

The sooner we admit this... the better-off we will be. ... We don't even know that we are doing it. ... It often seems insignificant and meaningless... but it can change the course of our lives... **Awareness** of it... is the first step to minimizing the damage it might do to us... The best thinkers among us do it all the time... (although they are rarely aware that they are doing it.) ... It often leads us into trouble... (trouble that sometimes we can sense immediately... and sometimes it is a trouble that is forestalled. It might hit us when we are least prepared.) ... What is this difficulty that I'm talking about? ... .. We **assume too much**.

We often impose our own thoughts onto Scripture... or we suppose things about God that was NEVER revealed in the Bible. We take our own ideas (and some of them will actually **CONTRADICT** what Scripture says)... but we hold-on to them... because our own ideas make better sense to us... or because if we **allow** our beliefs to be molded by certain Scriptures – we would have to make some uncomfortable change in our life... (and we don't want to do that!)

We do this all the time. We are sinners. Every one of us is prone to this.

You say... *“Speak for yourself, Pastor... not me!!! I am a careful thinker. I do not allow myself to assume too much (especially when it comes to Biblical truth.) I have been taught to think things through... and not to leave anything to assumption...”*

My contention is that it is so easy for us to do it... that we often do not even notice it. ... .. So... here... (Careful Thinker)... let me show you just how easy it is to make assumptions. I am going to give you a little test. Feel

free to speak out loud whatever your answer is... (Even though this is a little UNconventional for sermon time...) ... Are you ready...?

- 1) *How long did the Hundred Years War last? ... ..* ANS: 116 years, from 1337 to 1453.
- 2) *Which country makes Panama Hats? ... ..* ANS: Ecuador, which is why I could not find one 4 years ago, when I was in Panama. I had to settle for a baseball cap that had the word “Panama” on it.
- 3) *From which animal do we get catgut to string tennis rackets with? ... ..* ANS: From sheep and horses.
- 4) *In which month do Russians celebrate the October Revolution? ... ..* ANS: November, since the Russian calendar was 13 days behind ours.
- 5) *What is a camel’s-hair brush made of? ... ..* ANS: Squirrel fur
- 6) *The Canary Islands in the Pacific are named after what animal? ... ..* ANS: the Latin name was “Insularia Canaria” which means – Island of the dogs.
- 7) *What was King George VI’s first name? ... ..* ANS: Albert. When he came to the throne in 1936... he respected the wish of Queen Victoria that no future King should ever be called “Albert.”
- 8) *What color is a purple finch? ... ..* ANS: Distinctively crimson
- 9) *Where are Chinese gooseberries from? ... ..* ANS: New Zealand
- 10) *How long did the Thirty Years War last? ... ..* ANS: 30 years, of course – from 1618 to 1648. ... Umm Hello-ooh! It’s called the 30 years war... Did you assume I was trying to trick you?

OK... now that was a little silly. ... But the point that I am making is a serious one. We assume too much... and we must recognize that we are

prone to it when we read our Bibles. Part of our sinful nature is for us to do this. Even the wisest Bible scholars are susceptible to it. ... The only safeguard that we have is to humbly confess it... ask God to reveal our assumptions to us... and diligently study God's Word to know Him better. No one can read Scripture without "a good deal" of humility.

Now... because the passage of our study today... is often met with a lot of assumption... I would like to begin... by giving you some safe assumptions that you should make. Perhaps these are the safest assumption ANYONE could ever make.

### **#1. God's ways are higher than our own.**

#### **Isaiah 55:9 (ESV)**

*<sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

God's ways are higher than our own... and they are often very mysterious to us – BUT...

### **#2. We can trust God to act in justice.**

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

### **#3. This is God's universe and He (alone) is sovereign.**

**God Has the Right to Condemn as well as Save.** ... God is sovereign: in choosing one nation or individual rather than another... in giving some great spiritual advantages not given to others... in sometimes saving the low and disadvantaged and denying salvation to the wise and great... in bestowing salvation upon some who have had few advantages... in calling

to salvation some who have been particularly wicked and passing by the righteous and moral... in saving some who have sought salvation but not others who also seem to have sought it.

This is enough for us to get started. We'll probably have more challenges... as we go along... in which we will need to submit our assumptions... to what God's Word actually teaches. ... (In fact... let me give you a fourth one. It is closely tied to number three... We will also encounter this one in our passage.)

**#4. God is under NO obligation to conform to anyone else's will or to anyone else's understanding.** God is not answerable to us. We are answerable to Him!

So... before we begin... let's make sure that we safeguard ourselves with these four truthful understandings. ... #1. God's ways are higher than our own... #2. We can trust God to act in justice... #3. This is God's universe and He (alone) is sovereign... #4. God is under **NO** obligation to conform to anyone else's will or to their understanding.

Last week we ended on verses 15-16 of Romans chapter 9. I would like to begin with those same verses... as they lead into our text for today.

### **Romans 9:15-16**

Many believers (and you may be one of them) have been mis-led into believing that they have been saved... because **THEY** *did* something. Perhaps they prayed what has been called "*the sinner's prayer*"... or they walked down a church aisle during an "*alter call*"... or maybe they see it as a matter of their choosing Christ. I am not saying that such people aren't

really saved. What I **am** saying is that Romans 9:16 is very clear: **THAT** is *not what saved them!* Look at Romans 9:16 again: “So then it depends not on human will or exertion...” (Errrrrrttt! Back that truck up again.) “So then it depends not on human will or exertion... .. but on **God**... .. who has mercy.”

Let God’s Own Word (here) challenge your assumptions about evangelism, Folks! ... .. The measure of our success... (in our efforts of trying to win the lost)... should never be the display their human will and exertion (which includes walking down an isle at church... and/or praying a certain prayer.) Why...?

Because **#1**. Romans 9:16 explicitly says: It isn’t our methods that make people exert themselves that will save them. ... And **#2**. there are so many people who have walked down an isle... or prayed a certain prayer... and they show **no other evidence** of being a follower of Christ. (Those people... *in all likelihood*... are not saved... and we are giving them a false assurance that they are! ... They depend on their human will and exertion.)

Evangelism is far less about getting people to walk down an isle or praying a prayer. It is much more about our spreading God’s Word and seeing **God** draw people to Himself. (And this is not a one-time event.) The only true measure of evangelism’s success is that they begin to grow in their love and obedience to Christ. ... So... proclaim God’s Word and pray that God will extend His mercy to them... But let God lead you. You may need to keep proclaiming and praying until you see the **REAL** evidence of God drawing them to Himself – a changed heart that loves Jesus.

Leave the results of your evangelistic efforts in God's hands. The Lord draws whoever He wills. The entire matter is about God bringing glory to Himself. ... Paul goes on to explain it by using Pharaoh... as an illustration.

### **Romans 9:17-18**

We need to discuss this matter of God hardening Pharaoh's heart... don't we? OK... Let's begin by acknowledging that this hardening process is referred to at least fifteen times in Exodus 7-14. ... Sometimes we are told that **Pharaoh** hardened his own heart (Ex. 8:15, 19, 32)... and other times that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27).

By revealing His power... God gave Pharaoh opportunity to repent. But instead... Pharaoh resisted God and hardened his own heart. The fault lay not with God but Pharaoh. (LISTEN!) **The same sunlight that melts the ice also hardens the clay.** ... .. [ P A U S E ] ... ..

Pharaoh hardened his own heart first. ... But what does it mean that God also hardened it? ... And why was that necessary?

When the Scriptures say that God hardened Pharaoh's heart... it means that God forced Pharaoh to make the decision that was in his heart. ... (God forced him to do the thing he wanted to do.) God put Pharaoh in circumstances where his character would be more and more developed.

Neither Pharaoh nor any sinner can justly blame God for placing them in circumstances where they would develop their own character... and show what they are. God does not compel anyone to sin... AND God is not under any obligation to save a single one of us... who has prevalent evil desires

and wishes inside of us. ... (LISTEN!) There never will be a person in hell who did not choose to be there. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

Paul recalls the example of Pharaoh to illustrate how God had purposely placed that particular Pharaoh... in that particular position... at that particular time in history... so God's great power would be displayed. All of the miracles God did in Egypt to affect the incredible release of the Hebrew slaves... would spread God's fame spread throughout the world.

Forty years later (when the Israelites entered the Promised Land under Joshua)... the Canaanites had already heard of the Israelites' God... and what He had done to Pharaoh. ... Rahab told the spies:

**Joshua 2:10-11 (ESV)**

*<sup>10</sup> For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. <sup>11</sup> And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.*

God sovereignly used Pharaoh... to reveal His glory to the whole world.

#1. God's ways are higher than our own... #2. We can trust God to act in justice... #3. This is God's universe and He (alone) is sovereign.

But this does not end the questioning...

**Romans 9:19**

Paul probably had countless discussions with fellow Jews about these issues. So he could anticipate the questions of his readers.

*“If God simply chooses those on whom he will have mercy and those whom he will harden, why does God blame people for not listening? Haven’t they simply done what he made them do?”*

Occasionally these questions are asked by those who are genuinely seeking to understand God and His ways. Usually (however)... they are used to excuse certain behavior—“*It’s not my fault, God; it’s Your fault!*” ... We are (so often) guilty of trying to reject or resist God.

In our own ignorance... we try to assume some status equal to God that would permit us to question why He chooses to do what He does. This (of course) is impossible! ... God is God and little man won't change that. Here is the way one author (Sherman Nagel) put it:

*You cannot put one little star in motion; You cannot shape one single forest leaf, Nor fling a mountain up, nor sink an ocean Presumptuous pigmy, large with unbelief! You cannot bring one down of regal splendor, Nor bid the day to shadowy twilight fall, Nor send the pale moon forth with radiance tender; ... .. And dare you doubt the One who has done it all?*

We cannot judge Him simply on the basis of what seems fair or unfair to us. We do not sit in judgment on Him - He sits in judgment on us! He is not accountable to us - we are accountable to Him.

Martin Luther said with regard to God’s sovereignty, “*All objections to predestination proceed from the [foolish] wisdom of the flesh.... [which] exalts itself above God and judges His will*”. ... .. [ P A U S E ] ... ..

Paul is in the midst of giving four answers in our passage today. In last week’s passage... we saw him begin to answer: “*Did God’s plan fail... because the Jews rejected Messiah Jesus?*” ... But as he answered that... his answer brought up another question: “*Is God being fair?*”



Two sections of our passage today are Paul's attempt to answer: "*Is God being fair?*"... Verses 19-21 answers with "*Who are we to argue with God?*" ... But Paul will also give another answer with verses 22-24... "*God has His purposes...*"

We will examine Paul's two answers about **God's fairness**... but then Paul returns to the original question ("*Did God Fail?*") ... So (after the concern about God's fairness) we will (then) follow him back... and consider Paul's final two answers to "*Did God fail?*"

So let's go now to... "*Is God fair?*" and see how Paul answers that. ... First Paul argues "*Who are we to argue with God?*" ... (in verses 19-21.)

#### **Romans 9:19-21**

God is not answerable to man for what He does. However... He can be relied upon to act justly and consistently with His character. ... .. But Paul (also) gives a second answer for "*Is God fair?*" It comes to us in verses 22-24... and this is what he says there: **God has His purposes.**

#### **Romans 9:22-24**

God's chief end - **is to glorify GOD.** ... And this end will certainly be achieved.

It will be achieved in every detail of history... and in the life of every individual. ... Every person who has ever lived (or will ever live)... **will** glorify God... either actively or passively... either willingly or unwillingly... either in heaven or in hell. ...(LISTEN!) You will glorify God. Either you will glorify Him as the object of His mercy and glory... Or you will glorify Him in

your rebellion and unbelief (by being made the object of his wrath and power - at the final judgment.)

(In fact)... if you are rebelling... you are glorifying God right now... because His patience is displayed as He endures your sin for a time... rather than sending you to hell immediately... which you deserve. ... But PLEASE (!) understand two things...

1) God is patient for a reason. God has been patient with you... and the purpose of His patience is **to display His glory** – but not only that. It is also **to lead you to repentance**. God's patience is a great thing. But you must not abuse it.

2) God will not be patient forever. Although God's patience is great... it is not eternal. We are warned in Scripture that God's wrath has been withheld by His patience... but it is building up like waters behind a great dam... and it will one day come pouring forth. God was patient with Pharaoh... but God judged him in the end. And God was patient with Israel... but many perished in the desert.

“*Is God fair?*” - God is not answerable to man for what He (God) does. ... SECOND... God has His purposes... (and His ultimate purpose is to glorify Himself.) ... .. [ P A U S E ] ... ..

Paul now returns to the original question: “*Did God fail?*” ... Verses 25-29 tell us God did not fail – because all of this was prophesied...

### **Romans 9:25-29**

Look at the last part of verse 27 again... “*Only a remnant of them will be saved...*” Remnant means “few.” (So... in other words)... great multitudes

of them *would be cast off... and be not saved.* ... According to prophesy many Jews must be lost - and this was exactly what happened when they rejected the Messiah.

God did not fail... because the Jews response to Jesus was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies given centuries prior. ... (AND LISTEN!)... God 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.

Paul quoted two verses from the prophet Hosea and one from Isaiah. ... Several hundred years before Jesus' birth... Hosea told of God's intention to bring Gentiles into His family... after the Jews would reject His plan. ... God was not surprised by Israel's rejection. ...The failure of the Jews... and the inclusion of the Gentiles... has been in God's plan from the beginning.

Now... to be fair... I have to point out what the context of Paul's first quote from Hosea is. ... Romans 9:25 is a quote from Hosea 2:23... where Hosea did not speak about Gentiles being called by God. He was writing about his own society of rebellious Jews... who were rejecting God. ... Hosea was saying that God would call them back.

The Jewish nation in Hosea's day had rejected God... forfeited their rights as "God's favored people." They were therefor cast off... as if they were not God's people. But Hosea writes that God would re-call them... and bestow upon them all the rights and privileges of being His people. ... And the reason the Apostle Paul used this quote from Hosea is this:

If God purposed to call back to Himself a people whom He had rejected... (in other words... if God would bestow favors on these people - after they had forfeited His favor)... then it is not (at all) absurd... to think that God would deal in a similar manner with the Gentiles. ... This history of the Jews (of Hosea's day) established a precedent and showed God's character.

*Did God fail?* – No! Because (as Paul points out) God prophesied that His plan would only include a remnant (not all of Israel)... and God also left testimony about His character of offering His mercy to the most unthinkable candidates for receiving it.

We can trust God to act in justice. ... And we see further evidence of this in the next reason Paul gives... as to why God did not fail. Verses 30-33 will show that the Jews bear some responsibility.

### **Romans 9:30-33**

Here is a paradox: the Jews sought 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.

Sometimes we are like these people (trying to get right with God by keeping His laws.) ... We may think that attending church... doing church work... giving offerings... and being nice will be enough. (After all) we've played by the rules... haven't we? ... But Paul's words sting — this

approach never succeeds. ... Paul explains that God's plan is not for those who try to earn His favor by being good. ... It is for those who realize that they can never be good enough... and so must depend on Christ. ... We can be saved only by putting our faith in what Jesus Christ has done.

Many people do not like the doctrine of election... because it throws us upon the mercy of God. ... But it is the only means for our salvation.

Furthermore the doctrine of election shows us that God's purposes have not failed. And this means: God can be trusted! ... .. Is God calling you to glorify Him by placing your faith in Jesus Christ? ... God's purposes have not failed. He can be trusted. Throw yourself upon the mercy of God.

Or perhaps you have already given your life to Christ... as His follower... but you are facing some hardship in your life. ... Believer (!) God's purposes have not failed THERE either! He can be trusted.

The challenging circumstances in your life are there for a reason. God is sovereign... and it is as I said last week... You are no accident. God chose you!