

Dependent on God's Mercy

Rom 9:6-18

SS Lesson for 08/14/2016

Devotional Scripture: Exodus 33:12-23

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reviews how all of mankind is **Dependent on God's Mercy**. The **study's aim** is to understand how all individuals are dependent on the mercy of God and realize that this applies to us personally. The **study's application** is to adjust our thinking, words, and actions to acknowledge our dependence on God's mercy.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Rom 9:18

Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Since God is the self-existent Being who is the Creator of everything that exists outside Himself, He is sovereign and can therefore use and dispose of His Creation as He wishes. This sovereignty reveals not only His personal righteousness but also His provided righteousness. 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.

9:1-5. By repetition in positive and negative terms (internally attested by the witness of his own **conscience** [cf. 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.

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).

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).

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. 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.

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).

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

There is an old saying that states, "God has no grandchildren." The simple meaning is that every person is responsible to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for himself. We dare not presume that we are saved because our parents are believers, or because we have attended church, or because we have received ordinances or sacraments, or because we have done any number of other religious deeds or acts. Each of us must receive the mercy of salvation. We are dependent on such mercy. God must show it to us, and we must receive it or we are lost. Rom 9:18 points to the mystery of God's sovereignty over salvation. He has mercy on whom He has mercy and hardens whom He hardens. It is a difficult saying but one that urgently points all people to seek the mercy of God. Without it, we are lost. We are not born into salvation; we must receive it by the mercy of God. A text such as this leads us to ponder some deep theological truths. First, we see the reality of human depravity and unbelief. Sinful hearts are hard. God takes no blame for this even though He may work in His sovereign majesty with such hearts. The case of Pharaoh is cited in Romans 9:17. Pharaoh was deeply opposed to the faith of Israel, and God used His hardness of heart to display His own glory. What a sobering thought—to be exposed to the miracles of God and yet remain hard-hearted and unbelieving! Every person should take heed and leave this common and very tempting pathway. Next, we see the necessity of God's mercy in salvation. We must become the children of God through saving faith. And this can happen only through the mercy of God as He opens our hearts to see the Lord Jesus and believe in Him. Mercy is found in Christ, who shed His blood for sinners. By faith we receive Him and are born anew. This takes us from the realm of sin and unbelief as we receive the gift of eternal life. Yes, God has

no grandchildren. All men must be urged to receive God's mercy for themselves. Finally, we see that however God works in mercy and hardening, there is no ultimate unfairness toward any person (Rom. 9:14). God's ways are mysterious in these matters, but in no way is it proper to conclude that somehow we or anyone else has been treated unfairly by God. It just is not so. And any excuse made along this line will never be accepted. God is sovereign in His mercy; we are guilty in our depravity and unbelief. Such guilt deserves damnation. Hence we are dependent on God's mercy, and we must seek it until we find it. So the clear response to the great theological truths embedded in this powerful text is to cry out to God for His mercy. If we are dependent on mercy in this way, what are we waiting for? What is anyone waiting for? We must have God's mercy, so we must cry out for it and teach others to do so. Mercy brings the salvation of God. Mercy brings the atonement of Jesus. Mercy brings the grace of God. Mercy is what we need. Let us teach all men everywhere to cry out for God's mercy so that they might be saved.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

What is a hard heart? When we apply this to personalities, we are looking at emotional conditions. In common parlance, hard-hearted persons are emotionally stunted and cold. They act only in self-interest and cannot empathize with others who might need their help. They are the Simon Legrees and Ebenezer Scrooges of literature. This is not exactly what the Bible authors mean when they use the image of the hard heart. In the pages of the Bible, the heart is more than the emotional center of human personality. More fundamentally, the heart is the center of the will, of the decision-making process. When persons in the Bible are described as having a hard heart, they have a will that is turned against God. They deny his authority in their lives. They refuse to repent of sin. The hard-hearted person does not love God. Such rebellion reveals itself in daily choices. If I hate God, will I love others? No. The two great commandments to love God and love others (Matthew 22:36-40) will more likely become I hate God, so why not hate others? The emotional companions of the hard heart are bitterness, impatience, and arrogance. We see these in abundance in today's world. Today's lesson teaches us about a different, better path.

An important backdrop to Romans 9 is the multi-generational saga that began with Abraham. It began in Genesis 12:1-3, where God made certain promises to that patriarch. These promises included assurance that Abraham's descendants would become a great nation and a blessing to "all peoples on earth." Generation one featured Abraham, his wife Sarah, and handmaid Hagar. Generation two featured Isaac (son of Abraham and Sarah) and Ishmael (son of Abraham and Hagar). Abraham later married another wife, Keturah, and had six sons by her (Genesis 25:1, 2), but these do not figure into Paul's discussion in Romans 9. Generation three spotlighted Isaac's two sons, Jacob and Esau. But God's promises were passed down only through Jacob. His name changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28), and the promises eventually extended to his 12 sons (by four women). The descendants of these 12 became the nation of Israel.

In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul discussed God's plan for the nation of Israel (Romans 9:1-5). This topic was important to that church, because it was made up of Christians of both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds, with apparent friction between the two groups (compare 11:13-24). One of the issues seems to have revolved around God's promises to the nation of Israel. Perhaps some Jewish Christians touted these promises arrogantly, making the Christians of Gentile background feel inferior and second class. A response from the Gentiles to this might have been that the promises to Israel were irrelevant because of Christ. Paul condoned neither position. He wanted the readers to know that things were not so simple. The apostle bared his heart to confess his agony over the unbelief of the majority of his fellow Jews regarding Jesus. Paul said he would be willing even to have God's curse fall upon him if they would come to faith (Romans 9:3). He assured his readers that Jews had many blessings and advantages, including the Law of Moses, worship at the temple, and the promises given to their ancestors (9:4, 5a). Most of all, the nation of Israel was blessed by being the source of the Messiah himself (9:5b).

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Need for Mercy to Obtain God's Promises (Rom 9:6-13)

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."

Promises through God's Word (6-8)

Promises through the Bible as spoken to Abraham (Gal 3:16)

16 The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.

Promises through the Bible that were fulfilled through Jesus (Matt 5:17)

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Promises through the Bible that Jesus will eternally rule (Gen 49:10)

10 The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

Promises through the Bible that Jesus is God's salvation (Luke 3:6)

6 And all mankind will see God's salvation."

Promises through the Bible that state that all promises of God are yes through Jesus (2 Cor 1:20)

20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

Promises made with the Divine power (2 Peter 1:3-4)

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Promises that are only being completely satisfied in the present age (Heb 11:13-16)

13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country — a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Promises of an eternal life (1 John 2:24-25)

24 See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is what he promised us — even eternal life.

Promises to those of God's choosing (9-13)

Chosen to be a royal priesthood belonging to God (1 Peter 2:9)

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Chosen out of the world so that we belong to God (John 15:19)

19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

Chosen as a people for God Himself (Acts 15:14)

14 Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself.

Chosen to be justified and glorified (Rom 8:30)

30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Chosen to be holy and blameless (Eph 1:4)

4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love

Chosen through God's grace and for His purpose (2 Tim 1:9)

9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,

Chosen through God's foreknowledge and the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:1-2)

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, 2 who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Need for Mercy Because of God's Sovereignty (Rom 9:14-18)

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.

Sovereignty of a righteous God (14)

God is righteous in all His ways (Ps 145:17)

17 The Lord is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made.

God's righteousness is part of the foundation of His throne (Ps 89:14)

14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.

God's righteousness is proclaimed by the heavens (Ps 50:6)

6 And the heavens proclaim his righteousness, for God himself is judge. Selah

God works in righteousness (Ps 103:6)

6 The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

God's righteousness is like a mighty mountain (Ps 36:6)

6 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O Lord, you preserve both man and beast.

God's right hand is filled with righteousness (Ps 48:10)

10 Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with righteousness.

Sovereignty of a compassionate God (15-16)

God is compassionate because men are helpless and need a shepherd (Matt 9:36)

36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

God is compassionate because man needs healing (Matt 14:14)

14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

God is compassionate because man is weak and hungry (Matt 15:32)

32 Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."

God is compassionate because He is always willing to help (Mark 1:41)

41 Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"

God is compassionate because man needs teaching (Mark 6:34)

34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

God is compassionate because God longs to be man's refuge (Matt 23:37)

37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

Sovereignty of an Almighty God (17-18)

God is Almighty because all things are possible for God (Matt 19:26)

26 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

God is Almighty because He is majestic in power (Ex 15:6-8)

6 "Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy. 7 In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble. 8 By the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up. The surging waters stood firm like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea.

God is Almighty because of His greatness and mighty deeds (Deut 3:24)

24 "O Sovereign Lord, you have begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and mighty works you do?"

God is Almighty because He brings to life and puts to death (Deut 32:39)

39 "See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand.

God is Almighty because He is great and powerful (1 Chron 29:11)

11 Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.

God is an Almighty God (Ps 89:8)

8 O Lord God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O Lord, and your faithfulness surrounds you.

God is Almighty because He is endued with power (Ps 89:13)

13 Your arm is endued with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Although Israel Has Failed, God's Word Has Not (9:6-13)

On the surface of the issue it might seem to some that Israel's failure is to be explained as God's failure—that it is really the Word of God that has failed, since what it appears to have promised has not come to realization. Paul approaches the problem by first of all clarifying just what the Scriptures promised. The error of assuming God's Word to be at fault is two-fold. First of all the Scriptures never promised blessing to every physical descendent of Abraham. Second, the basis of God's blessing is not to be found in one's physical relationship to a particular forefather, but rather to one's spiritual relationship to God by faith.

As Paul introduces the subject of election, there is something we are to understand about it. The devout, but unbelieving, Jew not only delighted in it, but depended on it. The Jew was a devout believer in the doctrine of election—that is the doctrine of corporate election. They relished the thought that God had selected them from all the nations of the earth to be the recipients of all the blessings and privileges described by Paul in verses 4 and 5. They had no problem in viewing all the other nations as the 'non-elect.' They were perfectly content to relegate the heathen to hell.

Paul uses the theological position of the Jews as the starting point of his argumentation, but he presses their theology much farther than they intended. He takes the principle of election which they accepted on a national level, and applies it on an individual level.⁴⁹ If Israel could delight in their national election, then their dilemma of why so many Israelites disbelieved could be explained on the basis of individual election. Why were so many Jews failing to arrive at God's promised blessings? Because God hadn't chosen them to be blessed by salvation. While Israel's erroneous claim on God's blessing was based upon their ancestry and their works, the cause of blessing was God's calling by free choice. Such a claim must be documented, so Paul turns to the example in Israel's history of Isaac and Jacob.

The Example of Isaac, Not Ishmael (vv. 7-9). If blessing was guaranteed by physical relationship to Abraham, then many Gentiles would have the same claim as did the Jews for Abraham was the father of more than just Isaac. Ishmael would have equal claim to the blessings of the Jews if physical lineage was the sole cause of blessing. But as the Scriptures stipulated: "Through Isaac your descendants will be named" (Romans 9:7b, Genesis 21:12). Ishmael was the result of Abraham's feeble efforts to bring about what God had promised, but Isaac was the product of God's work in fulfillment of His promise of a son.

The Example of Jacob, Not Esau (vv. 10-13). To some, the example of Isaac might not be convincing because each child had a different mother. If this is a problem, it will be swept away by the example of Jacob and Esau, for they had the same father and mother; in fact, they were the offspring of the same conception, since they were twins.

Surely all must grant that God specified the blessing to come through the seed of Jacob, and not Esau. This confirms again that the blessings of God do not belong to men purely on the basis of origin. But what is the basis of God's designation of Jacob over Esau? The Jews would claim that it was because of some obligation which God had to Jacob, but the Genesis narrative does not support such a claim. God's choice was not conditioned by any human activity or instrumentality, but was determined solely on the free choice of God.

God's choice was apart from custom or tradition, for tradition would have granted supremacy to the first-born child, Esau. Neither was God's choice influenced by any good which would be done by Jacob, or any evil done by Esau, for Paul insists, "For though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in

order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls" (Romans 9:11).

Of course, God knew what Jacob and Esau would do, but His choice was not a result of this knowledge. Indeed God's choice of Jacob was in spite of such knowledge, for he was a rascal.

What, then, was the basis of God's choice of Jacob over Esau? God acted not out of any obligation, but rather out of His sovereignty, and thus chose freely on the basis of His own will. The election of God is not based upon the works of the individual, but on the will of God. "... in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls" (Romans 9:11b). As the Scripture says, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Romans 9:13, Malachi 1:2f).

Let us be sure we fully understand what Paul has said about divine election, for there are many misconceptions of this doctrine. Some would explain election in this way: God is voting for us; Satan, against us; and we must break the tie. Others have said that God has determined a certain number of elect, but not the specific individuals—that is up to us. Others seem to say that God has elected us 'in Christ' and therefore, whoever are in Christ are the elect. Again, this leaves the ultimate determination of who the elect will be to the elect themselves. This is the position, apparently, of W. B. Riley, when he states, "The soul's election depends upon the soul's choice. Thou, my friend are the only person who can settle this question of election. It is not settled in Heaven; it is settled on earth. It is not settled of the Lord; it is settled by man."

Even a casual reading of Romans 9 demands that we hold an entirely different position than those just mentioned, for the election of men to eternal salvation is the work of God, and I am grateful for it. If my election depended upon me casting my vote in favor of God, I would be forever damned, for my unregenerate will would always vote against God, for as an unbeliever I was dead in my sins, and by nature God's enemy and a child of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3; Romans 3:10-18). No other kind of election could be attributed to a God Who is truly sovereign than that which is described by Paul in Romans 9, for sovereignty implies absolute freedom and complete independence of action. God's decisions are not contingent upon ours. Our decisions are contingent upon His.

Here, then, is the answer to the problem of Jewish unbelief. Israel's unbelief was not a failure of the Word of God, but an outworking of the will of God. Israel failed because God willed it so. God's reason for Israel's unbelief will be explained in chapter 11, but for now we must accept the fact that God, far from being obliged to bless every Jew on the basis of his ancestry, is free to choose whomever He wills and to reject whom He wills. Such was evident from God's previous dealings with the nation.

Election Defended (9:14-23)

Perhaps one of the strongest lines of evidence for election being defined as God's absolutely free choice of those who will be saved is to be found in verses 14 and 19. In these verses, two objections to what Paul has taught about election are raised. The first is, "It isn't fair!," and the second is "It (unbelief) isn't my fault!" Now neither of these objections are valid unless Paul has indeed taught that God chooses men on the basis of His own free will, apart from man's will or his works. If Paul wasn't teaching the doctrine of election, then all he had to do was to answer these questions by saying, "You have completely misunderstood what I have been saying." The fact that he answers these objections demands that we understand Paul's teaching just as his objectors did—that of an act of God independent of men.

In fact, it is interesting that every time I have had the occasion to teach the doctrine of election it has never failed that the same objections that are raised in verses 14 and 19 are raised from the audiences I teach. It is, therefore, vital that we come to understand Paul's defense of his position on the doctrine of election, for we, too, will need to use these same lines of defense to answer our objectors.

(1) It Isn't Fair (vv. 14-18). Do you mean to tell me that if God has chosen me to be saved I will be saved in spite of myself, and that if God has not chosen me, there is no hope for my salvation? Why that isn't fair at all! Why should one person go to heaven and another go to Hell, just on the whim of God. Put in its simplest form that is the objection of verse 14: "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!" (Romans 9:14). The problem is that the objector is arguing the point of justice, while Paul is speaking of mercy. Justice speaks of men getting what is rightfully theirs. God's justice has already been discussed in chapters 1-3. The justice of God demands that the death penalty be paid by every man, woman, and child, for, "There is none righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). If we demand that God be just and just alone then every soul would spend eternity in Hell.

Election has nothing to do with justice, it is a matter of mercy. We are speaking of the grace of God when we speak of election. Mercy withholds punishment which is rightfully deserved. The guilty criminal cries for mercy before his judge. Grace goes even beyond mercy in that it bestows that which is completely undeserved. Any man whom God chooses to save is a man who deserves to die, for “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). The penalty which should be paid by the elect sinner has been paid by the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. In addition to this, this sinner is declared righteous in the Person of Jesus Christ, and he is made a son of God and a co-heir with Christ (Romans 8:15-17). This is grace!

As someone has rightly said, “The question should not be, ‘Why has God not saved all men?,’ but ‘Why has God saved any?’” We do not deserve the grace of God, and we dare not call God unjust because He has withheld His grace from some and bestowed it upon others. I believe it was Bill Gothard who used the illustration (to prove a different point) of a man who walks down our block giving out \$1000 bills—to every other house. Now what right do we have, if we have been passed over, to confront this man and charge him with injustice? How much time would a police officer give us if we tried to file a formal complaint? The issue is not one of justice, but one of grace. God is absolutely free to bestow His grace on whomever He chooses, and He is not one whit guilty of injustice for withholding it from any or all men.

Paul illustrates this point by contrasting God’s activity in the lives of two men who were contemporaries of each other, Moses and Pharaoh. To Moses, God exercised mercy, and toward Pharaoh God exercised His justice. God was just in both cases, and interestingly, God used both men to further His purposes. God raised up Moses to be a deliverer of His people and a type of Messiah to come. God raised up Pharaoh to display His great power and to proclaim His glory: “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth’” (Romans 9:17).

Stifler reminds us that, “God’s glory is promoted in the overthrow of a sinner as much as in saving one.”

To press this point further, the hardening of Pharaoh was an act of grace so far as the Jews were concerned, for it provided the occasion of their release. All Moses had asked for initially was to let the people of Israel go into the wilderness for a time to worship God (cf. Exodus 5:1). The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart occasioned the ten plagues, which more than answered the challenge of Pharaoh, “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?” (Exodus 5:2). More than this, his unbelief brought about the release of the nation from its bondage. This is precisely what the unbelief of Israel is accomplishing today.

(2) It Isn’t My Fault (vv. 18-23). But doesn’t the case of Pharaoh raise another problem? If God hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that He accomplished His purposes, if God is truly sovereign and His will is inevitable, then how can He blame us for our rebellion? Far worse than the charge often heard, ‘the devil made me do it,’ is the protest found here, ‘God made me do it.’

This question Paul refuses to answer immediately and reserves his response to the charge until the next two chapters. What Paul does attack vigorously is the attitude which occasions such a response. “Do you realize, O man, what you are doing?” “You, have set yourself above God, and have gone far beyond your privileges as a mere creature, to challenge the Creator of the universe!” “You’re completely out of line!”

I am reminded of the Book of Job where Job begins to challenge the wisdom and the justice of God in dealing with him as He had. The final chapters record for us the rebuke of God, the Creator, of a mere creature. “Where were you, Job, when I placed the heavens?” “What part did you have in the creation of the universe?” “What did you contribute to My works?” It is at this point that Job places his hand over his mouth and remains silent.

It is at this point that Paul has figuratively placed his hand over the mouth of the objector, reminded him of who he is, and more important, Who he is objecting to. God is the potter; we are the clay. God is just in disposing of us just as He wills. And we have no right to challenge His sovereignty, but we must submit to it or be crushed by it. We can be either a Moses or a Pharaoh. As a Moses we are the recipients of God’s grace, and we are vessels which God will employ to demonstrate His mercy. If we rebel we will be used as Pharaoh, and by our hardening we will be vessels by which God will reveal His wrath on sin. Either way, God is free to dispose of His creatures, and either way we will bring glory to Him. But, oh, what a difference for us!

I am fascinated by Paul’s reference to the fact that both vessels of mercy and vessels of wrath are made from the same lump. The same lump (Romans 9:21) is not the lump of innocent and deserving individuals, but the same barrel of rotten apples. Each of us deserve the wrath of God, but God has delayed His judgment of all in order to reveal His mercy toward some.

Just as God had chosen to bestow His blessings on the nation Israel, now He is blessing the Gentiles. Just as He once selected individual Jews to receive His grace, so He is choosing out some of the Gentiles for blessing as well (Romans 9:23).

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/11-sovereignty-god-salvation-romans-9>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The Christian life should not be one of cowering in fear of the wrath of God. Yes, we deserve punishment for our rebellious sin. But we have been given life through our faith in Jesus and his atoning death. We may not be a titan of the world stage like Abraham, but we are important to God. His mercy is personal, tailored for each of us according to our situation. Some of us are colossal sinners with epic résumés of evil in our past. Others are milquetoast sinners, with relatively bland personal histories. But all of us come to God with sin, and we escape his wrath because of his mercy. Let us therefore live as joyous freed slaves rather than as gloomy victims. Let us be children of the free woman (Galatians 4:31), not slaves of sin. Let us not have brick-hard hearts, but soft, pliant ones that pump out love for God and others.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. All are welcome to unite with God's spiritual family by faith (Rom. 9:6-8)
2. God chooses to save men based on His sovereign will—not because of our merit or background (vss. 9-12)
3. When we are confused by God's ways, we can trust His character and perfect plan (vss. 13-14)
4. We depend on God's mercy because none of us deserves His goodness (vss. 15-16)
5. God may choose to display His power through anyone—even those who reject Him (vs. 17)
6. God allows men to rebel against Him, but that choice leads to misery (vs. 18)