

In the first half of Romans chapter nine we saw Paul's passion for his Jewish people. He gave us Biblical reasons for salvation being by faith (9:6-8). We saw that God's foreknowledge is involved in His abundant mercy on some while hardening the heart of others (8:29). But we also reasoned that because He is not willing that any should perish, He would never harden to the end those who would eventually turn to Him. He can't be unjust. He is our Maker and knows all so therefore He can harden whom He will. All this is in the context of Paul's passion to see his fellow Jews accept Jesus as the Messiah (9:1-3).

Because of this freedom that God possesses to extend mercy or harden a heart, Paul anticipates an argument coming from his fellow Jews who have rejected Jesus as the Messiah. It is a question that could be asked by anyone. ¹⁹ *You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?"* This is from the extreme view of the sovereignty of God. One extreme says that God designs us to either be saved or be damned and there is nothing you can do about it. The other extreme says that our salvation is completely a matter of whether we have a good heart that seeks God and is willing to be saved. Both views are incomplete. They both have an element of truth, but miss the whole truth.

For those who believe the Scriptures are the pure revelation of God, **we must come to a conclusion that is consistent with all Scripture** (Proverbs 30:5). There are those who promote a doctrine that teaches that some people are Satan's seed. Some even go so far as to say that was really what the fall of Genesis chapter three was all about. They believe Satan seduced Eve, which resulted in the line of Cain, who they believe are evil people who can never be saved. Of course that is an extreme of the extreme. Many others believe God designs some people to never believe. But what does Scripture say?

Man is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). All of us are the same. Though we bare God's image, we all inherited the fallen nature of Adam. Paul wrote in Ephesians that we are all by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). Remember that, because it helps us understand the following verses. Scripture lumps us all together as sinners whose only hope is the grace of God (6:23). It makes no sense to say that God makes people to be damned when the Word clearly declares that it is not His will that any should perish (2Peter 3:9).

A verse that almost every one of you knows tells us that can't be the case. God so loved the world that ... (John 3:16) "Whosoever" is anyone, not just those designed for heaven. Now we can look at the next verses in light of the rest of Scripture. ²⁰ *But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why*

Commented [notes1]: Romans 9:6-8 (ESV)

⁶ But 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 the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

Commented [notes2]: Romans 8:29 (ESV)

²⁹ 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.

Commented [notes3]: Romans 9:1-3 (ESV)

¹ 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.

Commented [notes4]: Proverbs 30:5 (ESV)

⁵ Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

Commented [notes5]: Genesis 1:27 (ESV)

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Commented [notes6]: Ephesians 2:3 (ESV)

³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Commented [notes7]: Romans 6:23 (ESV)

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Commented [notes8]: 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Commented [notes9]: John 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

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? If you were molding a pot and suddenly to your surprise the pot began to argue that you should have made it for a different purpose, what would you think? God can do what He wants with what is His. He can make a vase or an ashtray out of the same clay.

The only people that we can truly say were shaped as vessels of honor were Adam, Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5), John the Baptist (Luke 1:15), and they all sinned. Then of course there is Jesus (John 10:36). God sovereignly filled them with the Holy Spirit from before they were born. Is that fair? Can God mercifully send anointed from birth messengers to deliver His message, while the rest of us are born as vessels of wrath? Can He have mercy on them that He might have mercy on us? Thank God; Yes He can!

We should understand that God made the first man perfect (Genesis 1:31). Sin is the cause of all flaws in our physical and spiritual being. It wasn't God's will that we sin. We exercised the freedom He gave us and rebelled, and all the problems of mankind started there. What Paul is writing about here is the eternal destiny of individuals. He longs for the Jews to know Jesus as Messiah. Some of them did receive Jesus, including Paul, but most rejected Him. Believing Jews might ask why their relatives do not come to Christ. Unbelieving Jews might argue that Jesus can't be the Messiah because so few Jews accepted Him as the One. Paul is telling them we have no right to argue with God.

God foreknew those who would harden their own hearts like Pharaoh did. That is why Paul used Pharaoh as an example (9:17). After hardening his own heart, God hardened it further to show the stubbornness of man and the glory of God. The ten plagues against the things Egypt worshiped were a demonstration of the grace of God calling Egyptians to believe in the one true God. Many did believe and came out of Egypt with Israel (Exodus 12:38). Pharaoh did not and never would, so God hardened him to the point of even ordering his army to march into the Red Sea between the walls of water (Exodus 14:23). What an illustration for all who would harden their heart toward the Messiah to their own destruction!

You see, Jews in Paul's day were hearing of the resurrection of Jesus and the miracles of the Apostles. The Temple was also experiencing miraculous signs of God's disapproval. They had looked for generations to the yarn from the scapegoat's head turning from red to white as a sign of God accepting their sacrifice. After the crucifixion the miracle ceased. The door to the Holy Place opened by itself each night and the eternal flame would be out each morning.¹⁷ The mercy and grace of God was just like that in Egypt, pleading with people to believe and be saved.

Even the destruction of the Temple was allowed by the mercy of God to cause them to see the truth of the Gospel. Some would and others would not, but not because they were designed to accept or reject. By nature, we would all reject submitting to the

Commented [notes10]: Jeremiah 1:5 (ESV)

⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Commented [notes11]: Luke 1:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

Commented [notes12]: John 10:36 (ESV)

³⁶ do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming," because I said, "I am the Son of God."

Commented [notes13]: Genesis 1:30 (ESV)

³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food. -And it was so.

Commented [notes14]: Romans 9:17 (ESV)

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."

Commented [notes15]: Exodus 12:38 (ESV)

³⁸ A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds.

Commented [notes16]: Exodus 14:23 (ESV)

²³ The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.

Commented [notes17]: Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud

Lord Jesus. **God's grace extends to us all and enables us to come if we are willing.** Here is this meeting of the sovereignty of God and the freewill of man.

In God's foreknowledge, He prepares good works in advance for those who will accept His grace (Ephesians 2:10), equips and empowers them to do them. In that sense you can say that all who will be saved are prepared as vessels of mercy. No praise is due those who simply act on the grace He gives to receive Him, and no blame can be placed on God by those who refuse that grace and reject Him.

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? Paul is telling us that God puts up with great patience those who reject Him and are destined for hell. He lets them get away with quite a bit. He could wipe them off the earth when they first started their rebellion, but He shows His patience and makes known His power by letting them continue. He shows His power in that whatever they do ends up for our good and for His glory from an eternal perspective (8:28). Their mocking and persecution strengthens us. The hardships they impose on us strengthens our character and resolve (5:3-4) They don't thwart His plan, they simply store up more wrath for themselves (2:5).

How does that make known the riches of His glory for the vessels of mercy? We see in the behavior of those who reject Him where we would be if we had not accepted God's grace extended to us. **It was the same grace the vessels of wrath rejected that we received and that took us down the path to glory.** Over and over the New Testament makes it clear that this comes to us by the grace of God when we by faith simply believe and receive what God has done for us in Jesus (Acts 15:11).

Though most Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah, Paul sees this as the fulfillment of prophecy. Once again Paul bases his conviction on Scripture. 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.'"* Paul is citing Hosea 2:23 and 1:10. Paul is not referring to the salvation of Gentiles but of the Jews who had rejected God. Hosea's baby was named Not My People since God was rejecting the Jews because of their idolatry. The prophecy to Hosea was that the day would come when some would once again be called 'sons of the living God.' This not only showed that being a child of God was not due to being in the bloodline of Abraham, but also showed that a day was to come when a way would be made for their spiritual restoration. Paul is declaring that way is Jesus.

Commented [notes18]: Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Commented [notes19]: Romans 8:28 (ESV)

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Commented [notes20]: Romans 5:3-4 (ESV)

³ More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

Commented [notes21]: Romans 2:5 (NIV)

⁵ But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

Commented [notes22]: Acts 15:11 (ESV)

¹¹ But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

Commented [notes23]: Hosea 2:23 (ESV)

²³ and I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people' and he shall say, 'You are my God.'"

Commented [notes24]: Hosea 1:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children 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." Once again Paul makes His point, this time from **Isaiah 10:22-23**, that it is not physical lineage that grants one the right to be a true child of Israel. This prophecy was not speaking of the remnant that would return to Jerusalem but rather the small number that would return to God. There were a large number of Jews in Jesus' day, but only a few would be saved. There were a lot of Jews in Rome, but only a few were followers of Jesus.

This was a direct answer to those with the question, "If Jesus was the Messiah, then why weren't more Jews becoming Christians?" All this Biblical explanation of Jews and Gentiles entering the kingdom by grace through faith leads me to believe the church in Rome was having troubles with these issues. Some Jews must have thought themselves superior to Gentile believers. Discussions with the local synagogue must have centered on these questions.

Paul's last proof text is from **Isaiah 1:9**. *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."* If there were not a small group of genuine believers, the Jewish nation would have ceased to have any true believers. It could have been annihilated once and for all. Is the same not also true for those who call themselves Christians today? We have so many churches that have rejected the Gospel of Jesus and the validity of Scripture. Some sing hymns while they preach human secularism. Others pick and choose what parts of Scripture their intellect tells them are inspired. If the Lord of hosts had not left us spiritual offspring, where would our nation be (**Psalm 9:17**)? Surely it would be even worse than it is today. There will always be a remnant of true followers of Jesus who will pay the price and acknowledge Him before men (**Matthew 10:32-33**).

You aren't a part of that remnant because your parents were. You aren't a part of the remnant because you attend church. The only way to be a vessel prepared for glory is to believe and receive Jesus as Lord. There is no other way (**John 14:6**). Jesus said so (**John 3:36**). If you don't like it, take it up with Him. But please do recognize and accept the grace of God that draws you to receive what He has done for you. Then exercise the faith that He gives you and take that free, undeserved gift of salvation (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). That means Jesus will be the Lord of your life.

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. Here is Paul's conclusion. Now he addresses the Gentile part of the equation. The Gentiles were not trying to meet God's standard. They were not making an effort to be righteous. Yet, it was the Gentiles, more so than the Jews, who when they heard the Gospel of the righteousness that comes by faith, gladly received it. Israel, on the other hand, tried so

Commented [notes25]: Isaiah 10:22-23 (ESV)

²² For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. ²³ For the Lord GOD of hosts will make a full end, as decreed, in the midst of all the earth.

Commented [notes26]: Isaiah 1:9 (ESV)

⁹ If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.

Commented [notes27]: Psalm 9:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God.

Commented [notes28]: Matthew 10:32-33 (ESV)

³² So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Commented [notes29]: John 14:6 (ESV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Commented [notes30]: John 3:36 (ESV)

³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Commented [notes31]: Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

hard to follow the law because they knew that was God's standard, but in doing so found none could keep the law (John 7:19).

It doesn't seem fair, but it is entirely fair that the ones who tried so hard failed and instead it is made available to all who will just receive it by faith. In fact, this is what the world argues against Christianity. They ask, "Shouldn't the truth be for the whole world?" Yes! And it is for all languages and tribes (Revelation 5:9). It works in every culture. You don't have to be educated, speak a certain language, follow certain tradition, or even measure up in any way. The righteousness that comes by faith is for all people and enables all who receive it to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 2:16).

So why did most Jews not receive Jesus by faith? 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."* Why did most Jews who were trying so hard to please God miss the fact that Jesus is their Messiah? It is because they were trying to be good enough for God by keeping the law rather than coming to Him by faith and trusting Him to do what they could not do.

In a way that was familiar to rabbis, Paul combines a number of passages from Isaiah to explain what happened (Isaiah 28:16; 8:14; 49:23). Jesus is the chief cornerstone of the kingdom of God (Ephesians 2:20). Isaiah predicted that He would be a stumbling block to the many who would reject Him.

Jesus was of the right lineage, but He didn't act and speak in the way they were expecting. Oh, they had signs and prophecies fulfilled by Him, but He wasn't conforming to what they expected. He was always advancing a spiritual kingdom, while they sought an earthly one. He taught and exemplified serving and humility as the way of true greatness (Mark 10:43-44), and this was not what they were seeking. He came to die for our sins, while they preferred to try to earn salvation in way in which they could be proud (Matthew 23:5).

When the Apostle Peter quotes this verse from Isaiah in his letter, he draws the same conclusion as the Apostle Paul. They stumble because they disobey the word, which is also what they were destined to do (2Peter 2:8). This was their destiny, not because it was God's will that they perish, but because God foreknew that they would reject His grace and strive for spirituality in a way in which they could be proud of themselves and honored by men. The same thing happens today in every false religion. Only Christianity teaches to humbly accept that you can do nothing (John 15:5). It is from there that by faith we simply receive the grace of God and what He has done for us. You must choose. You can't blame God if you reject the love and mercy He has revealed to you. You can't boast if you do receive it. Will you be the minority that choose God's way and become His remnant in the earth, a vessel prepared for glory?

Commented [notes32]: John 7:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?"

Commented [notes33]: Revelation 5:9 (ESV)

⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,

Commented [notes34]: Galatians 2:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Commented [notes35]: Isaiah 28:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be in haste.'

Commented [notes36]: Isaiah 8:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Commented [notes37]: Isaiah 49:23 (ESV)

²³ Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame."

Commented [notes38]: Ephesians 2:20 (ESV)

²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

Commented [notes39]: Mark 10:43-44 (ESV)

⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

Commented [notes40]: Matthew 23:5 (ESV)

⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long,

Commented [notes41]: 1 Peter 2:8 (ESV)

⁸ and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

Commented [notes42]: John 15:5 (ESV)

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Questions

- 1 What are the two extremes regarding salvation?
- 2 How does the Bible describe man?
- 3 Why did God put ten plagues on Egypt?
- 4 How did God warn Jews in Jerusalem?
- 5 Can we blame God for rejecting Him?
- 6 Explain verses 22-24.
- 7 What point is Paul making in quoting Hosea and Isaiah?
- 8 Can we relate to verse 29?
- 9 Of whom does the remnant consist?
- 10 Why did most Jews fail to obtain righteousness?