

GOD'S SOVEREIGN MERCY, PT. 4

ROMANS 9:6-18

There are some things we don't like to talk about or think about.

- ✓ Because we don't like to think about our finances we don't balance our bank statement for six months — and that tends to make us want to think about it even less!
- ✓ We don't like to talk about conflict — and the sin that causes conflict in our relationships (when I was candidating I was asked, "how do you handle conflict?" I don't remember what I said, but I remember I was more sure of myself than I should have been).
- ✓ We don't like to have the "birds and bees" talk with our children.
- ✓ We don't like our bosses to say, "come see me in my office."
- ✓ And some of us don't like it when the preacher says, "this morning's sermon is on divine election..."

Yet hard conversations are good for us in many ways, and hard truths in Scripture are revealed to us by God so that we will worship Him and have a greater view of His greatness and supremacy. And that is exactly why we have the extended discussion that we do in Romans 9 on divine election. It is given to us to make us to be confident in God and His faithfulness to save His children. He is faithful to His salvation plan for Israel and for us. That plan, which Paul begins to unfold in Romans 9:6-18, reveals that —

SALVATION IS ALWAYS THE RESULT OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN, MERCIFUL, AND FAITHFUL CHOICE.

In verses 6-18, there are five demonstrations of God's faithfulness; we looked at the first four previously; we will look at the final one today:

1. **God is Faithful — His Promises Don't **FAIL** (v. 6a)**
2. **God is Faithful — His Election Doesn't **FAIL** (v. 6b)**
3. **God is Faithful — His Election of Isaac is **TYPICAL** (vv. 7-9)**
4. **God is Faithful — His Purposes Will **STAND** (vv. 10-13)**
5. **God is Faithful — His Non-Election of Pharaoh is **IUST** (vv. 14-18)**

1. God is Faithful — His Promises Don't FAIL (v. 6a)

- In chs. 9-11, Paul is addressing whether or not God is faithful and trustworthy. He anticipates questions from his readers because in spite of the exultation in salvation in 8:31-39, Israel has not repented and the covenantal promises to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) have not been fulfilled. So the readers might ask, "If God hasn't saved Israel when He promised to save her, is He unfaithful?" Paul is anticipating that some might come to think God isn't faithful and can't be trusted for their salvation.
- Paul's immediate answer to his anticipated question (v. 6) is an unequivocal, "No!" — ***But it is not as though the word of God has failed.*** Because God is God, He *must* be faithful to His promises; Israel *will* be saved as a nation, and believing Gentiles *will* also be saved (through His faithfulness to Himself).

2. God is Faithful — His Election Doesn't FAIL (v. 6b)

- In the middle of v. 6 Paul places the word ***for*** to provide a reason that God's Word has not failed. And the reason quite simply is that ***they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel*** — that is, not all physical descendants are spiritual descendants of Abraham. They aren't descendants because they aren't elect — they haven't been individually chosen for salvation.
- Paul is demonstrating the adequacy and power of God; He has chosen who will be saved and all He chooses will be saved. God is faithful to His elective promises.
- Paul follows this with three illustrations of God's election: Isaac, Jacob, and Pharaoh.

3. God is Faithful — His Election of Isaac is TYPICAL (vv. 7-9)

- To demonstrate that not all Israelites are chosen and part of the promise, Paul uses the story of Isaac — that the promise to Abraham and Israel (Gen. 12:1-3) will be fulfilled through Isaac.
 - ✓ *God made a call (named, v. 7)* to use the line of Isaac to complete His promises — ***through Isaac.***
 - ✓ *God made a promise (v. 8).* Isaac was born only because of the divine promise and intervention of God; those who belong to Israel are only the result of divine intervention, and if we are saved, it is only because of divine intervention (8:30; 9:18).
 - ✓ *God (alone) acted to fulfill the promise.* Verse 9 emphasizes God's activity. He will come and in His coming the promise will be fulfilled. Abraham and Sarah did nothing to fulfill the promise; God did the work. That is the same way God's electing purposes in salvation always work; He does it all.

4. God is Faithful — His Purposes Will STAND (vv. 10-13)

- God's plan of election is demonstrated in Isaac, but Paul says (v. 10), **and not only this....** That is, there is more. God's sovereign, divine election is also seen in Isaac's wife Rebekah, and Jacob and Esau.
 - ✓ God's purpose and God's choice alone was the distinguishing act (v. 11b). The words **so that** emphasize the inadequacy of Jacob and Esau to influence God's electing plan. It was so that God would be seen as preeminent and sovereign. It was to emphasize God's superiority and greatness.
 - God chose Jacob to accomplish His **purpose**. God had a plan, will, and resolve with the boys and with the nation of Israel, and that purpose could not be thwarted.
 - God chose Jacob as a result of His electing **choice**. The word **choice** is often translated "election." God has selected which of the two would carry forward the Abrahamic promise. For His own purposes — His own personal interest and desire, God chose Jacob (and not Esau).
 - God chose Jacob by means of His **call** (v. 11d). Paul emphasizes a contrast — *not works, but call*. It was God's effectual, gracious call that chose Jacob. The cause of salvation is wholly in the hands of God, who sovereignly and effectually calls. Election and choice are not merited; election is never about what a man does to ingratiate God.
 - ✓ From start to finish, everything about our salvation is all of God, and that's what makes it secure. God's promise to Israel has not failed, and His word of promise to us for salvation will not fail.
- What about God's hatred of Esau (v. 13; Mal. 1:2-3)? Isn't that unfair?
 - ✓ **Jacob** (which is a reference to the nation of Israel, not the person) is **loved** with an elective, special love as an adopted, redeemed people and nation. God loved with a particular love in which He chose them and then brought them in fellowship with Him through faith (Dt. 7:7; Ezk. 16:1ff). God's love of Jacob is an expression of His unconditional choice of Jacob — a choice that did not require Jacob to meet any obligation or condition for it to be met. God loved because He did.
 - ✓ **Esau** (which is a reference to the nation of Edom, not the person) is **hated** as an expression of God's wrath against sinners who have rejected Him.
 - God does not hate them for their non-election. He hates them for their rebellion and unbelief.
 - We need to think carefully and rightly about what God's hatred and wrath are. While God is intrinsically loving ("God is love," 1 Jn. 4:8), He does not intrinsically hate (His hatred did not exist in the eternal past, because there was nothing for Him to hate). D. A. Carson is helpful:

"God's wrath is not an implacable, blind rage. However emotional it may be, it is an entirely reasonable and willed response to offenses against this holiness...God in his perfections must be wrathful against his rebel image-bearers, for they have offended him..." [The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God, 69.]

- It is that kind of hatred God has for Esau. Note that **Mal. 1:2-4** speaks of God's *eternal* judgment against Edom for her wickedness (v. 4). He doesn't just "love Edom less;" He *hates* Edom as a just expression of His wrath against its sin. They are culpable for their sin.
- God's hatred is actually part of His attribute of wrath and judgment: God's wrath is an expression of His righteous hatred of sin. He *must* pour out His judgment against sin (**1:18**).
- So when God says He hates Esau in this verse, it is an expression of His condemnation against Edom for its rejection of God — His hatred is an expression of His right wrath (as it always is).
- Esau (Edom) was not loved by God through His elective plan, and thus Edom remained in sin and remained under the condemnation and wrath of God, and therefore was hated by Him.
- ✓ Even when God hates sin and sinners, though, there is a great expression of grace:
 - He withholds His wrath, waiting for repentance (**Rom. 2:4**). That He doesn't immediately send sinners to Hell after their first sin is an expression of loving grace.
 - Even while hating the unregenerate, He still has a love for them as His created beings and is compassionate to them (Jn. 3:16; Ps. 145:8-9). God is on a worldwide search-and-rescue mission.
 - While God did hate Edom, it is also true that God loves and adopts as His children many whom He hates. Every believer in Christ was once the object of God's hatred and wrath (5:8). But His loving grace superseded His hatred and folded us into His family. Why? Because He loved (there is no good reason for grace, other than it is an expression of God's love, cf. **9:23**).
- ✓ It is not unfair that God hates Esau — Esau/Edom has simply remained where it was as a rejecter of God — under His wrath and condemnation. Esau did not receive any injustice from God by being hated by Him; Esau received exactly what it deserved. Esau received full justice
- ✓ It's never unfair for God to hate sinners. His hatred of sin and sinners is always just and righteous. What's "unjust" — and what's amazing grace — is that God loves sinners, which is Paul's next point.

5. God is Faithful — His Non-Election of Pharaoh is JUST (vv. 14-18)

• Objection: God's Election is Unjust (v. 14)

- ✓ In verse 14 Paul again anticipates an objection from his readers: *what shall we say then?* He asks the question, "what then" 7x in this letter (Rom 3:1; 4:1; **6:1; 7:7; 8:31**; 9:14, 30). The question frequently follows significant (and difficult) teaching, as it does here.
- ✓ Paul uses that phrase to introduce a real objection that many have: "God's not fair." In fact, they go even further than that, saying, "That's not *right*; God's not just in what He does." So Paul asks the question, *There is no injustice with God, is there?*
- ✓ Paul answers that question with his dogmatic, *may it never be!* I.e., "may that never come to existence," or "that's impossible" or "such a thought is abhorrent!" (E.g., **3:3-4, 5-6**; 6:2).

- ✓ In ch. 3, Paul uses the same expression in the same context to communicate the same truth — God is not unrighteous in His condemnation of sinners; in this passage, Paul is asserting that God is not unjust, even when He has not chosen them for salvation.
- ✓ The word **unrighteous** refers to a violation of a standard of right conduct. It is wrongdoing — and wickedness and unrighteousness. Paul is not asking, “Did God make a mistake?” (a non-moral error), but “Did God sin in what He did? Is God morally culpable for a wrong action?”
- ✓ The question is against everything that the Scriptures reveal God to be:
 - God has no capacity for injustice or evil: God is right in all He does (Ps. 145:8)
 - God not only does righteous things, but is full of righteousness (Ps. 48:10; 71:9)
 - God is not only full of righteousness, but His *nature* is righteous (Ps. 119:137, 142)
 - God is opposed to and will condemn all unrighteous activities and people (Rom. 1:18)
 - God is righteous, and if we have any hope of being righteous, it is only through believing in Him, who imputes His righteousness to us (Rom. 1:17)
 - “The idea that God is unjust is unthinkable.” [Kruse, 381.]
- ✓ Paul offers three answers to this objection that God is unjust for His sovereign election.

• Answer 1: God’s Elective Mercy is in Accord with God’s Justice (vv. 15-16)

- ✓ As an affirmation that God is not unjust in election, Paul quotes from Ex. 33:19:
 - Remember the background to this statement —
 - ... Moses had received the two tablets of stone with the Law of God on Sinai (Ex. 31:18)
 - ... At the same time, his brother, Aaron, was making a golden calf to worship (32:1-6)
 - ... In response to their rebellion, God commanded and 3000 men were put to death (32:25-28)
 - ... Moses interceded for the nation (32:30-31) and God affirmed His condemnation of the rebels, but also re-affirmed Moses’ leadership of the people (32:34-35).
 - ... When the people repent (33:4-6) Moses seeks further assurance from God of Moses’ ability to lead the people (33:12ff). God says he will do this for Moses, because Moses has **found favor in My sight** (33:17). Moses received mercy because that is God’s prerogative (33:19).
 - ... Paul uses this quotation to assert that God has a right to be merciful even when He could (and “should”) pour out His wrath.
 - Notice the repetition of words in vv. 15-16 — **mercy** = 3x and **compassion** = 2x. Paul’s emphasis is not on “justice” (i.e., “is God fair to condemn?”) but on grace (i.e., “isn’t God’s merciful grace amazing?”). Paul is correcting the misplaced emphasis of the objection. The problem is not that God isn’t fair in condemning; the amazement is that God is gracious to any!
- ✓ Paul makes the very conclusion we have already asserted in v. 16 — God’s mercy is not dependent on a **man who wills...or runs, but on God...**

- It is not up to the freedom of a man's *will* to secure his justification; his own desire and intention is not enough to save him (ignoring for the moment that no man desires it; 3:11). It is up to the freedom of God's will to mercifully choose him for and then grant his justification.
- It is not up to a man to *run* — to work strenuously for his justification as a product of his *will* — but it is God's effort alone that mercifully chooses and then produces his justification.
- God's election of sinners is based only on His will and not at all on the will or effort of man.
- Further, no one has a claim on God's mercy — He does not "owe" mercy to anyone (if He did, it would be a wage, and not grace, 4:4, 16). Mercy is God's action alone — and it is an *eternal* plan.
- ✓ How is God still just if He is merciful toward some?
 - He doesn't "overlook" or "ignore" the sin — that would *not* be just.
 - He is just because every sin experiences His just (right) wrath. Either the sinner is condemned in eternal Hell, or Christ absorbs the eternal wrath of God and satisfies God for those who believe in Christ (3:24-25).
 - Paul's point is that even when God is merciful, He is still just.
- ✓ In these verses (vv. 15-16), Paul addresses the objection to God's righteousness (v. 14) — but he turns the question on its head and asks the right question — not "is God righteous in condemning?" but, "is God righteous in being merciful?" As is so often the case, the wrong question is being asked.
- ✓ Paul's point in these verses is not that we should be astounded that God condemns sinners who have not been chosen; we should be astounded that God has been merciful to any. We tend to be indignant when people receive justice; we should be astounded when some receive mercy.
- ✓ I can't say it any better than the commentator Leon Morris:

"God is not unjustly condemning some, but in mercy saving some. We sinners have no claim on God whatever. If we are saved, that is due to God's mercy, not the justice of our cause. To say that God is not just in his treatment of Jacob and Esau misses the point that neither has a claim on God and that in both cases he acts in mercy." [Morris, 359.]

• **Answer 2: God's Non-Election is in Accord with His Justice (v. 17)**

- ✓ The word *for* in v. 17 indicates that Paul is giving another answer to the objection in v. 14.
- ✓ In vv. 15-16, Paul addressed a "positive" aspect of God's election — that He is merciful to some. His answer paralleled the first statement in v. 13 — *Jacob I loved...*
- ✓ In vv. 17-18, Paul addresses a "negative" aspect of God's election — some do not receive His mercy and that He keeps them under His wrath. His answer parallels the end of v. 13 — *Esau I hated...*
- ✓ Again Paul quotes from the OT, this time from **Ex. 9:16**, the seventh plague against Egypt.
 - ASIDE: As we look at the text, notice that Paul says, *For Scripture says to Pharaoh*, but Exodus is clear that *God* is speaking (v. 13ff). So Paul equates the voice of God and the voice of Scripture. When Scripture speaks, God speaks. We should listen to Scripture in that way.

- The emphasis in this quotation is all about the activity of God —
 - ... ***I raised you up*** — i.e., God elevated Pharaoh to His position in Egypt. Pharaoh did not achieve that position through anything he willed to do or through any action; it was God.
 - ... God raised up Pharaoh for a particular ***purpose***. God had plans in choosing Pharaoh for the position of leader of Egypt. Pharaoh's position wasn't accidental or random, but purposeful.
 - ... God's purpose was for the demonstration of ***God's power*** in Pharaoh. Through Pharaoh's obstinate rebellion, God's greater power was revealed (**15:4-11**). All Pharaoh's greatest strengths were overwhelmed as if they were nothing, to demonstrate that there is no one like God (**Ex. 15:11**). In a similar way, God's judgment of some Israelites prior to saving the nation also resulted in His power being revealed as able to save Gentiles (**Rom. 11:22-25**). (N.B. God's election always has a component of revealing the power of God, **Rom. 9:22**).
 - ... God's purpose was also for the ***proclamation*** of God's ***name*** all over the ***earth*** (to Jew & Gentile). That is exactly what happened (**Ex. 15:14-16**; cf. **Ps. 106**). God's "election" of Pharaoh to his kingship was only an end to God's being glorified.
 - ... Also notice this: God uses the rebellion of the Gentile Pharaoh to proclaim God's name to the people of the world (Gentiles), so that Gentiles will also receive salvation. God used the Gentile, Pharaoh, to accomplish His will that the Israelites proclaim His name to Gentiles.
 - ... God is not unjust, because God's hardening of Pharaoh brings God glory, which is a supreme act of righteousness.
- ✓ In summary, God has chosen and elected Pharaoh to his position as king of Egypt, but God has also *not chosen* Pharaoh to salvation, just as He did not choose Esau/Edom.
- ✓ God was using the non-election of Pharaoh to declare His power and authority over all men. Part of God's authority over all men is His right to judge them, as He did Pharaoh. And God was not unjust when He condemned Pharaoh. God did not elect Pharaoh and that non-election does not mean God is unjust — it actually fits perfectly with His justice, as Paul states in v. 18 —

• **Answer 3: All God's Desires are in Accord with His Justice (v. 18)**

- ✓ ***So then*** is Paul's way of summarizing and drawing this discussion to a conclusion. He has 2 points:
- ✓ ***He has mercy on whom He desires.***
 - The word ***desire*** is often translated "will." It is God's will alone that determines who receives His mercy. It is His intentional plan that makes any to be recipients of His mercy.
 - No one receives mercy apart from God willing them to receive mercy. God's choice of men precedes their trust in Christ (**Jn. 6:44**).
 - But all who have been willed by God to receive His mercy, will receive it.
- ✓ ***He hardens whom He desires.*** This is the more difficult statement.
 - The word ***harden*** means "be unyielding in resisting information," "render obstinate, stubborn."

- The word is used only 6x in the NT; every other time it refers to men hardening themselves.
- But here the two statements are parallel — God is the author of both mercy and hardening & God is actively involved in both mercy and hardening. He has a plan for both, and He does both.
- When people are hardened to God and to the gospel it is because of God's direct involvement.
- Pharaoh gives us a clear example of this:
 - ... Pharaoh hardened his own heart against God (Ex. 7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34, 35).
 - ... But we are also told that God hardened Pharaoh (Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27). And notice that 4:21 precedes any of Pharaoh's personal hardening. God is author of Pharaoh's hard heart. How can this be?
 - ... There is an element of this that is a mystery — how is God sovereign and yet man is responsible for his actions? (I.e., How can God not compel anyone to sin against His will, yet at the same time God can sovereignly use all sin to accomplish His purposes?)
 - ... Paul has already given us a hint, though, at how this works: cf. Rom. 1:24, 26, 28 — men have rebelled against God, and God in His judgment have turned them over to their sin. In essence, "If you want your sin, then I condemn you (harden you) in your sin and to your sin."
 - ... It is important to see that Pharaoh was not neutral to God. He born (like all men), opposed to God and he never wanted God. God did not choose Pharaoh for salvation and God kept him in his rebellion and sin, which is exactly what Pharaoh wanted. And the resulting judgment was entirely what Pharaoh deserved. God is completely just.
- What was true of Pharaoh is true of all men — God is sovereign in His elective purposes of all men: No one is hardened against his will. Everyone who is hardened gets exactly what he wants. And some who are haters and rebellious against God get mercy. Whether God is merciful in electing, or wrathful in not-electing, God is righteous and faithful.

- How shall we think about God's merciful election of some to salvation?

- ✓ As we examine the passage, the questions aren't —
 - Do I agree with the doctrine of divine election?
 - Do I *like* the doctrine of divine election?
 - Does divine election *make sense* to me? (Many doctrines don't — e.g., Trinity, hypostatic union)
- ✓ The questions are:
 - What does the text say? (Can I let it speak to me as if God Himself is speaking the words?)
 - What does the text mean?
 - Why is the text given to us (what is the author's intent with the text)?
- ✓ The goal of these verses is to accomplish several goals. We should:
 - *Be confident in God's faithfulness* to His promises, even when some reject Him.
 - *Have a God-sized view of God*, that He is sovereign over all things in our lives.

- *Trust that God will always do what is right.* God cannot do what is wrong or evil in any way toward you. Trust Him with that.
- *Do not be overly introspective.* This is God's gracious revelation to us who believe so that we can understand how He produced our salvation; it is not given to make us wonder, "have I or my friend been elected?" It's actually quite simple to answer that question: if you believe, then you are elected because the only way you can ever believe is to be elect. And if you do not believe, then you must believe, or you will bear the punishment of God for eternity.
- *Be warned about the consequences of unbelief.* All men are culpable for their sins, and only those who trust in Christ will escape the wrath of God.
- *Worship and give thanks if we are saved.* The goal of all this instruction is to produce joy in our salvation and worship for the God of our salvation (11:36).

CONCLUSION:

BENEDICTION: Romans 11:33-36