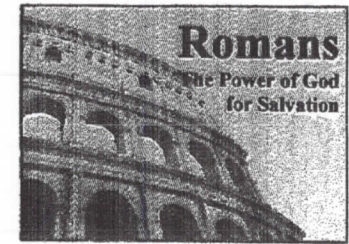


UNIT 19—God's Sovereign Choice/Romans 9:1-29



TEXT

God's Sovereign Choice

9 I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—²I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, ⁴the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. ⁵Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

⁶It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."^b ⁸In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. ⁹For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."^c

¹⁰Not only that, but Rebecca's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. ¹¹Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹²not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger."^d ¹³Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."^e

¹⁴What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵For he says to Moses,

"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,
and I will have compassion on whom I
have compassion."^f

¹⁶It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. ¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for

STUDY

READ

First Reading/First Impressions

What's going on here?

☐ Paul's getting really theological. ☐ I don't have a clue. ☐ Paul is defending God.

Second Reading/Big Idea

What words in this passage seem to be especially important?

SEARCH

1. After the ringing assurance of chapter 8, what is Paul's concern here? (vv. 3, 6a)

2. How might the widespread unbelief of the Jews cause people to doubt Paul's word in 8:38-39?

3. What benefits did the Jews have? (vv. 4-5)

4. The implication (v. 6) was that despite all these benefits which the Jews had, God had failed to keep his word to Israel. How do verses 6-13 answer that charge?

5. How does all this relate to his argument in 4:11-12?

6. Paul sees the possibility of a new accusation. (v. 14) How does he answer this one? (vv. 14-18)

7. In verse 19, a third question is raised. How would you sum up Paul's response to that?

8. Why is it important to recall 3:20 as we consider what is "fair" for God to do with us?

9. What qualities of God stand out in the Old Testament quotes? (vv. 25-29)

APPLY

Of the implied or stated questions here (vv. 6, 14, 19), which one most expresses some of your own concern about God's plan? Why?

Using a piece of pottery as an example, what work do you think God has for you (e.g., to be a pitcher bringing the water of life to others, a vessel in which people's feet can be cleaned, etc.)?

GROUP AGENDA

Divide into groups of 4 before starting on these questions. Follow the time recommendations.

TO BEGIN/10 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ Have you ever tried pottery-making? How did it turn out? ☐ How do you feel when a game show contestant or a lottery winner wins a huge sum of money without having had to "do" anything? ☐ What was one thing about which your parents used to tell you, "Wait until you're older: you'll understand then"? ☐ What did you put down for READ?

TO GO DEEPER/20 minutes (Choose 2 or 3)

☐ Go around and answer the questions under SEARCH—one person answering question 1, the next person answering 2, etc. ☐ Why does Paul take time out to deal with the question: "What happened to the promises made to Israel?" Hint: look at verse 6. ☐ If you were a Jewish Christian or formerly in the Jewish faith, how would you look back on the promises in the Old Testament? ☐ What is one question you would ask God about this passage? ☐ Case History: Your business associate was a devout Jew until he studied the Holocaust of the Jews under the Nazis, whereupon he decided there was no God. He asks you about your faith. What are you going to say that he would understand?

TO CLOSE/5-20 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ What did you put down for APPLY? ☐ Where are you growing in your understanding of God's purpose and plan for your own life?

this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."⁹ ¹⁸Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he

Continued on next page

NOTES ON ROMANS 9:1-29

Section Summary/Romans 9-11. At first glance this section might appear to be a long parenthesis in Paul's argument—of interest to the Jews of the time but not crucial to his overall statement. In fact, chapters 9-11 are vital to the case he has been building because here he wrestles with the question of the reliability of God. He has just stated that Christians have a sure hope (8:18-27) and that nothing can separate them from God's love (8:28-39). But if God proved unreliable in keeping his promise to Israel, what kind of confidence can a person have? Thus Paul wrestles with the question of Israel's place in God's plan in the face of their rejection of Jesus. In a tightly reasoned argument he will show that while it appears that the Jews have been rejected, this was in

order to open the way for the Gentiles to become a part of God's kingdom. But in the end both Jew and Gentile will be saved. By the nature of his logic, Paul's argument must be considered as a whole. To interpret one part outside the context of the whole will lead to misunderstanding.

Unit Summary/Romans 9:1-29. Paul begins his argument by affirming the special privileges given the people of Israel (vv. 1-5). Then he points out that to be a member of the true Israel has never been merely a matter of natural descent. Rather it is a question of election—God's process of selection has nothing to do with merit or right (vv. 6-13). Finally, Paul addresses the question, "Is God unjust?" (vv.

14-29) Some are selected for a positive purpose in God's plan and others are not selected through no fault of their own. Doesn't this make God unrighteous? Paul denies this emphatically and goes on to show from Exodus 33:19 (v. 15) that election is a product of God's *mercy*. Whatever God does is an expression of mercy even though it means He selects some (including people He ought to punish) and rejects others (including those one would expect to be chosen).

v. 2 In becoming the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul has not lost any concern for his own people. It is important to note that chapters 9-11 were written out of *anguish* not *anger*.

v. 3 **cursed** . . . literally, anathema. When something has declared anathema it was given over to God for total destruction (Joshua 6:17).

cut off from Christ . . . the horror of Paul's wish becomes clear. He who has written with such passion and delight about the Christian's future glorification would renounce even this, his final salvation, for the sake of his own people (see Exodus 32:32).

v. 4 **Israel** . . . the special name given by God to Jacob and his descendants who were to be a special people to God.

adoption . . . Israel has a special relationship with God. He is their Father, they are his children (Deuteronomy 14:1; Exodus 4:22). Yet the use of **adoption** calls attention to the fact that this relationship is by grace, a product of God's action and not the result of natural succession.

SCRIPTURE TEXT continued

hardens whom he wants to harden.

¹⁹One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"

²⁰But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?

"Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' " ^h ²¹Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

²²What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? ²³What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—²⁴even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵As he says in Hosea:

"I will call them 'my people' who are not my people;

and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one,"ⁱ

²⁶and,

"It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them,

'You are not my people,'

they will be called 'sons of the living God.' " ^j

²⁷Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

"Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved.

²⁸For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality."^k

²⁹It is just as Isaiah said previously:

"Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been like Gomorrah."^l

^{a5} Or Christ, who is over all. God be forever praised! Or Christ, God who is over all be forever praised! ^{b17} Gen. 21:12

^{c9} Gen. 18:10,14 ^{d12} Gen. 25:23 ^{e13} Mal. 1:2,3

^{f15} Exodus 33:19 ^{g17} Exodus 9:16 ^{h20} Isaiah

29:16; 45:9 ⁱ²⁵ Hosea 2:23 ^{j26} Hosea 1:10 ^{k28} Isaiah 10:22,23 ^{l29} Isaiah 1:9

divine glory . . . the supernatural light which was present when God made his presence known to Israel (Exodus 16:10)—the visible presence of the invisible God.

covenants . . . the formal agreements signifying a special relationship between God and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and then with the whole nation of Israel. He would be their God and they his people who would serve him (see Genesis 15:17f and Exodus 19:5).

the law . . . in which God's will had been made known.

temple worship . . . via the sacrificial system, Israel had special access to God.

promises . . . Old Testament prophecies which stressed that God had a great and noble task in store for Israel.

- v. 5 **patriarchs** . . . great leaders who had known God and had sought to lead Israel in his ways, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons.

Christ . . . all this led up to the coming of the Messiah—God's own Son who was born into the world as a Jew.

who is God . . . Jesus is, in fact, God—the divine Lord over all creation.

- v. 6a i.e., "What I have just said about my grief for fellow Jews is not to be interpreted as meaning that God's declared purpose in electing Israel failed." The fact that most Jews did not believe in Jesus has not frustrated God's purpose. Paul will use

the rest of chapters 9-11 to demonstrate this fact.

- v. 6 **failed** . . . the word is often used to describe flowers that have faded and fallen (Job 14:2).

vv. 6b-7 Paul makes an important distinction. The nation of Israel is not synonymous with the children of Abraham. Abraham had two sons. Ishmael, the oldest, was born of Hagar, the servant of Abraham's wife, Sarah (Genesis 16). Ishmael (and his descendants the Arabs) were not included in the nation of Israel (Genesis 21:10-12) though God still cared for Ishmael and included him in his mercy (Genesis 21:13, 17-21). Rather it is through Isaac, Abraham's other son, that Israel descended. In other words, selectivity (election) has been at work from the beginning.

- v. 8 The contrast is made explicit: to be a physical descendant of Abraham is not necessarily to be part of the true Israel. Paul will soon point out that there has always been a remnant of Jews true to God within the larger nation of Israel (11:1-5). Thus he argues that even though most Jews reject Jesus, this is not a sign of failure on God's part because right from the beginning, there has been an Israel within Israel.

vv. 8-9 Isaac was born when his parents were long past child-bearing years as the result of a promise God had given Abraham that he would have a son.

vv. 10-13 Not even Isaac's two sons are included in Israel. Paul offers a second illustration of the principle of selectivity,

realizing that some might object to his first (since Abraham was the father of both boys, but Sarah was not the mother of Ishmael). The illustration is now of two sons of the same parents *from the same moment of conception*. Even here, before it was evident if they were good or bad, one was selected. The implication is that membership in Israel has always been a matter of selection and hence the inclusion of Gentiles has precedence.

- v. 11 **God's purpose in election** . . . this is the key issue in chapters 9-11.

vv. 12-13 These quotations from Genesis 25:23 and Malachi 1:2-3 apply not to two people (Jacob and Esau) but to two tribes (Jews and Edomites) who descended from them. God selected one tribe through whom to develop his plan of salvation, and in so doing the other tribe, by not having been elected, was excluded from this particular purpose. Whenever one is *selected* (e.g., Israel to be the nation through whom God would reveal himself) someone else is *rejected* in the sense that they do not have the same purpose as the one selected.

- v. 14 **loved/hated** . . . these words express election and rejection (inclusion and exclusion), not an emotional reaction on God's part. As with Ishmael, so too Esau remained an object of God's mercy if not his purposeful plan. Thus, Paul points out that many Jews are, in fact, like Ishmael and Esau—objects of God's mercy but outside the circle of those in whom God's purpose is expressed.

- v. 14 As Paul has done so often in the past (e.g., 6:1; 6:15 and 7:7), he asks a hypothetical

question which expresses a false conclusion that might be drawn from the preceding statements. He then denies it emphatically before going on to answer it. Having shown that God's dealings with Israel have been *consistent* since the time of Abraham, he must now show that such dealings have not been *unjust*. This is especially crucial since a key theme of Romans is God's righteousness (or justice).

vv. 15-16 Paul uses this verse from Exodus 33:19 to show the freedom of God's mercy. Individuals cannot by virtue of works or parentage insist that he give mercy to them and not to others. God is free to offer such *mercy* (i.e., active, outgoing compassion) to whomever He chooses.

v. 17 **Pharaoh** . . . the ruler of Egypt who enslaved Israel at the time of the Exodus is an example of those who resist God—as unbelieving Israel is now doing. He was, as they now are, an "unwilling, unbelieving and ungrateful witness to the saving power and truth of God" (Cranfield). The issue is not the personal fate of Pharaoh *but* how God used his opposition.

my power . . . the focus is not on God's *unlimited might*, but as in 1:16b (and in 1 Corinthians 6:14) on God's *saving power* which is sufficient to deliver his people from slavery.

my name . . . God's character is revealed in his acts, and so his deliverance of Israel from Pharaoh becomes known all over the world.

v. 18 **Therefore** . . . what follows is the inference from the preceding verses.

mercy . . . hardens . . . God has *mercy* on some in that He allows them consciously and voluntarily to serve his purpose. Others He **hardens** in the sense that they have a negative role to play. In the Old Testament, while it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, it also says that Pharaoh had already hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:15).

he wants . . . God's will is not inconsistent and arbitrary. As verse 15 indicates, it is constrained by mercy.

v. 19 Two obvious objections are raised by the hypothetical opponent. If God's will cannot be resisted, should a person (e.g., Pharaoh) then be held responsible for doing what that person, in fact, had no choice but to do?

v. 20 **But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?** . . . "Paul's reference to 'God' . . . is the God revealed in Jesus Christ, the God whose will is wholly determined and has once for all been revealed as mercy . . . and 'man' is to be understood in the light of 5:12-21 . . . the creature created in the image of God, the sinner for whose sin Christ died and for whose justification He has been raised from the dead." (Cranfield)

vv. 20-21 See Jeremiah 18:1-10. God is free to appoint people to various tasks for his overall place and purpose. But just as a potter is not impulsive (he makes what he can sell), God has a purpose for even a stubborn Pharaoh and unbelieving Israel as He shows in verses 22-24. Furthermore,

while the focus here is on God's *purposeful will*, in other passages the focus is on the other aspect, namely that individuals *freely choose their actions* and are responsible for them. Such is the paradox when it comes to the relationship between God's will and human action.

v. 22 **patience** . . . though unbelieving Israel deserved punishment (the Old Testament recounts their continual rebellion against God), God was patient with them because from them Jesus would come.

objects of wrath . . . this does not mean they will always be such. God's *patience* may indeed lead to their repentance. In Ephesians 2:3 the believers are said to have once been "children of wrath."

vv. 22-23 The focus is on the *condition* of the vessel *not* on God's action whereby such a result is actually realized.

v. 23 **make . . . his glory known** . . . this is the ultimate purpose for God's enduring Pharaoh and a rebellious Israel. In 9:30—11:36 it becomes clear that such divine patience has the effect of revealing the baseness of sin out of which emerges the salvation of rebel Israel.

v. 24-26 "God has effectually called the vessels of mercy not only from among the Jews but also from among the Gentiles. . . . The presence of Gentiles within the Church is the sign and pledge that the realm of rejection, Ishmael, Esau, Pharaoh and of the unbelieving Jews themselves, is not finally shut out from the mercy of God." (Cranfield)

v. 25 **Hosea** . . . this verse originally applied to the ten lost tribes of northern Israel whose restoration is here promised. Paul uses the verse now to apply to the Gentiles who were not unlike the lost tribes.

vv. 27-29 Now the focus is on Israel. The point of the verses is that although most Jews are unbelieving, there will always remain a small remnant that will be saved. This is the present condition of Israel; but as Paul shows in chapters 10-11, it is not the final word by God concerning Israel.