

Selective Mercy

September 13, 2015 ~ Romans 9.1-24

Simple Outline of Romans

- ❖ Romans can be broadly subdivided into 3 major sections
 1. **1 to 8** ~ Salvation is by Faith
 2. **9 to 11** ~ God is Faithful ~ His Promise to Israel is Unbroken
 3. **12 to 16** ~ Living as Christians
- ❖ All sections can be outlined further / But this suffices for us today

Contrasting Joyful End of 8 and Mournful Start of 9

- ❖ **Read Romans 8.31-39** ~ “What then shall we say .. in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
 - ✧ 8 ends with soaring majesty
 - ✧ **T U L I P** - > “Perseverance of the Saints”
 - ◇ More like “Perseverance of God in Saving His Adopted Children”
 - ◇ “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it” ~ **Phil 1.6**
- ❖ **Read Romans 9.1-4a** “I tell the truth in Christ . . who are Israelites,”
 - ✧ Paul cites 3 witnesses to the truth of this statement
 - ◇ **Reread v1** emphasizing “Christ”, “conscience” and “Holy Spirit”
 - ✧ **v2** ~ He has “great sorrow and continual grief”
 - ◇ He says, “I could wish” / His salvation is not his to trade away

He Addresses an Implied Accusation that God’s Word has Failed

- ❖ **v6a** ~ “.. it is not that the word of God has taken no effect”
 - ✧ “What is Paul suggesting here?”
 - ◇ The accusation is that God has abandoned His promise to Israel / to Abraham
 - ◇ **Gen 17.7** ~ “I will establish My .. everlasting covenant .. descendants after you”
 - ◇ The promise was to Abraham and his descendants . . .
- ❖ **v6b** ~ Paul gives a definition of Israel they may not have in mind
 - ✧ There was a national or ethnic Israel – but there’s always been a spiritual Israel
- ❖ **v7** ~ God is fulfilling his first promise to Abraham in **Gen 12.1-3**
 - ✧ “.. in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”
- ❖ Paul is distinguishing between being born of man and born of God
 - ✧ Jesus did this with Nicodemus in **John 3** / God’s choice
 - ◇ **Read John 3.8** “The wind blows where it wishes .. who is born of the Spirit”
 - ✧ God did this with Abraham in **Genesis 12**
 - ✧ Paul will do the same here with his readers in **Romans 9**

Xition: Paul now applies this same principle to Rebecca and the twins

Paul Brings up God Choosing Jacob over Esau

- ❖ Read vss 10-13 ~ “And not only .. I have hated”
- ❖ Paul in v11 says, “that the purpose of God according to election might stand”
 - ✧ And “not of works but of Him who calls”
 - ✧ Then in v12 “The older shall serve the younger”
 - ✧ But then in v13 the infamous “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”
- ❖ Commentators uncomfortable with predestination interpret this differently
 - ✧ J. Vernon McGee says “hate” means “loves less”
 - ◇ He says God is selecting Jacob for service, not salvation, in place of Esau
 - ✧ Billy Graham says this pertains to a + or – relationship, not a saving one . . .
- ❖ “Are they right? Does this not pertain to salvation and damnation?”
 - ✧ “Does the election in question refer only to historic peoples – not real persons?”
 - ✧ Election occurs 23 times in the New Testament ~ every occurrence c/salvation
- ❖ And remember, “Why does Paul bring up Jacob and Esau?”
 - ✧ He’s differentiating between “children of the flesh” and “children of the promise”
- ❖ Yet the clincher is what Paul says next, in **verse 14** . . .

v14b ~ “Is there unrighteousness with God?”

- ❖ “Why would Paul ask this question if it were only a matter of tribal leadership?”
 - ✧ That selection of God was 2,000 years earlier . . . How would that effect Romans?
- ❖ “Why would Paul cite God’s freedom to have mercy on whomever He wills?”
 - ✧ “What is mercy?” ~ leniency / forgiveness / pardon
 - ✧ This text is entirely about salvation / Those that don’t accept it are willful in disbelief

God Extends Mercy to Whomever He Wishes

- ❖ v16 ~ “not of him who wills .. or runs .. but of God who shows mercy”
- ❖ This verse contrasts two of man’s actions with one of God’s
 - ✧ God extending mercy is not dependent upon the will of man or the work of man
 - ◇ Put differently, man’s wanting or doing, has no hold on God’s mercy
 - ◇ God dispenses His mercy to whomever He wills
- ❖ And not only that . . .

God Withholds Mercy from Whomever He Wishes

- ❖ v18 ~ “Whom He wills He hardens”
 - ✧ “What does it mean that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart?”
 - ✧ J Vernon McGee goes so far as to say the exact opposite of this
 - ✧ He says, “God did not harden Pharaoh’s heart.”

Xition: Paul knows this will upset some of his readers . . .

v19 ~ “You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? Who has resisted His will?’”

- ❖ Paul said God dispenses mercy at His pleasure, apart from our will or actions
 - ✧ Apart from our “*free will*” -and- our hypothetically worthy “*repentant actions*”

v20 ~ **What is Paul’s Reply to this Theorized Response?**

- ❖ “.. who are you to reply against God?”
- ❖ “Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’”
- ❖ He launches into the potter and clay analogy (**vss 21–23**)
 - ✧ **III**: Romans commentary ~ “**Most unfortunate of Paul’s illustrations**”
 - ◇ But Bible is 1) inspired, 2) inerrant, and 3) infallible
- ❖ This blogger speaks for many when he writes this:
 - ✧ “I **unequivocally affirm that the sovereign God** “has mercy on whomever he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whomever he wants to harden.” I would simply add that the “whomever” he has mercy on refers to “all who choose to believe” while the “whomever” he hardens refers to “all who refuse to believe.” The passage demonstrates the wisdom of God’s **loving flexibility, not the sheer determinism of God’s power.**” – Greg Boyd (*open theist*)
- ❖ This places ultimate sovereignty and control over man’s souls in man’s hands
 - ✧ Understandable perspective for an open theist . . . But not an orthodox believer

Jesus – the Equal Opportunity Savior

- ❖ Greg Boyd presents God as an equal opportunity savior who has done all that He can
 - ✧ The life preservers have all been thrown out to the drowning victims
 - ✧ Now it’s their responsibility to grab onto one and be saved
 - ✧ God is impotent to do more / To do more for this one would be unfair to others
 - ◇ To do more by bending their will to His own would violate their sovereign wills
 - ◇ God would be nothing more than a spiritual rapist were He to do that
- ❖ Paul’s reply in **v20** addresses the basic error in this perspective
 - ✧ We are creatures / We are what God made us / We exist where God made us
- ❖ **III**: Appeal of Mormonism
 - ✧ “**How is it fair that native Americans didn’t hear the gospel message proclaimed?**”
 - ◇ They solved that by having Jesus appear here after His ascension in Jerusalem

Xition: Theologians must wrestle through this text . . .

Freewill Theologians do Injustice to this Text

- ❖ They explain away Paul's precise logic and reasoning with broad dismissals
 - ✧ III: David Bennett advice to doubter ~ "Someone wrote to tell me that he believed in free will but had a hard time getting past Romans 9..."
 - ❖ David wrote him back on the 3 main components Paul introduces in Romans 9
 - Jacob and Esau / Hardening Pharaoh's heart / Clay in potter's hands
 - I was excited / This fellow might make some good points ...!
 - But I was sorely disappointed . . .
 - ❖ He doesn't address the **Romans 9** text at all
 - He wanders all over Scripture but doesn't exegete the text under study
 - He never addressed Paul's question in **v14** concerning unrighteousness
 - He never addressed Paul's question in **v19** concerning resisting God's will
 - He never addressed use of the word mercy regarding Jacob, Esau and Pharaoh
 - Then, in closing, he declares himself victorious in whipping the Calvinists
 - ❖ There are a lot of poor Bible scholars deceiving others and maybe themselves

John Piper and Romans 9 (What is Romans 9 About?)

- ❖ Romans 9 powerfully influenced John Piper twice – First in 1969
- ❖ When I entered seminary I believed in the freedom of my will, in the sense that it was ultimately self-determining. I had not learned this from the Bible; I absorbed it from the independent, self-sufficient, self-esteeming, self-exalting air that you and I breathe every day of our lives in America. The sovereignty of God meant that he can do anything with me that I give him permission to do. With this frame of mind I entered a class on Philippians with Daniel Fuller and a class on the doctrine of salvation with James Morgan."
- ❖ Emotions run high when you feel your man-centered world crumbling around you. I met Dr. Morgan in the hall one day. After a few minutes of heated argument about the freedom of my will, I held a pen in front of his face and dropped it to the floor. Then I said, with not as much respect as a student ought to have, "I [!] dropped it." Somehow that was supposed to prove that my choice to drop the pen was not governed by anything but my sovereign self.
- ❖ But thanks be to God's mercy and patience, at the end of the semester I wrote in my final exam, "Romans 9 is like a tiger going about devouring free-willers like me." That was the end of my love affair with human autonomy and the ultimate self-determination of my will. My worldview simply could not stand against the scriptures, especially Romans 9.

Xition: The 2nd influence came 10 years later in 1979 . . .

John Piper and Romans 9 in 1979 (What is Romans 9 About?)

- ❖ Then, about ten years later, I was on sabbatical from teaching at Bethel College. My one aim was to study Romans 9 and write a book on it that would settle, in my own mind, the meaning of these verses. After six years of teaching and finding many students in every class ready to discount my interpretation of this chapter I decided I had to give eight months to it. The upshot of that sabbatical was the book, *The Justification of God*. I tried to answer every important exegetical objection to God's absolute sovereignty in Romans 9. But the result of that sabbatical was utterly unexpected—at least by me. My aim was to analyze God's words so closely and construe them so carefully that I could write a book that would be compelling and stand the test of time. What I did not expect was that six months into this analysis of Romans 9 God himself would speak to me so powerfully that I resigned my job at Bethel and made myself available as a pastor.
- ❖ In essence .. as I studied Romans 9 day after day, I began to see a God so majestic and so free and so absolutely sovereign that my analysis merged into worship and the Lord said, in effect, "I will not simply be analyzed, I will be adored. I will not simply be pondered, I will be proclaimed. My sovereignty is not simply to be scrutinized, it is to be heralded. It is not grist for the mill of controversy, it is gospel for sinners who know that their only hope is the sovereign triumph of God's grace over their rebellious will. Because of Romans 9 I left teaching and became a pastor.

- We must approach God's Word with humility ready to learn . . .**
- We must be willing to sacrifice our personal idols of aberrant beliefs or practices . . .**
- God's Word is 1) inspired, 2) inerrant, and 3) infallible . . .**
- Hebrews 4.12-13** ~ "the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."
- Read Daniel 4.34 – 37** ~ "And at the end .. He is able to put down."

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,

And to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,

To God our Savior, who alone is wise,

Be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.

Amen *pause* Go in peace . . .