

“God’s Not Fair”

- Romans 9 -

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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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."



PART 2

Vs 9:10-13 *This son was our ancestor Isaac. When he married Rebekah, she gave birth to twins. But before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad, she received a message from God. (This message shows that God chooses people according to his own purposes; he calls people, but not according to their good or bad works.) She was told, “Your older son will serve your younger son.” In the words of the Scriptures, “I loved Jacob, but I rejected Esau.”*

Paul is stating in chapter 9 of Romans that a person becomes a child of God through faith in the promises of God. A “child of the promise” is a person who believes in the *promises of God*.

The story of Jacob and Esau is yet another example of skewed theology. Let's let the scripture defend itself on this matter. Neither Jacob or Esau had done any good *or* evil when the decision was made by God. In fact they had done nothing at all. So it wasn't a matter of works that somehow "earned" Jacob the "most favored place." It is never about what we *do*, but rather about what God *says*. Despite the Calvinist agenda, the point in God's decision to back Jacob over Esau...*Esau being the traditional and cultural firstborn, the inheritor of all things Isaac*...was not to present a picture that God is in heaven drawing straws. Indeed God **does**, and **makes**, and **destroys**, and **chooses**...at will, as He is God and owner of the vineyard. However, to believe that God is acting 'willy-nilly' and "off the cuff" with no other purpose than to exercise His authority is grossly distorting everything we know of Jehovah from Genesis to Revelation. God had a *plan*. He *always* has a plan!

Please note while indeed God chose Jacob, not on merit or works, He **did** chose him to see His purposes come to fruition, and to present a picture of the gentile people...the church and the church age, coming to the place that they hold today...the leader and voice of Christ on this planet, even though we are not the "chosen"...not the "first-born." The verse says that God did this **for a reason**; "...*that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls.*"

If we have been "chosen" by God before we were even born, how could anything we do now change that standing with Him? The Jews based their standing on their bloodline and their works. Ironically, they were attempting to earn what they already had. God loved them already and He proved it; and it wasn't because of what they did to please Him. The Gentiles came to the table with nothing...they had no works and no bloodline, and yet God *chose* them also. When we take our lifestyle...our works...what we *do*, off the table...and God blesses us anyway, one can easily stand in the distance and judge such as not being fair. Of course our understanding of what is "fair" is based on our world...our culture and our ideas of what is equitable and just. But God doesn't play by our rules. Remember, *He has a plan*...

Vs 9:14-15 *Are we saying, then, that God was unfair? Of course not! For God said to Moses, "I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose."*

So whether we like it or not, or whether or not we *agree* with God's ways, they are *His* ways and He *is* God...our Creator and our Master. How often we attempt to make God fair according to human thinking and man's ideals. After all, we come from a world where we "get what we deserve" so we think the Kingdom realm should operate on the same principles. And God's world doesn't work that way. In God's world, we get what we *don't* deserve. We received His love and mercy even when we gave nothing in return! Romans 5:8 says "*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"

The truth is that sometimes our flesh doesn't like the methods of our Creator. We are often troubled by the acts of God in the Old Testament, and are uncomfortable with a God that has such unilateral power and resolve. It's something men rarely murmur, but it is often the case. But to have such a view is to miss the history and the very nature of our Creator! We want His love without His justice, His blessings without accountability, His care without serving Him exclusively! We want *half* of God, but that half is most often the half that pleases our flesh. The "comfortable" half, the "New Testament half."

God *IS* righteous and indeed "just," but in a *Kingdom realm that is not of this earth*. It is the "*Kingdom of God!*" It is not a democracy but rather a monarchy and no one is asking your opinion. It is run utterly by a king. Verse 15 gives us God's answer to Moses, and subsequently to Paul also. God has a plan and a methodology that is the embodiment of His love, even if we do not understand or agree. The question is, and will always be, *do we trust Him?* Do we want what He wants to do? Or do we want Him to do what we think is fair?

Vs 9:16 *So it is God who decides to show mercy. We can neither choose it nor work for it.*

We are not saved because we are good folks, or even because we *chose* Him. After all, Rom 3:11 tells us that there is “*none that seeks after God.*” So it is true that if there was no godly election, none of us would ever be saved! I am not today arguing the reality of the doctrine of sovereign election by God. But scripture rejects the idea that God chooses individuals to be saved and have eternal life while choosing others to not have that option and to go to eternal hell without option. God chose Jacob and not Esau to be the path of Israel and blessing. But I read nothing about Him choosing Jacob to go to heaven and Esau to go to hell, despite some folks attempt to use that passage for such. Does God choose? Yes! And He has told us repeatedly and quite clearly that He chooses **all of us**...

The reality is that when you're God, you can do what you want! And further, the very basis of our faith is that He loves us...*a fact which He has proven repeatedly*, and our confession of mutual love, which is always in question...*at least ours toward Him!* The truth is that God operates in the realm of mercy *all of the time*. His **compassion** has kept us breathing, not our good behavior!

Vs 9:17-18 *For the Scriptures say that God told Pharaoh, “I have appointed you for the very purpose of displaying my power in you and to spread my fame throughout the earth.” So you see, God chooses to show mercy to some, and he chooses to harden the hearts of others so they refuse to listen.*

What's fair about God allowing Pharaoh to live and be so exalted? Or Hitler, or Mussolini, for that matter! Yet once again, *God had a plan*. He did so that He might ultimately show *His* power and sovereignty over a fallen evil world. God even used Pharaoh's rebellion against Him to ultimately show His own deity and power. And today, Pharaoh historically serves as a manifest proof of God's power and plan. A plan that no man will deter!

Again, verse 18 may illicit more of that “fairness” cry, but we need to remember the story! The account of Pharaoh tells us that he hardened his heart against God, and moreover despite numerous attempts to reach him, he hardened it repeatedly. Only *then* did God *confirm* His response and *harden Pharaoh's heart*. “Harden” in its original language has a different meaning than how we use it today. In Hebrew it means “a confirmation added to an already hard state.” Please note that if such account does indeed illicit a cry of “that's not fair!” then you better brace yourself because God will eventually do the same thing to each of us. It's called the unpardonable sin...the sin of saying ‘no’ repeatedly to the Holy Spirit.

Vs 9:19-21 *Well then, you might say, “Why does God blame people for not responding? Haven't they simply done what he makes them do?” No, don't say that. Who are you, a mere human being, to argue with God? Should the thing that was created say to the one who created it, “Why have you made me like this?” 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?*

The question naturally follows: *well if this is the state of affairs, then who really can be blamed? We're just a helpless pawn on the cosmic chessboard of life*. In other words, *isn't it all really God's fault?* Ahh! Now the “final shoe drops! Angry and backed into a corner, this is our desperate cry! *And it has been for hundreds of years...*

Paul's reply first begins with a hearty rebuke. Through it all we forget the fundamental issue: HE is the Creator and we are the created! Does the clay get to complain to the potter about what He made out of the clay? The

important thing, which we are apt to forget, is that **we're the clay!** Without a Creator, that's all we would have ever been. Remember Genesis 3:19 *"For you were made from dust, and to the dust you will return."*

Vs 9:22-24 *In the same way, even though God has the right to show his anger and his power, he is very patient with those on whom his anger falls, who were made ("prepared") for destruction. He does this to make the riches of his glory shine even brighter on those to whom he shows mercy, who were prepared in advance for glory. And we are among those whom he selected, both from the Jews and from the Gentiles.*

The language of the first occurrence of the word "prepared" is different from the second. The first instance means "prepared themselves," and the second is "God prepared." Thus please note that it was *man* who hung *himself*. It was the "potter" who made a "vessel of mercy" ... a vessel "prepared" not for destruction or damnation, but for "glory." Such "preparation" was not just for Paul and his Jewish brethren...but for me and you. *THIS* is why we were made! This is why all of it...

In a conversation with Job in the Book of Job chapters 38 – 39, God throws down with a man who thought he knew better...who thought God wasn't fair. Let's get just a taste of what He had to say that day...

Job 38:4-13 *"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much. Who determined its dimensions and stretched out the surveying line? What supports its foundations, and who laid its cornerstone as the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? "Who kept the sea inside its boundaries as it burst from the womb, and as I clothed it with clouds and wrapped it in thick darkness? For I locked it behind barred gates, limiting its shores. I said, 'This far and no farther will you come. Here your proud waves must stop!' "Have you ever commanded the morning to appear and caused the dawn to rise in the east? Have you made daylight spread to the ends of the earth, to bring an end to the night's wickedness?"*

God continues like that for over two chapters, which has to be one of the greatest butt kicking ever recorded in scriptures, and one of the most loving, patient and merciful conversations in any historical account ever written! Scriptures say that our hearts are where treasures are. How much more true of God? Eph 2:10 *"for we are His workmanship."* His "poiema." (poy'-ay-mah) **We are God's "poem."**

Vs 9:25-26 *Concerning the Gentiles, God says in the prophecy of Hosea, "Those who were not my people, I will now call my people. And I will love those whom I did not love before." And, "Then, at the place where they were told, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'children of the living God.'"*

Here now Paul reaches back to Old Testament passages to support his contention that the Gentile peoples of the world, (*all non-Jewish nations*), are not only *able* to come to Jehovah God, but by prophecy it should have been expected!

Vs 9:27-29 *And concerning Israel, Isaiah the prophet cried out, "Though the people of Israel are as numerous as the sand of the seashore, only a remnant will be saved. For the LORD will carry out his sentence upon the earth quickly and with finality." And Isaiah said the same thing in another place: "If the LORD of Heaven's Armies had not spared a few of our children, we would have been wiped out like Sodom, destroyed like Gomorrah."*

While Israel was and *is indeed* the chosen nation, God has reinforced a major theme found throughout Scripture: *the redeemed will always be few in number, whether that be Jew or Gentile!* And while the vast majority of the nation of Israel has rejected their Messiah, those who were not of the “chosen nation” have *become the spiritually chosen* by stepping forward to embrace Christ as Lord and Savior!

The Lord had judged the earth, *specifically His own people*, many times in past generations prior to Paul penning these words. Yes, He would even judge them at times yet in the future. And *still* the Jewish nation still thrives. So many have died terribly in the past, seemingly as God was even yet attempting to get their attention! Yet today they still stand, *indeed precariously*, yet stand they do! But even now their resolve is grounded not in God but rather in their own military defense, with their word’s echoing through the years... “**Never again.**” However, according to this prophecy, in the end when the final judgment comes, there will be a mere “remnant” that remains. But that remnant will find God once again and will...*like us all*, accept His grace and mercy.

Vs 9:30-32 What does all this mean? Even though the Gentiles were not trying to follow God’s standards, they were made right with God. And it was by faith that this took place. But the people of Israel, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded. Why not? Because they were trying to get right with God by keeping the law instead of by trusting in him. They stumbled over the great rock in their path.

The Jews clung to human achievement, and to the obedience to the law. But it was nothing more than a religion of works...a religion of their own making. The *gentiles* knew they did not have these things that the Jews had. *They* understood they did not have that “most favored nation” status that Israel held. Thus they came to God not with their hands full of sacrifice, but upon their knees! They came in humility! If only the Jewish nation would have looked back and remembered their past!

Paul presents a mystical irony here. The Gentiles never really tried to *be* righteous as the Jewish nation did with all of their rituals and sacrifices. And yet...*they* found Him! Or rather, *He found them*. And despite all of their efforts, the Jewish people did *not* find their “so sought after” Messiah. They tried so hard...but they were and yet still are operating according to their own ideals and under their own efforts instead of *His*! So many folks of every nation throughout the world are *still* missing Him despite much effort to “find God.”

Vs 9:33 God warned them of this in the Scriptures when he said, “I am placing a stone in Jerusalem that makes people stumble, a rock that makes them fall. But anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.”

Paul finishes up this chapter with the true and yet so seldom accepted description of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this “stumbling stone,” this “rock of offense,” is laying not only at the feet of Israel, but at the feet of the world! They have “stumbled” over His grace and mercy. After all, works and rituals are far easier than living by faith! Jesus is the “rock,” the *stone*, the living foundation of life! He will either be that foundation for us or we will trip over Him on our journey of “self-discovery.” Matthew 21:44 “...*whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.*”

So the bottom line is “God’s not fair.” And ya know...it’s a good thing that He isn’t. For we all would be forever lost if He was. God’s not fair. Praise the Lord!