

Text: Romans 9:14-18

Title: Israel, the Church, and the Purposes of God – part 6

Intro: A very challenging portion of Scripture—a text that ought to invoke our worship and adoration and wonder

- Also a text that offends the flesh

Do we believe in God's sovereignty???

- Do we believe that God is sovereign over evil???
- Do we believe that God is sovereign over man and his suffering???
- Do we believe that God is sovereign over salvation???
- Is God sovereign over Israel???
- Is God sovereign over Israel's rejection of Messiah at His first coming???
- Is God sovereign over our suffering???
- Can God prevent human suffering???
- Does God ordain and govern evil and the suffering that results from it???

The Apostle Paul will explain that Israel's unbelief is not inconsistent with God's revealed plan, nor does it demean God's Person—namely, His sovereign power.

- Some will say that if God chooses some to be 'heirs of promise' and not others, God is not fair.
- In 9:6-13—Paul just explained that God sovereignly chose Issac over Ishmael, and Jacob over his twin brother Esau.
- They were not chosen because of who they were or because of what they had done or would do, but because of 'Him who calls' (9:11).
- In other wds, because of God's sovereign will and purposes.
- The question is: 'Is God unrighteous because He take one and leaves another aside???'
- Do we have the right to accuse God of being arbitrary or unjust??
- How can God elect one person and reject the other before they were even born???
- In a society that deems all mankind as equal before the law, the idea of election/predestination are repulsive and unacceptable
- In other wds, the doctrine of election could not possibly describe a loving God who is just and righteous.

Notice: 9:14—"What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!"—the Apostle Paul defends the Lord in the strongest of Greek terms possible

- Because God Himself is the standard of righteousness, anything that God does must also be righteous
- God has no capacity for unrighteousness
- Jer 9:23-24—"Thus says the LORD, 'Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the LORD."

- To say that God is ‘unjust’ is for Paul a self-contradiction—God cannot be the One, true, living, holy God and be unjust.
- God is good by nature and not evil—God is not touched by evil and evil cannot come from Him
- Isa 45:5,7—"I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God...The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these."—while God ordains darkness, 1 John says that ‘in Him is no darkness at all’ (1 John 1:5).
- No darkness can emanate from Him. God never approves of evil—He hates evil, though He is in control of it.
- Psalm 5:4—"For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You."
- Hab 1:13—"Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor On those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up Those more righteous than they?"
 - The prophet is perplexed: ‘How can God not look upon evil with favor and yet He allows the wicked Chaldeans to devour the righteous???’
 - God is sovereign over earthly rulers and uses them for His purposes even though they themselves will be held accountable for their sin.
- God raises up kings and kingdoms and can dispose of them as well.
- Psalm 33:10-11—"The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation."—evil rulers and nations do nothing apart from the sovereign will of God
- Dan 4:37—"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."
- Dan 2:20-22—"Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him. It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding. "It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, And the light dwells with Him."
- Prov 21:1—"The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes."—you cannot escape the fact that God not only ordains an evil ruler, He guides and uses that ruler for His own purposes and then holds that ruler accountable for his own choices.
- God raises up kingdoms—even in the Middle East—God can remove kingdoms—even the United States if He so deems it.
- Prov 16:1—"The plans of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD."—human responsibility is always subject to God's sovereignty
- God places His limits and boundaries on world leaders and world events

God is sovereign over human suffering.

- See: 1 Peter 2:21-23—
- See: 1 Peter 5:8-10—

- See: 1 Peter 3:17—Satan is seeking someone to devour but he is bound by the limits God places on him. The enemy doesn't have the last word.
- At Christ's arrest in Luke 22:52-53—"Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against Him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against a robber? "While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours."—unless God wills it, suffering cannot take place
- Persecutors have limits—no one took Jesus' life until He Himself laid it down.
- See: Job 1-2—evil spirits, even Satan himself are subject to the sovereign will and purposes of God.
 - Satan and his demons cannot do anything without the permission of a sovereign God
 - Natural evil/natural disasters, though used by Satan himself, are subject to the sovereign hand of God
 - Satan brought incomprehensible suffering to Job—Notice: Job's response—1:20-22—"Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head [grief over what sin causes], and he fell to the ground and worshiped. He said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.' Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God."—Notice: the 'Lord has taken away'—I thought it was Satan that brought all Job's grief???
 - Job had a healthy theology—he understood that God is sovereign over his circumstances and he worshipped God through all the grief, difficulty, and pain.
 - Evil/suffering are from Satan and the Fall/corruption—but evil/suffering are not ultimate, God is.
 - Deut 32:39—"See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, And there is no one who can deliver from My hand."

God is sovereign over Christ's death

- John 13:27—says that Satan entered Judas Iscariot—Jesus said, 'what you do, do quickly'
- Acts 2:22-23—"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death."
- Acts 4:27-28—"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur."
- God has an eternal plan, and the crucifixion of Jesus was no exception.
- Judas made his own choices for which he is eternally accountable—and yet God was sovereignly working out His eternal plan.
- God is a God of mercy and bestows it on whomever He wishes

God can declare the end from the beginning because He has ordained the end from the beginning.

- Isa 46:9-10—"Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure','—when God declares through the prophet what He alone will do, it cannot happen otherwise.
- Lam 3:37-38—"Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?"

God is sovereign over salvation—Romans 9 make clear that it is not the will of a man or the achievements of a man, or the ethnicity of a man that saves him.

- It is only the promise of God when He sets His affection towards sinners who are worthy of death.
- When God sets His electing love upon a sinner, His plan of redemption will come to pass.
- Those whom God leaves in sin and unbelief are there of their own accord.
- Whatever God does, He does for His glory
- Whatever God does, He does consistent with His holy character.

A Jew might object and say that Paul is wrong—"if what you say is true, God cannot be just." Thus, Paul uses the OT to prove his point—the very text that a NT Jew would have been very familiar with. Paul is going to use two example cases: Moses and Pharaoh

Notice: 9:15—"For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."

- From Exodus 32:19—(turn there—See: Ex 32)
- Moses goes up to Mt Sinai and receives the two tablets of the testimony from God—while he is gone, his brother Aaron led the impatient people to melt down their gold jewelry and form a calf through which they were going to worship YHWH—as if it represented the true God (32:2-6).
- In response to that sin, God commanded that 'about three thousand men' be put to death.
- God would have been just in putting all to death who participated in that great apostasy, but only 3000 men.
- JM: "He would have been perfectly justified in killing all the Israelites who had participated in the idolatry, but He sovereignly chose to execute only those three thousand as a warning to the others and to preserve His witness nation."¹
- All deserved to be destroyed, but God spared some—for His own glory.
- Paul says, 'If you are going to say that God is unrighteous because He chooses one man and not another, then God was unrighteous at Sinai when He let you all live.'
- Everybody should have died, but God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy and compassion on whom He will have compassion.
- The only reason the entire nation of Israel was not destroyed at that time was because of the sovereign mercy of God.

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Romans*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 32.

- JM: “Because all men are sinful and deserve God’s condemnation, no person is wronged or treated unjustly if God chooses to condemn him. That is justice. His mercy toward any person is purely by His grace.”²
- ‘mercy’ and ‘compassion’ are nearly synonyms here but ‘mercy’ tends to reflect ‘action’ while ‘compassion’ reflects the heart behind the action.

9:16—“So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.”—‘it’—meaning ‘salvation’ does not depend on man but on God who has mercy

- God does not save because man is a sinner and needs to be saved.
- God saves because it reflects His own character.
- God loves to save.
- Yet, if God saves no one—He is still fair and just and holy
- All men are born sinners and subject to God’s wrath.
- Yet, God chooses to show mercy.

God is sovereign over salvation, and He is also sovereign when it comes to bestowing His judgment
Notice: 9:17—“For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH.”

- Pharaoh was an evil king over an evil/God-hating people
- God did not ‘make’ Pharaoh for this purpose but ‘raised him up’—in other wds, God made him to be in the place he was...he was ‘brought to a position of prominence’—God made him king over all Egypt and permitted his rebellion and hardness of heart so that He might demonstrate His power.
- Pharaoh was, as far as world rulers go, extremely powerful—and God raised him to that power in order that He might show His ultimate power
- Even through Pharaoh’s hardness of heart God would show forth His power
- Pharaoh had no idea how God was going to use him and his position and power and choices for God’s own glory. He is totally unaware of what God is sovereignly doing.
- God said, ‘Let My people go’—Pharaoh said, ‘No’ Pharaoh hardened his heart and said no again and again until God hardened Pharaoh’s heart as a judgment.

Why??? Why all this??? Because God is driven by a passion to magnify His own name—“... THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH”

- See: Ex 15:1-18—God became known among the pagan nations as ‘the awesome and fearful God who delivered Israel from Egypt.’³
- The exodus of God’s people from Egypt has been celebrated for millennia in the Passover—a remembrance of the Lord’s gracious, delivering power saving God’s people from the oppressing hand of Pharaoh.
- God is infinite, holy, He deserves glory and will have glory.

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Romans*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 32.

³ Ibid. 34.

- God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Why??? Because God wanted to demonstrate even greater wrath and He wanted to show even greater mercy/compassion to His people.
- God is driven by His character and name—not by anything in human beings that could somehow 'compel' God
- The earth and the world are cursed, and nothing can compel God to do anything but His own mercy and compassion.

Notice the conclusion: 9:18—"So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires."

- No sinner can initiate God's mercy upon himself.
- It is not man's choice that initiates God's mercy.
- It is not human effort or merit that invokes Divine mercy.
- Mercy always begins with God's sovereign, gracious, and eternal will.
- Those who receive God's mercy do so only by God's grace.

Next time: Rom 9:19ff