

TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

God's Plan from the Beginning: both Jews and Gentiles as His People Romans 9:25-33

As He says also in Hosea: " I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved." " And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ' You are not My people, there they shall be called sons of the living God."

²⁷ Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. ²⁸ For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth."

²⁹ And as Isaiah said before: " Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah."³⁰ What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; ³¹ but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.³² Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. ³³ As it is written: " Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

Background Notes

In Romans 1-8 we have a wonderful systematic presentation of the doctrine of justification by faith. The good news is that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross for the sins of the world. Anyone, Jew or non-Jew, who comes by faith and receives Christ as personal Savior is given eternal life. This is the gospel.

But now comes the logical question in the minds of those reading the letter to the Romans - both then and now. Why aren't more individual Jews becoming Christians? Aren't they the chosen people? Why are they refusing the gospel? And what about the promises and covenants to Israel -- have they failed? Has God changed His mind? The answer to these questions is the subject of Romans 9 through 11.

The answer is that God has not changed His mind. The promises and the covenants that God made with Israel are still good. However, it was never God's intention to save all the Jews -- only those who exercise faith. And it was always God's intention to extend His grace to the Gentiles.

In establishing these points, the doctrine of the sovereignty of God is clearly taught in Romans 9. That is, God is the ultimate authority in everything, including who gets saved. We've seen that this not an easy doctrine to understand. In addition, the doctrine of the sovereignty of God doesn't deny, or negate, or set aside the doctrine of the responsibility of man, as we see at the end of chapter 9 and we'll see in Romans 10. Both of these doctrines are true, and they run parallel courses throughout the Bible.

In John 3:16 the Lord Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." But in John 6:44 He also said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him..." Romans 10:13 says, "For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." And yet, Romans 9:18 says, "Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens."

How these two doctrines fit together is beyond our finite understanding, but **it's not a logical contradiction**. If the Bible said in one place, "God is sovereign and then in another place it said, "God is not sovereign" – now that's a logical contradiction. But the Bible doesn't say that! Instead, the Bible says that God is sovereign and it also says that man is responsible.

A number of illustrations could be given to help us understand how these two doctrines fit together, but I think I like the "cat illustration" best. We have a pet cat, and she's very smart. But guess what? I have not been able to teach this cat calculus! Why not? Because the mind of a cat is too finite to understand advanced mathematics! That doesn't mean that calculus is not true. It means that a cat's mind is too finite to take it in. The doctrine of the responsibility of man and the doctrine of God's sovereign election are both taught in the Scripture, and both are true, but how those doctrines fit together is beyond our finite comprehension.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. God's sovereign grace extends to Gentiles as well as Jews

In verses 23-24 we saw that the "vessels of mercy, which God had prepared beforehand for glory," included Gentiles as well as Jews. Verses 23-24, "...and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴ even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" In other words, it was part of God's eternal sovereign plan that His grace would reach out to the Gentiles.

To show that this plan was included in Old Testament prophecy, Paul quoted two verses from the Old Testament book of Hosea: "As He says also in Hosea: " *I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved.*" ²⁶ " *And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ' You are not My people,' there they shall be called sons of the living God"* (v25-26).

The context of these verses in Hosea is in reference to Israel, the Jewish people, but we see here in Romans 9 that the **fuller meaning** (not a **different** meaning, but the **fuller** meaning) of this prophecy includes the Gentiles. So the prediction of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles was included in Hosea's prophecy.

Then in verses 27-29, Paul quoted some verses from Isaiah. Verse 27: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. ²⁸ For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth." And as Isaiah said before: " *Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah.*"

In the context of Isaiah, the coming judgment and captivity of Israel at the hands of their enemies is being discussed. Here again we see the **fuller meaning** of these verses. The

point of these verses is that God, in His sovereign grace, has always preserved a believing remnant of Jewish believers. In His justice, God could have wiped Israel out like Sodom and Gomorrah. In fact He could have done it many times! But in His sovereign grace, He has always preserved a believing remnant - even to this day, and also in the future. In Romans 11:1 Paul included himself as part of this remnant. In Romans 11:5, he called it a *"remnant according to the election of grace."* In the rest of Romans 11, the remnant of the last days becomes the nation itself. So God's sovereign redemptive plans have always included both Jews and Gentiles. God's sovereign grace does extend to Gentiles as well as Jews.

2. God's sovereign grace does not exclude the need for faith.

This is what verses 30-33 are all about, and here the doctrine of the responsibility of man is clearly taught. Israel didn't attain righteousness. Why not? Verse 32: *"Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone."*

They were responsible before God, and they knew it -- but they tried to attain righteousness on their own by trying to keep God's law in their own strength. No one can do that - not then and not today. They would not come by faith! Meanwhile, Gentiles, who were also responsible, didn't have the Mosaic Law, and they were not pursuing righteousness, and yet they did attain to righteousness. Why? They realized their responsibility before God on the one hand, and their helplessness on the other, and they came to faith in Christ. Verse 30: *"What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith..."* God's sovereign grace doesn't exclude the need for faith.

Practical Application

How long will you continue to stumble?

In verse 33, Paul again quoted from Isaiah. *"As it is written: " Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."*

In this verse, the "stumbling stone" is Christ. Israel stumbled at that stumbling stone (v32). Why? Because they were convinced that they could keep God's Law on their own! When Christ came and told them differently, they wouldn't believe. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone."

I think this has an application for us today - for the believer as well as the unbeliever. The application to the unbeliever is obvious. There's only one way of salvation -- it's through Christ alone! Are you an unbeliever? How long will you continue to stumble? Don't try to "make it" with God on your own, as the Jews did. Humble yourself before God and accept Christ as your Savior. You will never be sorry or put to shame (v33).

What about an application for believers? As we come to the end of Romans 9, we realize that some of the doctrine in this chapter is not easy to swallow. But God, in His mercy, chooses some to be saved and doesn't choose others. That is not easy doctrine, and it can cause stumbling.

Illustrations are helpful, although not perfect. Here's a final illustration. The governor of a state decides to pardon all state prisoners. On a given day, the doors of all the prisons are thrown open, and "whosoever will" may go free! But not a single prisoner leaves -- even though they're free to make the choice to leave. Their wills are inclined to stay because of any number of reasons -- their friends, they don't trust the governor, whatever. Finally, in his mercy, the governor chooses to bring a certain number of prisoners out of the prison and persuades them that they've made the right choice. The rest he leaves in the prison to make their own choice -- which is to stay! The prisoners who came out end up eternally grateful to the governor for choosing them and for changing their wills.

Maybe that illustration will help to keep you from stumbling over the hard doctrine of Romans 9. In John 6:66 we read that "*From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.*" Why? Because of **hard teaching**! They stumbled at the hard doctrine He was teaching. Are you stumbled by the hard doctrine of Romans 9? How long will you continue to stumble?