

GOD'S GLORIOUS GOSPEL
Romans, chapter 9
The Gospel: God's Sovereign Mercy

I | CONTEXT AND CONNECTIONS

1 / **Chapters 9-11** of Romans are a unique and somewhat distinct section in Paul's development and proclamation of **God's Glorious Gospel**. And, if we read these chapters without making the connections with what comes before it, we may even think it is an abrupt interruption. Look at it this way: in **chs 1-8**, Paul has been thoughtfully and meticulously lining out that the Gospel is **in Christ, by grace, and through faith in Christ alone**. The righteousness of God cannot in any way be attained through our natural-born, human, and religious efforts. We simply 'don't have it in us,' nor can we work it out through anything we could ever do. **Chapters 1-4** described how God accomplished it *for* us in Christ. Then, in **chapters 5-8**, Paul describes how God accomplishes it *in* us. That is an over-generalization and simplification, but that's kind of the gist of it. Then, if you just skip over [we can't, but you get what I mean] **chapters 9-11** and go on into **chapter 12**, Paul will begin to describe how we work it out in our daily conduct and activities—as we will see when we get there...

2 / But, then, Paul brings us these three chapters about how God has *seemed to* cut Himself loose from all the promises He's made to the Jews through their history and His covenants He has made with them—and now He is focusing on and favoring the Gentiles. How does this square with His **promises [that is going to be one of the operative words here in chapter 9]**? REMEMBER also, as we have said before, that here in these very first days of the New Covenant Gospel era—and also specifically here in the churches in Rome—there had been a very prolific ingathering of Gentile believers. So much so, that the Gentiles were now comprising the majority of believers in Rome and every elsewhere in the first-century world. And, the ethnic Jewish populations, and even in their synagogues, were continuing to reject Christ as their promised Messiah and Savior [see **Acts 13.26-29**]. They were continuing to rest and trust in their Jewish heritage and legacy for their presumed righteousness—and in their law-keeping [**ch 10.1-4**].

3 / And so, *it seemed [at least] to the Jews that God had not kept His word of promise to them!* But as Paul will show over these three chapters, God has not 'cast them off' or abandoned ethnic Israel at all. But what God is doing now through the Gospel is: He is actually *keeping and fulfilling all the promises He has made to Jews and Gentiles alike in Christ and His Gospel [see ch 1.16]*. God is creating a *new Israel in Christ*—comprised of both Jews and Gentiles believers in Christ. This will be brought into focus more in **ch 11**. But the bottom line is, both Jews and Gentiles alike will be saved alike and the same way—through faith in Christ! **Paul will conclude chapter 9 with this grand summary—vv 30-33.**

4 / And the way God will save Gentiles is the same way He has been saving believing Jews all along—and that is, by faith in Christ, by His own sovereign choice of whom He will save, and by His sovereign mercy! So, let's read and see how Paul draws on their own Jewish history of salvation to show how God has always saved—and how He continues to save His people...

II | vv 1-5 | God had given the Israelites all the privileges and advantages that should have equipped them to recognize and receive Christ when He came to them—according to the promises God had made to them

1 / Paul's heart aches and breaks for the Jews—whom he calls **my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh**. Here is a distinction Paul makes and one that we need to make also to understand Paul's teaching concerning [1] who were true believers and truly saved among the Old Testament Israelites, and [2] how God views who belongs to His true people—His true 'Israel.' What we will discover is that there are ethnic Jews or Israel who are physical descendants of Abraham...and then there is the true Jew or Israelites—those who were not only circumcised in their flesh, but also circumcised in their hearts of faith [see **ch 2.28-29**]. But God had given the covenant ethnic nation all of these spiritual privileges: **the adoption / the glory [the manifestation of the Presence of God in the Tabernacle and Temple] / the covenants [Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic] / the giving of the Law / the worship [all the services, sacrifices,**

offerings—all of which portrayed and pointed to Christ] / AND THE PROMISES of the coming Redeemer and Messiah. All of which should have prepared them to recognize and receive Christ...

2 / All of these promises of Christ were revealed to all of their **patriarchs**, which includes not only Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—but also every one of their historical fathers who were figures in their OT history – and then **Christ Himself who came to fulfill and keep all of the promises God had made to them!** “...and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen!” This is an ‘eruption’ and exclamation of praise from Paul’s heart, exulting in His worship and glorying in the goodness and faithfulness of God to keep every promise of Christ He had given them—all of which were fulfilled and kept **in Christ!**

III | vv 6-13 | God promises His blessing of grace and salvation only to those whom He has chosen

1 / **But it is not as though the word of God has failed.** Paul is anticipating and pre-empting an objection that someone will raise. He will do this several more times as the chapter unfolds. *The historical fact is: when Christ did appear, the Jewish nation rejected Him. And they were still in a wholesale, ethnic-wide rejection of Christ and opposition to the very promises God had given them.* So, **has God failed to keep His ‘word’ of promise?** Paul equates God’s ‘word’ with His ‘promise’—a word that will come up repeatedly in this section of his message. Every **promise** is an expression of God’s elective **mercy**.

2 / Then, Paul makes this statement again, distinguishing the difference between those who were merely ethnic Israelites and those who were true members of God’s family of faith: **For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring.** I repeat, connect this statement to **ch 2.28-29**. Israel was Jacob’s ‘re-name’ by God from **Genesis 35.10**. The name means *‘favored by God—recipient of God’s favor.’*

3 / Even between Abraham’s two sons, Ishmael [born to Hagar] and Isaac [born to Sarah], God promised His favor only to those who would be born from the son He had chosen and promised—Isaac. **“Through Isaac shall your offspring be named” [Genesis 21.12].** *God reserves the right and prerogative to give His grace only to those whom He chooses to give His grace.* After all, it is His sovereign right to do so. So, He chooses to bring His salvation into our world through the **son of promise, Isaac**, and not through Ishmael, who was the son of Hagar—Abraham’s and Sarah’s idea. He did not choose Ishmael—He chose Isaac. **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**—because they are children whom God has chosen to be His people. And again, Paul quotes God’s **promise** of the son He would give Abraham and Sarah from **Genesis 18.10, 14**: **“About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.”** So, Abraham and Sarah were to believe God’s **promise** and trust Him to give His salvation as He had promised [see **ch 4.13-25**], just we believe and trust in His promised salvation through Christ.

4 / Then Paul gives another historical example of how God chooses to whom He will give His promised blessing of salvation: **Isaac and Rebekah, and their two sons, Jacob and Esau.** God chose Jacob over Esau to be the carrier of His covenant **promise**. And, He chose Jacob over Esau, NOT because Jacob was a better man or had the future promise of being worthy of God’s grace—but **because God chose Jacob**. **“...though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election [choosing one over the other] might continue, not because of works but because of Him who calls—she was told, ‘The older shall serve the younger [Genesis 25.23].’** As it is written, **‘Jacob have I loved, but Esau I hated [Malachi 1.2-3].’**” This ‘hated’ needs to be understood in the context like Jesus used it in **Luke 14.26** when He told His disciples that we should **‘hate father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even his own life’** to be His follower—meaning that we love and choose Him over all other relationships. So, God sovereignly—in keeping with His own sovereign prerogative—chose Jacob over Esau to be the recipient of His covenant promises, blessings, and salvation.

5 / NOTE ‘heads-up’: Paul introduces another key word here in **v 11**: **‘calls.’** God keeps His promise to **call** to salvation everyone He chooses to save. He will employ and emphasize God’s **call** to repentance and faith in Him in the upcoming **vv 24-26**—when He **calls** us whom He has chosen to faith in Christ [see **also 8.28, 30**]. We who have believed in and trusted Christ for salvation are **‘chosen and called’** by God to believe in Christ and be His people [**Revelation 17.14; plus numerous other Scriptures**].

IV | vv 14-18 | God is not unfair or unjust to have mercy on whom He chooses to have mercy—and harden those whom He wills [give them over to their own chosen unbelief]

1 / Now, Paul brings up what he knows what will be another objection to God's sovereign right to exercise His prerogative to show His **mercy** to whom He will. **What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!** This ought to be a 'no-brainer' even in purely human terms. What is **mercy**? It is showing and giving grace and favor to someone who doesn't deserve it. Someone who deserves whatever blame, punishment, or consequence that their transgressions and violations should receive. But instead, they are released from that deserved punishment by the sheer grace of the one who has the right, prerogative, and power to exact the penalty. So now, in addition to the examples of God's choosing Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau—Paul brings up the most seminal event in Israel's history—the **Exodus**, and particularly God's **mercy** on Israel *in keeping with His promises He had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*—and at the same time, **hardening Pharaoh's heart** to give Him the occasion to show His **mercy** in saving Israel from Egypt. *But, Pharaoh is responsible for the hardening of his own heart.*

2 / God reveals **mercy** as the catalyst of His Divine nature and character. Quoting from **Exodus 33.19**, **"For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'"** This was when God was threatening to destroy Israel after the episode of the golden calf. God proposed to Moses that He would just give the people to Moses to do with them what he would. Moses pleaded with God not to abandon them in the wilderness, but continue to go with them into the Promised Land. Then Moses begged: **"Please show me your Glory."** And the way God revealed His most glorious Glory is **mercy**: **"And He said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my Name, 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.'"** Just as a deeper side-note here: when God says **'on whom I will...'** He means, **'on whom I choose.'** Just another expression of His sovereign right to choose who receives His undeserved **mercy** and who doesn't. So then, God doesn't have to show **mercy** to anyone, does He? And if God shows **mercy** to anyone, it is because He chooses to. And if He doesn't show **mercy** to anyone, it's because they don't deserve it like the others, and He gives them not only what they deserve, but what they themselves chose for themselves. **So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy**—God's sovereign **will** and pleasure to show **mercy**.

3 / And God's sovereign will and right to choose who receives His mercy is what made the difference between how He dealt with Israel and Pharaoh. God had **mercy** on Israel and saved them Pharaoh—and He **hardened Pharaoh's heart** to oppose Him—to give Him the occasion to make His **power** and **mercy** shine all the more gloriously. **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,"** quoting from **Exodus 9.16 and 6.1; 14.4**. So then the question arises: *Who hardened Pharaoh's heart? Was it Pharaoh, or was it God?* If you go back and read the entire account, you'll read six times **God hardened Pharaoh's heart**. In fact, in **Exodus 4.21**, God specifically says **"But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go."** And that is affirmed here in **v 17**. At the same time, six more times, we read that **Pharaoh hardened his own heart**—from his own choice, will, and volition. So, *was God unjust or unfair to harden Pharaoh's heart to make His mercy and power shine all the more gloriously?* As Paul says here, **By no means!** God was only giving Pharaoh what he himself wanted and chose. God chose to let Pharaoh have his own way. And this is what God has done with all the nations and cultures throughout history as Paul declares in **ch 1.18-32**. They are responsible for their own condemnation.

4 / So, the upshot and conclusion here is this—when we consider God's sovereign right, authority, and prerogative to choose whom He will save—upon whom He will have **mercy**. The truth of the matter is, if God did not choose us and have mercy on us, then no one would be saved! We have to understand that and think of everything else against that backdrop of truth. This was Paul's argument in **ch 3.9-18**. Our sin has left us incapable of either desiring God or choosing God on our own—from our born-human nature. If we are saved at all, *it must be because God sets His love on us, chooses to save us, and gives us even the desire, the life, and the faith with which we believe in Christ.* **THAT is what mercy is, gives, and does.** Every salvation God chooses to bestow by His Grace is an exercise of His **mercy**!

V | vv 19-29 | When God has mercy on whomever He chooses and wills to have mercy, He is exercising His sovereign rights and prerogatives as Creator—and also His sovereign grace as Redeemer and Savior

1 / Now, here is yet another objection that Paul anticipates and pre-empt: **You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who can resist His will?”** The gist of the objection is: *Since God sovereignly chooses to whom He will have mercy and whom He will harden in their own self-chosen unbelief—then how can God judge anyone for their deeds? Isn't it all ‘fixed’ or pre-determined by God and no one has the power to choose his/her own destiny?* What we have to keep in mind here is that, [1] first of all, everyone of us has already chosen our own destiny of sin and unbelief—if it was left up to us. But God chooses to re-make, re-create His elect people into **vessels of mercy**. [2] And then, the second truth to keep in mind is that God possesses and reserves that prerogative just because He is God! He is the sovereign Creator of all things, and therefore sovereign owner and Lord over all—to do with as He chooses. And everything God does with His created and re-created **vessels** will be to His praise and glory!

2 / To set the table for this illustration, Paul brings in another most-common example: that of a potter and the clay he uses to make whatever vessel he chooses to make. Paul brings up a stinging rebuke to anyone who would even think about NOT giving God the Creator of all things the same sovereign right and prerogative to choose the recipients of His salvation as they would give the human potter: **But what are you, o man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for dishonorable use and another for dishonorable use?** We cannot argue with that kind of logic drawn from our nature. And then Paul reaches back into **vv 14-18** just to affirm again God's sovereign prerogative to create Israel as a **vessel of mercy** and Pharaoh as a **vessel of wrath prepared for destruction**. Here again, we have to keep in mind, that if God had not chosen anyone to be a **vessel of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory**, then *no one would have been saved—even as we learned early on in ch 1.18—ch 3.19*. Every single one of us—Jew and Gentile—would have chosen our own ways.

3 / But, thank God! He has chosen to have mercy on, rescue, and save **“even us whom He has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles.”** So now, connect this **call** with **v 11** and the further connections I made in my comments in **III, 5/**. God's **call** is both His gracious designation of believers as His people and also His work of faith in us when He **calls** us in our life-experience to believe upon Christ.

4 / Paul will illustrate what God is doing *now* with what He has done in Israel's past history—when He had **mercy** on a faithless covenant nation, in spite of what they deserved. His **mercy** on them will exemplify and **promise** what He is doing now among the Gentiles. He is making them **‘my people.’**

Hosea 2.23 & 1.10: When God sent Israel and Judah off into captivity for their faithlessness and unbelief, He promised them He would **call** them again to return to Him. Again, this is an exercise of God's sovereign prerogative of election. **Those who not ‘my people,’ I will call ‘my people.’** He can, and He does.

Isaiah 10.22-23 & 1.10: In Isaiah's prophecies of the coming desolations upon Judah for their sins of unbelief, God promises that even though they had proven to be no better than **Sodom and Gomorrah**, yet He would not destroy them utterly—without any survivors. Instead **only a remnant of them will be saved** and **If The LORD of Hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah**. And that is precisely what He is now doing among the ethnic unbelieving Jews—He is temporarily **hardening** them in their unbelief so He can **call** and re-gather again in a future time. And God is **calling** Gentiles and bringing them in to belong to His people. And all—by His sovereign choice and **mercy**. So much more on this in the next two chapters...

VI | vv 30-33 | Paul's grand conclusion to this part of his message...

What shall we say then?...to everything he has taught us in this chapter: In His **mercy**, God has chosen to save Gentiles who were not in the OT covenant agenda. And Israel, who sought and pursued their own **righteousness** by ‘keeping the law’ [or so they thought], has not. They didn't have **faith in Christ**, but rather **stumbled** over Him when they rejected Him. But, God has **mercy** yet in store for them...