

Romans 9
May 10, 2015

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

I'm like many of you. Sometimes it's hard to read Scripture when we come across language like "God's elect" or "God's Chosen." It creates discomfort because none of us want to believe that God only loves some of us while condemning the rest. This chapter contains some of this language.

Today's chapter will look, smell and taste like "God has predestined His chosen elect," and all the rest are doomed for destruction. The problem is that if we "zoom in" on this chapter, without "zooming out" to be reminded of the overall message of Paul's epistle to the Romans, we can seriously misinterpret what he is saying in Chapter 9. Accordingly, I am going to remind you of the theme of this book and give you an outline of Chp 9-11 so that you know in advance where Paul is heading!

First, the theme of Romans is found in Chp 1:16-17 – *God offers the gift of His righteousness to EVERYONE who comes to Christ by faith*. Paul wrote Romans to reveal God's sovereign plan of salvation (Chp 1-8), to show how Jews and Gentiles fit into that plan (Chp 9-11), and to exhort them to live righteous and harmonious lives (Chp 12-16).

Here is what the outline looks like for Chp 9-11:

Israel's Past: The election of God (9:1-29)

Israel's Present: The Rejection of God (9:30-10:21)

Israel's Future: The Restoration by God (11)

Transition: Paul is getting ready to remind the Jews of their past and how God began his plan of salvation. So as we read this, keep in mind that Paul is giving a history lesson by describing what God *originally intended* before He opened the door of salvation to everyone who comes to Christ by faith. As we go through Chapter 9, let's celebrate God's plan of salvation by praising God's attributes that shaped it.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Rom 9:1-5]

Process Observations/Questions:

V.1:

- I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—

V.2:

- I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

V.3:

- For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race,

V.4:

- the 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.

V.5:

- Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

Process Questions/Observations:

Q: How badly does Paul want to see the people of Israel have salvation in Christ? [He was willing to be cut off from Christ for the sake of his own race]

Q: Can you even wrap your mind around this? Paul was saying he was willing to go to hell for the sake of the lost. [Let people engage this]

Process: The closest I can come to the anguish Paul was experiencing is watching someone be presented with a fantastic deal that would be great for them, but they just don't see it and walk away from it.]

Q v.4, 5: What privileges did God give the Jewish people? [adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory; the covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic); the receiving of the law; the temple worship; and God's promises]

Q v.5: They had it all! What do we learn about Christ in this verse? [fully human, fully God over all. Paul affirms Jesus's deity]

Q: How would you describe God's attributes when you see all of the privileges the Israelites were given? [Faithful; Loving; Caring...]

Read Romans 9:6-13

V.6:

- It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.

V.7:

- Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."

V.8:

- In 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.

V.9:

- For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

V.10:

- Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac.

V.11:

- Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand:

V.12:

- not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.”
- V.13:
- Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

Process Questions/Observations:

Note v.6: Paul had argued in Romans 8 that the believer is secure in Jesus Christ and that God’s election would stand (Rom. 8:28–30). But someone might ask, “What about the Jews? They were chosen by God, and yet now you tell us they are set aside and God is building His church. Did God fail to keep His promises to Israel?”

Q v.6: What does Paul mean by “for not all who are descended from Israel are Israel?” [There is a difference between the natural seed of Abraham and the spiritual children of Abraham. X-Ref Rom 2:28-29]

Q v.7-10: How does Paul defend that God’s election was not based on the physical nation of Israel? [He compares/contrasts key biblical figures who would normally be “chosen” because of their birth positions, yet God chose differently]

Q v.11-13: When did God elect Jacob over Esau? [Before they were born; Therefore, Jacob’s election was not based on human merit]

Note for v.13: Romans 9:13 is a reference to Malachi 1:2–3 and refers to nations (Israel and Edom) and not individual sinners. **God does not hate sinners. John 3:16 makes it clear that He loves sinners. The statement here has to do with national election, not individual.** Since God’s election of Israel does not depend on human merit, their disobedience cannot nullify the elective purposes of God. God is faithful even though His people are unfaithful.

Q: What attributes of God do you see in these verses? [Faithful]

Transition: The fact that God chose one and not the other seems to indicate that God is unrighteous. Let’s see how Paul deals with that perception in the next set of verses.

Read Romans 9:14-18

V.14:

- What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!

V.15:

- For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

V.16:

- It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.

V.17:

- For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”

V.18:

- Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

Process Questions/Observations:

Q v.14: How does Paul answer the perception that God is unjust? [Not at all! A holy God would never commit an unrighteous act. Election is always totally a matter of grace. If God acted only on the basis of righteousness, NOBODY would ever be saved!]

Note v.15: Paul quoted Exodus 33:19 to show that God's mercy and compassion are extended according to God's will and not man's will. All of us deserve condemnation—not mercy. The reference in Exodus 33 deals with Israel's idolatry while Moses was on the mount receiving the Law. The whole nation deserved to be destroyed, yet God killed only 3,000 people—not because they were more wicked or less godly, but purely because of His grace and mercy.

Process v.17-18: We need to discuss the “hardening” of Pharaoh (Rom. 9:18). This hardening process is referred to at least fifteen times in Exodus 7–14. Sometimes we are told that Pharaoh hardened his heart (Ex. 8:15, 19, 32), and other times that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27). **By declaring His Word and revealing His power, God gave Pharaoh opportunity to repent; but instead, Pharaoh resisted God and hardened his heart. The fault lay not with God but Pharaoh. The same sunlight that melts the ice also hardens the clay. God was not unrighteous in His dealings with Pharaoh because He gave him many opportunities to repent and believe.**

Read Romans 9:19-29

V.19:

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

V.20:

- But 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?’ ”

V.21:

- Does 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?

V.22:

- What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction?

V.23:

- What 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—

V.24:

- even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

V.25:

- As 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,”

V.26:

- and, “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.’ ”

V.27:

- Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved.

V.28:

- For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality.”

V.29:

- It is just as Isaiah said previously: “Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.”

Transition: Now Paul is anticipating another objection from his readers. If God is sovereign and chooses who he “loves and hates,” then how can we be blamed for any wrongdoing? Why would we be held responsible? If we are being held responsible for our actions, doesn’t that make God “unjust?”

Process Questions/Observations:

Q v.19-21: How does Paul answer the question, “Is God unjust?” [“Who are we to argue with God?”]

Process: God is the Potter and we are the clay. To be sure, the clay has no life and is passive in the potter’s hand. We have feelings, intellect, and willpower, and we can resist Him if we choose. (See Jer. 18 where this thought is developed.) But it is God who determines whether a man will be a Moses or a Pharaoh. Neither Moses, nor Pharaoh, nor anyone else, could choose his parents, his genetic structure, or his time and place of birth. However, this does not excuse us from responsibility. Pharaoh had great opportunities to learn about the true God and trust Him, and yet he chose to rebel.

Q v.22-24: What is the additional defense Paul gives as to whether “God is unjust” or not? [God has His purposes.]

Process v.22: *The word “fitted” or “prepared” in Romans 9:22 does not suggest that God made Pharaoh a “vessel of wrath.” The verb is in what the Greek grammarians call the middle voice, making it a reflexive action verb. So, it should read: “fitted himself for destruction.”* God prepares men for glory (Rom. 9:23), but sinners prepare themselves for judgment. In Moses and Israel God revealed the riches of His mercy; in Pharaoh and Egypt He revealed His power and wrath. Since neither deserved any mercy, God cannot be charged with injustice.

Ultimately, of course, God’s purpose was to form His church from both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 9:24). Believers today are, by God’s grace, “vessels of mercy” which He is preparing for glory, a truth that reminds us of Romans 8:29–30.

Q v.25-29: Finally, what is the last defense Paul gives that “God was NOT unjust?” [All of this was prophesied! Paul quoted Hosea 2:23, a statement declaring that God would turn from the Jews and call the Gentiles. Then he cited Hosea 1:10 to prove that this new people being called would be God’s people and “children of the living God.” He then quoted Isaiah 10:22–23 to show that only a remnant of Israel would be saved, while the greater part of the nation would suffer judgment.]

Q: So what attribute(s) of God can we affirm based on this passage of Scripture? [Just, Holy, Merciful]

LOOK:

What does all of this prove? That God was not unjust in saving some and judging others, because He was only fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies given centuries ago. He would be unjust if He did not keep His own Word. But even more than that, these prophecies show that God's election has made possible the salvation of the Gentiles. This is the grace of God. At the Exodus, God rejected the Gentiles and chose the Jews, so that, through the Jews, He might save the Gentiles. The nation of Israel rejected His will, but this did not defeat His purposes. A remnant of Jews does believe and God's Word has been fulfilled.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 543–546). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

It seems strange that Paul would interrupt his discussion of salvation and devote a long section of three chapters to the nation of Israel. Why didn't he move from the doctrinal teaching of Romans 8 to the practical duties given in Romans 12–15? A careful study of Romans 9–11 reveals that this section is not an interruption at all; it is a necessary part of Paul's argument for justification by faith.

To begin with, Paul was considered a traitor to the Jewish nation. He ministered to Gentiles and he taught freedom from the Law of Moses. He had preached in many synagogues and caused trouble, and no doubt many of the Jewish believers in Rome had heard of his questionable reputation. In these chapters, Paul showed his love for Israel and his desire for their welfare. This is the personal reason for this discussion.

But there was a doctrinal reason. Paul had argued in Romans 8 that the believer is secure in Jesus Christ and that God's election would stand (Rom. 8:28–30). But someone might ask, "What about the Jews? They were chosen by God, and yet now you tell us they are set aside and God is building His church. Did God fail to keep His promises to Israel?" In other words, the very character of God was at stake. If God was not faithful to the Jews, how do we know He will be faithful to the church?

The emphasis in Romans 9 is on Israel's past election, in Romans 10 on Israel's present rejection, and in Romans 11 on Israel's future restoration. Israel is the only nation in the world with a complete history—past, present, and future. In Romans 9, Paul defended the character of God by showing that Israel's past history actually magnified the attributes of God. He specifically named four attributes of God: His faithfulness (Rom. 9:1–13), righteousness (Rom. 9:14–18), justice (Rom. 9:19–29), and grace (Rom. 9:30–33). You will note that these divisions correspond with Paul's three questions: "Is there unrighteousness with God?" (Rom. 9:14) "Why doth He find fault?" (Rom. 9:19) and "What shall we say then?" (Rom. 9:30)

God's Faithfulness (Rom. 9:1–13)

It is remarkable how Paul moved from the joy of Romans 8 into the sorrow and burden of Romans 9. When he looked at Christ, he rejoiced; but when he looked at the lost people of Israel, he wept. Like Moses (Ex. 32:30–35), he was willing to be cursed and separated from Christ if it would mean the salvation of Israel. What a man this Paul was! He was willing to stay out of heaven for the sake of the saved (Phil. 1:22–24), and willing to go to hell for the sake of the lost.

His theme was God's election of Israel; and the first thing he dealt with was the blessing of their election (Rom. 9:4–5). Israel was adopted by God as His own people (Ex. 4:22–23). He gave them His glory in the tabernacle and the temple (Ex. 40:34–38; 1 Kings 8:10–11). The glory Moses beheld on Mount Sinai came to dwell with Israel (Ex. 24:16–17). God gave Israel His covenants, the first to Abraham, and then additional covenants to Moses and to David. He also gave them His Law to govern their political, social, and religious life, and to guarantee His blessing if they obeyed. He gave them "the service of God," referring to the ministry in the tabernacle and the temple. He gave them the promises and the patriarchs ("the fathers" in Rom. 9:5). The purpose of all of this blessing was that Jesus Christ, through Israel, might come into the

world. (Note that Rom. 9:5 affirms that Jesus Christ is God.) All of these blessings were given freely to Israel and to no other nation.

But in spite of these blessings, Israel failed. When the Messiah appeared, Israel rejected Him and crucified Him. No one knew this better than Paul, because in his early days he had persecuted the church. Does Israel's failure mean that God's Word has failed? (The Greek word translated "taken none effect" pictures a ship going off its course.) The answer is, "No! God is faithful no matter what men may do with His Word." Here Paul explains the basis for Israel's election.

It was not of natural descent (vv. 6–10). As we saw in Romans 2:25–29, there is a difference between the natural seed of Abraham and the spiritual children of Abraham. Abraham actually had two sons, Ishmael (by Hagar) and Isaac (by Sarah). Since Ishmael was the firstborn, he should have been chosen, but it was Isaac that God chose. Isaac and Rebecca had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. As the firstborn, Esau should have been chosen, but it was Jacob that God chose. And Esau and Jacob had the same father and mother, unlike Ishmael and Isaac who had the same father but different mothers. God did not base His election on the physical. Therefore, if the nation of Israel—Abraham's physical descendants—has rejected God's Word, this does not nullify God's elective purposes at all.

It is not of human merit (vv. 11–13). God chose Jacob before the babies were born. The two boys had done neither good nor evil, so God's choice was not based on their character or conduct. Romans 9:13 is a reference to Malachi 1:2–3 and refers to nations (Israel and Edom) and not individual sinners. God does not hate sinners. John 3:16 makes it clear that He loves sinners. The statement here has to do with national election, not individual. Since God's election of Israel does not depend on human merit, their disobedience cannot nullify the elective purposes of God. God is faithful even though His people are unfaithful.

God's Righteousness (Rom. 9:14–18)

The fact that God chose one and not the other seems to indicate that He is unrighteous. "Is there unrighteousness with God?" Paul asked; and then he replied, "God forbid!" It is unthinkable that the holy God should ever commit an unrighteous act. Election is always totally a matter of grace. If God acted only on the basis of righteousness, nobody would ever be saved. Paul quoted Exodus 33:19 to show that God's mercy and compassion are extended according to God's will and not man's will. All of us deserve condemnation—not mercy. The reference in Exodus 33 deals with Israel's idolatry while Moses was on the mount receiving the Law. The whole nation deserved to be destroyed, yet God killed only 3,000 people—not because they were more wicked or less godly, but purely because of His grace and mercy.

Paul then quoted Exodus 9:16, using Pharaoh as an illustration. Moses was a Jew, Pharaoh was a Gentile; yet both were sinners. In fact, both were murderers! Both saw God's wonders. Yet Moses was saved and Pharaoh was lost. God raised up Pharaoh that He might reveal His glory and power; and He had mercy on Moses that He might use him to deliver the people of Israel. Pharaoh was a ruler, and Moses was a slave; yet it was Moses who experienced the mercy and compassion of God—because God willed it that way. God is sovereign in His work and acts according to His own will and purposes. So it was not a matter of righteousness but of the sovereign will of God.

God is holy and must punish sin; but God is loving and desires to save sinners. If everybody is saved, it would deny His holiness; but if everybody is lost, it would deny His love. The solution to the problem is God's sovereign election.

A seminary professor once said to me, “Try to explain election, and you may lose your mind; but explain it away and you will lose your soul!”

God chose Israel and condemned Egypt, because this was His sovereign purpose. Nobody can condemn God for the way He extends His mercy, because God is righteous.

Before leaving this section, we need to discuss the “hardening” of Pharaoh (Rom. 9:18). This hardening process is referred to at least fifteen times in Exodus 7–14. Sometimes we are told that Pharaoh hardened his heart (Ex. 8:15, 19, 32), and other times that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart (Ex. 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27). By declaring His Word and revealing His power, God gave Pharaoh opportunity to repent; but instead, Pharaoh resisted God and hardened his heart. The fault lay not with God but Pharaoh. The same sunlight that melts the ice also hardens the clay. God was not unrighteous in His dealings with Pharaoh because He gave him many opportunities to repent and believe.

God’s Justice (Rom. 9:19–29)

But this fact of God’s sovereign will only seems to create a new problem. “If God is sovereign, then who can resist Him? And if one does resist Him, what right does He have to judge?” It is the age-old question of the justice of God as He works in human history.

I recall sharing in a street meeting in Chicago and passing out tracts at the corner of Madison and Kedzie. Most of the people graciously accepted the tracts, but one man took the tract and with a snarl crumpled it up and threw it in the gutter. The name of the tract was “Four Things God Wants You to Know.”

“There are a few things I would like God to know!” the man said. “Why is there so much sorrow and tragedy in this world? Why do the innocent suffer while the rich go free? Bah! Don’t tell me there’s a God! If there is, then God is the biggest sinner that ever lived!” And he turned away with a sneer and was lost in the crowd.

We know that God by nature is perfectly just. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25) It is unthinkable that God would will an unjust purpose or perform an unjust act. But at times it seems that He does just that. He had mercy on Moses but condemned Pharaoh. Is this just? He elected Israel and rejected the other nations. Is this just? Paul gives three answers to this charge.

Who are we to argue with God? (vv. 19–21) This is a logical argument. God is the Potter and we are the clay. God is wiser than we are and we are foolish to question His will or to resist it. (The reference here is to Isa. 45:9.) To be sure, the clay has no life and is passive in the potter’s hand. We have feelings, intellect, and willpower, and we can resist Him if we choose. (See Jer. 18 where this thought is developed.) But it is God who determines whether a man will be a Moses or a Pharaoh. Neither Moses, nor Pharaoh, nor anyone else, could choose his parents, his genetic structure, or his time and place of birth. We have to believe that these matters are in the hands of God.

However, this does not excuse us from responsibility. Pharaoh had great opportunities to learn about the true God and trust Him, and yet he chose to rebel. Paul did not develop this aspect of truth because his theme was divine sovereignty, not human responsibility. The one does not deny the other, even though our finite minds may not fully grasp them both.

God has His purposes (vv. 22–24). We must never think that God enjoyed watching a tyrant like Pharaoh. He endured it. God said to Moses, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people ... and have heard their cry ... for I know their sorrows” (Ex. 3:7). The fact that God was long-suffering indicates that He gave Pharaoh opportunities to be saved (see 2 Peter 3:9). The word

“fitted” in Romans 9:22 does not suggest that *God* made Pharaoh a “vessel of wrath.” The verb is in what the Greek grammarians call the middle voice, making it a reflexive action verb. So, it should read: “*fitted himself* for destruction.” God prepares men for glory (Rom. 9:23), but sinners prepare themselves for judgment. In Moses and Israel God revealed the riches of His mercy; in Pharaoh and Egypt He revealed His power and wrath. Since neither deserved any mercy, God cannot be charged with injustice.

Ultimately, of course, God’s purpose was to form His church from both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 9:24). Believers today are, by God’s grace, “vessels of mercy” which He is preparing for glory, a truth that reminds us of Romans 8:29–30.

All of this was prophesied (vv. 25–29). First Paul quoted Hosea 2:23, a statement declaring that God would turn from the Jews and call the Gentiles. Then he cited Hosea 1:10 to prove that this new people being called would be God’s people and “children of the living God.” He then quoted Isaiah 10:22–23 to show that only a remnant of Israel would be saved, while the greater part of the nation would suffer judgment. Romans 9:28 probably refers to God’s work of judgment during the Tribulation, when the nation of Israel will be persecuted and judged, and only a small remnant left to enter into the kingdom when Jesus Christ returns to earth. But the application for today is clear: only a remnant of Jews is believing; and they, together with the Gentiles, are the “called of God” (Rom. 9:24). The final quotation from Isaiah 1:9 emphasized the grace of God in sparing the believing remnant.

Now, what does all of this prove? That God was not unjust in saving some and judging others, because He was only fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies given centuries ago. He would be unjust if He did not keep His own Word. But even more than that, these prophecies show that God’s election has made possible the salvation of the Gentiles. This is the grace of God. At the Exodus, God rejected the Gentiles and chose the Jews, so that, through the Jews, He might save the Gentiles. The nation of Israel rejected His will, but this did not defeat His purposes. A remnant of Jews does believe and God’s Word has been fulfilled.

So far, Paul had defended the character of God by showing His faithfulness, His righteousness, and His justice. Israel’s rejection had not canceled God’s election; it had only proved that He was true to His character and His purposes.

God’s Grace (Rom. 9:30–33)

Paul moved next from divine sovereignty to human responsibility. Note that Paul did not say “elect” and “nonelect,” but rather emphasized faith. Here is a paradox: the Jews sought for righteousness but did not find it, while the Gentiles, who were not searching for it, found it! The reason? Israel tried to be saved by works and not by faith. They rejected “grace righteousness” and tried to please God with “Law righteousness.” The Jews thought that the Gentiles had to *come up* to Israel’s level to be saved; when actually the Jews had to *go down* to the level of the Gentiles to be saved. “For there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:22–23). Instead of permitting their religious privileges (Rom. 9:1–5) to lead them to Christ, they used these privileges as a substitute for Christ.

But see the grace of God: Israel’s rejection means the Gentiles’ salvation! Paul’s final quotation was from Isaiah 28:16. It referred to Christ, God’s Stone of salvation (see Ps. 118:22). God gave Christ to be a Foundation Stone, but Israel rejected Him and He became a stumbling stone. Instead of “rising” on this Stone, Israel fell (Rom. 11:11); but, as we shall see, their fall made possible the salvation of the Gentiles by the grace of God.

We need to decide what kind of righteousness we are seeking, whether we are depending on good works and character, or trusting Christ alone for salvation. God does not save people on the basis of birth or behavior. He saves them “by grace, through faith” (Eph. 2:8–9). It is not a question of whether or not we are among God’s elect. That is a mystery known only to God. He offers us His salvation by faith. The offer is made to “whosoever will” (Rev. 22:17). After we have trusted Christ, then we have the witness and evidence that we are among His elect (Eph. 1:4–14; 1 Thes. 1:1–10). But first we must trust Him and receive by faith His righteousness which alone can guarantee heaven.

No one will deny that there are many mysteries connected with divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Nowhere does God ask us to choose between these two truths, because they both come from God and are a part of God’s plan. They do not compete; they cooperate. The fact that we cannot fully understand *how* they work together does not deny the fact that they do. When a man asked Charles Spurgeon how he reconciled divine sovereignty and human responsibility, Spurgeon replied: “I never try to reconcile friends!”

But the main thrust of this chapter is clear: Israel’s rejection of Christ does not deny the faithfulness of God. Romans 9 does not negate Romans 8. God is still faithful, righteous, just, and gracious, and He can be depended on to accomplish His purposes and keep His promises.

Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 476–479). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

A. God’s sovereign choice enunciated (9:1–29)

Paul here discussed God’s sovereign choice because of a practical problem. The Jews gloried in the fact that as Israelites they were God’s Chosen People (Deut. 7:6; cf. Rom. 2:17–20a; 3:1–2). But now in God’s program of salvation in the church, Jewish involvement was decreasing while Gentile participation was becoming dominant. Had God, then, abandoned the Jewish people? This is ultimately explained by God’s sovereign choice, a principle which has always been in operation even within the Chosen People of Israel and between Israel and other nations. Now this principle operates in God’s purposes for Israel and the church and in His dealings with Jews and Gentiles within the church.

1. ISRAEL’S PRIVILEGES (9:1–5).

9:1–5. By repetition in positive and negative terms (internally attested by the witness of his own **conscience** [cf. comments on 2:15] in the presence of **the Holy Spirit**) Paul affirmed his deep **anguish of heart** over the rejection of the gospel by the vast majority of Jews. His desire for their salvation was so strong that he was at the point of wishing (imperf. tense, **I could wish**) **that he were cursed and cut off from Christ for his kinsmen, the Israelites.**

Paul then listed seven spiritual privileges which belonged to the people of Israel as God’s chosen nation: **the adoption as sons** (cf. Ex. 4:22), **the divine glory** (cf. Ex. 16:10; 24:17; 40:34; 1 Kings 8:11), **the covenants** (Gen. 15:18; 2 Sam. 7:12–16; Jer. 31:31–34), **the receiving of the Law** (Deut. 5:1–22), **the temple worship** (*latreia*, “sacred service,” which may also include service in the tabernacle), **and the promises** (esp. of the coming Messiah). Also the Israelites were in the line of promise from its beginning in **the patriarchs** (cf. Matt. 1:1–16; Rom. 1:3) to its fulfillment in the Messiah, **who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.** This is

a clear affirmation of the deity of Messiah. Some take these words as a separate sentence (see NIV marg.), but the NIV text seems preferable.

2. THE CHOICE ILLUSTRATED (9:6–18).

a. *Isaac over Ishmael (9:6–9).*

9:6–9. The failure of the Jews to respond to the gospel of Christ did not mean **God’s Word had failed**. Instead this rejection was simply the current example of the principle of God’s sovereign choice established in the Old Testament. Paul reminded his readers of a truth he had presented earlier: **For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel**, that is, spiritual Israel (cf. 2:28–29).

Then Paul gave three Old Testament illustrations of God’s sovereignty (Isaac and Ishmael, 9:7b–9; Jacob and Esau, vv. 10–13; and Pharaoh, vv. 14–18). The first two show that God made a sovereign choice among the physical descendants of Abraham in establishing the spiritual line of promise. Ishmael, born to Hagar (Gen. 16)—and the six sons of Keturah as well (Gen. 25:1–4)—were Abraham’s **descendants** (*sperma*), but they were not counted as **Abraham’s children** (*tekna*, “born ones”) in the line of promise. Instead, as God told Abraham (Gen. 21:12), **It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned** (lit., “in Isaac seed [*sperma*] will be called to you”). Paul repeated the principle for emphasis **in different words: It is not the natural children** (lit., “the born ones of the flesh”) **who are God’s children** (*tekna*, “born ones of God”), **but it is the children** (*tekna*) **of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring** (*sperma*). To be a physical descendant of Abraham is not enough; one must be chosen by God (cf. “chosen” in Rom. 8:33) and must believe in Him (4:3, 22–24). God’s assurance that **the promise** would come through Isaac, not Ishmael, was given to Abraham: **At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son** (a somewhat free quotation of Gen. 18:10 from the LXX).

b. *Jacob over Esau (9:10–13).*

9:10–13. The second Old Testament illustration of God’s sovereign choice is drawn from the second generation of Jewish ancestry. Apparently God purposed to establish this principle clearly at the beginning of His relationship with His Chosen People. This illustration emphasizes God’s sovereignty even more than the first since it involves God’s choice of one twin over another. (In the case of Abraham’s sons, God chose the child of one woman over the child of another woman.) In addition, in the case of **Rebecca’s children** God’s choice was indicated **before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad**. This demonstrated that **God’s** sovereign choice was **not by works**, even foreseen works, **but by Him who calls** (cf. “called” in 1:6; 8:28, 30). God’s plan (8:28; 9:11), and not man’s works (4:2–6), is the basis of His **election**. Rebecca **was** informed, **The older will serve the younger** (cf. Gen. 25:23), a divine choice confirmed by God’s declaration, **Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated** (cf. Mal. 1:2–3). Esau, the older, did not actually serve Jacob, his younger twin; but Esau’s descendants, the Edomites, did (cf. 1 Sam. 14:47; 2 Sam. 8:14; 1 Kings 11:15–16; 22:47; 2 Kings 14:7). God’s “love” for Jacob was revealed in His choice of Jacob and God’s “hatred” for Esau was seen in His rejecting Esau for the line of promise. Hatred in this sense is not absolute but relative to a higher choice (cf. Matt. 6:24; Luke 14:26; John 12:25).

c. *Pharaoh (9:14–18).*

9:14–18. With the words, **What then shall we say?** (cf. 4:1; 6:1; 8:31) Paul introduced the question undoubtedly in his readers' minds, **Is God unjust** in choosing Isaac over Ishmael, and Jacob over Esau? The Greek negative particle (*mē*) with a question implies a negative response. Paul responded in his usual emphatic way, **Not at all!** (*mē genoito*; cf. comments on 3:4) The issue in such matters is not justice but sovereign decision, as God's word **to Moses** (Ex. 33:19) quoted by Paul indicates. As the sovereign God, He has the right to show **mercy** to whomever He chooses. In fact, He is not under obligation to extend mercy to *anyone*. **Therefore** experiencing His mercy **does not ... depend on man's desire** (lit., "the one willing") **or effort** (lit., "the one running"). No one deserves or can earn His **mercy**.

The Apostle Paul then presented his third illustration, the Egyptian **Pharaoh** of the Exodus. To him God said through Moses, **I raised you up** (i.e., brought you onto the scene of history) **to display My power in you and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth** (cf. Ex. 9:16). God's power (cf. Rom. 9:22) was demonstrated as He freed the Israelites from under Pharaoh's hand. And other nations heard about it and were awed (Ex. 15:14–16; Josh. 2:10–11; 9:9; 1 Sam. 4:8). It is significant that Paul introduced this quotation with the words, **For the Scripture says**, for he equated the words of God with the words of Scripture. Paul concluded, **God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy** (cf. Rom. 9:15) **and He hardens whom He wants to harden** ("make stubborn"; cf. Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:27; 14:4, 8; cf. 14:17). Because of God's choice, Pharaoh then hardened his own heart (Ex. 7:13–14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34–35). All this shows that God chooses and works sovereignly, but not arbitrarily. Yet Pharaoh was responsible for his actions.

3. THE CHOICE EXPLAINED (9:19–29).

9:19–21. Once again Paul anticipated the questioning response of his readers: **Then why does God still blame us?** (The Gr. word trans. "then" probably goes with the preceding statement rather than this question, though this also makes good sense.) **For who resists** (perf. tense, "has taken and continues to take a stand against") **His will?** (*boulēmati*, "deliberate purpose") These questions are still raised by those who reject the biblical doctrine of God's sovereignty. If God makes the choices, how can He hold man responsible? Who can go against what He does?

In response Paul reaffirmed the reality of God's sovereignty and the effrontery of such questions. **But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?** (cf. Isa. 45:9) Man, the created one, has no right to question God, the Creator. Paul then quoted a clause from Isaiah 29:16: **Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it, Why did You make me like this?** Drawing an analogy between the sovereign Creator and a potter, Paul asked, **Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes** (lit., "one vessel [pot or vase] unto honor") **and some for common use?** (lit., "unto dishonor") Obviously a potter from the same pile takes some clay to form a finely shaped and decorated vase and takes other clay to make a cooking pot (cf. Jer. 18:4–6). And the clay has no right to complain! The sovereign Creator has the same authority over His creatures, especially in light of man's origin from dust (Gen. 2:7).

9:22–26. Having stated that God is like a potter, Paul now applied this illustration to God's sovereign purpose for different people. He stated the two alternatives as conditional clauses (**What if ...?**) and left unstated the obvious common conclusion: Does not God have that right?

The one alternative is that **God ... bore with great patience** (cf. 2 Peter 3:9) **the objects** (lit., “vessels”; cf. Rom. 9:21) **of His wrath—prepared for destruction** (*apōleian*, “ruin”). The perfect participle “prepared” describes past action with a continuing result or state. “Prepared” may be reflexive (“prepared themselves”), but it seems preferable to take it as passive (“were prepared”). The thought is that they have been and are in a state of readiness or ripeness to receive God’s wrath. The objects of God’s wrath are the unsaved (1:18), who will suffer eternal judgment (John 3:36). God has patiently endured their antagonism to Him (cf. Acts 14:16; Rom. 3:25), but their judgment is coming. Those who oppose Him and refuse to turn to Him (Matt. 23:37) are then “prepared” by Him for condemnation. They are “storing up [God’s] wrath” against themselves (Rom. 2:5). In hell they will experience **His wrath**, and **His power** will be made known (cf. 9:17). God does not delight in wrath, and He did not choose some people to go to hell. **Choosing** (v. 22) should be rendered “willing.” Some are prepared by God for eternal judgment not because He delights to do so, but because of their sin. In view of their sin, which makes them “ripe” for destruction, God is willing to exhibit His wrath, and He will do so at the proper time.

The other alternative relates to God’s dealings with **the objects** (lit., “vessels”; cf. v. 21) **of His mercy**. God chose them as such in order **to make the riches of His glory known** and **He prepared them in advance for glory** (cf. 8:29–31; Col. 1:27; 3:4). The verb “He prepared in advance” (Rom. 9:23) is *proētoimasen*, “He made ready beforehand,” which God does by bestowing salvation. (The word “prepared” in v. 22 is *katērtismena*, “are made or prepared or ripened.”)

Up to this point Paul had been speaking conditionally and objectively, but in verse 24 he was more direct—**even us**—because he and his readers were some of the vessels of mercy sovereignly chosen by God. God **not only** chose them but **He also called** them, including **Jews** and **Gentiles**. The point is that God’s sovereign choice was manifested not only in the Jews’ ancestry (in Isaac and Jacob, vv. 6–13), but also in Paul’s generation and today. To back up his conclusion and particularly the part about Gentiles, Paul quoted two verses from **Hosea** (2:23; 1:10). God directed Hosea to give his children symbolic names—one son Lo-Ammi (**not my people**) and the daughter Lo-Ruhamah (**not ... loved**). These represented God’s abandonment of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to the Assyrian Captivity and Exile (Hosea 1:2–9).

God was not permanently casting away the people of Israel, however. In the verses quoted by Paul God promised to restore them as His beloved and as His **people**. By ethnic heritage the Gentiles were **not** God’s **people**, so Paul was led by the Spirit of God to apply these verses to Gentiles—and Jews also—who were sovereignly chosen by God and **called** to be His people in Christ. The quotation of Hosea 2:23 is rather free with the order of the clauses reversed to fit the application to Gentiles. Paul was applying these verses from Hosea to the Gentiles, not reinterpreting them. He was not saying that Israel of the Old Testament is part of the church.

9:27–29. Here Paul quoted Old Testament verses to support the fact that God in His sovereign choice and calling always includes a Jewish segment, though it is a minority. The passages quoted (Isa. 10:22–23 and 1:9, both from the LXX) make it clear that in God’s judgment on rebellious Israel He by sovereign choice preserves and saves a **remnant**. Those promises were fulfilled in the Captivity and Exile of both Israel and Judah and in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and will also be fulfilled in the national end-time deliverance of Israel (Rom. 11:26–27). Even today the same principle is true. Jews who become members of the church, the body of Christ, are what Paul later called “a remnant chosen by grace” (11:5), which included himself (11:1).

B. God's sovereign choice applied (9:30–10:21).

1. ISRAEL'S STUMBLING (9:30–10:4).

9:30–33. Once again Paul asked his familiar rhetorical question, **What then shall we say?** (cf. 4:1; 6:1; 8:31; 9:14) preparatory to his summation of this situation. His identification of **the Gentiles** (lit., “the nations”) as the ones who **have obtained ... a righteousness that is by** (*ek*, “out from”) **faith** is interesting. As Paul stated later, the church included Jewish as well as Gentile believers (11:1–5), but by the time of Paul's third missionary journey the increasing rejection of the gospel by the Jews and the predominance of Gentiles in the church led the apostle to speak of “the Gentiles” as antithetical to **Israel**. The latter **pursued** (“kept on pursuing”) **a Law of righteousness, but has not attained it**. “A Law of righteousness” refers to the Mosaic Law (cf. 7:7, 12, 14). To seek to attain righteousness by observing the Law requires that it be kept perfectly (cf. James 2:10). **Why** did Israel **not** attain it? **Because they pursued it not by** (*ek*, “out from”) **faith but as if it were by** (*ek*, “out from”) **works**. The Israelites did not admit their inability to keep the Law perfectly and turn by faith to God for forgiveness. Instead a few of them kept trying to keep the Law by their own efforts. Consequently **they stumbled** (cf. Rom. 11:11) **over the “stumbling Stone.”** The Lord Jesus Christ, “the stumbling Stone” (cf. 1 Peter 2:4–8), did not conform to the Jews' expectations, so they rejected Him instead of responding to Him by faith. To show that God anticipated this, Paul quoted from Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16 (cf. Rom. 10:11), combining the two statements to indicate the two contrasting reactions by **men** to the **Stone** that God placed **in Zion** (cf. “Zion” in 11:26).

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 1693 – 1695). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

9:6 Here, and in what follows, Paul distinguished two kinds of Israel and two kinds of election. God chose physical, historical Israel by selecting Abraham and his descendants (the “election” mentioned in v. 11). God chose the historical nation Israel, through which He accomplished many purposes, including the establishment of both Scripture (v. 4; 3:2) and the line of the Messiah (v. 5). But not all of elect, ethnic Israel constitutes elect, spiritual (saved) Israel (v. 8). Paul distinguished two kinds of election: (1) the election of the nation Israel to achieve certain tasks (also why God chose individuals—the patriarchs and Pharaoh, v. 17), and (2) election to salvation. To be in the latter group (that is, to attain righteousness) requires faith in Christ (vv. 30–33; recall what makes a true Jew in 2:28–29).

9:13–14, 21 These verses may give the impression that God acts arbitrarily and apart from human cooperation, suggesting God disregards human freedom, and consequently could not hold people responsible for their actions. None of this fairly represents Paul's point here. God's gracious and merciful plan does not violate human freedom. To select Jacob over Esau reflects God's choice to have the nation Israel come through Jacob's descendants, not Esau's. In saying God “hated” Esau, Paul did not imply that God excluded him from salvation.

For Messiah's line, God chose the tribe of Judah (not the most noble of characters), rather than the descendants of Joseph (a true believer). (In that sense, he “hated” Joseph but “loved” Judah.) God executes His redemptive, gracious plan as He pleases. Humans have no claim on God. So, on the national level, God sovereignly decided to have mercy on Israel (including the patriarchs). Nevertheless, Abraham's physical children cannot claim they are automatically

“elected” for salvation and are therefore “righteous” apart from genuine faith in Christ (vv. 31–32). Yet God’s gracious election also operates for salvation: God has determined to save those who trust in His Son. God will have mercy on whom He wills to have mercy, and no claim even of Jewish descent will override what the divine Potter chooses to do.

Interestingly, the prophet Jeremiah also used the potter as an illustration of how God works, clearly acknowledging that God may vary His response, given human reaction to His words (Jr 18:5–10). God desires people to repent and turn to Him. The potter illustration shows that God is not immovable nor impassive and that He does not carry out His plans willy-nilly.

9:22–23 Three interpretations diverge here. (1) Paul taught “double predestination”: before creation, God determined to save some and damn others (a view often associated with Calvinists). God fixed the number He will glorify and the number He will destroy. Given that all sinners deserve condemnation, God’s choice to save some demonstrates His mercy. (2) God elects some to save, leaving the rest to their deserved fate. In both of these views the non-elect, objects of His wrath, justly deserve their fate; so God is not unjust by not electing them. (3) God predetermined the general outcomes—either wrath or glory—but the saved or the destroyed determine their own fate (in response to God’s initiating grace). In this view the criterion for inclusion or exclusion in “My-People” is whether sinners pursue righteousness by faith or in self-reliance (v. 32; 10:3–4, 9–10). That is, those destroyed prepared themselves for their destruction. People are predestined to condemnation so long as they choose to continue in their ways and resist God’s grace.