



Romans 9:1-24

The Sovereignty of God - Election

Romans 9:1 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,

2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.

3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,

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.

6 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,

7 nor 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."

10 And 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),

12 it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger."

13 As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

14 What shall we say then? Is 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 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.

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?

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?**

[This will be our third and final sermon on the sovereignty of God, last week we began talking about God's Sovereignty in our salvation, and specifically his electing and predestinating grace, today we will conclude our examination of the sovereignty of God in salvation]

Here we have something that might strike some people as very odd indeed. Paul starts out by lamenting the fact that the greater part of his countrymen, the Jews, had rejected the gospel, and this was especially grievous to him because of all the advantages that they had been given. They were the people whom God had sovereignly chosen, from among all the nations, to be His own special treasure, His *Segullah* in the Hebrew. Moses himself had said *"The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."*

But now the greater part of them had rejected Christ, the Son of God, and not in ignorance as people who had perhaps never heard of Jesus. They had done this after He had manifested Himself in their midst and been preached to them, and in doing so, they had also rejected the one way of salvation, the only way to the Father. Peter Himself had warned in Acts 4:12, *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

So Paul sees the vast majority His countrymen going to hell and He is cut to the heart. He is so saddened he says that he could wish that he himself were accursed and cut-off from Christ if it would mean their salvation. And there is true pity, when a man like Paul who knew the eternal joys of heaven and the terrible reality of hell, could say I wish I was going to hell in their place and they were going to heaven in mine. This is the heart of a true evangelist.

If he'd stopped there, I think most people could understand it. But he doesn't. He goes on, and he talks about how their rejection isn't simply a terrible accident, but that it was also God's purpose and that in it God was still glorified. He moves from lamenting their rejection of the gospel to explaining how this too shows the sovereignty of God in salvation.

It surprises, but it shouldn't. Any review of church history quickly shows that most of the greatest evangelists, the men who most ardently pled with sinners to be reconciled with God were also believers in sovereignty of God. For instance, surely one of the greatest evangelists who ever lived was Charles Haddon Spurgeon. In his lifetime his preaching and teaching and writing was instrumental in bringing thousands to faith. And yet Spurgeon never hesitated to declare his own firm belief that salvation was entirely of God. He was a Calvinist and far from seeing Calvinism and the sovereignty of God as impediment to the gospel, he saw it as a critical part of it: He wrote in his autobiography:

"I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach that which is nowadays called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel . . . unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the

gospel unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of His elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out on the Cross; nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called." (Spurgeon's Autobiography, Vol. I, Ch. XVI, p.172)

Perhaps the greatest evangelist from the century prior to Spurgeon's, George Whitfield (who oddly is getting a lot mentions these days from Glenn Beck who is a Mormon) was also a Calvinist. In fact like Spurgeon, he not only considered Calvinism to be at the gospel he said that it was God's sovereignty that was the sole explanation why so many wretched sinners came to faith under his preaching: *"the frequent conversion of notorious sinners to God, to me is one great proof, amongst a thousand others, of that precious, but too much exploded and sadly misrepresented, doctrine of God's electing love; for whence is it that such are taken, whilst thousands, not near so vile, die senseless and stupid? All the answer that can be given, is, they are chosen vessels"*

And Whitfield's point there, is one of the main points that Paul is making here, that the fact that so many whom we might expect to come to faith in Christ are perishing, while others who were far off and removed from the promises, not raised in the covenant community or hearing the promises were coming to faith was not an evidence of the failure of the Gospel, but that rather all whom the Lord intended, that is His elect were being brought to faith, while those whom the Lord had given over to judgment were indeed perishing in unbelief.

1) This Brings Us to Point One – The Grounds for Election: Paul states that God's choice of certain men and women to be saved is unconditional. It's based entirely on His choice not on anything in them. For instance, men are not chosen or elected by God for salvation because of their birth. Merely being genetically a descendent of Abraham and part of the covenant community, did not make someone elect, nor did having the sign and seal of the covenant applied to them. No it was still God's sovereign choice who would be saved, and who would be lost.

In order to drive that point home, Paul uses the example of Esau and Jacob. Now these were the twin sons of the same man, the patriarch Isaac. Now we might expect that given that they were born in exactly the same circumstances that they would be both be equally worthy of salvation. But if we heard that only one of them was going to be saved, which one would we expect? Well probably Esau! He was the firstborn, he was his father's favorite, Isaac wanted him to be the son of the promise and let's face while they both start out pretty bad, Esau wasn't nearly as shifty as his brother. I mean it's not Esau who lies to his blind father.

But it is JACOB of whom the Lord says "I love" and ESAU of whom He says "I love Him not quite so much" no he doesn't say that does he says "JACOB I have loved, and Esau I have hated." Now at that point someone opposed to God's sovereignty in election might say *"well, of course, the Lord looked down the corridors of time and SAW that JACOB, although he starts badly would eventually change and come to faith in Lord while ESAU never would. So you see it was actually Jacob's foreseen act of faith that saved Him"* But Paul has already slammed the door on that thinking. In verses 11-13 he says "(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), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

He made the decision before they were born, and not based on any good or evil they had done or would do, and solely according to His purposes. Paul explicitly says Jacob's election was not due to Jacob's works but God's calling. He even speaks of how he felt about them BEFORE they were born

in the past tense, so it is not “Jacob I will Love” but “Jacob I have loved” the statement doesn’t make sense unless it is put in the context of God choosing Jacob before the creation of the world. From all the time since I first purposed to create a people for myself, to this moment, and indeed for all eternity, I have loved Jacob.

Now Christian, let me say here that should be a great comfort to you, that it was never the case that God was unsure of how he felt about you, or that his feelings towards you fluctuate according to your works. If God loves you now, He has loved you from before the foundation of the earth, and always will for all eternity, because He doesn’t change. If only people were as constant in their love as God, marriages would never fail.

2) **Now at this point, someone might object.** “*But IT’S NOT FAIR that Jacob is Chosen and Esau is rejected.*” Well, last week we discussed how FAIR would be that both Jacob and Esau go to hell. That’s fair. It’s purely a result of God’s undeserved mercy that anyone goes to heaven. Because left to themselves NO ONE WOULD CHOOSE to believe in No man dead in His Sins Can will Himself to come to spiritual life and believe, our salvation cannot be the result of our own efforts. Paul himself says “it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.”

Furthermore, and this is point two, even in his decision not to elect someone, that is the act of reprobation, God’s sovereign decision NOT to save someone, God is glorified and His purposes are achieved. Paul gives us the example of Pharaoh. And he points out that God created Pharaoh for the express purpose of making known His name in the earth. Because of Pharaoh’s refusal to repent the world saw the power and the justice of God in the destruction of Egypt and the freeing of Israel by his mighty hand.

But here we need to avoid the error of what is sometimes called *equal ultimacy*. You see while God has to work faith in the heart of an fallen sinner in order to save them, because there he is introducing something foreign to that Heart, he doesn’t have to *work unbelief* in the heart of a sinner in order for them to remain unbelieving, unbelieving and faithless is the natural condition of the sinner. So all he has to do to harden the heart of someone like pharaoh is to remove his restraining hand. He gives them over to their own uncleanness and debased minds as Paul puts it Romans 1. “*The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?*”

We were talking with the children last night at dinner about the fact that we’ve had Nuclear weapons capable of destroying the world for over 65 years now. And many of those weapons have been in the hands of evil and uncaring and sometimes even insane men. Why then have we not blown ourselves up a thousand times over? The answer is the restraining hand of God. He stops them from sinking down to the point where they would be willing to destroy both themselves and everyone else. To harden their hearts all he need do is remove his hand, as he did with Pharaoh, and they’d be willing to see even their own countries utterly destroyed rather than submit – just as Pharaoh was. Even his councilors were incredulous Exodus 10:7 “*Then Pharaoh’s servants said to him, "How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?"*” Do you think for a moment that Kim Jong Il hasn’t used his nukes because he’s not as bad as Pharaoh? No it’s because there is a hand restraining the evil of his heart.

3) **He is the Potter We are the Clay:** Some men were created for glory, others for destruction. God will be glorified in the lives of both. Some as his mercy is seen, others as his justice is seen. Without the justice part, we’d never understand or appreciate mercy. Without the mercy part, we’d never see

the depths of the love of God. Both election and reprobation were necessary in order that God be glorified.

So how can we, or why should we complain against God's sovereignty in salvation. Paul compares the ridiculousness of part of a lump of clay complaining to the potter that it had been shaped into a chamber pot while another lump had been made into a goblet for banquets. Both owe their existence to the maker, and both are necessary in their own right.

Application: Evangelism - "If we can view, unmoved, the perishing condition of our fellow-men, or are unwilling to make sacrifices for their benefit, we are very different from Paul, and from Him who wept over Jerusalem, and died for our good upon Mount Calvary, verses 2, 3." - Hodge

2Cor. 5:20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

NKJ 2 Corinthians 6:1 We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

Deut. 30:19 "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;

You MUST believe or you will not be saved. Nothing else can or will save you. Not your birth, your family, etc. "Believing on Christ must be personal; a man himself and in his own proper person must close with Christ Jesus—'The just shall live by his faith.' (Hab. 2:4.) This says, that it will not suffice for a man's safety and relief, that he is in covenant with God as a born member of the visible church, by virtue of the parent's subjection to God's ordinances: neither will it suffice that the person had the initiating seal of baptism added, and that he then virtually engaged to seek salvation by Christ's blood, as all infants do: neither does it suffice that men are come of believing parents; their faith will not instate their children into a right to the spiritual blessings of the covenant; neither will it suffice that parents did, in some respects, engage for their children, and give them away unto God: all these things do not avail. The children of the kingdom and of godly predecessors are cast out. Unless a man in his own person have faith in Christ Jesus, and with his own heart approve and acquiesce in that device of saving sinners, he cannot be saved. I grant, this faith is given unto him by Christ; but certain it is, that it must be personal."

- William Guthrie, The Christians Great Interest