

“Human Responsibility”
Romans 9:19
(Preached at Trinity, October 25, 2009)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. So far in **Chapter 9** Paul has been describing the reason for Israel's hardness towards the Gospel. It is due to election. Being a part of national Israel is not the same thing as being a part of Christ's Kingdom – true Israel.
Romans 9:6 – “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:”
2. In **Verse 13** makes a statement that has been troubling for man.
Romans 9:13 – “As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”
 - A. The ultimate difference between men is all of God.
 - B. In eternity God looked upon the entire race of sinful, condemned men. He saw nothing but wickedness.
Psalms 14:2-3 – “The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, *and* seek God. ³ They are all gone aside, they are *all* together become filthy: *there is* none that doeth good, no, not one.”
3. God determined that some would be saved from their wretched condition and He determined that others would perish in their sin.
We refer to this as the doctrine of election and reprobation.
 - A. It is clear that everything depends upon God. He calls some to salvation while He leaves others in His just condemnation.
William Hendriksen – “What Paul is saying is this: In the final analysis the reason why some people are accepted and others are rejected is that God so willed it. The divine sovereign will is the source of both election and reprobation.”
 - B. Some would presume to call God unfair. Some have even gone so far as to question His righteous character. Paul answers this quickly.
Romans 9:14 – “What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? God forbid.”
4. God saves whom He will and it is all of mercy.
Romans 9:15 – “For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”
5. These doctrines strike at the heart of human pride. We want full control. This has been our problem from the beginning. We want full autonomy. We want full control over our destiny. The problem is we chose the path away from God long ago. Left to ourselves we will never choose to return, in fact we can't return.
Romans 9:16 – “So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.”

6. There is a question that naturally arises from this discussion. If God has determined it all, if we are marching according to His sovereign drum beat, how can God hold us accountable for any of our actions?
 7. As Paul so often does he anticipates such a question:
Romans 9:19 – “Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?”
 8. **Verse 19** finds us right in the middle of what has been called the conflict between God’s Sovereignty and human responsibility. How do you harmonize the two? How can we bring reconciliation? The truth is this. You don’t have to reconcile friends. The Bible teaches both divine sovereignty and human responsibility.
Spurgeon – “Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory; but they are not. It is just the fault of our weak judgment. Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one place that everything is fore-ordained, *that is true*; and if I find in another place that man is responsible for all his actions, *that is true*; and it is my folly that leads me to imagine that two truths can ever contradict each other.”
 9. Someone once asked Spurgeon, How do you reconcile Divine sovereignty and human responsibility, to which he responded, “I didn’t know you had to reconcile friends.”
 10. This morning I want to pursue this great topic of human responsibility.
We’ll look at it under three headings
The Truth of Divine Sovereignty
The Truth of Human Responsibility
How Shall We Respond
- I. The Bible teaches plainly the truth of Divine Sovereignty
 - A. God is sovereign over all of nature
 1. God ordered the existence of all things, spiritual and material and then rules over it
1689 LBC (Chap 5:1- *Divine Providence*) – “God the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things,¹ from the greatest even to the least,² by his most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will; to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.”
 2. All of nature has a certain defined order – we call it the laws of nature
Picture a world without order
 - a. Could there be a hurricane or tornado with enough strength to sweep across the nation? How could we control it?
 - b. What would stop thunderstorms from causing major floods
 - c. What would stop snow from covering the earth?
 - d. What would stop the earth’s rotation from slowing bringing the end to life?
 - e. What would stop the animals of the earth from suddenly banding together to invade our cities?
 - f. What would stop a disease from sweeping across the earth destroying all life?

3. The lost man insists that nature maintains the balance – imagine such a perfect balance maintaining itself for thousands of years.
 4. There is nothing that happens in all the universe that God has not ordained. Every molecule is under God’s divine direction
- B. Human beings are under the sovereign direction of God
1. He maintains our lives
Acts 17:28 – “For in him we live, and move, and have our being”
 2. He determines the boundaries of our lives – where we live, who we marry, our occupation.
 3. God rules over the wills of men – He continually rules and overrules our wills
Proverbs 19:21 – “*There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.*”
 - a. He restrains our wickedness
 - b. Our very nature is to destroy all that is good. Our very nature is to destroy ourselves. It is only by God’s restraining rule that we don’t destroy ourselves
 - c. For 60 years we have had the ability to bring terrible destruction with nuclear bombs. What has stopped this from happening?
 - d. We have the capability to produce viruses which in the hands of terrorists could unleash terrible disease upon the earth that would kill millions. What stops this from happening?
 4. Many have this mistaken notion that it would not be right for God to impose His will upon our wills
 - a. They believe man is sovereign over his own will
 - b. To impose Himself upon our wills would be to infringe upon our rights.
 - c. The truth is God moves men according to His good pleasure – God has *always* imposed His will upon our will
 5. In **Verse 17** we read that Pharaoh was under the Divine direction of God
The reason Pharaoh would not heed the warnings of Moses is because God hardened his heart
Exodus 4:21 – “And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.”
 6. Does this seem unfair to you?
Joshua 11:20 – “For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, *and* that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.”
 - a. God does not take righteous men and make them wicked
 - b. God leaves wicked men to their own devices. Our hearts are already hard.
- C. Nowhere is the sovereignty of God demonstrated more clearly than in salvation
1. He looked upon the whole of humanity and as the righteous judge He found all guilty – He has condemned all.
 2. God decided to save some and leave the rest in their sin.

3. He did it according to His good pleasure.
Ephesians 1:5 – “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,”
4. It was determined before the world began – before we were born

II. The Truth About Human Responsibility

- A. The doctrine of election and reprobation in no way lessens our responsibility to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ
 1. Men argue: If God has determined every detail of our lives how can it be that God holds man accountable for his sin?
Who can resist God’s will?
Isaiah 46:10 – “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:”
Daniel 4:35 – “And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”
 2. This is the argument Paul is anticipating
Romans 9:19 – “Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?”
 3. On one hand, we must simply answer, because God is God. He is the Potter. This is Paul’s answer in **Verse 20** – we’ll see more of this next week.
 4. But this also speaks to human responsibility. Yes, God is the Potter. He is the determiner of all things – but He is not the author of sin.
1689 LBC (Chap 5:4- *Divine Providence*) – “. . . the sinfulness of their acts (i.e. the acts of men) proceedeth only from the creatures, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.”
1 John 2:16 – “For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”
 5. While God has decreed the acts of sin, the sinfulness rests in the depravity of men's hearts. Because of Adam’s sin we are born with a propensity to sin - we do sin and we have no propensity to turn to God - But God’s revealed will commands us to obey, to repent, to believe and we are accountable!!
 6. That God has decreed all things in no way relieves us of responsibility for our sin
 - a. The Bible teaches us that God is the first cause of all things
The Bible teaches us that God has chosen some for salvation and others for damnation.
These truths have no bearing on our responsibility
 - b. We are held accountable for our own sin.
- B. Paul has been talking about the rejection of Christ by the Jews
 1. When Jesus came into the world the Jews hated Him.

2. The Jews believed they had a right to the kingdom because they were Abraham's seed.
3. Jesus rebuked their faulty thinking
Matthew 3:9 – “And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”
4. Does this mean that God has broken His promise? Did God reject His people after all?
The answer is a resounding NO! God does not work through the wisdom of men. God fulfills His plan according to His good pleasure.
Romans 9:6 – “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel:”
5. Paul has been talking the difference between national Israel and true Israel.
National Israel – descendents of Abraham
True Israel – Those who trust Christ by faith.
The difference between national Israel and true Israel is election. It is by God's choice. Then the others must not be held accountable, right? NO
They are indeed held accountable.

C. Such is the case with God's elective purpose. God has chosen whom He will. He will show mercy upon whom He chooses.

Romans 9:16 – “So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.”

1. Does this make God unfair, or worse, unrighteous?
Romans 9:14-15 – “What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? God forbid.
For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”
2. Salvation is entirely by grace – nothing in it depends upon human beings. But, this doesn't mean that man is relieved of all responsibility.
3. The truth is every man is responsible for his own actions. Every man is responsible for his own soul. Every condemned man will stand before God and bear full responsibility for his condemnation.

III. How shall we respond?

- A. God commands all men to repent
 1. All who turn to from their sins will be saved.
 2. Every man must set his heart on seeking Christ. All who seek Him with their whole heart shall find Him.
Jeremiah 29:12-14 – “Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. ¹³ And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. ¹⁴ And I will be found of you, saith the LORD:”
Hebrews 11:6 – “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”
 3. God offers salvation to all. If you despise it you will perish in your sin.
 - a. Yes it is true that God hardened Pharaoh's heart – but Pharaoh also hardened his own heart.

- b. Yes God rejected Esau. The Bible says,
Romans 9:13 – “As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”
 But didn’t Esau sell his birthright? Did he not despise God’s spiritual promise for a bowl of stew?
- c. Yes God ordained that Judas betray Christ? Yes, but who lusted after personal gain.
Matthew 26:15 – “And said *unto them*, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.”
- B. We cannot erase personal responsibility.
1. What is the desire of your life? What are you running after? You will bear your own guilt.
 2. You will get what you deserve
Galatians 6:7-9 – “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. ⁸ For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. ⁹ And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”
- C. The great warning for our generation.
1. The greater advantage, the greater the responsibility. What advantages we’ve had.
 - a. Bibles are everywhere. It has been translated into hundreds of languages. There are multitudes of English translations. Almost every home has one. In fact, most have several.
 - b. Commentaries are available by the hundreds. There are now even computer programs to help you study the Bible.
 - c. There are Radio programs available daily. There is almost no city where some type of Christian broadcasting is not available.
 2. God holds all responsible and with greater opportunity comes greater responsibility.
Luke 12:47-48 – “And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. ⁴⁸ But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”