

Israel's Rejection of Christ

Romans 9

July 31, 2022

God's Faithfulness (Romans 9:1–13)

His theme was God's election of Israel; and the first thing he dealt with was the blessing of their election (Rom. 9:4–5). Israel was adopted by God as His own people (Ex. 4:22–23). He gave them His glory in the tabernacle and the temple (Ex. 40:34–38; 1 Kings 8:10–11). The glory Moses beheld on Mount Sinai came to dwell with Israel (Ex. 24:16–17). God gave Israel His covenants, the first to Abraham, and then additional covenants to Moses and to David. He also gave them His Law to govern their political, social, and religious life, and to guarantee His blessing if they obeyed. He gave them “the service of God,” referring to the ministry in the tabernacle and the temple. He gave them the promises and the patriarchs (“the fathers” in Rom. 9:5). The purpose of all of this blessing was that Jesus Christ, through Israel, might come into the world. (Note that Rom. 9:5 affirms that Jesus Christ is God.) All of these blessings were given freely to Israel and to no other nation. But in spite of these blessings, Israel failed. When the Messiah appeared, Israel rejected Him and crucified Him. No one knew this better than Paul, because in his early days he had persecuted the church. Does Israel's failure mean that God's Word has failed? (The Greek word translated “taken none effect” pictures a ship going off its course.) The answer is, “No! God is faithful no matter what men may do with His Word.” Here Paul explains the basis for Israel's election.¹

It was not of natural descent (vs. 6–10).

It is not of human merit (vs. 11–13).

God chose Jacob before the babies were born. The two boys had done neither good nor evil, so God's choice was not based on their character or conduct. Romans 9:13 is a reference to Malachi 1:2–3 and refers to nations (Israel and Edom) and not individual sinners. God does not hate sinners. John 3:16 makes it clear that He loves sinners. The statement here has to do with national election, not individual. Since God's election of Israel does not depend on human merit, their disobedience cannot nullify the elective purposes of God. God is faithful even though His people are unfaithful.²

God's Righteousness (Romans 9:14–18)

“Is there unrighteousness with God?” Election is always totally a matter of grace. If God acted only on the basis of righteousness, nobody would ever be saved. Paul quoted Exodus 33:19 to show that God's mercy and compassion are extended according to God's will and not man's will. All of us deserve condemnation—not mercy.

Paul then quoted Exodus 9:16, using Pharaoh as an illustration. Moses was a Jew; Pharaoh was a Gentile; yet both were sinners. In fact, both were murderers! Both saw God's wonders. Yet Moses was saved and Pharaoh was lost. God raised up Pharaoh that He might reveal His glory and power; and He had mercy on Moses that He might use him to deliver the people of Israel. Pharaoh was a ruler, and Moses was a slave; yet it was Moses who experienced the mercy and compassion of God—because God willed it that way. God is sovereign in His work and acts according to His own will and purposes. So it was not a matter of righteousness but of the sovereign will of God.

A seminary professor once said to me, “Try to explain election, and you may lose your mind; but explain it away and you will lose your soul!”³

God chose Israel and condemned Egypt, because this was His sovereign purpose. Nobody can condemn God for the way He extends His mercy, because God is righteous.

What about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Rom. 9:18)? This hardening process is referred to at least fifteen times in Exodus 7–14. Sometimes we are told that Pharaoh hardened his heart (Ex. 8:15, 19, 32), and other times that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27). By declaring His Word and revealing His power, God gave Pharaoh opportunity

¹ Warren Wiersbe

² Ibid

³ Ibid

to repent; but instead, Pharaoh resisted God and hardened his heart. The fault lay not with God but Pharaoh. The same sunlight that melts the ice also hardens the clay. God was not unrighteous in His dealings with Pharaoh because He gave him many opportunities to repent and believe.⁴

God's Justice (Romans 9:19–29)

Who are we to argue with God? (vv. 19–21) This is a logical argument. God is the Potter and we are the clay. God is wiser than we are and we are foolish to question His will or to resist it. (The reference here is to Isa. 45:9.) To be sure, the clay has no life and is passive in the potter's hand. We have feelings, intellect, and willpower, and we can resist Him if we choose. (See Jer. 18 where this thought is developed.) But it is God who determines whether a man will be a Moses or a Pharaoh. Neither Moses, nor Pharaoh, nor anyone else, could choose his parents, his genetic structure, or his time and place of birth. We have to believe that these matters are in the hands of God. However, this does not excuse us from responsibility. Pharaoh had great opportunities to learn about the true God and trust Him, and yet he chose to rebel. Paul did not develop this aspect of truth because his theme was divine sovereignty, not human responsibility. The one does not deny the other, even though our finite minds may not fully grasp them both.⁵

God's Grace (Romans 9:30–33)

Paul moved next from divine sovereignty to human responsibility. Note that Paul did not say “elect” and “nonelect,” but rather emphasized faith. Here is a paradox: the Jews sought for 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. “For there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:22–23). Instead of permitting their religious privileges (Rom. 9:1–5) to lead them to Christ, they used these privileges as a substitute for Christ. We need to decide what kind of righteousness we are seeking, whether we are depending on good works and character, or trusting Christ alone for salvation. God does not save people on the basis of birth or behavior. He saves them “by grace, through faith” (Eph. 2:8–9). It is not a question of whether or not we are among God's elect. That is a mystery known only to God. He offers us His salvation by faith. The offer is made to “whosoever will” (Rev. 22:17). After we have trusted Christ, then we have the witness and evidence that we are among His elect (Eph. 1:4–14; 1 Thes. 1:1–10). But first we must trust Him and receive by faith His righteousness which alone can guarantee heaven.⁶

No one will deny that there are many mysteries connected with divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Nowhere does God ask us to choose between these two truths, because they both come from God and are a part of God's plan. They do not compete; they cooperate. The fact that we cannot fully understand *how* they work together does not deny the fact that they do. When a man asked Charles Spurgeon how he reconciled divine sovereignty and human responsibility, Spurgeon replied: “I never try to reconcile friends!”

Prayer Focus:

- **Am I of the elect? How do I know? Have I trusted in Jesus?**
- **Do I have a desire for other to know Jesus?**
- **Thank the Lord that He has called you!**

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid