

Not Ashamed
(Week 24)
Romans 9:14-33
"Is God Fair?"

Introduction

"What should we say then? Is there injustice with God? Absolutely not!"

Romans 9:14

We live in a society in which the founding fathers declared that "all men are created equal, and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...". We strive for this ideal in our country, and as noble as it may seem, the question remains, "Is this really true?" Does God treat everyone the same? In our mind, that would seem to be fair, would it not? But scripture is pretty clear that everyone is not treated equally. In fact, if we were all to get what we deserved, then all of us would be sentenced to death for our sins,

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Romans 3:23

So, why is it then, that some are saved, while others will be destroyed. The answer is simple. We are saved by God's grace. The very definition of grace is that it is unmerited. God chooses those to whom He will show mercy, and they are spared from His wrath. If it were not for His compassion, all of us would share in the same fate equally. We ALL deserve to die. You have been saved, because of God's mercy, and it had nothing to do with your own "goodness" or what you deserved.

Have you ever stopped to think about why God chose you? I have many times, and I have yet to come up with an answer. I realize from reading the Scriptures that in order to be saved, I must first believe in God's promise. So, there is some requirement upon my part. The question remains, then, how to reconcile God's sovereign election with man's responsibility. When Charles Spurgeon, the great pastor of the 1800's, was asked how he reconciled the two, he replied, "I never try to reconcile friends". Good answer! We know that God's sovereign election and man's responsibility go hand in hand for salvation, but no one really understands the complexity of it all. It is just one of those mysteries that we will have to wait and find out how it works.

While *The Bible* is absolutely clear that those who have been saved were saved by God's sovereign election, nowhere in Scripture does it tell us that those who are lost were predestined for destruction. In fact, God Himself has said that He does not long for anyone to perish. It is because of this that God shows such patience and restraint with the wicked in this world.

"The LORD does not delay His promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance."

2 Peter 3:9

Make no mistake, God knows who are His. He knows exactly who will be left standing at the end, but that doesn't mean that some are never given a chance. And the debate rages on. Many a church split has been brought about by the discussion of God's sovereignty versus man's freewill. But like Spurgeon has said, why must we try and reconcile the two? Let's just agree to let God be God. He is eminently more qualified to work it all out. I, for one, am simply grateful that He decided to have mercy on me!

So, will everyone have the same inalienable rights when it comes to salvation? The short answer here is no. Many are called, but few are chosen (**Matthew 22:14**). And those who are chosen have received this calling by God's own sovereign election. He is God, and He has every right to do so. Today, as we finish with **Romans Chapter Nine**, we see that God's choices are made in complete righteousness. We are not qualified to question His authority, nor His sovereign election. God's decisions are *always* the right ones. Let us look together at God's sovereign election juxtaposed against His promises, and we will see that God will work all things together to accomplish his purposes, for Jews and Gentiles alike, as it pertains to their salvation. He will choose whomever He chooses. **Romans 9:15-33** reconciles these truths for us as we see: The Right, The Remnant, and The Rock.

The Right (vs. 15-22)

“For He tells Moses, I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then, it does not depend on human will or effort but on God Who shows mercy. For the Scripture tells Pharaoh, I raised you up for this reason so that I may display My power in you and that my name be proclaimed in the whole earth. So then, He has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy and He hardens whom He wants to harden. You will say to me, therefore, ‘Why then does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’

On the contrary, who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? Will what is formed say to the one who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ Or has the potter no right over the clay, to make from the same lump one piece of pottery for honor and another for dishonor? And what if God, wanting to display His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience objects of wrath prepared for destruction?”
Romans 9:15-22

As we have previously discussed, verse 15 is a statement that God made to Moses came on the heels of Israel's rebellion in the wilderness. While Moses was in the presence of God up on Mount Sinai receiving The Ten Commandments, the children of Israel were at the foot of the mountain worshipping a golden calf. After being delivered from Egyptian bondage, such a short time later, they had rebelled against the very God Who had rescued them. Rather than destroy every last one of them, God put to death only 3,000 of them that day. Let us be clear here, ALL of those people had rebelled against God, but only a small number of them in proportion to the entire population were destroyed. Why? Because God decided to show mercy to the vast majority of His chosen people. Simple as that. They weren't saved, because they were not guilty. They were saved... by grace. God could have eliminated all of them for their sins against Him, but He spared most of them. It was His choice to do so, and He did. Simple as that.

He made a similar choice between Moses and Pharaoh. Both men were sinners. Pharaoh was a cruel taskmaster, who cared nothing for the suffering of others. This truth is evident from the Scriptures. But lest we forget, Moses was himself a murderer. All things being equal, both men deserved the death penalty for their crimes. And yet, God chose Moses to deliver His people, and He “raised up” Pharaoh to be destroyed.

The question arises from this scenario, as to whether or not Pharaoh ever stood a chance at forgiveness. And it is a legitimate one. A careful reading of the Exodus story will show us that when God first sent plagues upon the land of Egypt, Pharaoh hardened his heart multiple times and would not let the people go. He had witnessed first hand the mighty power of God, but in his own rebellion, refused to humble himself before Him. In Egyptian culture, the Pharaohs were considered as gods, to be worshipped along with the many other deities of the land. Pharaoh, no doubt, was loathe to relinquish this status of superiority and kneel before The Holy One of Israel.

As time goes on in the narrative, we see a change in the language of the Scriptures. During the earliest plagues we read over and again, **“Pharaoh hardened his heart, and would not let the people go.”** But after the sixth plague (boils), we read, **“And God hardened the heart of Pharaoh.” (Exodus 9:12)**. So, the argument could very well be made that God gave Pharaoh the chance to do the right thing, but his pride wouldn't allow him to humble himself before God. Then God took over, and it became impossible for him to do so. I do not pretend to understand all of this, but the combination of Pharaoh's stubborn pride and God's sovereign will clashed in such a way that the Egyptian monarch's fate was sealed, and God used him simply to prove a point.

At one point, God instructs Moses to tell Pharaoh that He could have struck him dead at any time, but he allowed him to live (be raised up) in order that God could display His mighty power for all to see (**Exodus 9:15-16**). It is from this passage that Paul quotes in **Romans 9:17**:

“For The Scripture tells Pharaoh, I raised you up for this reason so that I may display my power in you and that My Name may be proclaimed in the whole earth.”
Romans 9:17

You see, each of the plagues that God sent upon the land of Egypt were related to various Egyptian gods that the people worshipped. God used Pharaoh's own stubborn pride to display that the gods of the Egyptians were false gods, and that the God of the Israelites was in fact the One True God. So, therefore, Pharaoh unwittingly played right in to God's sovereign plan. His rebellion only served to fulfill God's purpose. By the time that God was finished, no one in the land would be able to doubt His power and majesty. Even the Egyptians began to realize this truth by the seventh plague, which is evidenced by the fact they put up all their livestock in order to save them from the plague of hail that Moses predicted. Everyone in the land knew that God was God... except Pharaoh. For him, it was too late. His fate was sealed. God had made His sovereign choice.

The natural result of this is for many to question God. "This doesn't seem fair", they might say. If Pharaoh didn't stand a chance, and Moses who was also a sinner was shown grace, then is God truly being just? Answer: Of course He's being just! He is The Creator and as such has every RIGHT to make such choices. He is the potter. We are the clay. The clay has no say whatsoever, in what the potter does with it. It simply yields itself to his will. That's what "clay" does. We have no right to question the sovereignty of God. Ours is to surrender ourselves over to His power and let Him make of us what He will. If Pharaoh had simply done this, the story would have turned out much differently. Rejection of God's sovereign will is the very essence of being lost. God has the right to do whatever He so chooses with His creation. For those who disagree, your only option is to go and create a universe of your own, and then you can make the rules as you see fit. In this universe, however, God has the right to do as He pleases. He chooses whom He pleases to be saved, and He patiently endures those who are rebellious in order that His divine purpose is revealed.

The Remnant (vs. 23-29)

"And what if He did this to make known the riches of His glory on objects of mercy that He prepared beforehand for glory — on us, the ones he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As it also says in Hosea, I will call Not My People, My People, and she who is Unloved, Beloved. And it will be in the place where they were told, you are not My people, there they will be called sons of The Living God. But Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, though the number of Israelites is like the sand of the sea, only the remnant will be saved; since The LORD will execute His sentence completely and decisively on the earth. And just as Isaiah predicted: If The LORD of Hosts had not left us offspring, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah." **Romans 9:23-29**

Paul then goes on to make the case that in the much the same way, only a portion, or "remnant" as it were, of Israel is destined to receive salvation. Although the Jews mistakenly believed that just by being Jewish and attempting to live according to The Law of Moses, they would automatically be saved from the day of judgment that will one day come upon the world, *The Old Testament* scriptures themselves tell an entirely different story. Just as some of the Israelites in the wilderness were spared, while others were not, and just as Moses was chosen over Pharaoh, only some of God's chosen people (The Jews) would ultimately believe in Christ and receive salvation.

Hosea was a very interesting prophet. God chose him to be a living example of His faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness. He commanded the prophet to marry an adulterous prostitute (named Gomer, meaning *complete*) and care for her, even though he knew that she would be unfaithful. The marriage was meant to "completely" symbolize the kind of "wife" that Israel had been to God, Who had chosen her. The marriage between Hosea and Gomer had produced three children; two sons, Jezreel (meaning "*God will sow*") and Lo-ammi (meaning "*not my people*"), as well as, a daughter named Loruhamah (meaning "*no mercy*"). This marriage between Hosea and Gomer, as well as, the three children that resulted from it, tell the complete story of God's relationship with Israel. Israel, like Gomer, was an adulteress. The nation had been chosen by God (her loving Husband), and in spite of the fact the He had graciously provided for her in every way, she still rebelled against Him and served other gods. Her children had therefore brought condemnation upon themselves, and as a result, God would **sow** them (scatter them like seed among the Gentile nations) showing many of them **no mercy**, for they would **no longer be His people**. Later in the marriage, Gomer runs away from Hosea, and he is instructed to go and buy her

back. In the same way, God will one day "buy back", or redeem, a remnant of His chosen people Israel even though they have rejected Him. This is all part of God's sovereign plan.

Though the nation of Israel has rejected her deliverer, and, as a result, has been scattered like seed throughout the earth, God will one day cause a remnant of them to return home, and after the times of the Gentiles have been fulfilled, God will save the nation of Israel. In the meantime, as Israel is "hardened" against Christ, the Gentiles have turned to Him by faith. Though Israel had been given much more to go on and should have embraced their Messiah, they, like Esau, have for now rejected their "birthright" and have exchanged God's grace for The Law. But God will one day unite those Gentile Believers with His beloved Israel and bring them together from the four corners of the earth to receive this same salvation by grace, through faith.

"...I will call Not My People. My People, and she who is Unloved, Beloved. And it will be in the place where they will be told, you are not my people, there they will be called sons of The Living God."
Romans 9:25-26 (Hosea 2:23, 1:10)

The Prophet Isaiah also prophesied that only a portion of Israel would come to faith in Christ and thereby receive salvation. God has always known this to be true, and therefore, every promise that He made to Israel will be kept, but it will be done so according to His predetermined plan. Just as not all of the Israelites were allowed to enter the promised land due to their unbelief, so too, will not all Jews come to faith in Jesus, but God in His mercy has seen to it that some of them will. If He had not, Israel would have been utterly destroyed in her rebellion, much as God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (**vs. 29, Isaiah 1:9**). God has always intended to save a remnant of His chosen people. And they will be saved in the same way as everyone else, by grace through faith in the crucified and resurrected Son of God!

The Rock (vs. 30-33)

"What should we say then? Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained righteousness — namely the righteousness that comes from faith. But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not achieved the righteousness of The Law."

Why is that? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. As it is written, Look, I am putting a stone in Zion to stumble over and a rock to trip over, and the one who believes on Him will not be put to shame."
Romans 9:30-33

"The Rock" to which Paul is referring in this passage is none other than Christ Himself. Many passages of Scripture tell us of the rock that was chosen by God to be the chief cornerstone, but was rejected by the builders. This simply means that Christ is the only way to become part of the kingdom of God, but the builders (the nation of Israel), who should have recognized Him for who He was, rejected Him instead. Jesus, Who proved to be the source of salvation for the Gentiles, became a stumbling block for the Jews. While many Gentiles accepted Him by faith, the Jews by and large saw no need of Him, for they mistakenly believed it was by their observance of The Law of Moses combined with the fact that their nation had been chosen by God that would be sufficient for their salvation.

Christ had this to say about those who would believe and those who would reject Him:

"Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given a people producing its fruit. Whoever falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will shatter him."
Matthew 21:43-44

Simply put, this means that whoever recognizes Jesus for Who He is will be broken over their sin and will fall upon Him for mercy. Those who are broken and put their faith in Him will receive salvation. But those

who reject Him will be crushed and forever destroyed by the wrath that is to come. Jesus is the only way to God, and for Jews and Gentiles alike, the only way to salvation is to humble themselves and place their faith in him alone. But sadly, many Jews have neglected this great salvation by their own unbelief. The night before He went to the cross, *The Bible* tells us that Christ sang a hymn (**Matthew 26:30**). The Scripture doesn't tell us which hymn/psalm it was that He sang, because the writer, being Jewish, assumes that everyone would know.

Jesus and his disciples had just observed the feast of passover, and Jewish tradition requires a closing psalm to be sung at the end of the feast. The psalm that is always sung to end passover is **Psalm 118**. Listen to the words that our Savior sang the night before He went to the cross:

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This came from The LORD: it is wondrous in our sight. This is the day The Lord has made: let's rejoice and be glad in it." **Psalm 118:22-24**

And just what "day" is He rejoicing about? The day that The Son of God would lay down His life to pay for the sins of the world. And whoever would believe in Him would not perish but would inherit everlasting life (**John 3:16**). He is the Stone that the builders (Israel) rejected, but without Him, the "house" of God can have no foundation. He is The Way, The Truth, and The Life, and no one comes to The Father, but by Him. If you believe that this morning, then congratulations... you have been chosen!

And let all the children of The Living God say... TRUTH!!!