

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

The Book of Romans
Lesson 10. Children of the Promise

A Verse-by-Verse Study of Romans 9 From the 1888 Message Perspective

The theme of Romans 9 is God's everlasting covenant. God made His promise to Christ, the guarantee of His covenant, and He elected the whole human race to be saved. Strict Calvinism teaches that God elected a special few to be saved. Islam, too, has its version of Allah's sovereignty of election. Arminian Protestantism says, God has offered salvation to everyone if they do something right first and believe. Paul taught the Truth of the Gospel: God has *already given* the election of salvation to everyone.

Paul's God-ordained ministry of the gospel is a demonstration of its practicality. "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 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" (**verses 1-3**). In other words, Paul would give up his salvation for his fellow Jews who have missed their Messiah. God's love revealed in Christ's submission to the cross compels Paul to bear the curse of his brethren in the final judgment so that they may never have to suffer such self-condemnation.

Those for whom Paul is willing to make the sacrifice "are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (**verses 4, 5**). And yet, for all these sacred privileges which should have led them to Christ, their blindness led them to crucify Him.

The privileges of the Jews consisted of: (1) "adoption" as children into the household of God; (2) "the glory" which pertained to the priesthood and Temple; (3) "the covenants" of their election to salvation; (4) "the law" which was ordained for life; (5) "the service of God" as missionaries to the world; (6) "the promises" of God; (7) "the fathers" as a heritage of patriarchal example; and culminating with, (8) Christ who came as one of them in "the flesh." These were the unmistakable privileges of being a Jew, which to a great extent were missed.

But God's Word never returns to Him void, because it is "not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (**verse 6**). If Paul's ethnic brethren won't take the good news to the world, God has other plans that are already contained in His covenant promise.

Not all Abraham's children are the promised seed. "Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called" (**verse 7**). In other words, Ishmael was not the promised seed. He was born after the flesh, i.e., through unbelief. Likewise, "They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" (**verse 8**). Fancy Paul designating the Jews as children of Ishmael because of unbelief in Christ!

Who are "the children of the promise"? Paul now provides a series of Old Testament illustrations identifying who the true seed are. "For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son [Isaac]. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (for 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" (**verses 9-12**). Prior to the twins' birth, God told Rebecca that Esau would defer to Jacob. God's foreknowledge saw the end from the beginning, but it did not preclude the choices that they both made. God's call to election of salvation is a gift in Christ to both Esau and Jacob. God simply foresaw from the womb that Esau would live by the self-motivation of works in rejection of Christ and that Jacob would overcome by faith through the love of Christ.

The Lamb of God was given from the foundation of the world for both men. God evangelized them with His self-sacrificing love. Both were prodigal sons of the Father's love. Only Jacob returned. Esau remained self-estranged in a far country. Thus the drawing power of God's love can even turn His own son into hatred. This is why "it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (**verse 13**). Esau *perceived* His Heavenly Father's love as hatred.

Therefore the question is asked, "Is there unrighteousness with God?" Should God be blamed for His love driving Esau away? "God forbid" (**verse 14**).

God doesn't stop loving anyone for fear that someone might reject Him for it. He pours on His mercy in ever greater measure to those who are resistant. "For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy" (**verses 15, 16**). God doesn't withdraw His grace from anyone who chooses to go astray. In fact, He pours it on tenfold more.

A good example of this is Pharaoh. "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth" (**verse 17**). The king of Egypt at the time of Israel's enslavement was in a position of political and economic world dominance. God's purpose for Pharaoh was to give him salvation in the everlasting covenant so that his heart would be reconciled to God. He would be used of God along with Jacob's descendants to evangelize the whole earth. It is impressive that God wished to "cut short in righteousness" the great controversy between Christ and Satan in Pharaoh's day by lighting the whole earth with the true knowledge of God's character

as revealed in the cross. God is not into delaying the inevitable demise of the kingdom of darkness. It is God's people who have delayed the inevitable.

If it was God's purpose to reach the heart of Pharaoh with the gospel of Jesus Christ, then there is no limit to the extent of God's mercy in reaching any hardened sinner. "Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth" (**verse 18**). Many harden their hearts to the gospel because they resist His much more abounding grace. The same sun that melts wax hardens clay! God's mercy must certainly be relentless for Paul states it is God's will to extend mercy to the sinner whether he yields or hardens his heart.

Having shown that it was God's purpose to make an end of sin in the days of Pharaoh, and the king resisted His mercy, God went on to Plan B in order to proclaim His glory throughout the earth through the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Like a good Calvinist someone might ask, Why should the sovereign God complain that His plans are foiled? "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will?" (**verse 19**). After all, says the determinist, God's will is irresistible, isn't it?

Where does man, the creature, get the nerve to tell his Creator to "step off"? "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?" (**verse 20**).

The inanimate clay has no "say" whether the artisan makes a perfect pot out of it or messes it up. "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?" (**verse 21**).

And now Paul applies the illustration to the case of his fellow Jews. "What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (**verse 22**). God spent a *long* time believing that ancient Israel would overcome and take His name to the world. But instead they chose to thwart His purposes and ultimately acted out that hatred for God by trying to get rid of Him by murdering the Son of God. (They were but a mirror image of all humanity, including ourselves.) Their ultimate act of wrath against God was the occasion for God's wrath against sin being revealed by His Son bearing the curse which is the second death.

The Jewish leadership by and large rejected God's Messiah, and thus God's Plan B was thwarted; and so He turned to Plan C in order to reach the world with the good news about who He is. "And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" (**verses 23, 24**). The Gentiles were included all along in the election of God's everlasting covenant. The Jews were to have been the agency for evangelizing the Gentiles throughout the world. Now the Gentiles will be used of God to evangelize not only their own, but also the Jews.

Writing regarding the Gentiles, Hosea said: "I will call them My people, which were not My people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not My people; there shall they be called the children of the living God" (**verses 25, 26**). An Israelite, indeed, is an "overcomer" by the grace of God. Gentiles, by definition, are like Esau, they trust in the works of the flesh. By definition they "were not My people." But this does not exclude Gentiles from the covenants of God's promise. The same gift of salvation is given to them as is given to the Jew—the same as was given to Pharaoh. Paul envisions many Gentiles "called the children of the living God." He sees them as overcoming sin in Christ, just as Jacob who was renamed Israel.

Isaiah wrote of things that express hope for the future of Israel. The church of ancient Israel is in continuity with modern Israel. They rest in their graves awaiting the first resurrection. Israel today is to learn the lessons of all previous history in their "growing up" experience of becoming the Bride of Christ. "Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved" (**verse 27**). The remnant here are those who proclaim "the third angel's message in verity" as the unity of "the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 12:14). The remnant will be the first fruits of God and the Lamb who finally reciprocate His love and are thus a mate who shall stand by His side.

From the human standpoint we are tempted to think that God's plan has been frustrated all the long ages of history. But God believes in the success of His Son's work in being "the Saviour of the world". "For He will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth" (**verse 28**). It is God's work to finish. It is Christ's gift to cleanse His people. It has ever been and it is still His purpose to "cut it short in righteousness". It is the evil servant who says, "My Lord delayeth His coming" (Matthew 24:48). For us to give in to the temptation of thinking that it is up to us to finish the work of God on earth is to perceive it as human righteousness and not God's righteousness that will finish His work. To the degree that we fall into this failed way of thinking we perpetuate the delay of His coming.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is the nexus from which the "remnant" "seed" shall emerge which "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." "And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha" (**verse 29**). This apt description of "a seed" in the scorched earth over which fire and brimstone has ravaged all life, gives hope, just as Christ was the promised "seed" in the manger of Bethlehem! It may appear that the truth of the Gospel, the true Christ, and the true Cross, have been completely eliminated from the minds of modern Israel. But one should never count God out! Nor what God can do with an honest heart like Elijah's.

What is Paul's final point? "That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith" (**verse 30**). Justification by faith is a heart reconciliation to God which can only be effected by

appreciating the cost of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. In it is no legalism for such faith is constrained by *agape*.

"Righteousness" is *dikaiosune*. The only righteous One is Christ. Notice how carefully Paul states this. The Gentiles "have attained to righteousness." Yet, it is "the righteousness which is of faith." The point: Christ's righteousness is appropriated by faith. It is His gift to Gentiles who were formerly unrighteous and incapable of straightening themselves out.

The Ten Commandments are a perfect description of God's righteousness which brings life in the keeping of them. "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" (**verses 31, 32**). Paul is the only one who understands the failure of his brethren. They have sought the righteousness of the law through their old covenant promises to keep the law just right. Their self-motivated desire to be good in order to attain a reward has been a failure because self-dependence leads to an ever spiral downward into more bondage of trusting to self to obey, and this the law condemns.

The righteousness of the law is attained only by faith in Christ. "For they stumbled at that stumblingstone. As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed" (**verses 32, 33**). To have missed such a large "rock" in their pathway, the Jews had to have been completely blind to Christ their Messiah. It is not the fault of the "stumblingstone" that the Jews fell flat on their hands, and knees, and face all bloodied and bruised with abrasions.

They are still in God's promises of His everlasting covenant. They are elected to salvation in Christ. God's plan now is to provoke them through the ministry of the Gentiles. The Gentile-based evangelism is in continuity with the ministry of the church of the Old Testament and will certainly exceed it in glory to the One who deserves His reward for which He died.

—Paul E. Penno

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/HzPoi60knIM>

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