

Study 11: Romans Chapter 9

Introduction

In the next three chapters, Paul deals specifically with the Jews (Israel) as “God’s people”. The Jews had taken the position that *we’re right with God because we are Abraham’s children*, and that *the Gentiles have no place in God’s work unless they become Jews*.

Body of the Study

How does Paul introduce the problem in vss 1-5?

What does “they are not all Israel who are of Israel” mean?

Is Paul talking about individuals, or the Jews as a whole?

Is God unfair in not giving the Jews “exclusivity rights”?

How does Paul assert the absolute Power of God?

How does Paul support the conclusion of salvation amongst the Gentiles?

How does Paul conclude the argument?

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *How do our hearts become hardened?*
- *Think carefully through this point, because none of the Jews would accept that they weren’t the people of God. What are the implications for us?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 10 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 11: Chapter 9

Introduction

Paul begins here a discussion that will go over the next three chapters, dealing specifically with the Jews (Israel) as “God’s people”. They had taken the position that *we’re right with God because we are Abraham’s children*, and that *the Gentiles have no place in God’s work unless they become Jews*.

Chapter nine needs to be read in the context of the whole book, and also in the context of these latter three chapters (9, 10, & 11) of the book. If we are not careful, then we could make wrong application as to what Paul has to say to the Jews as a whole, and apply that to individuals.

Body of the Study

How does Paul introduce the problem in vss 1-5?

Paul is quite specific about who he is discussing here “...for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh...” (9:3 NKJV). We may be tempted to conclude that *brethren* means christians, and that *brethren who are his kinsmen* would be Jewish christians. However *brethren* is also used to describe Jews who are not christians (Acts 28:21), (and it is in this same context that Ananias greets Paul - Acts 9:17). Paul is saying, that he is concerned for his Jewish brethren – those who are his kinsmen according to the flesh (by their common ancestry with Abraham).

He expresses his great sorrow and lament for the sins of the Jewish people, and their lack of repentance. Moses expressed a similar lament in Ex 32:

EX 32:31 So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. ³² But now, please forgive their sin--but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written."

EX 32:33 The LORD replied to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. ³⁴ Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin." (NIV)

God’s response is that the lament and pleadings will not make amends for their condition, and He will see that justice is performed.

The Israelites have a great advantage (as Paul has already shown 3:1-2 ff) because they were God’s people – by adoption –

²² Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, ²³ and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.' " (Ex 4:22-23 NIV)

As God’s people they were given the Covenant, and the Law, and also fulfilled the ministries of the Law in the Temple – the service of God – and through them were the promises made. But even further than that – the promises were made through Israel, and there was a physical fulfilment of those promises in Christ, who came through the line of descent of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Jews traced their ancestry back to Abraham, and claimed to be God’s people because of their physical descent. But, as Paul is about to show, other nations can also trace their ancestry back to Abraham. It was only *some* of the descendants that God regarded as *His people*.

The real question that Paul is raising (and then proceeds to answer over the next three chapters) concerns whether salvation (in this context, justification = being right with God) comes from being and only because of physical descent from Abraham (including adoption into the family as a Proselyte).

What does “they are not all Israel who are of Israel” mean?

Paul begins to answer the question that he has raised above, concerning the state of the Jews with God. Importantly, he is heading towards pointing out that salvation is open to the Gentiles, and not just the exclusive right of the Jews. As a first step towards that, he points out that just claiming Abraham as our father is not enough to claim that we are right with God.

Abraham had two sons – Ishmael and Isaac. Isaac was the son of promise, and Ishmael was born to a slave woman (compare Gal 4:21-31). It was through Isaac that the promises came, and so not all of Abraham’s descendants were to receive the promises.

But Isaac also had two sons, Esau and Jacob, and whilst the blessings and the promises would normally have come through the elder son (Esau), in this case Esau sold his birthright and ended up serving his younger brother.

So, not all of the descendants of Abraham can claim the recognition (even on a physical basis) as being one of God’s chosen people. But it goes even deeper than that, because even those who *were* of the physical descendants did not all express their faith and obedience – and true Israel are those who are of faith.

There is a logical link to be made (to which Paul is heading) that since justification comes by faith and not physical descent, then there is no problem with the Gentiles being acceptable to God.

Is Paul talking about individuals, or the Jews as a whole?

The purpose that he is addressing in the letter is announced firstly at the beginning of the chapter (9:1-5), and then the second question is asked (9:14) – actually the 5th of the rhetorical questions that he asks. However this second question (in Paul’s customary style of the letter) is asked in response to the answer to the first question. The context is clearly advocating that he is addressing Israel as a whole. Remember that his purpose here is to show the Jews (who were purporting a place as God’s children because they were Abraham’s descendants), that this is not a logical conclusion to reach.

Therefore, the second question addresses the issue of God’s fairness to the Jews (9:14).

Is God unfair in not giving the Jews “exclusivity rights”?

The answer is obvious, particularly with my paraphrase of it. Paul uses the scriptures to support the fact that God is not only a fair and reasonable God, but also to show that the Jews would *not* have “exclusive access rights”.

First argument Ex 33:19:

"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." (NIV)

God is an absolutely Sovereign God, and He has absolute power and authority. God does not show mercy and compassion because *man deserves it*. In fact, on the contrary, man is not in a position to demand anything of God, and so the mercy that God shows to all sinners is purely a matter for His own discretion. And likewise for the Jewish nation. If God wants to show mercy to the Jews, then that is His business. And if He wants to show mercy to the enemies of the Jews (even to the Gentiles!) then that also is entirely His business, and His alone.

Second argument Ex 9:16:

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (NIV)

Moses was chosen to lead the children of Israel out of the captivity in the land of Egypt. At every turn, Pharaoh resisted Moses (and hence resisted God). A sovereign God could well have removed Pharaoh from power to allow the children of Israel to be set free. But God showed His

power over even the most stubborn Pharaoh. There could be no doubt that it was God who was all powerful, and not the persuasive power of Moses. Turner says:

God favoured and used Moses (vs 15), and Paul says he also hardened and used Pharaoh (Ex 7:3; 9:16): **For this same purpose I have raised you up, that I might show My power...My name be declared.** Ex 7:22 says the magicians hardened Pharaoh's heart; and Exodus 8:15, 32 say Pharaoh hardened his own heart. God hardened Pharaoh's heart by demanding something his stubborn heart did not want to do (Ex 9:7). So when we read **(18) He has mercy... and He hardens...whom He will**, Paul is saying God is in control; these matters are God's business. He is not saying Moses or Pharaoh had no will in the matter, as Exodus shows. While the subject of free will is not a part of Paul's argument here, we must keep the whole of God's truth in perspective.¹

McGarvey says:

Having put Pharaoh in power, God so managed the contest with him that his stubbornness was fully developed and made manifest, and in overcoming his power and stubbornness through the weakness of Moses, God showed His power...²

How does Paul assert the absolute Power of God?

Paul is addressing the Jews who might make some objection to the position of the Gentiles gaining some standing with God, and specifically in rejecting the unbelieving Jews but giving mercy to the believing Gentiles.

RO 9:19 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"²⁰ But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" (NIV)

The fact is that God does, *and always does*, find fault with sinners. God ***WILL*** blame us because we deserve to be blamed! We can stand and argue "*injustice*" all we like, but it will do us no good, because we have no argument that we can make to a sovereign God, when we are unrighteous.

God has absolute power just as the potter has absolute power over the clay to make whatever he wants out of it. Paul is building on his argument with Moses and Pharaoh. God can make one vessel for honour, and another for dishonour. In both cases, the word translated "for" is *eis*, - "***unto***". God can make one *unto* honour (such as with Moses) and another *unto* dishonour (such as with Pharaoh). The obvious conclusion from the argument that Paul is making is that God has the power and the absolute prerogative.

It should be noted here that Paul is *not* making an argument (as some have suggested he does) that God arbitrarily chooses which individuals will be saved and which individuals will not be saved. He is still answering the objections that the Jews might make concerning the Gentiles. In the example, God is the potter, the human race is the clay, and the vessels are the nations.

Paul answers the question of the absolute power of God by saying "*What if...*" (9:22) – what are you going to say (or do)? And God has shown His almighty power and absolute sovereignty, by "*...making known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy ... even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles...*" (9:23-24 NKJV).

Here Paul has reached the point that he has been driving towards – that of salvation amongst the Gentiles, and not just the Jews.

¹ Turner, Robert F: Reading Romans, p 76

² McGarvey, JW: Commentary on Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans, p 399

How does Paul support the conclusion of salvation amongst the Gentiles?

Paul does not leave the brethren wondering about what God's eternal intentions were. He goes right back to the (Old Testament) scriptures to support the conclusion.

First piece of evidence Hosea 2:23

"I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one," (9:25 NIV)

God through the prophets foresaw that the Gentiles would become His people, and that it would not be the Jew's exclusive right. The inspired apostle says that when Hosea said this, what he had in mind was that God would accept the Gentiles. He quotes further from Hosea (Hos 1:10):

RO 9:26 and, "It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" (9:26 NIV)

Second piece of evidence Isaiah 10:22-23

"Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. RO 9:28 For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality." (9:27-28 NIV)

God had made the promises to Abraham (the National promise) of a great nation, with his descendants like the sand on the seashore and the stars in the sky. The Jews had hung their hat on the National promise, but they had ignored the seed promise – *in thy seed shall every nation of the earth be blessed*. It was through the seed promise that Christ was to come, and the blessings were not just for the Jews, but for *every nation*. Even though the Jews had rebelled against God, yet He will not totally cut them off – a remnant will be saved. Of course, these are the ones who will be saved because of their faith in Christ – just exactly the same kind of faith that their great father Abraham had. He quotes Isaiah again (1:9):

"Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah." (9:29 NIV)

Without the remnant of the Jews, they would have suffered the total destruction – like Sodom & Gomorrah. There is much "contemporary thought" today that the biblical writings are just a religious myth, and they are not literally true. If we have any doubt about the truth of what they say, then have a look around and see if there are any Jews around! The remnant of the Jewish nation confirms the existence of Abraham, and consequently the God of Abraham!

How does Paul conclude the argument?

Paul reaches the summary of what he has been saying (up to now) by posing another question – the 6th rhetorical question. The Gentiles who were outside of the Law (of Moses) and did not pursue righteousness have now been made right. But the Jews who did pursue righteousness (by attempting to keep the Law of Moses) did not – and could not – get the righteousness that they were seeking. The reason was that they were seeking righteousness by works – the works of keeping the law – rather than seeking it by faith.

They stumbled over the right and just Messiah – the Christ. The prophets foresaw that this would happen. Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:16, when the stone is rejected it becomes a stumbling block (Is 8:14). Whoever believes on Him (the Christ) will not be put to shame (Is 28:16).

"See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (9:33 NIV)

There are some practical applications for us. Salvation does not come by keeping any system of law – even the law of Christ. If we think that because we have "done everything that God said to do, and not done the things that He said not to do" – so "God owes us our salvation", then we have missed the point. We are no better than the Jews.

Our salvation only comes when we realise our hopeless position and our total reliance on the true and living God – and that outside of the Christ we have no hope.