

SAKLC CONVERSATIONS

Mid-week adult study at St Armands Key Lutheran Church, Sarasota, FL
"ROMANS, a letter for today"
Session Plan for Thursday, April 20, 2017

A TIME OF JOINT PRAYER

THE EXCHANGE OF GOD'S PEACE

A STUDY OF ROMANS 9

OUR OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION:

1. To identify Paul's questions about why and how God could choose to reject the nation of Israel (except for a faithful remnant) and accept people from among the Gentiles; and, to explain how Paul answers these questions.
2. To show how Paul continues to use metaphors to describe God's plan of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles.
3. To discuss God's process of "election" as it is experienced starting very early in Jewish history.
4. To mentally wrestle with the question: "Is God Fair?" in His decisions

Introductory Comments:

In approaching our last 3 study sessions, which focused on Romans 8, statements were made about that chapter being one of the "high points" in all of the Apostle Paul's writings! Now, however, we turn to a portion of Romans that represents one of the most pressing problems confronted by the church in every age – the problem of the Jews! The next chapters, Romans 9-11, are very complicated and difficult to understand. Therefore, prior to "unwrapping" them, it is important to understand some ideas that Paul was using and the context in which these chapters were written.

It is suggested that we proceed with the following understandings:

- a) These chapters were not written in ANGER; they were written with a "HEAVY HEART."
- b) PAUL never lost sight of the fact that he was a JEW. His greatest desire would have been to have Jews accept Jesus Christ!
- c) The Apostle never denies that the JEWS were indeed GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE. The special place of the Jews in God's plan of salvation was the starting point of a huge "problem." Jesus, himself, was a Jew! God gave the Jews:
 - I. The Covenants
 - II. The Patriarchs
 - III. Temple Worship
 - IV. The Law
 - V. The Glory of His Presence
- d) While it is true that the Jews as a nation rejected Jesus, it is also true that some accepted him; the N.T. reports that many of the earliest followers of Jesus, who worshipped together in "house church groupings", were Jews!

- e) Looking retrospectively back on history, Paul makes the point that racial descent from Abraham does not make a Jew.

TEXT: Romans 9:1-13 (AMP TRANSLATION) *Paul's concern for his fellow Jews*

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me [enlightened and prompted] ***by the Holy Spirit,*** ² ***that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.*** ³ ***For*** [if it were possible] ***I would wish that I myself were accursed,*** [separated, banished] ***from Christ for the sake*** [of the salvation] ***of my brothers, my natural kinsmen,*** ⁴ ***who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, the glory*** (Shekinah), ***the*** [special] ***covenants*** [with Abraham, Moses, and David], ***the giving of the Law, the*** [system of temple] ***worship, and the*** [original] ***promises.*** ⁵ ***To them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to His natural descent, came the Christ*** (the Messiah, the Anointed), ***He who is exalted and supreme over all, God blessed forever. Amen.***

⁶ ***However, it is not as though God's word has failed*** [coming to nothing]. ***For not all who are descended from Israel*** (Jacob) ***are*** [the true] ***Israel;*** ⁷ ***and they are not all the children of Abraham because they are his descendants*** [by blood], ***but*** [the promise was]: ***"YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED THROUGH ISAAC"*** [though Abraham had other sons]. ⁸ ***That is, it is not the children of the body*** [Abraham's natural descendants] ***who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are counted as*** [Abraham's true] ***descendants.*** ⁹ ***For this is what the promise said: "ABOUT THIS TIME*** [next year] ***I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON."*** ¹⁰ ***And not only that, but this too: Rebekah conceived twin sons by one man*** [under the same circumstances], ***by our father Isaac;*** ¹¹ ***and though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything either good or bad, so that God's purpose*** [His choice, His election] ***would stand, not because of works*** [done by either child], ***but because of*** [the plan of] ***Him who calls them,*** ¹² ***it was said to her, "THE¹OLDER*** (Esau) ***WILL SERVE THE¹YOUNGER*** (Jacob)."¹³ ***As it is written and forever remains written, "JACOB I LOVED*** (chose, protected, blessed), ***BUT ESAU I HATED*** (held in disregard compared to Jacob)."

Scriptural Footnotes:

- a. Vs.4 The Hebrew word "Shekinah" ("divine presence") does not appear in Scripture, but has been used by both Christians and Jews to describe the visible Presence of God (the brilliant light of the divine), in such things as the burning bush, the cloud and the pillar of fire that led the Hebrews in the wilderness, and the Presence of God that rested between the cherubim over the mercy seat of the ark. It is said in the Talmud that the Emperor Hadrian once told a rabbi, "I want to see your God." The rabbi replied, "You cannot see him." "Indeed," said the Emperor, "I will see him." So the rabbi took the Emperor and positioned him to face the sun during the summer solstice, and said to him, "Look at it." He replied, "I am not able to." The rabbi said, "If you are not able to look at the sun, which is merely one of the servants that attend the Holy One—blessed be He—then how can you presume to look at the divine presence!"
- b. Vs. 12 The descendants of Esau, the Edomites.
- c. vs. 12 The descendants of Jacob (Israel), the Israelites.
- d. vs. 13 The Israelites received God's protection and blessing.
- e. vs. 13 The Edomites were left to God's judgment.

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF EARLY JEWISH HISTORY:

- a) Repeatedly, in history, there was in “*God’s wisdom*” a process – Paul calls it (vs. 11) “*election*” – whereby some of those who were racial descendants of Abraham were chosen and some were rejected. This selection had nothing to do with merit; it was not an “*earned right*”; it was entirely the work of God! The God of the Jews and “*our God is one who acts*”; moreover, His actions are sometimes beyond the powers of human comprehension! As examples:
- i. Isaac – Ishmael (*below: the significant details of this story as told in Genesis*) –
 - Abraham had been told by God that he would father many nations
 - His wife, Sarah, knowing she was past the age of child bearing, tried to help Abraham by allowing Abraham to have a child by her handmaid that he might fulfill God's promise.
 - But Sarah got jealous when Hagar (*the Egyptian handmaid*) conceived; and, Sarah beat her and Hagar ran away.
 - God told Hagar to go back because the child she was carrying would be the father of a great nation.
 - Ishmael was born.
 - When Ishmael was 13, God told Abraham to circumcise himself and his people as a token of the Covenant God had made with him.
 - Thereafter, God told Sarah and Abraham that they would have a son together.
 - Isaac was born and then circumcised when he was eight days old.
 - After Isaac was weaned, Ishmael and his mother were sent away.
 - God intervened to save Ishmael and his mother
 - God called on Abraham to sacrifice Isaac whom God then called Abraham's "only son".
 - When Abraham died, he was buried by both Isaac and Ishmael. He left everything he owned to Isaac, with a few gifts for his later children (*he had remarried after Sarah died*) though no mention of leaving anything specific to Ishmael.
 - To some the example of Isaac not Ishmael might not be convincing enough, because each child had a different mother.
 - In the next example, however, both had the same father/mother; more pointedly, they were offspring of the same conception!
 - ii. Jacob – Esau: twins born of Isaac and Rebecca (*for further exposition see – Genesis 25:19-34*)
 - God’s choice was apart from custom or tradition, which would have granted supremacy to the 1st born, Esau.
 - God’s choice not influenced by any ‘*good*’ done by Jacob, or ‘*evil*’ done by Esau; in fact, Jacob was a rascal!
 - God acted not out of any obligation, but rather on basis of his sovereignty.
- b) God’s chosen people in the O.T., never really included the entire nation. “*Chosen-ness*” was experienced in being part of the “**RIGHTEOUS REMNANT.**” As examples:

- I. Prophet: Elijah – 1 Kings 19:18 *“Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”*
 - II. Prophet Isaiah – Isa. 10:22 *“For though your people Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness.”*
- c) **PAUL’S POINT** – At no time in Israel’s’ history were the *whole* people the *chosen people*. A principle of *selection* was always at work; an *election solely on the part of God*. God makes choices according to His Divine Purpose! Israel failed because God willed it so. God’s reason for Israel’s unbelief will be more thoroughly explained in Romans 11, but for now we must accept the fact that God, far from being obliged to bless every Jew on the basis of his ancestry, is free to choose whomever He wills and to reject whom He wills.

DISCUSSION BREAK – Summarizing our thoughts

1. Thus far, what are the main points made in these opening vss. of Romans 9?
2. How much love did Paul have for the nation of Israel?
3. Does the list of God’s blessings to Israel include eternal life and a guarantee of God’s favor on each individual Jew with eternal salvation?
4. Who are the true children of God?

TEXT: Romans 9:14-29 (AMP TRANSLATION) **God’s Sovereign Will; A Defense of God’s Election; God’s Word is not being frustrated, but rather fulfilled!**

¹⁴ *What shall we say then? Is there injustice with God? Certainly not!* ¹⁵ *For He says to Moses, “I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOMEVER I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOMEVER I HAVE COMPASSION.”* ¹⁶ *So then God’s choice is not dependent on human will, nor on human effort* [THE TOTALITY OF HUMAN STRIVING], *but on God who shows mercy* [TO WHOMEVER HE CHOOSES—IT IS HIS SOVEREIGN GIFT]. ¹⁷ *For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “I RAISED YOU UP FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE, TO DISPLAY MY POWER IN* [DEALING WITH] *YOU, AND SO THAT MY NAME WOULD BE PROCLAIMED IN ALL THE EARTH.”* ¹⁸ *So then, He has mercy on whom He wills* (CHOOSES), *and He* ^[1] *hardens* [THE HEART OF] *whom He wills.* ¹⁹ *You will say to me then, “Why does He still blame me* [FOR SINNING]? *For who* [INCLUDING MYSELF] *has* [EVER] *resisted His will and purpose?”* ²⁰ *On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers* [ARROGANTLY] *back to God and dares to defy Him? Will the thing which is formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?”* ²¹ *Does the potter not have the right over the clay, to make from the same lump* [OF CLAY] *one object for honorable use* [SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL OR DISTINCTIVE] *and another for common use* [SOMETHING ORDINARY OR MENIAL]? ²² *What if God, although willing to show His* [TERRIBLE] *wrath and to make His power known, has tolerated with great patience the objects of His wrath* [WHICH ARE] *prepared for destruction?* ²³ *And what if He has done so to make known the riches of His glory to the objects of His mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory,* ²⁴ *including us, whom He also called, not only from among the Jews, but also from among the Gentiles?* ²⁵ *Just as He says in* [THE WRITINGS OF THE PROPHET] *Hosea:*

“I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, ‘MY PEOPLE,’

AND [I WILL CALL] HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED, ‘BELOVED.’”

***26 “AND IT SHALL BE THAT 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 And Isaiah calls out concerning Israel: “THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL BE LIKE THE
SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS ONLY THE REMNANT [A SMALL BELIEVING MINORITY] THAT WILL BE SAVED [FROM GOD’S
JUDGMENT]; 28 FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD UPON THE EARTH [HE WILL CONCLUDE HIS DEALINGS WITH
MANKIND] COMPLETELY AND WITHOUT DELAY.” 29 It is as Isaiah foretold,***

***“IF THE LORD OF HOSTS HAD NOT LEFT US SEED [FUTURE GENERATIONS FROM WHICH A BELIEVING REMNANT OF ISRAELITES
CAME],***

***WE WOULD HAVE BECOME LIKE SODOM, AND WOULD HAVE RESEMBLED GOMORRAH [TOTALLY REJECTED AND
DESTROYED]!”***

SCRIPTURAL FOOTNOTE:

[1] harden – to make callous, to make strong; it can be accomplished in 2 ways:

- a) indirectly, by providing occasion to repent or resist
- b) directly, by strengthening those who rebel so as to contrast power, mercy, or judgment

SO ----- IS GOD FAIR? (Is it fair of God to select some (GENTILES) and to reject others (ISRAEL)?)

- a) Paul’s Question: If Jews are *elected/rejected* through no *fault/virtue* of their own, how can they be blamed for rejecting Christ?
- b) Paul’s Answer: God can do whatever God likes; humans have no right whatsoever to question God’s decisions.
- c) Election has nothing to do with justice; it is a matter of mercy. We are speaking of the Grace of God when we speak of election.
- d) Mercy withholds punishment which is rightfully deserved. God cannot be accused of injustice
- e) Paul contrasts the lives of two men who were contemporaries: Moses and Pharaoh. To Moses, God exercised mercy; to Pharaoh, God exercised His justice. God used both men to further His purposes.
- f) Pharaoh was once the object of God’s wrath. God brought him on the stage of history simply and solely to be the instrument through which God’s avenging power was demonstrated.
- g) The hardening of Pharaoh was an act of Grace so far as the Jews were concerned, for it provided the occasion for their release.
- h) A reminder for your facilitator of the Book of Job – and its questions!5
- i) Potter/Clay are reminders of who God is; the clay cannot talk back to the craftsman who shapes it, either for a very honorable purpose, or for a very menial purpose. That, says Paul, is what God {*the Master Craftsman*} has the right to do with humans!
- j) Hosea quoted in vs. 25-26, was the prophet who was to marry a harlot. His relationship with his adulterous wife was a picture of Israel’s infidelity to God. Because of the infidelity of Israel, God disowned them, so that they were no longer His people. But God also promised that after their chastening He would once again draw them to Himself and call them His people. Technically, this passage referred to God’s relationship to Israel. But Paul saw in this passage a principle. This principle was that God was going to restore to Himself a people that was not His own (just as Israel had become). This principle could equally apply to the Gentiles as it could to the adulterous nation of Israel.

- k) Isaiah quoted in vss. 28-29 is to show that God's judgment demanded severe punishment on disobedient Israel. But in this message of punishment there was also a ray of hope, for God promised to preserve a remnant; and, in this remnant rested Israel's hope for future blessing. The greater context of Isaiah's prophecy was that of the apostasy of the northern kingdom of Israel and the judgement of God through the Assyrians. Although the divine judgment was devastating ("completely and without delay") there was the promise of preservation of a small remnant without which Israel's hopes would have been totally destroyed.

DISCUSSION BREAK –

1. Is the implication here, that "If God has chosen me to be saved, I will be saved in spite of myself?"
2. Conversely, "If God has not chosen me, is there no hope for my salvation?"
3. Is that fair? Why should one person go to heaven; another to "hell" just on God's whim?

TEXT: Romans 9:30-33 (AMP TRANSLATION) **ISRAEL'S UNBELIEF**

³⁰ What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness [WHO DID NOT SEEK SALVATION AND A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, NEVERTHELESS] **obtained righteousness, that is, the righteousness which is produced by faith;** ³¹ **whereas Israel,** [THOUGH ALWAYS] **pursuing the law of righteousness, did not succeed in fulfilling the law.** ³² **And why not? Because it was not by faith** [THAT THEY PURSUED IT], **but as though it were by works** [RELYING ON THE MERIT OF THEIR WORKS INSTEAD OF THEIR FAITH]. **They stumbled over the stumbling Stone** [JESUS CHRIST]. ³³ **As it is written and forever remains written,**

***"BEHOLD I AM LAYING IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE;
AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM*** [WHOEVER ADHERES TO, TRUSTS IN, AND RELIES ON HIM] ***WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED*** [IN HIS EXPECTATIONS]."

The Basis of God's Choice: Faith vs. No Faith

- A) For the Gentiles (vs. 30)
 - i. Though they had not actively been looking for it (30a)
 - ii. Yet many have attained righteousness through faith (30b)
- B) For Israel (vss. 31-33)
 - i. Though diligent for the Law, did not have the attitude of faith (31-32a)
 - ii. And, therefore stumbled over Christ, as foretold by Isaiah (32b-33)

CONCLUSIONS:

1. Romans 9 contains some very difficult passages and phrases, but the main point is clear:
2. The Jews were upset that their theocratic, national status had changed and Gentiles were being accepted into God's family.
3. Paul is just beginning to make his response in Romans 9; when we proceed to Romans 10 & 11 further clarification will be gained.
4. We conclude this chapter (9) affirming that Paul believed God did what He decided to do; who are we (Jew or Gentile) to reply, find fault, or argue with God?
5. Earlier we asked the question: Is God fair? YES! Because anybody, regardless of race, gender, education, social standing – anybody can hear, believe and obey the Gospel of Christ and be saved!

FOR COMPARISON SAKE – ROMANS 9 – THE MESSAGE TRANSLATION:

9¹⁻⁵ At the same time, you need to know that I carry with me at all times a huge sorrow. It's an enormous pain deep within me, and I'm never free of it. I'm not exaggerating—Christ and the Holy Spirit are my witnesses. It's the Israelites . . . If there were any way I could be cursed by the Messiah so they could be blessed by him, I'd do it in a minute. They're my family. I grew up with them. They had everything going for them—family, glory, covenants, revelation, worship, promises, to say nothing of being the race that produced the Messiah, the Christ, who is God over everything, always. Oh, yes!

6-9 Don't suppose for a moment, though, that God's Word has malfunctioned in some way or other. The problem goes back a long way. From the outset, not all Israelites of the flesh were Israelites of the spirit. It wasn't Abraham's sperm that gave identity here, but God's *promise*. Remember how it was put: "Your family will be defined by Isaac"? That means that Israelite identity was never racially determined by sexual transmission, but it was *God-determined* by promise. Remember that promise, "When I come back next year at this time, Sarah will have a son"?

10-13 And that's not the only time. To Rebecca, also, a promise was made that took priority over genetics. When she became pregnant by our one-of-a-kind ancestor, Isaac, and her babies were still innocent in the womb—incapable of good or bad—she received a special assurance from God. What God did in this case made it perfectly plain that his purpose is not a hit-or-miss thing dependent on what we do or don't do, but a sure thing determined by his decision, flowing steadily from his initiative. God told Rebecca, "The firstborn of your twins will take second place." Later that was turned into a stark epigram: "I loved Jacob; I hated Esau."

14-18 Is that grounds for complaining that God is unfair? Not so fast, please. God told Moses, "*I'm* in charge of mercy. *I'm* in charge of compassion." Compassion doesn't originate in our bleeding hearts or moral sweat, but in God's mercy. The same point was made when God said to Pharaoh, "I picked you as a bit player in this drama of my salvation power." All we're saying is that God has the first word, initiating the action in which we play our part for good or ill.

19 Are you going to object, "So how can God blame us for anything since he's in charge of everything? If the big decisions are already made, what say do we have in it?"

20-33 Who in the world do you think you are to second-guess God? Do you for one moment suppose any of us knows enough to call God into question? Clay doesn't talk back to the fingers that mold it, saying, "Why did you shape me like this?" Isn't it obvious that a potter has a perfect right to shape one lump of clay into a vase for holding flowers and another into a pot for cooking beans? If God needs one style of pottery especially designed to show his angry displeasure and another style carefully crafted to show his glorious goodness,

isn't that all right? Either or both happens to Jews, but it also happens to the other people. Hosea put it well:

**I'll call nobodies and make them somebodies;
I'll call the unloved and make them beloved.
In the place where they yelled out, "You're nobody!"
they're calling you "God's living children."**

Isaiah maintained this same emphasis:

**If each grain of sand on the seashore were numbered
and the sum labeled "chosen of God,"
They'd be numbers still, not names;
salvation comes by personal selection.
God doesn't count us; he calls us by name.
Arithmetic is not his focus.**

Isaiah had looked ahead and spoken the truth:

**If our powerful God
had not provided us a legacy of living children,
We would have ended up like ghost towns,
like Sodom and Gomorrah.**

How can we sum this up? All those people who didn't seem interested in what God was doing actually *embraced* what God was doing as he straightened out their lives. And Israel, who seemed so interested in reading and talking about what God was doing, missed it. How could they miss it? Because instead of trusting God, *they* took over. They were absorbed in what they themselves were doing. They were so absorbed in their "God projects" that they didn't notice God right in front of them, like a huge rock in the middle of the road. And so they stumbled into him and went sprawling. Isaiah (again!) gives us the metaphor for pulling this together:

**Careful! I've put a huge stone on the road to Mount Zion,
a stone you can't get around.
But the stone is me! If you're looking for me,
you'll find me on the way, not in the way.**

The Message (MSG)

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