

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
August 14, 2016

Lesson Text: Romans 9:6-18
Lesson Title: Dependent on God's Mercy

Introduction

Romans chapter 9, 10, and 11 are devoted to the nation of Israel. A careful study of these chapters reveal this section is a necessary part of Paul's argument for justification by faith. The emphasis in Romans 9 is on God's choice of Israel in the past. The Apostle Paul believed God sovereignly chose Israel from among all other nations to be His people (Deuteronomy 7:6). If that is true, the Jewish believers at Rome could ask, "Why are some of our people rejecting the message of the gospel?" It was a legitimate question. Thus, Paul had to deal with the problem of Jewish unbelief to assure the Jewish believers at Rome concerning their place in the kingdom of God.

Romans 9:1 opens with Paul's words, "*I say the truth in Christ, I lie not...*" He wants to certify the truthfulness of what he is about to say. In Romans 9:1-5, Paul expresses his passion to see every Jew saved. Some Jews accused Paul of being a traitor to his country because he was burdened to see Gentiles saved. While Paul was "*the Apostle to the Gentiles*" (Romans 11:13), he never forgot he was a Jew and the gospel "*...is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*" (Romans 1:16).

In Romans 9:6-18, Paul defended the choice and character of God by showing how Israel's past history magnifies the sovereignty and mercy of God. Paul has not forgotten who He is, nor is he confused as to who God is. He is committed to the belief that the promises of God are certain; they always come true. In spite of the unbelief of many Israelites, God has not changed His promises to Israel.

God's Merciful Choice (Romans 9:6-13)

Verse 6-7

"Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called."

When Paul says, "Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect" he is saying, "God's Word and His promises to Israel have not fallen powerless." It cannot be denied that God chose Israel to be His people to the exclusions of others (Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2). However, Paul said, "For they are not all Israel,

which are of Israel” meaning just because one was born a Jew does not mean they are saved. Salvation takes faith in the Messiah. Nor are they saved because they “are the seed of Abraham” or, Abraham’s descendants. God’s choice is involved in who is in the family of God by faith. He chose this to happen through “Isaac” for He said, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called.”

Abraham had two sons, one named Ishmael through Hagar and one named Isaac through Sarah. God’s sovereignly chosen plan to send Messiah and salvation would come through “Isaac” the younger of the two boys, not “Ishmael.” This was God’s choice, not man’s.

Verse 8

“That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.”

“They which are the children of the flesh” is a reference to earthly descendants of Abraham. “These,” the earthly descendants of Abraham, “are not the children of God,” or the spiritual seed through which Messiah would be born. Only “the children of the promise,” through Isaac are regarded as “the seed” or descendants of Abraham.

Verse 9

“For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son.”

Paul quotes from Genesis 18:10, “*I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.*” This promise means although Abraham had fathered a son by Hagar, the handmaiden of Sarah, nevertheless Isaac, the son of Sarah, would be born in fulfillment of a promise which seemed so unlikely it provoked Sarah to laughter (Genesis 18:12).

Although Isaac, the “son” of Abraham by “Sara” was not the firstborn son, he was God’s choice as the son through whom the promises of God would be fulfilled. Paul is making his point that the “promise” of God, not the bodily descent, is what determines relationship to Abraham.

Verse 10-11

“And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)”

After hearing “election” (choice) of grace through Isaac, Paul provides a second example of God’s “election” through the birth of “Esau” and “Jacob.” “And not only this...” means, in addition to the example of Isaac and Ishmael, there is the example of “Rebecca” and her sons.

Isaac’s wife “Rebecca,” gave birth to twins, “Esau” and “Jacob.” Before Esau and Jacob were born and before they ever did a good or bad deed, God sovereignly made a choice to give the covenant blessing of the firstborn which in this case should have went to “Esau” to the second-born, “Jacob.” In those days the older son received the double portion of the inheritance, but not in this case.

Verse 12

“It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.”

Before the twins, “Esau” and “Jacob” were born, the Lord told their mother, “The elder (Esau) shall serve the younger (Jacob).” This was not a prediction; it was the sovereign choice of God.

There is no question Isaac’s sons, “Esau” and “Jacob,” are both legitimately in the line of the promised child. Yet Paul states God, by His personal choice, overrode the process of natural arrangement in granting inheritance and chose “Jacob,” the younger, to be served by “Esau,” the elder. The reason for this choice is “that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth” (verse 11). As we studied last week, every action of God arises out of His eternal purpose (Romans 8:28).

Verse 13

“As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”

If Paul’s readers still are not convinced God has the sovereign right to choose as He pleases, he appeals to the prophet Malachi with which the Jews were familiar. *“I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever. And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, The LORD will be magnified from the border of Israel.”* (Malachi 1:2-5).

While there are good Bible preachers and authors who differ on how the words, “*I hated Esau*” are to be understood, the context of Malachi 1:2-5 requires us to

understand this means more than God loved Esau less than Jacob. There is no need for us to try to explain away the word “hate.”

Does God “hate?” How can a God of love “hate?” The Hebrew word for “*hate*” in Malachi 1:3, is *sane* {sah-NAY}. While the word can be used to express emotional displeasure, it has more to do with one’s priorities than with his or her emotions. “Esau” made a choice for a bowl of soup over his covenant blessing (Genesis 25:29-34). As a result, his descendants, the Edomite’s, incurred the wrath of God, not in uncontrollable anger, but in righteous judgment. God’s choice to “hate” Esau and “love” Jacob is absolutely righteous and just. He does the same with individuals who sin and do not repent.

God’s Merciful Character (Romans 9:14-18)

Verse 14

“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.”

If you have questions after what you have just studied, breathe a sigh of relief. Paul’s readers had plenty of questions also. To head off their questions, Paul engages in his usual pattern of asking and answering a question before others have opportunity to do so. That is the meaning of “What shall we say then?”

Paul asks, “Is God unrighteous because He loved Jacob and hated Esau?” His answer is, “God forbid.” To the human observer, the choice of “Jacob” over “Esau” prior to their birth appears unfair. But this is because we as humans are looking at things on the basis of limited knowledge. Paul’s response to the thought could God ever be unjust is choosing one over another is, “God forbid,” or, “May it never be!”

Although the subject of God’s sovereignty and election may be difficult to understand, Christians should never, ever, not for one moment, entertain the thought God is unjust or unfair when it comes to His work in man’s salvation (Ephesians 1:3-6).

Verse 15-16

“For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.”

In this verse, Paul illustrates his denial of injustice in God by quoting from Exodus 33:19, “*And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.*” Commenting

on this verse, Doctor Oliver B. Greene writes, *“These words were spoken to Moses in connection with his prayer for a general forgiveness for the people, which was refused (Exodus 32:31-35), and his request to behold God’s glory, which was granted (Exodus 33:12-19). Paul points out that even the great Hebrew captain Moses could not attain grace from God on any ground except that of God’s unmerited favor” (The Epistle of Paul to the Romans: The Gospel Hour, Inc., page 313, par. 1).*

Notice in verses 15 and 16, Paul says nothing about justice. He only speaks about “mercy.” The question in verse 14 was, “Is God unrighteous in choosing “Jacob” over “Esau?” Paul’s answer is all about “mercy.” Salvation is not about fairness; it is about “mercy.” Salvation is not about getting what you deserve; it is about “mercy.” If you want to get what you deserve, the answer is God’s wrath and torment forever.

What does “mercy” and “compassion” mean? God’s “mercy” is the outward manifestation of His inward “compassion.” God gives “mercy” to sinners because He is a merciful God and it is His choice to give it (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 103:8; Luke 6:36; Hebrews 2:17).

Salvation is all about the sovereign choice of God to demonstrate His “mercy” and “compassion.” That truth is magnified in Paul’s words, “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.” God’s “mercy” is not a response to human desire or human works. It is not of “him that willeth,” meaning desires or wishes. It is not of “him that runneth,” meaning the one who works for salvation.

Salvation is not received because man wants it. Salvation is not received because man runs or works for it. It is received purely and simply because of God’s “mercy” and “compassion” (Isaiah 48:3)

Verse 17

“For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.”

Paul presents another illustration from the life of “Pharaoh.” The case of “Pharaoh” in Egypt illustrates this principle of “mercy.” God “raised up” “Pharaoh” so He could demonstrate His power in the Egyptian ruler that Jehovah’s “name might be declared throughout all the earth.” If you read history and the word of God you will discover that is exactly what happened. The story of Pharaoh and the Exodus across the Red Sea is known the world over.

Not even the power of the great Egyptian Pharaoh could stop the eternal purpose of God (Exodus 9:16).

Verse 18

“Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.”

One more time Paul says, “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.” “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy” echoes Exodus 33:19 and “whom he will he hardeneth” echoes Exodus 7:13. Pharaoh did harden his own heart by his personal choice to oppose God’s will (Exodus 5:2), however, a time came when his heart was hardened by God (Exodus 7:23; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8).

Conclusion

How are we supposed to respond to the truth in this lesson? If you are responding by questioning God's fairness in salvation with regard to some being saved and others not, you are responding wrong. The issue here is “mercy.” Leave the sovereignty to God. If you want to question something, question how sinners get what they do not deserve; mercy, salvation, and heaven. Do not question the righteousness and justice of God.

When we see God's sovereign choice and character in salvation we realize our salvation is all grace. It is not based on our worthiness, it is not based upon our deeds, it is not based upon our backgrounds, it is not even ultimately based upon our choice or our faith. These are instruments of God's grace. It is based upon God's grace and mercy alone and therefore we may be assured we who have answered His call are safe and secure forever.

Amen.