

Notes on Romans 9

Intro: We are entering now a new division in the study of Romans. However, one could easily move from Paul's discussion of Romans 6-8 to chapter twelve without the slightest difficulty. But Romans would not be complete without the discussion of chapter 9-11. Paul has raised in the book some important issues that need clarification. If the gospel is the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham, why have the Jewish people not believed the gospel? Have they lost access to the promises? Are they no longer the Lord's people? Have the promises made to them as a people failed? In this section Paul answers these questions. In sum his message is:

Israel's rejection of the gospel does not mean God's promise to Abraham has failed nor that salvation is no longer available to them. However, only those whom God has chosen can be His people, whether Jew or Greek; and that only by accepting His covenant of forgiveness through faith in Christ (9:1-11:36).

I am grieved by Israel's lost condition. However, God's promises have not failed because Israel has remained in unbelief. God's children are not merely the physical descendants of Israel but those who believe in God's promises (9:1-8).

v. 1-5—Paul's grief is so great that he could wish himself "anathema" in view of Israel's rejection of the gospel. That because of the special privileges they enjoyed

God's sons (Ex. 4:22; Hos. 11:1; Hos. 1:10)

The Glory is the "shekinah" of Ex. 40:34 & 1 Kg. 8:10

The covenants are the respective revelations made to Abraham (Gen. 15:18; 17:4), Moses (Ex. 24:8, 10; Deut. 29:1), Joshua (Deut. 27:2; Jos. 8:30; 24:25) and to David (2 Sam. 23:5; Ps. 89:28) of God's purpose to the their descendants.

The giving of the Law refers to the revelation at Sinai (Ex. 20:1)

The service refers to the divine worship of the tabernacle and temple

The promises refer to the special revelations of God's purpose as made known in covenants and prophecy.

These blessings were made to the Jewish fathers from whom the Christ was born. Christ is both man (according to the flesh) and God (over all God blessed forever).

v. 6-8 Israel's rejection does not mean that God's promise has failed. For God's people are not merely the physical descendants of Abraham (Cf. Mt. 3:9). Compare Paul's earlier development of this theme in 4:9-25 where he shows that the true seed of Abraham and true heirs of the promise are those who "walk in the steps" of Abraham's faith.

What Paul begins to carefully develop is the distinction between receiving blessings by faith and receiving them by works. The blessings that come by faith are based on promise; blessings that come by works are earned by human merit. Paul now proceeds to show that Israel's unique place in the purpose of God was based on promise, not human merit. In this way, he lays the ground work for the point that since salvation is a matter of faith, then He has a right to choose who His children are and that no man can criticize His choice.

It was God's choice to make Israel the nation through whom the promises were to be fulfilled (9:9-13).

With this the Jew would have no disagreement. But if they could see that no man had a right to question who would be the channels of the promise, then no man had a right to question who God chose to be heirs of the promise. And if he said "not all those who descend from Abraham are sons" then that is no different from God choosing Israel or Esau through whom to accomplish His purposes.

v. 9—The selection of Isaac through whom to accomplish God's purposes was a matter of promise, not obligation. Isaac did not earn this position by his works or obligation God to choose to use him. Since it was a matter of promise, God had a right to choose through whom to accomplish His purpose. No that the Jews would be in hearty agreement.

v. 10-13—In a similar way, God chose Jacob through whom to accomplish His purposes. This too was not based on the merit of Jacob's deeds; for the promise was made before they were born (Gen. 25:23) and history illustrated God's choice at work (Mal. 1:2). With this the Israelites would have no disagreement. In fact, this was his pride that God has chosen Jacob.

Yet, the very processes that made these things possible are the same ones that determine who God's people are now. God has the right to choose who his people are and He says they are not the fleshly descendant of Abraham but those who believe of both the Jew and the Gentile.

Since God's choices are a matter of mercy, there is no injustice with Him however He chooses to accomplish his purposes, whether by enlightening some or by hardening others (9:14-18).

v. 14-16—Is God unjust in His declaration that only believers in the gospel are His children and not all the descendants of Abraham, like the Jews believed and wanted to be true? Not at all. Again, Paul points out that this choice involves processes of judgment and mercy that God used in Israel's own history. Every Jew knew that God had mercifully chosen Israel to be His children and made himself known to them and delivered them from bondage. This blessing did not come to them because they deserved it but out of God's own choice.

v. 17-18—At the same time that God saved Israel from bondage, He hardened the heart of Pharaoh in order to declare His power and that His name might be made known throughout the earth. Thus, in

Israel's history there was God's own demonstration of this principle of divine action: He shows mercy to whom He desires and hardens whom He desires.

Now Paul wants the Jews to see that those same processes are working in the present time. God has chosen who his people are (those who believe) and hardens the rest. Paul will explicitly make this point in 11:7.

Some might respond to this statement: if God shows mercy to some in accord with His desire and hardens others in accord with His desire, then who resists His will? And why does He find fault?

If God endured evil men for a time, it is only that he might show mercy to those he has chosen, both among the Jews and the Gentiles (9:19-29)

v. 19-21—The question could have been answered this way: God does not act toward man in such a way as to take away the exercise of their own will. Yet, this would not be adequate, in that in whatever condition men may exist, whether believers or unbelievers, they are all the creation of God. And the fact remains that some of those God created will have been created not for eternal salvation but condemnation. And to apply the point to the question at hand, not all Jews are the children of God. Among both Jews and Gentiles there will be those who are hardened by God and who will be eternally lost. However, no man has a right to “answer back” to God by charging him with injustice in His dealings with man or accusing him of wrong in holding men accountable for their actions and punishing them accordingly. That there should exist among God's creation people for common use and others for honorable use does not in any way impeach the character of God. Man has no right to question this fact, any more than a pot has a right to question why a potter should make vessels of different kinds for his household.

v. 23-24—What if God endured vessels of mercy prepared for destruction? (The implication is that some who were created by God were destined for this purpose). He did so that he might show demonstrate His wrath in them and make His power known in order that he might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy prepared for destruction.

v. 25-29—Both Jews and Gentiles are among those vessels of mercy. As to the fact that Gentiles are included Paul urges the reader to consider the promise of Hosea (2:23). As to the fact that not all Jews are included may be proven simply by reminding the reader of Israel's past unbelief and how it resulted in the destruction of all but a remnant (Is. 10:22; 1:9). Again, Paul would explicit point this out in 11:5.

However, Israel has not attained the blessings of the promise because they pursued them by works rather than by faith (9:30-33).

Now at last Paul explains why it is that the nation of Israel as a whole has not enjoyed the salvation of the Lord promised to them, why “they

are not all Israel who are descended from Israel". This discussion Paul continues through chapter 10.

v. 30-33 The Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness attained it by welcoming the message of salvation by grace. The Jew in contrast seeking salvation by law did not arrive at that law because they pursued it by works rather than by faith (cf. 10:4). Had they pursued it by faith they would have welcomed their Messiah as the sacrifice for their sins. Instead, they stumbled over the stumbling stone of the crucified Messiah. This quotation from Is. 28:16 refers to Christ as a source of deliverance for those who cling to him but a source of stumbling to the unbelieving (Cf. 1 Pet. 2:6-9). Interestingly, in keeping with Paul's theme of God's right to choose remarks, "to this doom they were also appointed".