

Today... I'd like to tell you about Billy. Billy was a nine year-old (from a Christian family) who was sitting at his desk in school (one day)... when all of a sudden... there was a puddle between his feet... and the front of his pants were wet. ... He thought that his heart was going to stop... because he knew that once the other boys in his class discovered it... he would never hear the end of it. And when the girls find out... they'll never speak to him again... as long as he lives.

Billy quickly squeezed his eyes tight and shot up this urgent prayer: "*Dear God... this is an emergency! I need help now!...*" He looked up... just in time to see Mrs. Billingsly (his teacher) with a look in her eye that said he had been discovered.

As Mrs. Billingsly approached... but was still two desks away from him... a classmate (named Suzie) was carrying a fishbowl... nearly full of water. She stumbled - and dumped the goldfish bowl – right into Billy's lap. ... Billy pretended to be angry... but inside... he was praying: "*Thank You, Jesus! Thank You... Thank You... Thank You!*"

Rather than being the subject of ridicule... suddenly Billy became the object of his classmates sympathy. ... Mrs. Billingsly rushed Billy downstairs and gave him gym shorts to wear until his pants would dry. Once he returned to class... all the kids were on their hands and knees cleaning up around Billy's desk. "*This sympathy is wonderful!*" thought Billy.

But in the big picture of things... not everything was so wonderful. The ridicule that should have been **Billy's**... had been transferred to **Suzie!** ... When she tried to help clean up the mess at Billy's desk... her classmates wouldn't let her. They told her to get away. "*You've done enough already*

... *you klutz!* ... As the day progressed and news of the incident spread around the whole school... sympathy got better and better for Billy... and the ridicule exponentially got worse and worse for Suzie.

At the end of the school day... as they waited for the bus... Billy saw Suzie waiting by herself and walked over to her. He whispered: "*Suzie... You did that on purpose... didn't you...?*"

She grinned (ever so slightly) and whispered back: "*I wet my pants once too...*"

I tell you that story... because it illustrates what "mercy" is. But even though we can see it in a story like this... "mercy" can often be overlooked where it is prominently displayed. No where is this truer... than in our passage of Scripture today (in Romans chapter nine.)

Some of you... who are familiar with the book of Romans... might say... "*Romans chapter nine and mercy...? Isn't Romans chapter nine a prominent discussion about 'election' and 'predestination'? Yes... chapters 9-11 deal with it. "Wait a minute! Are you telling us, Pastor, that mercy is equated with election and predestination...? And I say – ***"I'm not... the Apostle Paul makes this clear equation in our passage!"****

What is mercy? Is it different from compassion...? Is it the same thing as "grace"? "Mercy" is the purposeful withholding of negative consequences that someone deserves. I am a sinner. But God does not immediately strike me dead whenever I sin – even though I deserve it. He withholds my deserved punishment.

Compassion is often used as a synonym of "mercy." But they are not the same. It is possible to have "mercy" without any "compassion"... and it is

possible to have “compassion”... without any “mercy.” “Compassion” is an emotion that often accompanies “mercy.” ... But very quickly... let me distinguish “mercy” from “grace.” “Mercy” withholds deserved punishment... but then “grace” gives something that is UNdeserved. God withholds the punishment of Hell (mercy) and then gives eternal life with Him in Glory - forever! (grace).

In our passage today... “Mercy” – is the final answer to a series of questions that the Apostle Paul anticipated his readers would be thinking after the first 8 chapters of his letter... The first question that Paul expected his readers to be asking about now is Did God fail...?

The promises of God about a coming Messiah were to Israel... and yet Israel as a whole was unresponsive. ... Since the promises were to Israel... and since Jesus of Nazareth was that Messiah... Israel should have been willing to embrace Him. But Israel as a whole did not. ... When the Messiah appeared... Israel rejected Him and crucified Him.

Did this mean that God's promises to Israel had failed... (that is... Had God Himself failed?) ... And does it mean that the promises of God cannot be trusted? ...(Furthermore) In the matter of salvation... is God simply free to change His mind? “OK... Jews... Never mind... I'll just go to other people!”

Is God fair and can God be trusted to do what He says? These are the ultimate questions that Paul seeks to answer in chapters 9–11. (And do you know what...?) ... If God indeed promised He would bless Israel and then turned around and blessed the church instead... He might do the same again. ... His promises to me (personally... as a believer) might not be

reliable either. Absolute trust in God to accomplish what he has promised is fundamental to our security as believers.

So the Apostle Paul will attempt to resolve this by discussing election and predestination. ... (He did not fail... because He saved those Who He had elected to save.) ... But then... **that subject** raises a whole new set of questions... which can be boiled down to this: Is that fair...? Is God being fair to select some people who deserve eternal punishment – and give a free pass only to them. (Paul will answer this with his discussion about “mercy.”)

Romans 9:6-8

Answering the first question (did God fail?)... Paul begins a discussion that God’s election of Israel had never been for everyone who was in the bloodline of Abraham. From the beginning there had always been an “elect core” within this elect nation. The selection of SOME (and not all) has been the case from the very beginning. Abraham had many descendants... but not all were “children of the promise.”

Earlier in this letter... Paul has already written a definition of a “true Jew.” In Romans 2:29 he wrote that a “True Jew” is one whose heart is right with God.

Romans 2:29 (ESV)

²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

When Jesus appeared on the scene to begin His public ministry... He (too) made the distinction. In fact... this is one of the earliest things recorded of him. In John 1:43-46... we are told how Jesus called Philip to be one of His

disciples and how Philip immediately found his friend (Nathanael) and brought him to Jesus. ... When Jesus saw Nathanael He said: "*Here is a **true** Israelite...*" (v. 47).

You may also recall what the Jews said to the Lord Jesus on one occasion,

John 8:39,44 (ESV)

³⁹ *They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did,*

⁴⁴ *You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires....*

Being a descendant of Abraham... and being Abraham's "Child of the promise" are not the same. It was this precise distinction that Paul is making in this chapter. ... So... it is a false conclusion that because Israel (as a whole) did not embrace Jesus... at His first coming... that God has failed. God has not failed. Everyone who He has elected has been (and will be) saved. It has been this way in God's dealing with His people... from early on.

Romans 9:9-12

God chose Isaac over Ishmael... and God chose Jacob over Esau.

A word of caution before we proceed: This is one of the least popular passages in the Scriptures... because Paul bases his answer on the doctrine of *election*... which teaches that before the world was created God chose who would receive salvation. God chooses individuals to be saved based on nothing but His Own free decision. St. Augustine put it this way: "*God does not choose us because we believe, but that we may believe.*"

The choice of Jacob instead of Esau was made before either child had opportunity to do either good or evil. It was made while the children were still in the womb. This means — and we cannot miss it — that election is **not** on the basis of **anything** done by the individual who is chosen.

Just before our current study here in Romans... I led you in a study through Genesis here on Sunday mornings. And as we were studying the section of Genesis where Jacob was elected over Esau... we saw how undeserving Esau was for despising his birthright. But I hope that you will remember how Jacob was just as undeserving. It is no surprise that Esau was not selected. But it is a great shock that the rascal Jacob was!

Nothing a person has done (or will do) — not even faith — has any bearing on God's choice. This does not jibe with our natural way of thinking. And I know a lot of people who think along the lines of: "*If election is true... God is not just. I could never believe in a God like that.*"

But... Folks... here it is... plainly... and very clearly taught in Scripture. And it will stare us in the face... from here through chapter 11. ... It is a very dangerous stand to take – to not believe it because it seems unfair. ... To seek understanding is one thing. God encourages it. But to demand that God conform to our limited insights into what is just or right is another matter entirely.

It has been a long time since I have quoted from J. Vernon McGee... but I think that I should right here.

We cannot avoid the doctrine of election, nor can we reconcile God's sovereign election with man's free will. Both are true. Let's keep in

mind that this is His universe. He is sovereign. I am but a little creature on earth, and He could take away the breath from me in the next moment. Do I have the audacity to stand on my two feet, look Him in the face, and question what He does? That would be rebellion of the worst sort. I bow to my Creator and my Redeemer, knowing that whatever choice He makes is right. By the way, if you do not like what He does, perhaps you should move out of His universe and start one of your own so you can make your own rules. But as long as you live in God's universe, you will have to play according to His rules. Little man needs to bow his stiff neck and stubborn knees before Almighty God and say, "There is no unrighteousness with Thee"

Although I have questions... I nevertheless believe the doctrine of election and I rejoice in them. I am suggesting that you do, too. Why? ... Because election means that salvation is of God. It is His idea and His work... and therefore it is as **solid** as God (Himself) is.

If salvation were up to me... I would blow it. ... Even if I could choose God and be saved... I would soon **un**choose Him and so fall away and be lost. But because God chooses me... I can know that I am secure because of his eternal and sovereign determination. God began this good work. And "*he who began [this] good work... will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 1:6).

Romans 9:13

"Hate" is a powerful word. We are taught from childhood to avoid hatred at all costs and to obey the command of Christ to love everyone, including our enemies. So it's shocking to read the words of Malachi, who declared that God loved Jacob but hated Esau. How can a God of love - "hate"?

Let's begin by examining the Hebrew culture's use of this term. The first thing that I want to say... is that in the Jewish culture (just like our own culture) used their words for hate (*sane* and *maas*) to express an intense EMOTIONAL displeasure toward something. But they ***also*** used it in a different way (unlike our American culture.) Just as common as an intense EMOTIONAL displeasure... the Hebrews used "hate" as an expression of ***priority***. More than one commentator that I read said the Hebrew words "sane" and "maas" ("hate") have more to do with one's priorities than his or her emotions.

For example... Genesis 29 tells the story of Jacob's two wives and how he "*loved*" Rachel and "*hated*" her sister (Leah.) ... Again... the term indicates Jacob's choice to favor one over the other. He wasn't completely nauseated by Leah. (I can say this pretty confidently... because he did conceive more than ten children with her!)

Furthermore... in the New Testament... Jesus required His followers to "hate" their money... their families... and even their own lives (Matt. 6:24; Luke 14:26; John 12:25). ... Was Jesus instructing His disciples to treat others cruelly? No. ... The issue at hand was *priority*... choosing discipleship over all other things and choosing Christ over all other relationships.

So God's hatred of Esau is neither *prompted* by... (nor *motivated* by)... emotion. He simply prioritized Jacob over Esau. ... But that now prompts Paul to address the next anticipated question – he can expect from his readers.

Romans 9:14

Paul can emphatically say “no” (ou may... one of the strongest negations in the Greek language) ... for at least two reasons.

1. All human beings deserve hell, not heaven. No one who has followed Paul's argument in the earlier chapters of Romans can doubt this...

Romans 3:10-12 (ESV)

¹⁰ as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

We are talking about what all deserve... and what we deserve is condemnation. That is justice. The justice of God.

2. If any individual is to be saved, it must be by mercy only, and mercy is in an entirely different category from justice. Justice (or what is deserved)... is based upon what people have done. ... Mercy has nothing to do with what people have done... but is something that finds its source in the will of God only.

And here is where it really gets good... as Paul continues to counter any thought of God being unjust... with His mercy. Here comes the very **peak** of this entire chapter! From God's point of view... the revelation of His Own glory... is the great priority.

Romans 9:15-16

Verse 15 comes from a quote found in Exodus 33... and I think that Paul assumed our knowledge about the context. ... Moses, you recall, wanted to

see the glory of God. God said in effect, "*I'll show it to you, Moses, but I'll not show it to you because you are Moses.*" Now, Moses was a very important person. He was leading the children of Israel through the wilderness. God says, "*I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. I will do this for you, not because you are Moses, but because I am God!*"

Exodus 33:18-19 (ESV)

¹⁸ Moses said, "Please show me your glory." ¹⁹ And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

Do you know why God saved me? It was not because I am Jim Hofman... but because He is God... and a vital part of His name is "Mercy"! God was telling Moses: "*I will have mercy on people you would not expect, and I will have compassion in ways that will surprise you, especially when I am compassionate with you!*"

God's mercy is not extended as a recognition of human will... nor is it a reward of human work. Human-willing and human-working are not motivating causes of God's actions.

If God's plan depended on us... we could never be certain. We would continue to doubt... because of the (ever present) possibility of our blowing it – because of our sin. ... But there is certainty... because God chose to show us mercy – independent of our flimsy (sinful) will! There is security in that! It does not depend on your will – or whether or not your faith is strong enough. It is all a matter of His choice.

Your being included in God's plan is not an accident. Let me say that again: CHRISTIAN – YOU ARE NOT AN ACCIDENT BUT A DIVINE CHOICE! ... There is only one appropriate response to that – continual gratitude!

Perhaps you are here today... and you need to ask yourself... *Am I a true Christian... or am I a Christian in name only?* ... This is a serious question and a necessary one. ... Because if Israel (with all the spiritual advantages that Paul mentions in Romans 9) could be composed of millions who were not true Israel... it is certain that many who attend good evangelical churches (like ours) are actually unbelievers.

Let me quickly give you a way to examine yourself... with 4 questions that James Montgomery Boice put forth. ... Paul told the Corinthians, "*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves*" (2 Cor. 13:5a)... so here are the 4 questions.

1. *Do I believe on Christ?* The first requirement is faith, because faith is our point of contact with the gospel. Paul told the Philippian jailer, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved*" (Acts 16:31a). ... So ask yourself, "*Have I believed on Jesus?*"

Don't ask: "*Have I believed on him in broad cultural terms?*" — like anyone in the western world might be expected to do... especially if he or she has been raised in a Christian home or has attended a Christian church. ... But rather, "*Have I been touched by knowledge of Jesus' death for me, and have I committed myself to him? Am I serious about following after Christ,*

obeying his commands, and pleasing him?" (That is the kind of belief it needs to be.)

2. *Am I following after Christ?* The first question leads to the next: "*Am I actually Jesus' follower?*" The way Jesus called his followers was by the words *Follow me*. And when they did follow Him... their lives were inevitably redirected. Some had been fishermen... but when they began to follow Jesus they became fishers of men. One had been a tax collector... but after he had followed Jesus... he became concerned with the currency of heaven. Nobody who has begun to follow Jesus Christ has ever been entirely the same or walked in the same paths afterward.

So ask yourself: "*Has my life been redirected? Is there anything I am doing now that I did not do before or would not be doing were I not committed to Jesus? And are there things I have stopped doing? Is Jesus my very own Lord and Savior?*"

3. *Do I testify to Christ?* This is a harder point for true self-examination, because it is easier for some to talk about Jesus than for others. It is easier for some to talk about nearly anything than for others. Nevertheless, this is an important question and one worth asking. If you never speak to anyone about Jesus, how can you suppose that you really care about him and love him, not to mention caring about and loving the other person, who needs to receive the Savior?

Nominal Christians do not talk about Jesus. They are content to let everyone believe as he or she likes. They wouldn't think of trying to impose

their beliefs on others. But not all who are Christians are true Christians, just as "*not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.*"

Examine yourself. Do you testify of Jesus?

4. *Am I learning about Christ?* The last of the four questions I have posed for determining whether or not you are a genuine Christian is: "*Am I trying to learn more and more about Jesus Christ? Do I know more about him today than I did at the time of my conversion? Or at this time last year?*"

I know people who claim to be Christians who never go to a Bible study, and, as far as I can determine, never seriously study the Bible on their own. If you are one of them how can you think of yourself as a Christian when you have no interest in learning about the one who gave Himself for you? How can you consider yourself a believer when you really don't care about Jesus?

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves"

God may be inviting you today to answer His call. If there is anyone who would like to have Christ come into their life... and have Him be your Master... and you be His servant... let's talk and let's pray... before you leave today. ... If God is calling you... answer His call today.