and this is what Jesus said in John 8:39 which says ³⁹They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.”

Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham.

We might remember that Abraham was a man that believed God and it was accounted to Him for righteousness...Those that not only have the promises of God but act on those promises which ultimately point to Jesus are those that are truly the children of Abraham.

You and I might be able to relate to this if we think about how the Lord told Nicodemus that being born of the flesh isn’t enough to get into heaven...instead one must be born again of faith in Jesus and Paul will get to this at the end of the chapter.

The promises of God made to the Israelites are not null and void...they have been seen in the past all the way back to Abraham and they continue on today through the child of promise and through the method of faith...

When it came to the Jewish people they often felt that they were better than others, that somehow they were more moral because they had the promises of God and now Paul is going to simply show those he is writing to that morality has nothing to do with how God calls people to Himself and works in their lives...and he uses the example of Jacob and Esau if you look at verses 10-13 which say 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.”

Isaac who was the promised son of Abraham eventually married a woman by the name of Rebecca and she became pregnant...if you remember while she was pregnant there was much turmoil in her womb and she finally asked the Lord what was going on...and the Lord told her that in her womb there were two children and that the older son would eventually serve the younger son.

We should understand that the natural method of blessing for the Jewish people was always that the firstborn would be blessed more so than any other child in a family...they would actually inherit a double blessing from their father while the rest of the kids would receive just 1 portion of the inheritance.

What is interesting here is that God spoke before the children were ever born and before these children had ever done a good or a bad thing and said that the younger was the one that He had chosen.

That's interesting to think about isn't it? Here we can see that God chose ahead of time...I must remind us that God can see the end of a person's life from the beginning...God can see the choices a person will make and as such He acts accordingly.

There was something in Esau's future that caused the Lord not to choose him...perhaps God knew that one day he would despise the birthright, that he would be a wild man.

Some might look at Jacob and they may say well he was just the better and more moral person but I want to remind you that Jacob's name means “heal catcher”, that he was a liar and a thief as he tricked his

father into giving him the birthright, he even had multiple wives as he went through life.

The truth is there was nothing better about Jacob than there was about Esau...Both of these men were undeserving of the blessings of God...**If these things are so then we might ask why and how does God choose?**

Notice in the middle of verse 11 we have the following phrase...that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls.

The election of God and choice of God is a hard thing to grapple with...There have been many who have done so to the point of exhaustion **and do you know at the end of the day I think the answer is God chooses who He wants because that's His choice.**

In the context of what we are looking at we should think of Israel...have you ever looked at a map at the size of Israel? It's not all that large, it doesn't have all that much significance to it and yet the whole world seems obsessed with them as a people group.

There is nothing special about the people of Israel, there was nothing special about Abraham, there was nothing special about Jacob but God simply chose them as people to display His glory and His might and His power...Israel as a nation does not deserve the blessings of God, in fact they have pretty consistently throughout their history rejected the blessings of God and the authority of God over their lives and yet that election might stand according to God's purposes they are the chosen ones.

There are some that struggle with what we have in verse 13 when it says Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated...I don't think we should take this literally but instead we should simply observe that compared to the glorious love of Jesus and the promises given to Israel it seems as if God hates or disapproves of Esau...I think it's a figure of speech used here to just demonstrate the love that God has for His people.

There is a similar statement made over in Luke 14:26 when Jesus said this ²⁶ **"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."** So great should our love for Jesus be that in comparison it seems as if we hate our family.

The reality is if those of Esau's family came to faith and trust in God what would they find? That God loved them and grafted them into the family of God and the blessings of God...No one is being left out here or rejected.

Perhaps you and I might ask a different question when we think about this...we might ask how was it that God could ever love Jacob to begin with? Or for that matter how is that God has chosen to love us who were far from Him, who were filled with sin...the miracle and the glory of God is that He loves sinners so much He gave His Son to die for them.

Now some may look at what Paul is saying here and they may come to a very natural conclusion that it's not fair that God loves Jacob and chose not to love Esau...or that God is unfair in the way that He chooses people and predestines them to come to know Him...look at verses 14-18 which say this ¹⁴ **What shall we say then? /s**

there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! ¹⁵ For 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.” ¹⁶ So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. ¹⁷ For 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.” ¹⁸ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

Well if you don't like the way God works and the way God chooses I guess the response here from Paul is deal with it...I mean here we have a very simple, very concise statement from Paul that God is going to do what He wants and how He wants to do it.

God shows mercy on whomever He desires and that's a little hard to grapple with...I am reminded of what we have recorded over in Acts 12 and if you read that chapter of the Bible you will see that Herod began to persecute the church and he actually took as prisoner James the brother of John and he put him to death with the sword.

After this Herod seeing that the Jews were pleased with what he had done decided that Peter was going to be his next target and he actually went and had him arrested and we are told that while Peter was in prison he was asleep and an angel came in and woke him up and essentially dragged him out of there and sent him on his way.

Now we as humans as we look at this account we may say “God isn't fair to allow James to die and Peter to live” I mean God could have just as easily allowed James to go free and yet He didn't...God chose

to see fit that one man would live and see mercy and compassion while allowing another to see the end of his life.

Have you ever thought about how God works everything out in His wisdom? He certainly can harden people's hearts and soften others...and we have the example of Pharaoh that is given here and if you remember Pharaoh was a man that ended up dying for his hatred of the Jewish people.

God clearly hardened his heart and we are told so as the plagues of God came upon the Egyptians...Pharaoh even lost his firstborn son in the process...I am reminded though that as the first plagues came upon the Egyptians that we are clearly told that first Pharaoh hardened his own heart...and then afterwards we are told God hardened it.

Clearly Pharaoh had a choice in the matter at least at the beginning but after time and a constant rejection of God's works in his life the Lord firmed up his position allowing him to become even more hard.

In verses 19-21 Paul again anticipates the argument of man if you look at that is says ¹⁹**You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?"** ²⁰**But 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?"** ²¹**Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?**

Humanity is always looking for a loophole are we not? Some as they read about and heard about what Paul was saying about God choosing and working in the hearts of men would come to the

conclusion that because God is the one that chooses and because our morality has nothing to do with it then why does He still find fault with you and I?

Paul in response simply says that the one who has been formed and has been made by the master potter ought not to reply against God...The potter certainly has power over the clay to do whatever He wants.

I would remind us today that we as humans also have the power to create...and when we do create we have a certain control and authority over that which has been made.

Does God not have the authority to do as He sees fit with each person? Does He not have the ability to choose those who will be honorable and those who will be dishonorable?

I might add here that when all is said and done in life that not one person will be able to say that God was not fair, or that God made a mistake...God is perfect, just and merciful all at the same time.

How is it that we think God can't handle the affairs of men and direct and guide people where He wants them to accomplish His will...If God knows every choice we will ever make does He not have the ability to put us where He wants us in life and work all things out for His glory?

And I might add that while I believe God knows those who are His and those who are not His and that I believe the scriptures clearly teach that God does choose that you and I as humans also have a choice and a decision to make as to whether we will serve Jesus or not.

It has been said that the door of salvation is two sided...On the side that humanity walks through are the words “Whosoever may come” meaning anyone that wants to come to Christ will be gladly accepted...On the other side when we step into a life with Christ the door says “Chosen from the foundations of the earth”

God does have His hand on humanity, He does oversee all things, He does see the choices we will make and He does choose us at the same time just as He has chosen His people Israel.

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

Notice at the end of verse 24 that Paul includes the Gentiles as well as the Jews that will believe...There are some that say this chapter is only dealing with the Jewish people and while I believe for the most part this is true the inclusion of the Gentiles in verse 24 is evident.

God can and does bear with the wicked of this world...He can use the wicked to demonstrate His love and mercy...He can leave an awful person in charge of a country for a time enduring with them while at the same time making known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy.

It's amazing to think that God is working things out all over the world in the life of every human in order to accomplish His plans and His desires. He patiently endures with the wicked, He patiently endures

with those who are right with Him...He has plans that He wants to accomplish that go beyond our understanding.

We might ask as we look at this verse does God allow some people to come into the world as those who are going to go to hell...That's what verse 22 seems to imply...notice though that Paul's statement is hypothetical saying WHAT IF God...It's my firm opinion that we all get a fair shake at knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior of our lives...at the same time God knows the choices we will make and as such if He knows we are not going to receive Him He places us in a position that He can use us for His purposes.

God does give man a choice in the matter...The Bible is clear that you and I can choose Christ, that we can receive Him in our lives and we can be saved...We aren't robots, we have a free will and at the same time here in chapter 9 God has a sovereign hand on us as well.

Now in verses 25-29 Paul is going to give some scriptures for those reading to think over and to develop a few points if you listen to those they say ²⁵ **As 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."

²⁷ **Isaiah 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.

**²⁸ For He will finish the work and cut *it* short in righteousness,
Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth.”**

**²⁹ And 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.”**

The first reference we have is from Hosea and if you look at that we can see that Paul is making it clear that there is going to be a people group that are called His people who are not really a part of His people...Who do you think that is? It's the Gentiles, it's you and I that have come to faith in the promises of God that began all the way back with Abraham.

Then concerning Israel in verse 27 Paul quotes from Isaiah and in that passage Paul kind of points back to the beginning of chapter 9 as he says that though the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea only a remnant will be saved...The sad reality is that most of the Jewish people are going to miss out on the blessings of knowing Jesus...Only a few will be saved...Not all who are of the blood line of Israel will be saved, only those that come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

And then in verse 29 Paul again quotes from the prophet Isaiah simply pointing out that God is the one that left a seed in the nation of Israel...It was not by the merits of Israel that they would have the opportunities of knowing Jesus...It was because God had mercy and compassion that was undeserved.

And then to conclude the chapter here look with me at verses 30-33 which say **30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not**

pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 32 Why? 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. 33 As 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.”

The point we have here and what will be developed in the chapters to come is that Jew and Gentile alike in order to be considered righteous must come to Christ by faith...The Gentiles have discovered this as we were alienated from the promises of God and yet now as we have come to the Lord Jesus we have found the incredible gift of salvation.

On the other hand the Jews have missed out on the promises of God...they have attempted to please God by good works, by keeping rules and regulations and they have stumbled on the stumbling stone...and that stumbling stone is Jesus.

The simple truth is that there is one way to be right with God...and that way is by placing your faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ upon the cross. Jesus died for the sins of the world that whosoever would come to Him trusting in what He has done for them would find eternal life.

The doors of eternity are open to all who would come to Him...have you done so today? Have you come to know the Savior of the world? Can you confidently say that you have chosen to place your faith in Jesus? If not it may be that today you need to place your faith in Jesus

and perhaps the God of the universe has orchestrated and overseen and preserved your life to this point and to bring you here that you might have this opportunity in your life to come to Jesus.

If that's you today I encourage you to come forward during the worship and stand with me and I'll pray with you that you might accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Let's pray.

Romans 9:1-33 “The Sovereignty of God”

Cross References

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Romans 8:29-30

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John 8:39

Verses 10-13

Luke 14:26