

ADDRESSES ON ROMANS

by

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CHAPTER EIGHT

RIGHTEOUSNESS REJECTED

Romans 9:1-11:36

I. ISRAEL'S PAST, 9:1-33.

CHAPTERS nine, ten, and eleven of the book of Romans are parenthetical, yet they develop further the central thought of the epistle as expressed in the theme, "The Righteousness of God."

We have seen in the first eight chapters that righteousness is required by our holy God, revealed in Christ, received by faith, and realized in the life by the power of the Holy Spirit. These first eight chapters are doctrinal. Now we are to see how this gift of God, in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, has been rejected by Israel. Therefore, we are concerned with dispensational truth in this portion of Romans, which outlines God's dealings with His chosen people in the past, in the present and in the future.

A glance at our chart will help us to get the outline facts of these three chapters in mind as we read them, not as separate chapters, but as one main division of the epistle. In the past, Israel, as a nation, neglected her opportunity, despising God's favor toward her. In the present church age, she has rejected the gift of God's righteousness, as a nation, having failed in God's purpose for her.

But in the age to come, that is, in His millennial reign on earth in the Person of His Son and Israel's Messiah, God will fulfill all His promises to Israel, as a nation, bringing her into all the covenant blessings foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Let us read these three chapters repeatedly, prayerfully, before taking them up, one by one, for a more analytical study.

At first, as we read, we shall very likely be perplexed at many of these verses; for this is one of the most difficult portions of the Scriptures to understand. It is, in some measure, beyond our finite minds to comprehend, because it deals with the sovereign will of God, which does not always harmonize in our minds with the free will of man.

Many people stumble at this portion of the inspired record, and some of the statements written here have become the subject of incessant controversy throughout the ages. When we try to harmonize the free will of man with the sovereignty of God, we get beyond our depths. We should accept these truths with simple faith, remembering that our Lord said, “**What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter**” (John 13:7). And when we get to heaven, we shall understand how the two are in perfect accord.

Paul is dealing with this subject here in answer to the objections of the Jews, who were questioning the righteousness of God in setting aside Israel and bringing the Gentiles into the place of blessing.

It was necessary that he meet these objections, because many of the Roman Christians were Jews who had accepted Jesus as their Messiah, but who could not reconcile the Old Testament promises to Israel, as a nation, with the setting aside of that nation, even for a time. They could see that many Gentiles were turning to Christ and were being blessed. They were also familiar with the Old Testament prophecies which said that the Gentiles would be blessed when the Jews should come into glory and Christ should reign as King of Kings.

But instead, they could see that many Gentiles were even then being blessed, while the Jews, as a nation, were hardened to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This did not seem to harmonize with their Old Testament prophecy. It seemed to them that these promises were of none effect. Therefore Paul, in chapters nine, ten, and eleven gives light on this subject.

First we shall consider chapter nine, Israel’s past; in our next lecture, chapter ten, Israel’s present; and in the next study, chapter eleven, Israel’s future.

Thus we shall see that, although Israel has failed, as a nation, and although God is dealing with her in governmental discipline in this age of grace; yet all His Old Testament promises will be fulfilled when Israel turns to her Deliverer out of Zion, at His coming in glory to reign. Then the Gentiles also—the whole world—will enter into yet richer and fuller blessing.

As we read these chapters, much of the difficulty will pass away if we but remember that, while God is sovereign, yet He delights in mercy. However, He need not show mercy to anyone, for both Jews and Gentiles have proved themselves unworthy of His blessing. All have earned the wages of sin— death.

This the Jews failed to see in regard to themselves, and consequently they raised a protest because the Gentiles were being blessed. That is why Paul goes into the subject at length here. And let us remember that he is not dealing with individuals in these chapters, but with Israel as a nation.

(1) Paul’s Concern and Heart-Heaviness for Israel, 9:1-3

Now let us look at chapter nine. The opening words arrest our attention, for in them Paul expresses great concern for his people:

“I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (vv. 1-3).

What heart-heaviness he felt for Israel! This same concern caused Christ to weep over Jerusalem, saying, **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!”** (Matthew 23:37).

The same compassion that filled the heart of the Son of God evidently filled Paul’s heart as he thought of the lost condition of his brethren according to the flesh.

Note in the first three verses of chapter nine how carefully Paul weighs his words. What a statement he makes here!

As he looked out on the nation to which he belonged, he wept because of their unbelief. Although he carried continual joy in his heart, yet he felt also continual sorrow. That is the paradox that every child of God must experience. I think Paul must have been a most joyous man. The epistle to the Philippians bears this out. Yet while he was always rejoicing, he was sorrowing. How could his heart know anything else but continual sorrow as he looked on Israel and saw that her heart was hardened toward God and that she rejected Christ, her only Saviour?

The apostle called the nation of Israel his kinsmen, acknowledging his relationship to them. Do you see that he was not ashamed of being a Jew?

I should like to tarry long enough here to say that faith in Christ always produces the highest type of patriotism. It enables us to love our people and our nation with a greater and a purer love. If Christianity has not done that for you, if you do not love your nation and your family more since accepting Christ as your Saviour than you did before, then I question whether you have the right message or whether you know the Christ of God.

Do you know anything about sorrow for the sin and unbelief in the United States, or for the sin and unbelief of loved ones? When you went to church last Lord’s Day and left that sixteen-year-old son in bed, sleeping, unconscious of his duty toward God, did you not have sorrow in your heart? If you have unconverted loved ones, you should know something of this continual sorrow.

We sing:

Give me a heart like Thine;
By Thy wonderful power,
By Thy grace ev’ry hour,
Give me a heart like Thine.

Do you sing like that? Do you yearn for the salvation of loved ones as Christ sorrowed over Israel?

I was talking to a woman once about her unsaved loved ones. Seemingly unconcerned, she said: "I do not bother about them. I have turned them over to the Lord. I have the rest of faith."

If you have a heart like Christ's, you will know what tears are, my friend. His eyes filled with tears as He looked over Jerusalem, as He saw the sin and unbelief there. The Lord Jesus and Paul both had faith, and yet they knew sorrow.

I want us to get the practical lessons here, as well as the dispensational truth. And what compassion filled the heart of our Lord! What a burden for souls Paul had, and what concern filled his heart for the lost people of the house of Israel! We, too, shall know something of that burden if we live near to the heart of God. Every person that has been used as an instrument of God to win lost souls has known something of this sorrow.

Have you read of David Brainerd? He was a missionary to the American Indians during the early years of 1800. After his graduation from one of the eastern universities of that day, instead of accepting a call to some influential church, as he had opportunity to do, he went as a missionary to the Indians who were without Christ. He dedicated his life to them and died of tuberculosis as a result of the hard life he had to live in order to preach to them. Sometimes, as he went from one tribe to another, he had to swim rivers. Having crossed over a stream, he took off his clothes, wrung out the water, put them on again, and went on. Yet he could write: "I dream of lost souls. I care not what suffering I undergo, as long as I see souls saved."

As he approached a group of Indians and saw the smoke rising from their wigwams, he got off his horse, knelt down in the snow, sometimes over a foot deep, and there prayed that God's blessing would rest upon His Word. He prayed so earnestly that the perspiration ran down his face, even though he knelt in the snow. No wonder God's Spirit swept through great crowds of these Indians, and many of them became marvelous tokens of grace! As a result of this man's burden for lost souls, pagan savages were transformed into saints of God.

Robert Murray McCheyne, through reading the biography of David Brainerd, dedicated his life to winning souls.

If you want to read something that will stir your heart, my friend, read the story of this missionary to the Indians. He burned his life out like a candle in the service of the Lord, and died at the age of twenty-eight.

Would to God we preachers of today had this passion for lost souls! The Son of God knew this concern. He shed tears for the lost men and women of Israel. Paul also had this continual sorrow, but I am afraid many of us do not have it today.

I am sure that greater numbers would be saved if we shed tears over the lost. Paul knew about tears. Here he is addressing his own nation, and with what tenderness! If we sorrowed for the lost, it would make us more like Paul—more like Christ, for Paul was conformed to the image of his Lord.

The inspired writer goes on to say that he could wish himself accursed for his kinsmen. Did he really mean that he was willing to become anathema, to be accursed of God, if by doing so, he could save his brethren? Yes, that is what he meant. What a passion!

There was also another man in Bible history who cried something like this. That man was Moses.

The Israelites had sinned against God in worshipping the golden calf. And when God threatened to cut them off, Moses went up on the mountain and prayed:

“Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written” (Exodus 32:31, 32).

Moses and Paul were men that God could use in winning souls for Christ. But their becoming anathema could never have saved those people. God ever requires personal faith. There is One who did become anathema for us. Our Lord Jesus was **“made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree”** (Galatians 3:13).

Thank God! Israel will one day look upon Him, and a fountain of cleansing will be opened for her! She will be washed as white as snow. Then she will be able to sing, “Jesus Paid It All.” Then Paul’s **“kinsmen according to the flesh”** will turn to their Deliverer and Lord.

(2) The Eightfold Privilege of Israel, 9:4, 5

The apostle’s concern and heart-heaviness for Israel appear all the more poignant in view of the opportunity they had neglected. To have been specially favored by God made their lost condition seem all the more tragic.

In verses 4 and 5 Paul enumerates eight great blessings upon Israel that had distinguished her from other nations. These honors had never been given to any other people. We boast of America, but here is the greatest nation that has ever existed. Other countries have tried to exterminate the Jews, but they have failed. It is no wonder Paul was not ashamed to acknowledge his citizenship, to acknowledge Israel as his kinsmen; for in the Old Testament God often called Israel His **“sons.”** Now let us read these verses and see how God had bestowed special privileges and honors upon His chosen people:

1. “The Adoption”

They were adopted as God’s people from among other nations. He possessed them as His own. Let us remember that Paul is not speaking here of individuals, as he does in Ephesians and Romans. There he speaks of individual adoption through faith in Christ.

“For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15).

God hath **“predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will”** (Ephesians 1:5).

But in Romans 9:4 the inspired writer is not speaking of individual adoption; he has in mind national adoption. This is what Moses meant when, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he wrote to Israel, saying, **“Thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth”** (Deuteronomy 14:2).

The whole Word of God teaches plainly that Israel was chosen to be the nation through whom Christ and the Bible should be given to the world. Surely it was an honor to be **“adopted”** as the people through whom **“all families of the earth”** should be blessed! (See Genesis 12:3).

2. *“The Glory”*

The glory to which Paul refers is the manifested excellence of God. It is the Shekinah Glory that was seen on the mount when Moses went up and talked with God face to face. This same Shekinah Glory stood in the tabernacle and in the temple. It was the manifested glory of God. It was in their midst, but was never with other nations. It was the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night that led Israel to earth; this cloud of glory will return with Him. Christ will be the center of Israel then, and the Shekinah Glory will be in the midst of His people.

3. *“The Covenants.”*

The covenants were made with Israel, and pertain to her. God made no covenant with the Gentiles, though it was His purpose that they should be blessed through His dealings with His chosen people. But with the Hebrew nation He made four covenants; these are **“the covenants”** to which Paul refers in Romans 9:4:

(a) *The Abrahamic Covenant* promised Israel’s Messiah and the Redeemer of the world; and it promised to the Hebrew nation the land of Palestine as her inheritance.

(b) *The Davidic Covenant* has to do with the throne of Israel and the promised King and His Kingdom. When Christ returns in glory He will sit upon **“the throne of his father David”** (Luke 1:32).

(c) *The Mosaic Covenant* was the law—as Paul described it to the Galatians—**“our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ”** (Galatians 3:24).

(d) *The New Covenant* was promised by the prophet, Jeremiah, and fulfilled in Christ:

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel:

“After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 31:31 -34).

In writing to the Hebrew Christians concerning the Lord Jesus, Paul quotes these very words, and applies them to Christ, **“the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.”** (See Hebrews 8:6-13). This covenant is all of grace, shared by Jew and Gentile alike; but the One of whom it speaks was a Jew, **“according to the flesh,”** and the covenant came through Israel. To it our Lord referred when He broke the bread and poured out the wine at the Last Supper saying, **“This is my blood of the new testament [covenant], which is shed for many for the remission of sins”** (Matthew 26:28).

4. *“The Giving of the Law”*

In our former studies we have seen that the law was given to Israel, not to the Gentiles. We need not dwell further on this subject here, since much has already been said concerning it, except to add that it was no light matter that the God of heaven should give to human beings the law of righteousness. Gentile governments have long patterned their laws after the Mosaic Law. And in **“the law”** there were many beautiful types and shadows of the coming Redeemer and Lord. **“The giving of the law”** was not to be lightly esteemed.

5. *“The Service”*

“The service” here refers to the ritualistic worship connected with the tabernacle and the temple.

Israel was the only nation given an authorized form of worship. And everything connected with the ritualistic ceremony pointed forward to Christ—the sacrifices, the laver, the shewbread, the altars, the candlestick, the vail, the burning of incense, the ark—all beautifully typified the Person and work of Christ.

Some Gentile organizations, unmindful of God’s purpose, have taken over these customs and ritualistic ceremonies. We see priests in churches today, boys carrying candles, beautiful tapestries—all copied from the Jewish religious service. But these things are all meaningless, except as they were observed by Israel in Old Testament times. And in Christ they have been done away! (See Hebrews 8:1-10:18).

6. *“The Promises”*

The promises refer to the temporal blessings connected with the reign of Christ on earth. During His millennial rule over the earth, the Hebrew people will be wonderfully blessed in material ways. They will be honored by all nations. No longer the people of the wandering feet, they will be established in their own land; and through them our Lord, with the Church, will rule over all the Gentile world.

The promise of the Messiah's first coming has been fulfilled; and the promises that have to do with His second coming in power and glory are sure! Israel will one day come into her own.

7. *"The Fathers"*

"Whose are the fathers"—what other nation has had fathers like those in Israel? What an ancestry she has! There were men like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.

I believe it was Lord Disraeli, one of the foremost prime ministers England ever had, who in answer to a taunt concerning his being a Jew said: "Yes, my friend, I am a Jew. I belong to the most wonderful nation on the earth. Let me remind you that when your ancestors were gathering acorns in Germany, mine were giving the law to the world."

Whenever I see a Jew, I think of the fact that he can go back four thousand years to the father of his nation. If you were to take a Jew today and set him alongside a Jew of four thousand years ago, you could not tell one from the other. We cannot go back that far in our pedigree. And if we could, we should not care to acknowledge our forefathers. Israel is the only nation that can boast of her ancestry.

8. *"Of Whom as Concerning the Flesh, Christ Came"*

What a distinction! What an honor! These words take us back to Romans 1:3, where we read that God's Son, **"Jesus Christ our Lord . . . was made of the seed of David according to the flesh."**

They take us back to all the Old Testament prophecies of His coming—from the nation of Israel, from the tribe of Judah, from the house of David, to be born in Bethlehem. These and scores of other promises were all fulfilled when our Lord was born in Bethlehem of Judea and lived and suffered and died for the sins of the world. And **"according to the flesh,"** our Saviour was a Jew!

The tragedy of it is that, in spite of all these privileges, Israel, as a nation, has for centuries been lost, because the people have not known Christ as Saviour. They turned their backs on Him. They rejected their Messiah. That is why Paul was in heaviness of heart.

It is possible that I am addressing someone who has been reared in a cultured home and blessed in a temporal way, someone who has education, wealth, position, all that the world can offer.

My friend, whatever your distinction may be, multiplied by ten, it cannot save you and bring you into the right relationship with God. Apart from Him, education, wealth, and culture are nothing.

All of Israel's privileges did not save her. Do you not see what a commentary this is on that statement made by the Lord in John 3:3, **"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"?**

As we have already observed, the faithful Jews who put their trust in these promises to God's chosen people couldn't understand why Israel should be set aside, as a nation, and the Gentiles be brought into the place of blessing. They couldn't get away from the fact that these honors belonged to Israel. God had never made such promises to the Gentiles; but they could see Israel, that honored nation, set aside, while poor, lost, alienated Gentiles were brought into the place of blessing. This puzzled them. Therefore Paul explains in verses 6-13 that God's righteousness is vindicated in thus dealing with the Hebrew nation.

*(3) God's Righteousness Established in Setting Aside Israel
for a Time, 9:6-13*

For the enlightenment of these bewildered Christian Jews, the inspired writer presents three plain facts:

1. *The Word of God Concerning Israel Cannot Fail.* The nation had failed and had been temporarily set aside. God called the Gentiles, and they received the blessings. But Paul makes it clear that this does not put to naught God's purpose concerning Israel. Every one of His promises to them, as a nation, will be fulfilled.

This is what James meant when he said at the first church council in Jerusalem, addressing a group of apostles and other fellow-Christians:

“Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written. After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruin thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Know unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:14-18).

We studied earlier in this epistle that God cannot lie. When He gave the promises to Abraham, He confirmed His word by His oath, **“that by two immutable things [His word and His oath], in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul”** (Hebrews 6:18, 19).

Thus Paul wrote to the Hebrew Christians concerning the promises God made to Abraham; and yet unfulfilled promises of God are just as certain of accomplishment as if they were already facts of history. Israel's God cannot lie!

2. *All of Israel Are Not Israel.* Whom does God call Israel? Those who are entitled to these promises must be more than merely natural descendants of Israel. Who, then, are Israel? That is the question with which Paul is concerned here, and one which the Jews needed to have answered.

According to the mind of God, whom did He mean when He promised blessing to His chosen people?

The unbelieving Jews would say that the natural descendants of Abraham were Israel. They said that in the days of Christ, and on that fact set their hope for salvation. But they did not have Abraham's faith; therefore, they were not real sons of Abraham.

When the Jews boasted of the fact that they were of the flesh of Abraham, the Lord Jesus replied, **"If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham"** (John 8:39).

Yet, in spite of this warning, the Jews expected salvation because Abraham was their father. They thought this made them heirs of all the promises given to Israel. However, John the Baptist disillusioned them in that respect when He said, **"Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham"** (Matthew 3:9).

And the Lord Himself said also to the unbelieving Jews, **"I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come"** (John 8:21).

He made known to them that, apart from faith, being in the fleshly line of Abraham meant nothing. The real sons of this great man had his faith. And that is what Paul means when he says in verse 6: **"They are not all Israel, which are of Israel."**

Again, he adds, **"Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called"** (v. 7).

What a blow these words are to the doctrine of the universal Fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man!

People today are saying that, irrespective of what we believe, we are all God's children. This is not true. God is Father only of those who are adopted by faith. This other doctrine is Satan's lie. Neither does the universal Fatherhood of God refer to Israel. God took them out from among other nations, but He ever had in mind a regenerate people.

The real children of Abraham are those who have his faith, as well as his ancestry.

If Israel could have expected blessing on the ground of natural descent alone, then the Edomites, descendants of Esau, would have entered into the promises; for they were of the flesh of Abraham. Yet the Jews would not admit that these people should enter into the blessings. And the great majority of those whom the Jews considered the true children of Abraham did not really belong to Israel. Not all born of Israelitish blood belong to Israel, as recognized by God.

The Illustration of Isaac and Ishmael. The real children of promise and the natural descendants of Abraham are illustrated by Isaac and Ishmael (vv. 7-9). Ishmael was the product of the flesh, while Isaac was miraculously born, illustrating those born of the Spirit.

In that sense you and I are children of Abraham. However, Paul is not talking here about Gentile children of Abraham, but about those who are his natural descendants, as well as of his faith. He is making a distinction between Israel and Israel.

Only to born-again Jews did God give promise. Every Jew without Christ, as well as every Gentile without Christ, is lost. **“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him”** (John 3:36).

What a lesson Paul gives to ungodly, unconverted church members who have had great men of faith as their fathers!

I know of a man whose father was used of God to touch the world; but the son has embraced modernism, and has forsaken the faith of his father. That son cannot be saved because of his father’s faith. Sons without faith are not really sons at all, according to God’s reckoning. There is a lesson here for children of godly people, children who have been baptized and confirmed while yet young but who are still unconverted.

“They are not all Israel, which are of Israel . . . They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God.”

3. *God Has Ever Acted on the Principle of Sovereign, Electing Grace.* If He chooses to set aside the Jews for a time and give the Gentiles His blessing, He is only acting on the principle of sovereign, electing grace, as He always did in Old Testament days. Through sin both Jews and Gentiles have forfeited all right to blessing, insofar as personal merit is concerned. All alike are guilty. And all blessing must come from the God of grace.

As we saw in chapter eight, foreknowledge precedes foreordination; and if God, foreknowing that some will receive His grace, elects them to eternal blessing, then is that not His sovereign right?

(a) *The Illustration of Ishmael and Isaac Again.* Now in Romans 9:6-9 Paul has referred to Abraham’s two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Even before they were born, God had said that Sarah should have a son, the child of promise. And after the children were born, God testified further, saying to Abraham, **“In Isaac shall thy seed be called”** (Genesis 21:12; Romans 9:7). This was according to the principle of sovereign, electing grace.

(b) *The Illustration of Jacob and Esau.* To bear out the point further—that God has always acted on the principle of sovereign, electing grace—Paul uses the illustration of Jacob and Esau, also familiar to every Jew. Note the words of the text in verses 11 and 12:

“. . . the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth . . . it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.”

Even before the children were born, acting on the principle of electing grace, God passed over Esau in favor of Jacob. This has been His method from the beginning.

Paul took these instances from the Jews' own Scriptures. Therefore, they furnished a complete answer to their question concerning God's action in setting aside Israel and in blessing the Gentiles.

Do not stumble at verse 13, my friend:

“As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”

God was speaking from a dispensational sense. And his offer of salvation was just as free in Esau's day as it is now. If Esau had wanted to go to God, God would have welcomed him.

But did Jacob deserve this grace? No; God chose Jacob before he was born. You say this is terrible? Yes, it would be if our God were a tyrant instead of a God of love and mercy. He brought selfish, grasping Jacob into the place of blessing. He brought the poor, lost, alienated Gentiles into the place of blessing.

Our lives are described in the first chapter of Romans; yet God loved us and in His mercy turned to us, offering salvation. And he will yet make Israel, as a nation, **“a praise and a fame”** throughout the whole earth, even though Israel thrust Him out of the world at the point of a spear nearly two thousand years ago. God always reserves the sovereign right to act according to His perfect will—and that any are saved, is only because of His grace!

(c) *The Illustration of God's Sovereign Mercy Upon Israel.* The same thought is implied in verses 15 and 16, where we read that it was only the mercy of God that allowed Israel to continue as the nation of promise—or to continue to exist at all, for that matter.

Let us bear in mind that verse 15 is quoted from Exodus 33:19. Israel had been worshipping the golden calf not long after agreeing to keep God's law. This happened while Moses, their great mediator, was on the mount. They had already broken two commandments of the Decalogue, and God was about to blot them out. But after Moses interceded for them, God defended His action in saving them by uttering the words of sovereign grace quoted by Paul in Romans 9:15: **“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”**

These words were prompted by the love of God, my friend. You will note that Paul does not go on to say, “I will send to hell whom I will.” God never uses His electing grace to send anyone to hell. He who spends eternity in hell chooses to do so.

Observe the wonders of God's grace. As Dr. Ironside wrote,

“God took refuge in His own inherent right to show grace. Apart from this, Israel would have been blotted out. Nationally Israel owes her blessings to God's mercy and grace and compassion. Paul's argument is that if it pleased God *now* to take up the Gentiles, *why should Israel complain?* They themselves would have been wiped out, had it not been for God's grace. Thus salvation ever depends upon God's sovereign mercy.

“Therefore, verse 16 can be explained in this light, because without God’s touch, no man wills to seek God. **‘So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.’** Left alone, man’s heart becomes hardened. No man accepts Christ unless the Holy Spirit touches his heart.”

“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid” (v. 14).

None would be saved, but for the grace of God. And has He not the right to act according to His sovereign will?

As we have already said, this is perhaps the most difficult portion in the Bible. But the difficulty will pass away, to a large extent, if we remember that Paul is arguing for God’s righteousness in bringing in the Gentiles, thereby meeting the Jews’ objections. In these illustrations and in the one that follows concerning Pharaoh, Paul simply enlarges upon what he has already said concerning the sovereignty of God.

My Christian friends, in heaven I will be able to talk to you a thousand years about this subject, for I will know more about it. But as long as we are in our mortal bodies, as long as we have these finite minds, we must accept God’s Word in simple faith. If God wants to save us—and He does—He is acting on the principle of sovereign, electing grace; and no one should raise objections.

4. *Pharaoh—An Illustration of God’s Sovereign Judgment.* As Isaac, Jacob, and Israel illustrate God’s sovereign mercy, so Pharaoh illustrates His sovereign judgment.

- Let us remember that Pharaoh said, **“Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?”** (Exodus 5:2).

- Let us remember that over and over God gave Pharaoh a chance to repent, and that over and over he hardened his heart against God and His servant, Moses.

- Let us remember that God did not harden Pharaoh’s heart until after Pharaoh had wilfully rejected the light which God had given him.

Pharaoh did not want God; he hardened his own heart first; then God made him a monument of wrath and pointed him out as such. A man hardens his heart of his own volition; and God shows through Pharaoh what the end of every man will be who despises His grace.

God raised up Pharaoh and caused the story of his rebellion to go down in history, in order to show that, if a man is left to the inclination of his natural heart, that heart will harden itself against God. If God had let you and me alone, we should have gone the same way. If our hearts are inclined toward God, it is because He has touched us.

Let us not forget that God does not harden any man’s heart directly. He might if He wanted to. It would be His prerogative. We are all sentenced to the electric chair, as it were. But God did not see fit to condemn us to die. He did not harden Pharaoh’s heart until Pharaoh hardened his own heart.

Then God finished the transaction by taking away influences that would have softened his heart. As God said in Hosea 4:17, “**Ephraim is joined to idols . . . Let him alone,**” so He said, in substance, concerning Pharaoh, “**Let him alone.**” He used Pharaoh as an object-lesson before the world, to show what comes of the man who hardens his heart against Him.

5. *The Potter and the Vessel.* If we dare to raise any objection to what God does or does not do, our answer is found in verse 20: “**Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?**”

God acts according to His prerogative. If God shows mercy, it is not because man deserves it. When a man stands before the judgment bar of God lost, he cannot say that it was because God willed it so.

God shows His sovereign mercy and judgment through human instrumentality, as we see in verses 20-24. Do you see that God has two things to make known—His power and His mercy? And He shows them through vessels that are human.

The vessels of mercy are prepared by being washed in the blood of the Lamb, thereby being justified. To them He will show His riches in glory throughout eternity. Moreover, He will show wrath and power through vessels “**fitted to destruction.**”

But who fits these vessels for destruction? God does not so fit them, although He does fit the vessels of mercy. The vessels of wrath, however, fit themselves just as Pharaoh did. Every man who does what Pharaoh did, every man who goes on despising grace, will eventually become a vessel fitted unto wrath.

Many people do not like the subject of wrath. I preached a sermon not long ago on the subject, “Is the Punishment of the Wicked Age-long Discipline or Eternal Separation from God?” It drew the fire! But the wrath of God is taught in the Bible.

My unsaved friend, you can be a vessel of mercy, if you will kneel down right now and say,

Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to Thy cross I cling.

You will immediately find yourself in contact with God, who loved you enough to give His Son to die for you.

We see in verse 24 that God wanted some of these vessels of mercy to be Gentiles, as well as Jews. Let us remember that Paul is still answering the question as to why God set aside Israel. It was prophesied again and again in the Old Testament that the Gentiles would be vessels of mercy.

And this thought introduces the closing verses of the chapter, which set forth two important facts:

(1) That Israel's rejection and the Gentiles' acceptance of God's righteousness was foretold by Israel's own prophets;

(2) that the Gentiles' acceptance of God's righteousness was by faith in Him whose right it is to have compassion on whom He will.

Let us consider these two points briefly.

(4) Israel's Rejection and the Gentiles' Acceptance of God's Righteousness Foretold by Israel's Own Prophets, 9:25-29

Paul quotes four passages from the Jews' own Scriptures to prove that their prophets foresaw the very thing about which he has been arguing: That because of Israel's rejection of the gift of God's righteousness, their nation would be temporarily set aside, and that the Gentiles would be brought into the place of blessing. Let us look at these four passages, noting the Old Testament prophecies from which they are quoted:

"I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved" (Romans 9:25; cf. Hosea 2:23).

"And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there they shall be called the children of the living God" (Romans 9:26 cf. Hos. 1:10).

"Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: for he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth" (Romans 9:27, 28; cf. Isaiah 10:22, 23).

"Except the Lord of Sabaoth (or 'LORD of hosts') had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha" (Romans 9:29; cf. Isaiah 1:9).

Thus Israel's own prophets, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, foretold the fact that Israel, as a nation, would be set aside, and that only a remnant would be saved, that she had forfeited her title as **"sons of God."**

In chapter eleven we shall see how the prophets also foretold the time when God's grace will again go out to Israel, and the nation shall become once more **"the sons of God."**

But here Paul is showing how, during this present church age, only **"a remnant"** in Israel is receiving the message of the grace of God, while the Gentiles are being called His **"people,"** His **"beloved,"** His **"children."**

As we well know, we—Gentiles—are beloved of God only because of His sovereign, electing grace, and because we are **"accepted in the beloved,"** God's own well-beloved Son.

We are His “**people,**” His “**children,**” only because He was “**not ashamed to call**” us His “**brethren**” (Hebrews 2:11); because He identified Himself with us and tasted “**death for every man,**” that He might “**lead many sons unto glory**” (Hebrews 2:10). “**As many as received him,**” the Lord Jesus Christ, “**to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name**” (John 1:12). “**For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God**” (Romans 8:14).

How wonderfully the New Testament fulfills the Old! And how great was God’s love for us that He had our eternal salvation in mind from the beginning, sinful and unworthy as He knew we should be!

*(5) The Gentiles’ Acceptance of God’s Righteousness
by Faith, 9:30-33*

Now let us read verses 30-33, which give the conclusion of this chapter, and show that the reason the Gentiles received God’s gift of righteousness is that they accepted it by faith in Christ. Israel had tried to keep the law and had failed. Then her Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, was sent into the world to keep the law, as the sinner’s Substitute. But the Jew stumbled here. He would not accept Christ as his Saviour. He did not see his need of One who could give him righteousness.

On the other hand, the ungodly Gentiles, without Israel’s privileges and honors, accepted God’s gift by faith. God put before them the message of salvation all of grace, and they believed.

This is what Paul meant when he wrote: “**What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law**” (Romans 9:30-32).

These words should be significant to self-righteous Gentiles today who are walking the way of the Jews described here. Many are trusting in alms-giving and philanthropy, but the only way to attain righteousness is by faith in the Lord Jesus. He only is “**the way, the truth, and the life.**”

Paul concludes the chapter with one or more quotations from the Jewish Scriptures, which, like the preceding passages from Hosea and Isaiah, foretold Israel’s unbelief, at the same time showing that individual faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to eternal life:

“**Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed**” (v. 33).

To sin-blinded Israel, Christ was “**a stumblingstone and rock of offence**”; but to the Christian, whether Jew or Gentile, He is the “**chief corner stone**” of the church. To us who believe He is “**elect, precious**” (I Peter 2:6). “**And whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.**”

My unsaved friend, “**other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ**” (I Corinthians 3:11).

Would you not like to be “**a living stone**” in the temple which is His church? (See I Peter 2:5).

Accept Him today as your Saviour and Lord, and then you will be among that blood-washed company that shall ever sing the song of the redeemed.

Look to Him by faith today and sing, with all the children of God:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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