

God's Sovereign Choice

August 13 – Romans 9:1-33

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Day 225 – 140 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Now that Paul has finished his explanation of the gospel, he predicted and addressed some arguments with which the Jews might respond (9:1-11:32). For example, they might have said, "But we are Israelites, descendants of Abraham, God's chosen people, beneficiaries of His Law, people of the covenant. We are already saved. Why do we need to believe in Jesus?" Out of love, Paul expressed his desire to save all Jews, even if that meant that "he be cursed" (v.1-5), then he explained some difficult truths.

First, being a descendant of Abraham did not guarantee salvation (v.6-8). For many nations descended from him, but only one was chosen to be God's people. Furthermore, two nations arose from Jacob and Esau, but God only chose one (v.9-13). **Salvation was not guaranteed to all Jews, only a remnant (v.27). Their salvation depended on God's sovereign choice.**

Second, **in choosing those to be saved, God did not consider a person's actions or merit (v.11-13).** Because of our sinful nature, we have no merits to commend. All fall short of God's glory. Jacob and Esau were twins, essentially equals, but God chose one. "He chose before they were born and before they had done anything good or bad" (v.11). He did not choose the older son who inherited privileges in the Jewish culture. **No, God's choice was based on His sovereign purposes, not based on any human influence.**

"But that's not fair," some might say. Or as Paul wrote, "What shall we say then? Is God unjust?" (v.14). Not at all. If God gave us what we deserved, no one would be saved, for we all deserve death in hell. But God has chosen to demonstrate mercy (v.14-18). Therefore, **salvation does not "depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (v.16),** so that no one can boast. Thus, no one is treated unfairly. Some receive the punishment they deserve (justice), while others are recipients of God's mercy (His choice).

But if God chooses to be merciful to some people but not others, then how can He still find them guilty? Paul addressed this question next (v.19-23). As God's creation, we have no room to complain. He is sovereign, and we are not. He is the Potter, and we are the clay. Also, because of our sin, we stand condemned. If He chooses to save some, that is His prerogative. He has not doomed anyone who ought to be saved. Rather He has saved some who ought to be doomed. **No one can blame God for His punishment, and no one can take credit for his salvation.**

So then, back to Paul's original concern for the Jews. Jews are not saved simply because they are Jews; and Gentiles are not condemned simply because they are Gentiles. But God has chosen to show mercy to some of each (v.24-33); and His salvation is not a result of works, but by faith in the Cornerstone, Jesus, who has become a stumbling stone to Jews (v.32, 33; *Isa. 8:14; 28:16*).

Daily Reflection

These are difficult doctrines to understand. Entire books have been written about them. Truth be told, we may not fully understand these doctrines until we are with the Lord. That explains why Paul often referred to the gospel as a mystery.

Paul has made it clear that, whether we are a Jew or Gentile, no part of our salvation has been a result of our own doing. **From beginning to end, our salvation has been in God's hands and has come to fruition according to His sovereign choice.**

His purpose in all of this, Paul wrote, was "to make known the riches of His glory upon the recipients of mercy" (*Rom. 9:23*). In other words, once we realize what we deserve, we will be more grateful for what we've been given. As the Psalmist said, "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes" (*Ps. 118:23*).

Zeal Without Knowledge

August 14 – Romans 10:1-21

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Day 226 – 139 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We continued the section of Paul’s letter to the Romans in which he focused his attention on the Jews’ past (*Rom. 9*), present (*10*), and future (*11*). The Jews had this misconception that they were automatically given salvation because they were descendants of Abraham and recipients of the Mosaic Law. They had also fallen for the lie that they earned favor with God by their good works, by adhering to the laws.

But Paul felt pity for them. He wrote, “**They have a zeal for God without knowledge**” (*10:2*). In other words, **they were devoutly religious and ritualistic people who ignored the truth**. Their ancestry did not save them, and neither did receiving or obeying the laws. The Mosaic Law was given to show Israelites that they could not live up to God’s standard of holiness and that they needed a Savior. Thus, Paul wrote, “Christ is the end of the law...” (*v.4, 5*). Where the law revealed their unrighteousness, they could find righteousness in Christ by faith.

This righteousness based on faith is not hard to find. No one must journey to heaven or the abyss to find it (*v.6, 7*). “It is near us,” Paul wrote, for God places saving faith in our heart (*v.8*). All we must do is “confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, and we will be saved” (*v.9, 10*). This, of course, was difficult for Jews. They did not believe Jesus was the Son of God (Lord), and they struggled with the idea that anyone can be raised from the dead. So then, there is faith involved, and anyone — Jew or Gentile — can believe (*v.11-13*).

But how will anyone, especially the Jews, believe in Christ if no one tells them about Him? It is true. Someone must know about the Lord before believing in Him (*v.17*). But remember, no one is without excuse. God has revealed Himself to mankind through creation and conscience (*1:18-20; 2:14, 15*); and the Jews, more than anyone, have had their opportunities.

Paul reminded the Jews that God has been trying to reach them with the good news for centuries. They, too, have had creation as a witness against them, for “the heavens declare the glory of God... and their voice has gone out into all the earth” (*10:18; Ps. 19:1-4*). God also sent Moses to them, who warned them that because of their idolatry, He would raise up a people for His possession outside of their nation, speaking of Gentiles (*10:19*). God sent prophets to warn His people, Isaiah, for example, but “who believed their report?” (*16, 20*).

What else could God do to save His people? He made Himself known through creation, conscience, Moses, the Law, prophets, even His Son, but the Jews rejected all of them. “All day long,” He said, “I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people” (*v.21*). Simply put, He was done with the Jews, for now. Next, Paul will address God’s plan for the Jews during their national rejection (*Rom. 11*).

Daily Reflection

The Jews had “**a zeal for God without knowledge**” (*10:2*). Zeal is defined as a passion, eagerness, or fervor. Having zeal is good. Having zeal for the Lord is even better, but not unless that zeal is grounded in knowledge or truth. The Jews were zealous people, devoutly religious and ritualistic, but **their zeal was a misguided waste of time, for they missed Christ**.

I wonder. What does it look like today to “have a zeal for God without knowledge”? Thoughts?

Hardened for Now

August 15 – Romans 11:1-36

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Day 227 – 138 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul finished a mini section of his letter to the Romans in which he focused on the Jews and their relationship with Christ (*Rom. 9-11*). He has already exposed the lie that Jews were saved by being descendants of Abraham or by adhering to the laws of Moses. He has also explained that the Jews have had more than enough opportunities to see Christ as their Messiah and believe in Him by faith. So then, Paul addressed a natural question. **Is God finished with Israel and the Jews forever?**

His immediate answer is a resounding no, for Paul was a Jew and a follower of Christ (*11:1*). Also, God made a promise to Israel that He intended to keep (*v.2*). However, as a nation, the Jews have rejected God's offer of salvation through Christ. Therefore, God has only saved a small percentage of Jews, called a remnant, as in the days of Elijah (*v.3-6*). **As for the rest of the nation, He has allowed it to be hardened against His Son, for now** (*v.7*). Could this be the consequence for accepting responsibility for Jesus' crucifixion (*Matt. 27:25; Acts 4:10-12*)?

Because of the Jews' hardened hearts, "salvation has come to the Gentiles" (*v.11*). God has poured out His gracious blessings upon the Gentiles, blessings that Paul hoped would provoke the Jews to follow Christ (*v.12-15*). Jesus, who has proven to be an obstacle or "stumbling block" for the Jews, has also proven to be the greatest opportunity for the Gentiles.

Paul described the inclusion of Gentiles in the family of God as a gardener who grafts branches onto a tree (*v.17-25*). He breaks off dead, unproductive branches and replaces them with living, fruitful ones. The unbelieving Jews have been "broken off" of God's tree, and Gentile branches have been added. Thus, salvation is offered to everyone. But, once again, this salvation is no work of our own. It is God who has done the grafting and, therefore, we cannot boast about it (*v.18, 20, 25*).

But will the Jews be hardened against Christ forever? No. Paul said it is a "partial hardening," a temporary one (*v.25-29*). It will only last "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (*v.25*). In other words, there will be a day when the window of salvation will be opened again to Israel, and scores of Jews will believe in Christ. But, until then, the time is now for Gentiles to be saved. For because of Israel's "disobedience, we have been shown mercy" (*v.30-32*).

Daily Reflection

Paul's response to God's sovereignty is astonishment. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable are His ways" (*v.33*). The whole ordeal is a mystery (*v.25*). We can't understand it (*v.34*). We don't deserve it (*v.35*). We can only be grateful and give Him glory for it (*v.36*).

Knowing the history of the Jews, their response to Christ, and God's response to them, how should we view them today? What should be our response or our prayer for Israel as a nation?

Paul ended his recounting of the mystery of salvation by writing, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things..." (*v.36*). Put this statement in your words. What is he saying?

A Living Sacrifice

August 16 – Romans 12:1, 2

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Day 228 – 137 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We transitioned to the second part of Paul's letter to the Romans. In the first part, Paul explained to us what to believe about the gospel (1:1-11:36). In the second part, he will expound on how we should behave in response to the gospel (12:1-16:27). The first part of the letter establishes why we do what we do as Christians. The second part of the letter expresses how we are to do it. Thus, the second part of Paul's letter will be less philosophical and more personal and practical.

The transitional word, of course, is *therefore*, which is found in the first verse. Because of all that God has done for us in and through the gospel (*Rom. 1-11*), we are, therefore, to live in a way that honors His gracious work (12-16). What follows the *therefore* are two verses that set the stage for the rest of the letter. Just as *Romans 1:16, 17*, were the foundation for the first half of the letter, so are *Romans 12:1, 2*, the foundational verses for the second half.

There are three sections of Chapter 12. The first section deals with how we should relate to God (v.1, 2). The second section deals with how we should relate to the church (v.3-8), and the third section deals with how we should relate to other individuals (v.9-21). Today, let's consider how Paul said we should relate to God in response to the gospel.

Because of the great mercy that God has shown us in our salvation (*Rom. 3-11*), Paul urged us to offer our lives to Him as an Old Testament priest would have offered an animal for sacrifice in the tabernacle or Temple (12:1). That is the way we can best worship God or render Him "spiritual service." But our sacrifice is different than Old Testament priestly sacrifices. **Their sacrifice was dead, but we are living. Thus, we are not to make a one-time sacrifice, as they did, but rather a daily, ongoing sacrifice.**

Also, our sacrifice is to be holy. Old Testament sacrifices were made holy by the blood of the lamb. We, too, are made holy by the blood of the Lamb (Jesus). We were made righteous internally by the great exchange on the cross, His life for ours. We are made holy externally through sanctification. Though our sinless spirit is trapped in our fleshly body, we are being "conformed into the image of Christ" (8:29).

Though God is working to conform us into the image of His Son, our enemy, Satan, wants to conform us into his image. He desires to squeeze us into the mold of the views and values of this world. But Paul urged us "not to be conformed to this world but be transformed" (v.2). The word *transformed* here is the Greek word for *metamorphosis*, to be changed from the inside out, which again is our sanctification.

When the Holy Spirit indwells us at salvation, His first assignment is to begin to influence and "renew our minds." With consistent study of God's Word, the Spirit can teach us the mind of Christ, help us filter out the lies of this world, and take every thought captive according to the gospel (*Col. 4:8; 2 Cor. 10:5*). By seeking out the will of God in His Word and living it out in our lives, we exhibit that which is "good and acceptable and perfect" (*Rom. 12:2*).

Daily Reflection

Have you responded to God's gracious work in your life the way that Paul described? Are you daily giving yourself to Him in worship, seeking purity in mind and heart? **The problem with living sacrifices is that they often crawl off the altar. To stay on the altar, we must willingly choose to sacrifice ourselves daily.** Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Me" (*Lk. 9:23*). But, if we crawl off the altar (or cross), we are in essence running to be conformed to the world rather than submitting ourselves to be renewed. Which is it for you?

Gifts and Grace

August 17 – Romans 12:3-8

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Day 229 – 136 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We are now in the second part of Paul's letter to the Romans, in which he applied the gospel to everyday life (*Rom. 12-16*). This part of Paul's letter is personal and practical, exhibiting how we should respond to what God has done for us. For example, in *Romans 12*, Paul described how we should relate to God (v.1, 2), how we should relate to the church (v.3-8), and how we should relate to each other (v.9-21). Today, we read Paul's comments regarding the church and spiritual gifts, which were like the comments in his letter to the Corinthians (*1 Cor. 12*).

Though we tend to focus on Paul's list of the gifts (*Rom. 12:6-8*), we must not miss his instructions about the gifts in general. In just a few verses, Paul highlighted five aspects of spiritual gifts as they relate to the church.

First, **our attitude toward spiritual gifts should be humility** (v.3). The gifts are not earned or rewarded; rather they are undeserved and given by God, "who has allotted to each a measure of faith" (v.3). Therefore, we should not become arrogant or "think more highly of ourselves than we ought" (v.3), as the Corinthians did. Rather, we should have "sound judgment" and maintain a proper perspective. Our spiritual gift is to be used for the edification of others, not for the glorification of ourselves.

Second, **we must not allow spiritual gifts to jeopardize our unity**. Paul described the local church as "one body in Christ, having many members" (v.4, 5). There may be 30, 300, or 3000 believers in a church, but they are all on the same team. Unity was very important to Jesus (*Jn. 17:11*). It should be important to us. "There must not be any division among you," as Paul wrote, "but the members must have the same care for one another" (*1 Cor. 14:25*).

Third, while we must protect the unity of the church, **we must also accept and affirm the diversity of gifts among us**. Though we are all

on the same team, we are not all the same. Paul wrote that "members do not have the same function" (*Rom. 12:4*). The variety of gifts are apportioned as God desires (*1 Cor. 12:18*).

Fourth, along with protecting our unity and embracing our diversity, **we must also recognize our interdependency**. Paul wrote, "Though we are many members of the body, we are individually members of one another" (*Rom. 12:5*). Simply put, we need the church, and the church needs us. Whatever function our spiritual gift supplies is vital to the health of the body. Likewise, we benefit from others who use their spiritual gift(s). "If one suffers," Paul said, "all the members suffer; and if one is honored, all the members rejoice" (*1 Cor. 12:26, 27*).

Finally, **Paul challenged the Romans to use their gifts responsibly**. "According to the grace given to us (by God), each of us is to exercise [the gifts] accordingly" (*Rom. 12:6*), with faith, generosity, diligence, and cheerfulness (v.6-8). In other words, God has given us a gift, let us be good stewards of it.

Daily Reflection

Evaluate yourself regarding Paul's instructions. With your spiritual gift(s), have you been humble or arrogant? Have you used your gift(s) to sow division or promote unity? Have you embraced the diversity of gifts in your church, or have you expected everyone to be like you? Are you using your gift(s) at church, as well as benefiting from the gift(s) of others? Have you been a good steward of your gift(s), faithfully developing them rather than hiding them? What is God saying to you regarding your gift(s)?

Characteristics of a Christian

August 18 – Romans 12:9-21

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 230 – 135 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul turned a corner in his letter to the Romans. Rather than express gospel beliefs (*Rom. 1-11*), he explained gospel behavior (*12-16*). Now that we know what God has done for us through Christ, how shall we live as a follower of Christ? In *Romans 12*, he addressed how we should relate to God (*v.1, 2*), how we should relate to the church (*v.3-8*), and how we should relate to others (*v.9-21*). Let's consider the last category.

Remember, the context for this section is *Romans 12:1*, in which Paul urged Christians "to present themselves as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God..." But what exactly does that mean? What does that look like? That's where today's passage is helpful. Paul gave us a rapid-fire list of characteristics that befit a follower of Christ.

LOVING (v.9, 17): Love summarizes the other qualities. Our love must be genuine, not phony.

MORAL (v.9, 21): God defines good and evil. He is our standard of morality. We must cling to it.

DEVOTED (v.10): We should treat others like family, lovingly, faithfully, and thoughtfully.

UNSELFISH (v.10): We are to honor others by giving them preference, meaning put them first.

DILIGENT (v.11): Christians should be steady, and hard-working, not idle, or slothful.

PASSIONATE (v.11): We should be "fervent in spirit," motivated by our faith and mission.

SERVANT (v.11): We should do whatever the Lord asks or requires for the good of others.

OPTIMISTIC (v.12): Because of Christ, we can "rejoice in hope" regarding our circumstances.

PERSEVERING (v.12): Despite our trials, we remain steadfast, faithful to God.

PRAYERFUL (v.12): We always talk to God, who is our source of strength, wisdom, and joy.

GENEROUS (v.13): We are to support the ministries of Jesus, meeting the church's needs.

HOSPITABLE (v.13): We should kindly receive others and look to their comfort and needs.

GRACIOUS (v.14, 20): Avoiding spite, we respond to antagonists in a kind manner.

SYMPATHETIC (v.15): We are to "rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep."

AGREEABLE (v.16): We should promote unity by seeking common ground or like-mindedness.

HUMILITY (v.16): We are to befriend all and never think of ourselves as better than others.

FORGIVING (v.17, 19): We don't repay evil, but turn the other cheek and pardon offenses.

RIGHTEOUS (v.17): We must earn a reputation of doing what is right despite what others think.

PEACEABLE (v.18): We are to promote unity, even if that means personal sacrifice.

Daily Reflection

As Paul described the characteristics of a Christian, he was really describing the characteristics of Christ. He exhibited all these qualities. Do you? As you review this list, which one(s) does not describe you? How can the Lord grow you in this area? What do you need to do?

God and Government

August 19 – Romans 13:1-7

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Day 231 – 134 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We are in the second half of Paul's letter to the Romans, in which he described the character and conduct of a Christ-follower (*Rom. 12-16*). So far, he has explained how we should relate to God (*12:1, 2*), how we should relate to the church (*12:3-8*), and how we should relate to other believers (*12:9-21*). Next, Paul explained how we should relate to governing authorities (*13:1-7*) and unbelievers (*13:8-21*). Today, let's consider Paul's comments about those who rule.

First, Paul began with a statement that summarizes this section, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities" (*v.1*). The rest of the passage is his explanation of why. The word *subjection* is much like the word *submission*. It does not insinuate inequality or inferiority but rather a choice to yield to another's authority. We are commanded to yield to authorities willingly, but why?

To explain why we should submit to authorities, Paul goes back to God. **Government (which means the exercise of authority) begins with God.** He was (and is) the first authority in the universe. Therefore, all authority begins with God. He is sovereign. He's in control, and He determines the rules or laws for creation.

Since government (authority) begins with God, then **all earthly governments receive their authority from God.** He entrusts or delegates some of His authority to human rulers (*Dan. 2:21; 4:17; Jn. 19:10, 11*). Paul wrote, "There is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God" (*Rom. 13:1*). He continued, "Whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God" (*v.2*).

Notice how Paul described rulers. They are "ministers and servants of God" (*v.4, 6*). Why did God delegate some of His authority to human rulers? **For our good, Paul wrote, to protect the lawful and punish evildoers** (*v.4*). We are expected to be law-abiding citizens, for

the civil government's purpose is to protect our lives, liberty, and property. God even gave it authority to "bear the sword," meaning to avenge capital or heinous crimes.

Because civil government is a God-ordained institution and serves a good purpose, we are not only expected to submit to its authority, but **we are also expected to support it financially.** "Because of this," Paul wrote, "you pay taxes. Render to all what is due them..." (*v.6, 7*). To protect life, liberty, and property costs money. Therefore, we should help. Even Jesus paid His taxes (*Matt. 17:24-27; 22:17-21*).

Daily Reflection

Submitting to government's authority is the right thing to do, not simply to stay out of trouble but to keep a clear conscience before God (*v.5*). However, this passage is often used to fool Christians into believing that we should submit to government in all things. Is that true?

By nature, delegated authority is limited, and **a person with delegated authority (i.e., ruler) is not only accountable to God for the use of His authority, but he must stay within the limits established by God.** Simply put, rulers are not free to do whatever they want. When they punish lawful citizens and practice evil themselves, does God still expect us to submit?

Take a minute to read these passages — *Ex. 1:17, 21; Dan. 3:13-17; 6:10; Acts 4:18; 5:29* — then formulate an answer to that question.
