

GOD'S SOVEREIGN CHOICE (God is God and I am not) - Romans 9:1-33

Introduction

- **Question:** What is today? It is Reformation Day. 502 years ago today, on Oct 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses on the door of church in Wittenberg. This was the start of the Protestant Reformation and is relevant to our lecture today... *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* speaks of God's power and sovereignty.
- I have a confession to make. When I received the lecture schedule this summer from Carol I eagerly looked for what I would teach. Would it be Rom. 1, 3, 5, 8, or even chapter 12? No. My first lecture was on Rom. 9. God's Sovereignty! Yikes!
- I have to ask myself though why this is a problem? Do I believe in God's sovereignty? 100% yes. God is sovereign and in charge of the universe. So what is the problem? I think that the problem is that in the world in general, and even among Christendom, is that God's sovereignty is not a popular or an understood concept. We like to talk about God's love, His mercy, His forgiveness, and His patience. But to talk about God's judgment, His holiness, His justice, and His control over everyone's lives, is not as popular and most try to ignore it.
- Oh it is okay when God is in control of other's peoples lives and punishing those that deserve it, but what about when God is in control of my life? What about when things happen in my life I do not like? What about a friend dying, a family member that rejects God, a prayer that is not answered, or ridicule by the world. Is God sovereign then? Yes He is!
- **Question:** What is God's sovereignty?
- A. W. Pink in his book *The Attributes of God*, makes the following statement:

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD MAY BE DEFINED AS THE exercise of His supremacy...Being infinitely elevated above the highest creature, He is the Most High, Lord of heaven and earth. Subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent; God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases. None can thwart Him, none can hinder Him. So His own Word expressly declares: "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isa 46:10) - Pink
- God can do just as He pleases, when He pleases, and for whatever reasons He chooses. Because of the subject of this lecture I am going to subtitle this lecture with the statement: **God is God and I am not!**
- One of the books I have read over the last few weeks is Chuck Swindoll's book *Searching the Scriptures* which is a book about how to study God's Word. He states four steps that we have to follow:
 - (1) **Observing the Text;** (2) **Interpreting the Text,** (3) **Correlating the Text,** and (4) **Applying the Text.**
- As I approached Romans 9 I applied these steps: (1) I read the scripture over and over again, at least a couple dozen times. I made notes of key points, examined key words and concepts. (2) I then tried to understand what it was telling us. (3) Next I tried to see if what was presented in this passage was consistent with the rest of Scripture. In this passage this was very important because there are some verses here that are hard to understand. (4) Finally I looked at the passage to apply it to my life. Swindoll made the following comment:

For it is in the application of the truth that we find conviction, direction, correction, and encouragement for our spiritual growth. Application is the crowning accomplishment of Bible study—the finishing touch, the ultimate setting of the diamond in the ring of truth. - Swindoll
- If we look at the Bible as an intellectual book only we miss the mark about what it is telling us. The passage before us today has deep theological significance to all our lives, but without applying it to our lives we are not allowing the Spirit of God to touch our spirit and change our lives. My hope and goal in this lesson is that God can touch our lives and help us understand Him more and more.

Lesson

- This passage before is built upon four questions that will be our outline for this lecture, but Rom. 9 starts off with the following, which is an important context for us to understand:

- **Point #1:** Paul's anguish for the Jews
- **Rom. 9:1,2** *I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.*
- **Question:** What was Paul upset about? The Jews had everything. They were God's chosen people, had seen God in their midst and seen His glory. They had received His law and His promises; they had a covenant with God, and from the Jews came the Messiah, God's own Son Jesus Christ.
- But the Jews had rejected God, followed the letter of the Law, but missed the part about obeying Him in their heart and trusting in God for their own salvation and not their good works.
- **Rom 2:17, 18, 23** *But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law...You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.*
- **Rom 3:9, 23** *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*
- The Jews had rejected God. They had rejected the Messiah Jesus Christ. Paul was in anguish for his fellow countrymen...
- *What, then, is this truth which he asserts with such force? It concerns his continuing love for his people Israel, who have rejected Christ.* - Stott (*The Message of Romans*)
- One of the things that bring me anguish is the choice that people make and reject Jesus as their Savior. I talked many times to my mom about the Gospel and salvation. I hope that she had trusted Jesus as her Savior, but I have doubts. I hope to see her in heaven. I talked to my brother many times and the conversation I had with him a year ago and I asked what he thought about Jesus. He said that he believed the Jesus was the Son of God, but he said that he thought when he made it up to heaven he thought God would let him because he had tried hard in his life and even though he had done many bad things he felt God would still let him in. I hope that my brother's commitment was true, but I have my doubts. I pray that he would fully commit himself to Jesus. I am in anguish that he might not make it.
- **Point #2:** Has God's promise failed?
- **Rom. 9:6-8** *But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants will be named." That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.*
- **Question:** If God had given all these advantages to the Jews and they had rejected God, has God's promise to them failed? Paul tells us that God has not failed.
- Paul tells us in v.8 that it is not the physical descendants that are part of the "children of God", but it is the "children of the promise" who are the true descendants.
- Paul has already told us in Rom 2:28, 29 that true circumcision which makes them Jews is not the physical act, but it is the circumcision of the heart. **Rom. 2:28,29** *For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.*
- In Rom. 9 it was through Abraham's one son Isaac, not Ishmael, that was the true descendant. The promise came through the child of promise: Isaac, not the physical descendant only.
- The next example is that even though twins were born, Jacob and Esau, it was through Jacob that the promise was fulfilled. Once again it was the child of promise that God's promise was fulfilled. Look at what verse 11 says:
- **Rom. 9:11** *for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls.*

- Note what it says: God made his decision before they were even born. Some say that God chose Esau over Jacob because God knew how Esau would turn out. But is this a belief in God's sovereignty or is it a belief that man's choice is more important than God's sovereignty?
- *In this case, however, it was even clearer that God's decision had nothing whatever to do with any eligibility in the boys themselves, for there was nothing to distinguish them from one another. Isaac and Ishmael had had different mothers, but Jacob and Esau had the same mother (Rebekah). -Stott*
- **God's promise had not failed.** His promise has been fulfilled. For it was through the descendant of Abraham, through Isaac, and then through Jacob, and eventually in the birth of Jesus that God's promise was fulfilled. It was through Jesus that God became man and lived among us, and died for us so that we could be with God forever.
- *Throughout Old Testament history God's purpose was handed down through an inner group, an elect minority, a saving remnant. Abraham had a number of sons, but only through one of them, Isaac, the child of promise, was the line of God's promise to be traced. Isaac in his turn had two sons, but only through one of them, Jacob, was the holy seed transmitted. - F. F. Bruce (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Romans)*
- God's promise was fulfilled in the way He wanted, not and because of whether anyone, whether Jacob or Esau, was good or evil, not based upon their "good works", but based upon His choice, his sovereign choice, His choice as the sovereign of the universe and all creation: **God is God and I am not.**
- **Point #3:** Is God unjust?
- **Rom. 9:14-16** *What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.*
- As Stott says, *Granted that God's promise has not failed, but has been fulfilled in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and in their spiritual lineage, is not 'God's purpose according to election' intrinsically unjust? To choose some for salvation and pass by others looks like a breach of elementary justice.* - Stott
- **Question:** What is God's election?
- *The divine choice of individuals to be children of God, and therefore heirs of heaven.* - Unger's Bible Dictionary
- *In the New Testament [selection] occurs 6 times (Romans 9:11; 11:5,7,28; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Peter 1:10). In all these places it appears to denote an act of Divine selection taking effect upon human objects so as to bring them into special and saving relations with God* – ISBE (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)
- Election is God choosing based upon His own criteria some for salvation. These verses in Romans are telling us that God is not unjust and makes His choices as He sees fit. If he chooses to show His mercy to some and not to others that is just. God's choice does not depend upon man's desires or efforts. God's choice is independent of how good the person is.
- You may well say that it isn't fair, and I would agree, but is it unjust? No! God has mercy upon whom He wants to and has compassion on whom He wants. What is fair is God's judgment of us, not our salvation.
- *Thus Paul's way of defending God's justice is to proclaim his mercy. It sounds like a complete non sequitur. But it is not. It simply indicates that the question itself is misconceived, because the basis on which God deals savingly with sinners is not justice but mercy. For salvation does not ...depend on man's desire or effort, that is, on anything we want or strive for, but on God's mercy.* - Stott
- And as F. F. Bruce states *The force of the words is that the mercy and compassion of God cannot be subject to any cause outside his own free grace...Again it is emphasized that God's mercy has its cause in himself, and not in human will or activity.* - Bruce
- This doctrine and these verses are hard to understand. Over the years I have struggled with these concepts and what it means. I have come to the conclusion that I believe in God, I believe in His Word, and even though it doesn't seem fair, it is just, and I am glad it is based upon His choice and not my own efforts. I am glad that He has chosen me. **For He is God and I am not.**

- *So God is not unjust. The fact is, as Paul demonstrated in the early chapters of his letter, that all human beings are sinful and guilty in God's sight (3:9, 19), so that nobody deserves to be saved. If therefore God hardens some, he is not being unjust, for that is what their sin deserves. If, on the other hand, he has compassion on some, he is not being unjust, for he is dealing with them in mercy. The wonder is not that some are saved and others not, but that anybody is saved at all.* - **Stott**
- What we deserve is to be sentenced to eternal punishment. If it wasn't for God's grace and His mercy no one, not one single person, would be saved. Romans has told us that no one chooses God on His own...
- **Rom. 3:10-12, 23,24** *There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.*
- **Point #4:** Why does God still blame us?
- **Rom. 9:19** *You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"*
- Isn't that a great question? God has made promises and He has fulfilled them. He has not failed. God has chosen some and not others and that is just. He has chosen to have mercy and grace on whom He wills and there is nothing wrong with this. If God is sovereign and His will cannot be thwarted and what He decides happens, how then can we be blamed for His not choosing us?
- Paul responds to these questions with three responses of his own.
 - (1) God has the right of a potter over his clay (9:20-21)
- **Rom. 9:20** *On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?*
- God has made us and not the other way around. **God is God and I am not.** Our image of God is distorted. God does not object to us asking reasonable questions, but to talk back to God or argue with God is not acceptable. Can the pot challenge why the potter made the pot the way he did? Isn't it the right of the potter to make pots for whatever purposes he wants? The one who argues shows a spirit of **rebellion** against God and the **refusal** to let God be God and for us to realize that we are mere creatures.
- But we must make the following observation as Stott does: *It is nowhere suggested that God has the right to 'create sinful beings in order to punish them', but rather that he has the right to 'deal with sinful beings according to his good pleasure', either to pardon or to punish them.* - **Stott**
- (2) God reveals Himself as He is (9:22-23)
- **Rom 9:22-23** *What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory*
- God and His actions are in harmony with His nature. God deals with those who have not accepted Him with great patience and He provides every opportunity for them to repent and turn to Him. God shows that those who are vessels of mercy the riches of His glory – the glory revealed in the redemption brought to them by Jesus.
- We don't know the ultimate reason God has chosen some and not others, but it is according to His will and His good purposes.
- (3) God foretold these things in Scripture (9:24-29)
- **Rom. 9:24** *...even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles*
- In Hosea God calls those who were not Jews "My people". In Isaiah it tells us that the remnant will be saved. It must be remembered that the nation of Israel had rejected God and His ways except for a few, the remnant that remained faithful to God. The majority rejected God.
- So we have to ask ourselves the question: Do we have the option to choose or reject God? Yes we do. The choice is legitimate and the choice is ours. Tim Keller in his book **Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering** makes the following statement:

- *The Bible teaches that God is completely in control of what happens in history and yet he exercises that control in such a way that human beings are responsible for their freely chosen actions and the results of those actions. Human freedom and God's direction of historical events are therefore completely compatible... God's plan works through our choices, not around or despite them. Our choices have consequences, and we are never forced by God to do anything—we always do what we most want to do. God works out his will perfectly through our willing actions.* - Keller

- **Point #5:** What then should we say in conclusion?
- **Rom. 9:30-33** *What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, just as it is written, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed."*
- (1) The Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness, but gained it by faith
- (2) The Israelites pursued righteousness by following the Law by their works, but did not attain it
- It goes back to how Paul started this book that is only by faith that we gain righteousness, not by doing good works.
- **Rom 1:16-17** *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."*
- The Jews stumbled over Jesus the cornerstone and to the Jews He was the rock of offense. We have two choices: to follow Jesus by faith and receive eternal life or to follow our own righteousness and fail.
- *So everybody has to decide how to relate to this rock, which God has laid down. There are only two possibilities. One is to put our trust in him, to take him as the foundation of our lives and build on him. The other is to bark our shins against him, and so to stumble and fall.* - Stott
- **Application:**
 - (1) We need to realize that God is God and I am not.
 - (2) We need to acknowledge the fact that God is sovereign and makes decisions according to His will & good pleasure
 - (3) We need to trust God and rest in Him that He has our best interests at heart even though we don't fully understand why He does what He does, but He we know that He is just and reliable and fulfills His promises,
 - (4) We all have a choice to make: to follow Jesus or reject Him, this is a decision that is made by our freewill and is not forced upon us.
 - (5) We need to rejoice in the fact that God has chosen us and we need to give thanks to Him daily
 - (6) We need to pray for those around who are not saved and that they may make a decision to turn their lives over to God and accept in faith what Jesus has done by dying on the cross for their sins