

# Romans 9 - God's Chosen

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Romans chapter 9. Here we go. Romans chapter 9.

*"I am speaking the truth in Christ — I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit — 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. 4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. 5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen." (ESV)*

By the way, if you were thinking, wow, that's a really amazing declaration of His deity! You're right.

*"6 But it... (excuse me.) it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, 7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. 9 For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son." 10 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad - in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls - 12 she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."*

*14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! 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." 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.*

*19 You will say... then, (or yes,) You will say then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will? 20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to (the) molder? "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? 22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— 24 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? 25 As indeed he says in Hosea,*

*"Those who were not my people, I will call 'my people,'  
and her who was not beloved, I will call beloved."*

*26 And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,'  
there they will be called "sons of the living God.'"*

*27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, 28 for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." 29 And as Isaiah predicted,*

*"If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,  
we would have been like Sodom  
and become like Gomorrah."*

*30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 as it is written,*

*"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;  
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."*

Pray with me, Heavenly Father, we thank You so much for the ministry of Your Word and the power of that Word to give us insight and understanding into the Scriptures into the wisdom that is laid out for us in the Word.

Now, Father, help us to understand it. Help us to apprehend it. And most of all, Lord God, help us to apply it in our lives in such a way, Lord, that we can walk

it out in our lives. We ask Lord, that You would be with us through Jesus Christ, our Savior, amen.

You might have noticed that with Romans chapter 9, we have a very distinct shift in Paul's wording and even his mood. Throughout the course of this study so far in the first 8 chapters of Romans, the apostle has painted a picture for us of our salvation. Starting off with telling us: The judgment of God is due to every human being because all have sinned. And he basically brought us to the very brink of despair in the first 7 chapters of Romans. If you can last through the first 7 chapters of Romans, you can get through anything I'm convinced.

And then we came to chapter 8, which was this delightful, refreshing, change of from what Paul had been saying. And beginning it with chapter 8, Paul began reciting blessing, after blessing, after blessing, that is ours in Jesus.

He began that chapter, you remember, by saying, *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Romans 8:1) And he went through all these things that you and I, are blessed to have as part of our lives in Christ. And Romans chapter eight is a wonderful study.

But now here we are in chapter 9. And you can tell by reading it can't you that this is a challenging chapter. There's a lot of difficult things in here. Well in this chapter and the next two afterward, Paul, is going to be turning his focus to the subject of God's sovereignty. God...

And when we say, God's sovereignty, we mean God's ability to dictate the affairs of man apart from anyone challenging Him. God is sovereign. There is no one above Him.

And he's going to speak of God's dealings, His sovereign dealings with man. And specifically, he's going to relate it to Israel. Because that's one of Paul's passions. In fact, he started off this chapter talking about his passion for Israel.

And you'll remember that at the end of the last chapter, Paul broached the subject of predestination. Let me put this up on the screen for you so that you can remember just the words that were said. Paul said,

**Romans 8:28-29 (ESV)**

*And we know for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

*And we know for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (And then he said) For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

There are two statements in those verses that I want you to take special note of and I'll highlight them for you. The first is, "*called according to his purpose.*"

**Romans 8:28-29 (ESV)**

*And we know for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are **called according to his purpose**. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

That is now what Paul is going to begin to talk about in depth. The fact that God has a purpose. And God has called you according to that purpose. God has a purpose for your life. God has a purpose for your existence. And it isn't just to make money, be happy, and have fun. God has a purpose for your life.

You'll notice the second statement that Paul made there that's very key is the statement or the phrase, "*those whom he foreknew he also predestined.*"

**Romans 8:28-29 (ESV)**

*And we know for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are **called according to his purpose**. For **those whom he foreknew he also predestined** to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

Now we talked about that when we covered those statements But they are key as we launch now into a further study of these ideas in Romans 9, 10, and 11. And in these chapters again, Paul will emphasize God's sovereign right to choose who He will.

And as Paul addresses this very challenging subject, he will use, as I said, Israel as his example. Look with me again in verse 1. He starts off by saying, "*I am speaking the truth in Christ— I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.*"

This is that change that we were talking about. Paul has been through chapter eight talking about the wonderful blessings of those who are in Christ. And then

we get into chapter 9 and suddenly he changes his tone. And he says, when I think... It's like he's saying, when I think about God's salvation and the blessing that is ours through Jesus, I rejoice. But when I think about Israel, I have sorrow. I have sorrow he says. And he says, unceasing anguish in his heart. Sounds a little dramatic doesn't it?

But what Paul is doing is he's thinking about his kinsmen, the Jews. And his heart is filled with sorrow to the point where he says that he wishes that he could be accursed. Isn't that interesting. Look at verse 3 again. *"...I wish that I myself were accursed... cut off (he said) for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen, according to the flesh."* He's talking about the Jews.

Paul loves his people so much. He says, if it were possible, I could wish that I was accursed. I could wish that I myself would suffer eternal separation from God, if it would mean their salvation.

Now, obviously Paul can't do that. Nor is it necessary. Because, as you well know, Jesus was accursed for the people of Israel already. Remember, the Bible says, anyone who is hung on a tree is cursed by God. (Deuteronomy 21:23, Galatians 3:13) And Jesus received the curse of God for us. He was cursed for you, so that you and I, would never have to be cursed. There's nothing more that Paul can add to what Jesus has already done.

What he's doing is he's just expressing his heart in very dramatic wording about his love for the people of God. And he says in verse four, if you look with me again there. He talks about the blessings given to the nation of Israel.

He says, *"They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants..."* I mean, all the great covenants that God made with mankind. He cut through the people of Israel and those who came before them. And he says, and *"the giving of the law"* came through Israel. He said, *"the worship, ...the promises."* These all came to Israel. *"To them belong the patriarchs."* Speaking of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And from their race, according to the flesh is the Messiah - the Christ. Even Jesus came through the Jews.

It's interesting, Martin Luther, not talking about Martin Luther King. Martin Luther the reformer, lived back in the 1500s, actually wrote a book at one point called, just very simply, Jesus was a Jew. Because in Martin Luther's time, there was a lot of anti-Semitism, just like there is today. A lot of hatred toward the Jews. And Martin Luther, wanted to remind people that Jesus was a Jew.

These are all of the blessings that are given to the nation of Israel, that didn't come to any other nation on the face of the planet. No other country. These things weren't given to the United States of America. God didn't reveal His law. He didn't bring, raise up prophets. He didn't speak of the Messiah and bring the Messiah into the world through the United States or some other country. Did it through Israel. Little tiny Israel.

No other nation was chosen and that's key, like the people of Israel to have God living in their midst. No other group of people can lay claim to the things that Israel can lay claim to. God gave them promise, after promise, after promise, after promise, ultimately leading to the coming of Messiah.

We recite those promises every Christmas, when we do our Christmas Eve service. You guys probably do it at home, too. Some of you who have some Christmas traditions of reading the Old Testament during your Christmas celebration. You probably dig into the Old Testament, find a passage speaking of the coming of Messiah. And you read it as a way of reminding yourself that this was something that God prophesied. That He promised would come, Messiah would come. And those prophecies came through Israel. And Jesus came through the Jews.

Why then did the very nation through whom all those promises came, actually end up rejecting their own Messiah? I mean, obviously they didn't all reject Him. Paul himself, was a Jew by birth. He was a Christian. And there were obviously, other Christians. But by and large, the nation of Israel, rejected their Messiah. After all the prophecy. After all the things that God did to point the way so they would recognize the Messiah. When He came they... He came and they crucified Him. That's what they did. They actually crucified Him.

It almost makes you wonder if God's Word somehow failed in the sense of all those promises and so forth that God had gave. And that's why Paul makes the statement in verse 6 in your Bible. Look there, *"But it is not as though the word of God has failed."*

And what Paul is saying is, it's not as though God failed to make good on His promises. God didn't... In other words, the problem wasn't on God's part that Israel failed to recognize their Messiah. It wasn't God's problem. It wasn't God's fault. God is faithful no matter what men may do with His Word.

Where was the problem? Look in the middle of verse 6. We didn't actually finish reading verse 6. Here's where Paul explains it. He says, *"For not all who*

*are descended from Israel belong to Israel," Verse 7, "and not all are children of Abraham (simply) because they are his offspring,..."*

Paul is making the point that just because you're born a Jew doesn't mean that you're naturally going to be a child of God. Right?

Just because somebody is a Jew, they are part of a wonderful race. And to them belong all these incredible blessings that you and I, can't lay claim to as Gentiles, unless you're a Jew or part Jew. But just because you are born with those blessings doesn't mean you're going to embrace them. Doesn't mean you're actually God's child.

Here's how he explains it. Look at the last part of verse 7 here. He says, *"but Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."* He's quoting the Words of the Lord here. And he goes on to say in verse 8, *"This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring."*

And what Paul is doing here is he's reminding you and I, of our Old Testament lessons. And he's saying: Do you remember, Abraham had two boys. He had two sons. Ishmael was born first. Ishmael was born to a slave girl named Hagar. And basically, you know the story. Ishmael was born because Abraham and Sarah got impatient. They got tired of waiting for the promise of God to be manifest. And they decided that they needed to help God. Can you relate?

Sometimes we do that. We feel like, God, I think you need a little help. So, Abraham and Sarah decided to help God and they got Ishmael. And Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn son. Isaac, you'll remember, was his second born son who was born through Sarah. And you guys remember from your Old Testament studies, that Sarah was past the age of childbearing. Which means that Isaac came about supernaturally. He was born as the result of a supernatural act of God through a promise. Okay.

By the way, do you see the connection between Isaac, and you and I? We're the same as Isaac. We're born supernaturally as the result of a promise. Right? You're not a child of God simply because you're born. You're a child of God because you're born-again. Right?

People mistake all the time. They'll talk about how we're all God's children. We're not all God's children. It's just absolutely, positively not true. We are not all God's children. If you look at just the children of mankind, they are not all God's children. Who are God's children? Those who are born as the result of a

supernatural work of God, according to a promise. That's who the children of God are. Right? I mean, that's what the Bible says. John chapter 1, to those who believe, to those who received Him, He gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12) He gave the right to become children of God, born supernaturally.

But the point that Paul wants to make here, is how, and this is the key guys, so don't lose me right here. The point that Paul is making here, is how Ishmael and Isaac were chosen. Okay? You got two sons of Abraham. And God's promise and blessing is going to come through one of them. Only one of them. Which one is it going to be? How's God going to choose? Is He going to go, eenie, meenie, minie, moe? Is He going to flip a coin? Is He going to just say, well, I like you better. I mean, is that the process that He's going to go through in this situation?

Well, if He was going to follow the rules of man, He would have had to have picked Ishmael. Why? Ishmael was the firstborn. You guys know, biblically speaking, the firstborn son always gets the blessing. Right? That's the rule, firstborn. Firstborn son gets the inheritance. Inherits the blessing from the father. And what is Paul telling us here in this passage? He's saying God broke the rules. He didn't pick the firstborn son. He picked the second born son. And that's what he explains in verse 9. We'll get into why here in just a moment.

Look at verse 9. *"For this is what the promise said: 'About this time next year I will return, and Sarah (she's going to) have a son.'"* Now that's talking about the birth of Isaac. *"And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children (with Isaac) by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad - in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls - she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.'"* As it is written, *"Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."*

Now stop there. And do not get tripped up over what appears to be rather harsh language, when the passage says, *"Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."* This passage is not telling you that God was having a bad day and decided to be petty. Like we can do. I like you, but I don't like you. That's not what God was doing here.

God isn't literally saying that He despised Esau, or that he hated Esau. In fact, if you look through the Old Testament record, you will find that God blessed Esau. He became a great nation. And the man himself, Esau, was hugely... He



was super wealthy. I mean, just blessed with all kinds of land, all kinds of family. God blessed Esau.

The statement, "*Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated...*," is spoken in the context of God breaking the rules of man and choosing Jacob over Esau, contrary to human rules, and guidelines, and traditions. That's what He's saying. It literally means, I favored Jacob, but I didn't favor Esau. Okay, I favored one and not the other. In other words, God overruled: The son that should have been chosen first and He instead chose the younger.

Now, this is what we call, election. Okay. That's the word that you need to keep in your heart: Election. Instead of choosing the son who tradition and human merit would have told you to choose, God made His Own sovereign choice. That's election.

Now let's get into this question: Why did He choose Jacob over Esau? This is important. Well, if I were to ask most people: Why did God choose Jacob? Why did He reject Esau? Most people would say, well, He must have seen something in Jacob that He didn't see in Esau. Jacob must have been more righteous than Esau.

But then we remember two things. We've read through the Book of Genesis and Jacob was a scoundrel. In fact, just as much as Esau. I mean Esau, I'll grant you, was a piece of work. But so was Jacob. He was a deceiver. He was a cheat. He lied to his father. Stole his brother's birthright. I mean, Jacob was a character. The idea that somehow Jacob was better than Esau just doesn't fly. We know better.

And not only do we know better from reading the passage, but we know what we read right here in verse 11 and 12. Look with me, again, in verse 11 and 12 in your Bible. Look what it says.

He says, "*Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—*" (In other words, to merit God's response to their lives,) "*in order that God's purpose of election might continue, (look at this) not because of works,*" (In other words, not because of the way they live their lives,) "*but because of him who calls— she was told,*" The older, Esau is going to serve the younger, Jacob.

Why was Jacob chosen? The answer is in verse 11 of this chapter. Just so we can all see it on the board. Here's what it says.

**Romans 9:11 (ESV)**

*...in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works, but because of him who calls...*

*...in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works, but because of him who calls...*

That's why God chose Jacob, so that His purposes in election might stand. Is that a satisfying answer for you? Yeah, I know, not for me either. I mean... And He doesn't really explain Himself. It's the interesting thing about God. He doesn't feel the need to explain Himself.

We love it when people explain things to us because it helps us to make a judgment. Even when our kids do something wrong, why did you do that? And based on their answer, we're probably going to meet out their punishment.

And even when something happens in our lives, people come to me and say, pastor Paul, I just want to know why? Why do you want to know why? Have you ever stopped yourself to ask yourself the question: Why do I want to know why? I think... We think that it's going to give us comfort if we just know why. If I just knew why God, let this happen. We think that it would bring us comfort.

But there's another reason we want to know why. So that we can judge it. We judge the answer. We can judge it and say, well, that's stupid. Or, okay, I accept that. And we think that maybe if God explains why to us, that then we can go, oh, okay. Now I understand.

But what if God makes a decision and we say, God, why did You do that? He goes, because. Didn't you hate it when your parents used to say that? And then I got to be a parent and I got to say it. And it was fun. Say it to your kids. And your kids go, why? And you go, just because I said so. It's like, wow, that felt good. I think I was letting off some steam from all those years of hearing my Mom and Dad say it or something like that. We hate it. We hate it when people say that to us, because I said so.

And why do we hate it? They're not giving us anything to judge. Right? You're not telling me anything. How am I going to judge you? Well, I think I'll just go ahead and judge you anyway. I'll judge you based on a lack of information. That's what people do with God.

God comes along. He says, listen, I'll tell you why I chose Jacob over Esau. Because that's who I chose. Yeah, but why? Was he a better person? You read the text and see for yourself. No. Okay, well then why'd you choose him? So that My purpose might stand. So that My purpose... Your purpose? What's your purpose? I'm sorry, My child. It's so far over your head, you can't even begin to understand.

And that's not terribly satisfying. Look what Paul reminds us in the next verse. Look at verse 15. The basis on which we are chosen. *"For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'"* Isn't that a fancy way of saying, I'll do whatever I want to do. And you can't stop Me. It is. Although it's couched in much nicer language. I'll have mercy on whom I have mercy and I'll have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

But here's the point that Paul is making. He's not saying this just to frustrate you and I, and make us feel like, gee, God isn't telling me things. He's saying this so that you understand God's choice is not based on merit. Do you understand? Do you understand that God chooses you not because of what you've done? I mean, do you really understand that?

Do you understand that your being chosen by God is the same as Jacob. It has nothing to do with you being a good person, or a bad person, or an in-between person, or anything. He just chose you. Can you get that through your head?

It's so hard for people to get it through their head. God says here, listen, you know why I chose you? Mercy. Do you guys remember the definition of mercy? Mercy is not getting what you deserve. Right? Mercy is not getting what you deserve. You know you deserve it but you don't get it, because God is merciful. Why did God choose you? Mercy. His mercy.

The fact is, all of us deserve to be punished for our sin. That's the fact of the matter. I deserve, I deserve hell. And so do you. But that's not what we get. We get mercy. We get heaven. Do we deserve heaven? Pfft! you kidding? Absolutely not! I don't deserve heaven. Do you? If there's anyone here who thinks they deserve heaven, you better read your Bible through a few more times. Because you're missing the point.

That's why Paul says what he says in verse 16. Look in your Bible. *"So then it depends not on human will or exertion, (that word means effort,) but on God, who has mercy."*

Now this is something we already knew. We knew this all along. I mean, we knew that our salvation wasn't based on effort. Being a good person. Pastor, I'm just trying to be a good person so I can go to heaven. Stop it. You aren't going to get to heaven by being a good person. We've known it for a long time.

We know that we don't deserve salvation. And you guys remember Ephesians 2. Let me put this up on the screen here for you because you guys know this.

**Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your doing, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

*For grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your doing. (Isn't that what Paul wrote? It's not your doing) it is a gift... (It's) not... (the) ...result of... (you being a good person. That's what) works... (is.)*

He says, in fact, he says, "In heaven, there's no boasting. There's no boasting at all. You can't boast in God's presence, and go, I'm here because I lived a stellar life all my days. And God was impressed. Thank you very much. No, there's none of that. You can boast on earth. You can't boast in heaven because salvation is a gift. Oh, we've known that.

But now Paul is going to take it even further. Look at what he... Keep reading now in verse 17 again. He's going to use... He's going to keep talking about God's sovereign choice.

He says, "*For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, (Now he's talking about the Old Testament) 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.'*" So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills..."

Oh Boy, what did he just tell us? I mean, we like hearing that He has mercy on whoever He wants to have mercy. But we don't like hearing the second part. He hardens whom He wants to harden. Verse 19, "*You will say to me then, (Paul's anticipating the questions. Well then), Why does.. (God) still find fault?*" (in me.) Because if I'm just simply being what He's called me to be, then who can resist His will?

Paul is posing the question of all questions and believe me, this question has been debated ad nauseam. And that's the whole idea of: If God shows mercy to whomever He shows mercy and He hardens others, then how can He actually be just in judging me if He made me the way I am? Interesting question, huh?

Here's the response. You ready? Verse 20. *"But (you who he says,) who are you, O man, to answer back to God?"* Don't... Again, hated when my parents said that. You've got such a good response to whatever they're saying. At least you felt like it was a good response.

Remember that when you were a child? Some of you, hasn't been that long since you were a child. For me it was just yesterday. Doesn't it seem like that sometimes? And your parents say something to you and you respond back. And you have a good response. And what do they say? Hey, don't talk back. Don't you talk back to me, young man.

It's like, I was just talking. I was just responding. I thought it was a good response. (CLOCK- Pastor Paul feigns being hit in the head.) But I just hate it. It's like it just shuts down the conversation. I thought we were having a conversation here. And Paul throws that thing out here. And he says, you who are asking, well, wait a minute. Isn't God unjust when He judges those whom He hardened? Paul says, who are you to talk back to God?

He says, in fact, *"Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?'"* In other words, he's bringing the picture of the potter into view. Does the pot say to the potter, why'd you make me like this?

He says in verse 21, *"Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?"* The fact is - God has the right. God has the right, doesn't He? Can we at least agree on that? God has the right. He can do anything you want us to. Right?

And then he goes on to propose a what if. Verse 22, *"What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory - even us whom he is called, not from the Jews (but also or) only (rather) but also from the Gentiles?"*

Okay, this is a little troubling. It's a little troubling. Is the apostle Paul saying that God created men like Pharaoh, just so He could nuke them? I mean, is that what he's saying here in this what if scenario that he's suggesting? Is Paul actually saying, that God creates people just to send them to hell?

Well, as I said, Paul is presenting a what if scenario. I want you to really take notice of that. He starts off verse 22, with what if; what if? Listen, if God did

create people to simply receive His wrath, well that is His sovereign right. And the point here is that God is sovereign. And He can do whatever He likes.

But the second point that you and I need to be very careful to understand here, is that whatever God does do, it is always righteous. And it is always just. And it is always fair because He cannot be otherwise.

When I deal with... And this is not a thing that only just a few people have been troubled by. A lot of people have been troubled by it. And there are three passages in the Scripture that I often go to, when I struggle with this question of God's sovereignty. Because these are challenging things to look at. And the first passage is from Genesis chapter 18 that I'll put on the screen for you. And this is a question that Abraham posed to God. And he said this. He said,

**Genesis 18:25 (ESV)**

*Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?*

*Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?*

Now, I know that it's put in the form of a question. But it is essentially a rhetorical question. I mean, when you talk to God, you don't... You know what I mean? He's saying, in essence, God, you are just. And will you not act justly?

Do you remember when he was posing this question to God? He posed it at a time when God told him that He was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Problem was, Abraham had a nephew living there. And he knew that God's judgment would be a death sentence for his nephew, so, he began to intercede on behalf of his nephew because he knew that his nephew wasn't deserving of this judgment for the wickedness that was going on in Sodom and Gomorrah. And Abraham posed this question: "*Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?*" Or, what is right.

As a pastor, I've sat with people many, many times throughout the years when they've experienced some kind of tragedy in their life. And don't think I have, those of you who I've done that for, that I don't have any words of great wisdom at a time like that. I just don't. There's so much in this life, I have no idea why it happens. Why God lets certain things happen. But one thing I do is, I come back to comfort myself (with that same question.) And I say, "*Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?*" Will He not do right?

There's a point where you have to believe that God is going to do right. Or, you know what? You might as well just pack it in. I mean, you're either going to

believe in the attributes of God, and the holiness of God, or you're not. You know what I mean? And if you don't, then stop pretending that you do. And that's not to say that there aren't things that sometimes you have to work through because we do. But the point is you ultimately you have to, by faith, accept the fact that God is just. Meaning, fair and equitable. And He will always act according to His nature regardless of what you and I think.

There's another verse that I often hang on. And it's from Ezekiel chapter 18 where the Lord speaks. And he says,

**Ezekiel 18:23 (ESV)**

*"Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live."*

*"Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live."*

And this to me expresses the heart of God. See Paul in chapter nine up to this point, really isn't expressing much about the heart of God. Do you understand that? That's not the focus right now. He's expressing the sovereignty of God. You with me? But we sometimes have to turn and say, but God, I want to know your heart. I understand you're sovereign. You can do anything you want to do. But what's your heart?

Well, here's God's heart. He says, do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked? Do I take pleasure in people dying for their sin? No. Do I not rather take pleasure in the fact that a man should turn from his sin and live? See, that's... Again, that's the heart of God. And then the last passage that I often go to when I'm struggling is, I go to a passage in 2 Peter chapter three. And it goes like this,

**2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, regarding the coming of the Lord, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*

*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slow slowness, regarding the coming of the Lord, but is patient toward you, (Look at this next phrase.) not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*

I read that slowly because people, that's the heart of God. And you have to merge and hold in balance: the heart of God, with the sovereignty of God. If you focus too much on the sovereignty of God, you know what you're going to end up with? A severe, judgmental God. You must also understand that this sovereign God, who can do anything He wants to do, has expressed His heart.

And His heart is, *"God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes will not perish, but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16) Do you understand what Paul's doing here when he's focusing on the sovereignty of God?

And then let's read the last verses of the chapter. It's really interesting to me that in the midst of this chapter, where he deals with these very, hard hitting, elements of focusing on the sovereignty of God, he then returns... He returns in the last part of the chapter to talk, not about sovereignty, but about your choice in the matter.

Before he's been saying, "He chooses whom He wills. He hardens whom He wills." And then in the last verses, beginning of verse 25, he starts... He puts it back on you. Look what he says, *"As indeed he says in Hosea,*

*"Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,'  
and her who was not beloved, I will call 'beloved.'"*

<sup>26</sup> *"And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called, 'sons of the living God.'"*

<sup>27</sup> *And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will actually be saved,  
<sup>28</sup> for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." And as Isaiah predicted,*

*"If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,  
we would have been like Sodom  
and... Gomorrah." (Completely wiped out.)*

*"What shall we say, then? That the Gentiles who didn't pursue righteousness, they've actually found it, they attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by (what?) faith." Faith. That's your part. Okay? He's been talking about God's part of election earlier.*

Now he's going back to talk about your part. Faith. *"...but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness (actually) did not succeed in*



*reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it (How?) by faith; but as if it were based on works. What did they do? They (end up) stumbling over the stumbling stone, as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever (Whoever ) believes in him will not be put to shame."*

Isn't it fascinating you guys, in a single chapter of the Bible, Paul talks about salvation from God's perspective and salvation from yours. He talks about God sovereignly choosing who will be saved. Which is thoroughly biblical and thoroughly true. And now we get to the end of the chapter and he returns to the idea that, we need to place our faith in Christ. And those who trust in Him are the ones who are declared righteous.

Do you remember how we talked about that here a few weeks ago when we dealt with predestination? And I told you that you can look at salvation from two perspectives: from God's and from yours. And from God's perspective, you were... He chose you. He chose you from the foundations of the earth. He chose you before you were born. That's how God sees you from His perspective. That's heaven's view.

But there's an earthly view. And that's our vantage point. And from our vantage point, God says, choose God, choose Jesus, receive Him, believe in Him, believe in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. And both of the views are expressed in God's Word. And Romans chapter 9, reveals both of those perspectives.

Can I be completely honest with you? I don't like looking at life from God's perspective. I don't understand it. That's why I don't like it. I don't get it. As a teacher, I love putting things in organized compartments. I like doing that. It's just, it's easier to understand.

You guys notice how, when I go through the Scriptures, we chop it up, and we make it into small little things, and we go, okay, that fits there. And that fits there. And that fits there. And then God, He backs up and He starts talking to us about life from His perspective. And I can't do that to it. I can't chop it up and say it fits there. Because it doesn't fit anywhere! Except to say that it's just true.

But I can't explain it. How in the world can you and I, be chosen beforehand, and yet we still have to choose Him? I don't get it. I don't understand it. I never will. Well, I can't say that. Never say never. Bible says, one day we will know as we are known. (1 Corinthians 13:12) Maybe someday. But for right now, it's beyond me. All I can say to you, Christians, is that it's true.