

Message #34

Romans 9:6-20

Back around 1983, I was given the responsibility to teach the book of Romans at the Grand Rapids School of the Bible and Music. The class was quite large and so it met in the library study area that had many tables and chairs. When I had finished the lecture on this very text in Romans, the room emptied except for one young lady who was sitting at her table sobbing. Everyone else had left but this girl was sobbing. So I walked over to her and asked her what was wrong and if I could help. I will never forget this as long as I live. She said you have just taken us through Romans 9 and I see you have handled the text accurately, but this goes against what I believe and I am struggling. I said where did you get the data for what you believe. She said I got it from my Pastor, but he never taught this. He never taught this passage in Romans.

Romans 9 is a powerful, accurate, inspired text written by Paul that magnifies and glorifies the sovereignty of God in salvation. Many people don't like this doctrine and they don't like this text because it truly does give God all of the credit and glory for electing and saving any sinner.

When I first came to faith in Jesus Christ, I viewed it as my decision. That is what I thought and that is what I knew. But my aunt told me about the sovereignty of God in that decision and I got so angry that one time I stormed out of her house. But she was right and I was wrong and eventually I went back and told her.

Really, when you get right down to it the argument of God's sovereignty in salvation comes down to this: **Can the will of God overtake and be more powerful than the will of man?** If it comes down to a choice between the will of a sinful human versus the will of the sovereign God, who wins?

The Apostle Paul did not want the Romans negligent on this subject. **He wanted God's people to truly understand the sovereignty of God when it comes to the salvation of national Israel and when it comes to the salvation of the individual sinner.**

Now what contextually led Paul to write that here is because he had just completed talking about the great promises and privileges that were given to the nation Israel. Paul had a heavy heart, a burdened heart because Israel had rejected Jesus Christ as her God/Savior/Messiah/King.

He knew someone would say well because Israel has rejected this, then the program of God for Israel has failed and has ceased, so God's sovereign will and word has been thwarted by the rebellion of Israel.

Paul says no. No one beats the sovereign program of God. What he writes here is this:

GOD'S WORD IS PRECISELY ACCOMPLISHING GOD'S SOVEREIGN WILL IN THE ELECTION AND THE SALVATION OF ISRAEL AND INDIVIDUALS.

No nation or individual can thwart the sovereign plan of God. No nation or individual can deny the sovereign election of God. God will accomplish exactly what He wants to accomplish and it is not dependent on the will of man.

Jesus chose twelve disciples when He was here on earth. God chose Abraham when he was not even seeking a relationship with God. He was not from a godly home, but an idolatrous home and he did not live in a godly country.

One of the main problems with many religions and churches is that they elevate man, when they should be elevating God. God is God. God is the God of salvation. God is the God of election. God is a God of total and complete sovereignty. It is about time that God's people know this, believe this and defend this.

Now to establish this, Paul develops two very important theological points:

THEOLOGICAL POINT #1 – God sovereignly chooses who will receive His blessings. **9:6-13**

The argument of **verse 6** goes something like this—Well being born a Jew means they should have received the blessings of God, but since they didn't, God's word failed. Paul says, "No," it is not just being born a Jew that is the issue; you must be a chosen by God Jew. There is a chosen Israel within the nation Israel. In other words, to get the blessings of God you must be a Jew who was elected and chosen to receive those blessings. Paul says read the book of Genesis carefully and you will see that.

Now to prove the point, he cites two illustrations from the book of Genesis:

Illustration #1 - God sovereignly chose to give His blessings to Isaac. **9:7-9**

This illustration comes from the story found in Genesis 21. Abraham was told by God that the one who would be blessed would be Isaac. Isaac would be the one who would receive the blessings and promises of God. It was not enough to be a child of Abraham, one had to be the God-chosen and appointed child of Abraham.

Abraham had two boys: Ishmael, who came through Hagar, and Isaac, who came through Sarah. It was promised that Sarah would be the one who would have the son God would bless.

Now of course the question here is this: "Who determined which son would be blessed?" Who determined that Isaac would be born to Sarah and that Ishmael would be born to Hagar? Who sovereignly determined this? It is God.

Who determined that we would be born to our parents? Who determined that we would be born in the country in which we were born? Who determined whether we would be a boy or a girl? It was God.

Now of all the people born, who decides who will receive the blessings of God? Who decides who will be blessed by God and who won't? It is God. God is the sovereign God of election.

Illustration #2 - God sovereignly chose to give His blessings to Jacob. **9:10-13**

This illustration is taken from Genesis 25. God had promised Isaac that he would have a son, but his wife Rebekah was barren. So Isaac prayed and God allowed Rebekah to conceive twins and have two sons, Esau and Jacob. God chose one and He did not choose the other.

Now Paul knew some fickle Arminian would say well God chose on the basis of what they would do or would become. So he carefully states the point in **Romans 9:11**. **It was God's sovereign decision as to whom He would choose. He made His sovereign choice before they were even born and before they had done anything good or bad.** This had nothing to do with their works. This was solely based on God's calling and choice.

He really emphasizes this in **verse 12** when Paul reminds all that God told her the older would serve the younger and in **verse 13** he quotes Malachi 1:2-3 in saying God loved Jacob and hated Esau. That is election. Any way you analyze this, God made a sovereign choice whether they or we like it or not.

The result of that choice is that Jacob was blessed and through him came the nation Israel. Esau did not receive the blessings of God and he produced the Edomites.

Now the most amazing thing pertaining to the choice of Jacob was that Jacob was the liar and trickster. Jacob was a crook and schemer. Esau was by far the better boy. In fact, his dad, Isaac, loved Esau the best because he was much more of a man's man. Esau liked to be outdoors. He was a guy who liked to hunt and bring back food. On the other hand, Jacob was kind of a mamma's boy who hung around the kitchen (Gen. 25:27-28).

One time a student of W. H. Griffith Thomas (1861-1924) said to him that he was having a hard time figuring out why God hated Esau and Dr. Thomas said I have a hard time figuring out why God loved Jacob.

John Calvin said when it came to the choice of these two boys, His choice could not possibly be based on any good God saw; for there is no good He sees. Apart from Christ we are corrupt. Salvation is due to God's goodness and not ours.

God's sovereign choice in election is not determined by the goodness of man. It is His sovereign work and it is His sovereign choice and it is His sovereign business. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, thank God He chose you.

THEOLOGICAL POINT #2- God sovereignly chooses who will receive His mercy. **9:14-18**

Notice how **verse 14** begins, “What shall we say then?” Paul knew people say stuff about God’s sovereignty. People hate this doctrine of God’s election. They want to be their own Sovereign God and most don’t like to read that it is God who elects and saves them.

Paul knew some misguided person would reason well if God is the one who sovereignly determines and elects who receives His blessings and who doesn’t, then He is the source of injustice.

Paul’s answer again is “May it never be.” May you never think like that. God is not unjust. There is never any unrighteousness or injustice with God (John 7:18). God has a legal right to send all people to hell because all people have sinned against God and fallen short of His glory. If God were interested in only doing the just thing, He would let every human being go to hell. But God is also merciful. In His mercy, He chooses some to save from the fires of hell.

Dr. Chafer said we are all sinners flowing in a river that is heading to condemnation and we deserve to be in that river. The question is not why does he let sinners flow to destruction, the real question is why does God throw any sinner a lifeline and save them and take them to heaven?

There are two powerful illustrations Paul gives:

Illustration #1 - God sovereignly chose Israel to receive His mercy. **9:15-16**

Verse 15 is a partial conversation between God and Moses in Exodus 33:18. Moses was on Mt. Sinai asking God to show him His glory. Now the reason why he asks God to do this is not because he was infatuated with the idea of seeing something spectacular; it was because Israel had blatantly rebelled time and time again against God, and Moses wanted to see some sign that God was still on Israel’s side.

God’s answer to Moses is basically this—My decision to grant mercy and compassion to Israel has never been based on her faithfulness, but on My election. God says I have mercy on whom-ever I want and the fact that He had mercy on Israel was never based on Israel’s faithfulness or lack of it.

Paul concludes the illustration in **verse 16** by stating this has nothing to do with man’s will or man’s work. This is totally God’s elective choice and decision. This has nothing to do with how hard or where a man runs; this has to do with God’s merciful choice.

When one trains to run a race, there is a lot of preparation and hard work. Paul says salvation has nothing to do with hard work or training; it is God’s sovereign choice that determines it.

Old Pelagius tried to dodge this verse but Augustine went right after him with it. He said since the will of man has nothing to do with election, then the sole cause of election is the mercy of God and the will of God.

Illustration #2 - God sovereignly chose Pharaoh not to receive His mercy. **9:17-18**

The second illustration is the illustration of Pharaoh. God uses him as an illustration of one non-elect. Notice how Paul begins this, “For the Scripture says.” You do have to ask how it was possible that in spite of overwhelming evidence, Pharaoh did not really believe in God.

Pharaoh saw water turned to blood, plagues of frogs, lice, flies, disease, boils, hail, locusts, darkness and death. How was it possible that he would not humble himself to God? The answer is God “hardened” his heart so he would not respond (**Rom. 9:18**).

John Calvin said that word “hardened” does not mean permission like some wishy-washy preachers would have it; this is an active operation of God’s wrath (*Romans*, p. 362).

Now in **verse 17**, we get a look at two important reasons why God does not elect some and why He hardens some:

- 1) To demonstrate His sovereign power;
- 2) To spread a testimony of Himself to the whole world.

If you have believed in Jesus Christ, here are two reasons why you have:

- 1) God wants to demonstrate His power by your life.**
- 2) God wants you to testify of Him through your lips.**

It is our job to tell people about the sovereignty of God. We have a responsibility to testify as to how sovereign God is in being able to harden a heart or soften a heart. We have a responsibility to teach others about election. We need to tell others that God can harden your heart so that you never believe. God can break down your heart so you will believe. He is God and He is sovereign and wise people cry out to Him to save them.

Now someone will read **verse 18** and say well God hardened Pharaoh’s heart after Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Well let’s check the Biblical record on that.

- 1) In Exodus 3:19 God tells Moses that the king of Egypt will not let Israel leave.
- 2) In Exodus 4:21 God says he will not let them go because He will harden his heart.
- 3) In Exodus 7:3 God says He will harden Pharaoh’s heart so He may multiply His signs.
- 4) In Exodus 8:32 we read “but Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also.”
- 5) In Exodus 9:34 we read “Pharaoh...sinned again and hardened his heart.”

Notice carefully God says He will harden Pharaoh’s heart long before Pharaoh hardened his heart and it is my contention that when you read Pharaoh hardened his own heart, that was God causing him to do that. God keeps repeating the fact that He hardened Pharaoh’s heart—Ex.4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:27; 14:4, 8, 17.

God wants people to know He sovereignly turns hearts and minds the way He wants and if you are wise you will ask Him to turn your heart and mind so that you love Him and fear Him.

Now some of you may not like this doctrine of God's sovereign election. Some of you may say it is not fair. God is unjust. In answer to you we cite **Romans 9:14**—may you never think that or say that.

Some of you may say well then if God saves by His election and He hardens whomever He wants, then He cannot find fault with anyone because everyone is just doing what God wants. To you we cite **Romans 9:20**—who are you to talk about to God.

Some will say well this only has to do with Israel. This does not have to do with individual salvation. To you we cite **Romans 9:24**—not just Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

If you are wise, you will ask God in His sovereignty to take over your heart and mind. You will call out to Him and ask for His salvation and ask Jesus Christ to come into your life.