

“God’s Not Fair”

- Romans 9 -

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Romans 9: 1-33

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen

according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. 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." 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. 19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" 20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? 22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? 25 As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved." 26 "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God." 27 Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved. 28 For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth." 29 And as Isaiah said before: "Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, And we would have been made like Gomorrah." 30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 32 Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. 33 As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

Romans 9 once again, represents part of “ground zero” of the Calvinist movement. The take on this chapter for these folks is the “proof” of the doctrine of “Unconditional Election.” The main idea behind Unconditional Election is that God chooses who will be saved and who will not be saved. The only way a person can become saved is by being chosen by God. If you are not so “chosen” you are not eligible for salvation. This means that God already picked out those He wants and furthermore that they *have* to become a Christian and will not get an option to say no. (See the Doctrine of Irresistible Grace) Everyone else doesn’t get a choice to say yes and are lost because He says so. The people who He has chosen to save are known as the “elect.” This doctrine of course is a source of much conflict and for obvious reasons!



This doctrine is fueled at least in part by this chapter 9 of Romans. The understanding herein is that Paul is painting a picture of a God who has “chosen” Bob for salvation and eternal life and “condemned” Mary to hell without a chance to get on the salvation train. And further, He (God) has a right to do so and so that’s that. But the only problem is, that’s not what this chapter is about and I don’t need a degree from Dallas Seminary to see that clearly. And sadly, because of their preconceptions, they miss the incredible truth that *is* so richly presented in this chapter!

This chapter is not about *individual* selection, but rather *corporate* selection. It’s not about choosing Bob and chucking Mary, it’s about Him choosing the Jews and then temporarily setting them aside to pour out His favor upon the Gentiles...that’s us! (Please note...that’s a *temporary* focus...for the purposes of the “church age”, but His people are still the nation of Israel) And even **that** choice is not so emphatic and absolute to mean that now all people of Jewish descent are bound to hell with no chance at redemption, nor does it mean that because I’m a Gentile I am automatically given a seat in first class to heaven. We must always interpret scripture in light of context and furthermore we need to remember who He is talking to; to a nation of Jew’s that are coming to terms with the fact that God is now “coming out” for the nations of non-Jews and bringing redemption and relationship to them also. Maybe that’s an extraneous issue for us, but for the average Jew in Paul’s day...well, this chapter could very well start a riot.

Paul begins chapter 9 speaking with words of heartbreak. He had throughout his ministry regularly been accused of being an enemy of the Jewish people. Yet he here speaks with a real agony over the state of his brethren! Paul was pleading for his nation to trust God and trust him. The Jews called Paul a false prophet and a liar. Why? Because unlike the modern Calvinist, he was preaching God's love and salvation for *all* men instead of just for the Jews alone.

Vs 1-3 With Christ as my witness, I speak with utter truthfulness. My conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm it. My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed — cut off from Christ! — if that would save them.

Paul comes out of his corner seeking to be clear and emphatic. His emphasis is on the fact that he is telling the absolute truth! After all, this was not a baseless plea on his behalf. This was not an “I love the Jews, so trust me” kind of thing. No, he had already presented his case and did so with “facts and figures,” not just desperation and passion! Throughout this whole letter and especially throughout chapter 8 Paul had argued and thus established his position: *that Jews and non-Jews alike were sinners in need of redemption*. He spoke of how man was saved by faith, not by Jewish religious works, and that even their main man Abraham had proven that very truth! He went so far as to reach back even to the beginning...back in the garden, to paint a portrait of God’s ultimate plan of salvation that was even then for all men. God had that plan from word ‘go.’

Paul was specific as to the law of works and the law of grace...how it was that they were no longer under the law of works because of Christ...because the law was dead and the ‘marriage’ to law was thus over. In chapter 8 Paul tied it all up with a ribbon and “slid it across the table.” And now...here in 9, he is spilling his heart...telling his Jewish brethren...that he loved them. A plea of “...*are you hearing me on this? ...I am ultimately saying all this because I love you as my own flesh and blood.*” He is saying he was getting nothing monetarily or beneficial by what he was telling them...that he had “no dog in this race” except his bond and love of them as his own people.

Paul had come to the profound truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and desired nothing more than for his brethren to find that same joy and peace of salvation that he had come to know! He went so far as to take the position that, if he could, he would give up *his own* eternal salvation for the sake of his fellow Jews! Few men in history

loved with that kind of love! *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."* John 15:13. Moses was one of those men. In Exodus 32:30-32, Moses had asked God for the same impossible scenario that Paul asked for: that he would give his own life and standing with God for the redemption of 'his people.' Both Paul and Moses...*as well as others called by God throughout scriptural time and thereafter,* knew what it meant to love those they ministered to. Without such love, we often fail to lead the lost to Christ. Without such love, we will eventually pack it in and go home to something more comfortable and less dangerous and costly.

Vs 4-5 They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God's adopted children. God revealed his glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave them his law. He gave them the privilege of worshipping him and receiving his wonderful promises. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ himself was an Israelite as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, the one who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.

We know from the totality of Old Testament scripture that the Jews were God's chosen people! Please note the word "chosen." God *chose* them, and therefore did *not* chose others. This fact He proved repeatedly throughout history. The Jews have been, are, and will forever be God's "chosen people." Please note this important caveat: He chose the Jew's for favor apparently for no particular reason but He did *not* chose the rest of us to burn in hell for no particular reason. That is an important aspect to note in the understanding of what picture God is painting herein.

Why **did** God chose the Jews over others? The Bible tells us that His choice of Israel had nothing to do with merit. It was not because they were more numerous than other people in the world, for in fact they were the least (see Deuteronomy 7:7). It certainly was not because Israel was more sensitive to God than other nations. We know enough about her Old Testament history to know better than that! Although God called her by name, Israel did not know Him (Isaiah 45:4) or at least did not *want to know Him*. It was not because Israel was more righteous than other nations. When God later confirmed His promise of land to the Jews, He reminded them that they were a rebellious, stiff-necked people (Deuteronomy 9:6-7).

If God chose to bless the nation of Israel not because she was more populous or spiritually responsive or righteous than other nations, just why did He choose the Jews? Certainly it was His sovereign right to do so. After all, He IS God and He made them. As verse 21 of this chapter says... *"When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn't he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into?"* And perhaps that passage reflects even a bigger picture...a clearer answer in that it appears that God chose the Jewish nation simply to be an expression of His glory and mercy: to be the expression of the artist...the author...the builder. They would be a real time living "book" in which to play out his plan of redemption and the reasons why He did it thus so. They would be the example for us all. To be sure Israel had received every "edge" that could be given them. They had it "all." Even the Messiah Himself, who they had rejected, was one of their own! God had tried again and again, and each time His "chosen nation" had rejected Him. Ultimately, they sold their birthright for a mess of pottage.

Despite the centuries of saga, the Jewish nation ultimately rejected and *yet rejects* Jesus as the Messiah and thus Christianity in totality. So it appears that God didn't just pick a winner! Yet here **I** am ...languishing here in Gentile land because I am not one of God's "chosen." If it wasn't because of merit...they didn't win the race or get a better score, then why did they get first place in line? It all seems so...*well*, unfair...

Vs 9:6-9 Well then, has God failed to fulfill his promise to Israel? No, for not all who are born into the nation of Israel are truly members of God's people! Being descendants of Abraham doesn't make

them truly Abraham's children. For the Scriptures say, "Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted," though Abraham had other children, too. This means that Abraham's physical descendants are not necessarily children of God. Only the children of the promise are considered to be Abraham's children. For God had promised, "I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

Now Paul moves to hone in on the major structural issue of this chapter, and that is to clarify just who really *was* a Jew. Paul now effectively "pulls the rug out from under the nation of Israel" by declaring that just because someone was of *racial* descent from Abraham didn't in fact make him a *real* Jew. Throughout their early history God had made both unconditional *and conditional* promises with the descents of Abraham. The Jewish nation *had* been, and still *are* to some degree, attempting to lay claim to the benefits of both while failing to "stand and deliver" on their part...their participatory aspects of that conditional promise: those things which held the idea that there was a "spiritual" Israel as much as there was a national Israel of lineage and blood.

This chapter is not the only place in scripture that this idea is presented. Paul tells us boldly in Galatians 3:7 that the real children of Abraham ... *are all those who put their faith in God.*" Just because you have the blood, that didn't make you a real Jew. That idea may be fighting words for some, but it's not like Paul just pulled this principle "out of his hat." The history of Israel itself presents this picture! Remember; only Isaac was chosen, and not Ishmael. This was because Ishmael was the result of a purely carnal and fleshly desire. If blood lineage was the only factor, then Ishmael's lineage would be included in all of the scriptural Jewish promises.

All of this, for many of us, may serve only as a finger of condemnation pointed toward the nation of Israel. But the fact is that we that have been so chosen...we who have "entered into the sheepgate" via Christ and spiritual Israel, now stand in that same danger and we seem to be falling to that same trap. If we are "spiritual Israel" then it would behoove us to know and pay attention to what that means and what our share in that conditional promise of God looks like. Often, we that are within the church family today are so quick to point out the error of the average Jew, the missteps of the nation of Israel, without seeing that we can *and so often do*, easily make the same mistake.

After all, what makes a child of God...what makes true Israel? What is part in our "conditional" promise?

1. **1 Cor 10:1-5** (obedience)
2. **John 4:19-24** (how we worship God: *is our worship spiritual, real, and tangible?*)
3. **John 1:12** (one has to "receive" Him...to trust Christ to save them. This speaks of a relationship, a dependency, and a surrender.)

Being of Jewish lineage and living in Jerusalem does not make you a Jew. Knowing the Talmud and eating kosher does not make you a Jew. But going to church and doing religious things doesn't make you a Christian either. Both of these things involve more than what you *do*, it involves what you *are*. It's not just a matter of *doing* but *being*. It's not a matter of *doing* "born again." You must *be* "born again."