

ROMANS

In our last lesson, we looked at the security of the believer, our salvation from punishment, pain and struggle, and the life that awaits us living with God in the new heaven and earth.

In this lesson, we will contrast how the Jews were approaching God through the keeping of the Law, while the Gentiles were approaching God through their faith in Christ. The differences are dramatic, as well as the results.

Read Romans Chapter 9 from the Contemporary English Version (CEV) below, or from your favorite version.

Romans 9

God's Choice of Israel

¹I am a follower of Christ, and the Holy Spirit is a witness to my conscience. So I tell the truth and I am not lying when I say ²my heart is broken and I am in great sorrow. ³I would gladly be placed under God's curse and be separated from Christ for the good of my own people. ⁴They are the descendants of Israel, and they are also God's chosen people. God showed them his glory. He made agreements with them and gave them his Law. The temple is theirs and so are the promises that God made to them. ⁵They have those famous ancestors, who were also the ancestors of Jesus Christ. I pray that God, who rules over all, will be praised forever! Amen.

⁶It cannot be said that God broke his promise. After all, not all of the people of Israel are the true people of God. ⁷⁻⁸ In fact, when God made the promise to Abraham, he meant only Abraham's descendants by his son Isaac. God was talking only about Isaac when he promised ⁹Sarah, "At this time next year I will return, and you will already have a son."

¹⁰Don't forget what happened to the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. ¹¹⁻¹²Even before they were born or had done anything good or bad, the Lord told Rebekah that her older son would serve the younger one. The Lord said this to show that he makes his own choices and that it wasn't because of anything either of them had done. ¹³That's why the Scriptures say that the Lord liked Jacob more than Esau.

¹⁴Are we saying that God is unfair? Certainly not! ¹⁵The Lord told Moses that he has pity and mercy on anyone he wants to. ¹⁶Everything then depends on God's mercy and not on what people want or do. ¹⁷In the Scriptures the Lord says to Pharaoh of Egypt, "I let you become Pharaoh, so that I could show you my power and be praised by all people on earth." ¹⁸Everything depends on what God decides to do, and he can either have pity on people or make them stubborn.

God's Anger and Mercy

¹⁹Someone may ask, "How can God blame us, if he makes us behave in the way he wants us to?" ²⁰But, my friend, I ask, "Who do you think you are to question God? Does the clay have the right to ask the potter why he shaped it the way he did? ²¹Doesn't a potter have the right to make a fancy bowl and a plain bowl out of the same lump of clay?"

²²God wanted to show his anger and reveal his power against everyone who deserved to be destroyed. But instead, he patiently put up with them. ²³He did this by showing how glorious he is when he has pity on the people he has chosen to share in his glory. ²⁴Whether Jews or Gentiles, we are those chosen ones, ²⁵just as the Lord says in the book of Hosea,

"Although they are not
my people,
I will make them my people.
I will treat with love
those nations
that have never been loved.
²⁶"Once they were told,
'You are not my people.'
But in that very place
they will be called
children of the living God."

²⁷And this is what the prophet Isaiah said about the people of Israel,
"The people of Israel
are as many
as the grains of sand
along the beach.
But only a few who are left
will be saved.

²⁸The Lord will be quick
and sure to do on earth
what he has warned
he will do."

²⁹Isaiah also said,
"If the Lord All-Powerful
had not spared some
of our descendants,
we would have been destroyed
like the cities of Sodom
and Gomorrah."

Israel and the Good News

³⁰What does all of this mean? It means that the Gentiles were not trying to be acceptable to God, but they found that he would accept them if they had faith. ³¹⁻³²It also means that the people of Israel were not acceptable to God. And why not? It was because they were trying[c] to be acceptable by obeying the Law instead of by having faith in God. The people of Israel fell over the stone that makes people stumble, ³³just as God says in the Scriptures,

"Look! I am placing in Zion
a stone to make people
stumble and fall.
But those who have faith
in that one
will never
be disappointed."

Consider the questions below regarding Paul's comments in Romans Chapter 9:

1. What are the specific things that Paul lists in Romans 9:1-5 that indicate just how special the Jews are to God?
 - a. ANSWER 1: Paul states that "my own people" are descendants of Israel and are also God's chosen people.
 - b. ANSWER 2: God showed them His glory.
 - c. ANSWER 3: God made agreements with them.
 - d. ANSWER 4: God gave them His Law.
 - e. ANSWER 5: The Temple is theirs.
 - f. ANSWER 6: The promises of God made to them are theirs.
 - g. ANSWER 7: They have famous ancestors—they were the ancestors of Christ.
2. What are some of the promises that God made to Israel? He made many, but three of His promises spoke to the Promised Land, the Messiah, and to the role of Israel during the Millennial reign of Christ. What were they?
 - a. ANSWER 1: He promised they would have their own land; we call it the Promised Land.
 - b. ANSWER 2: God promised that He would send them a Messiah, an Anointed One—we know him as Jesus the Christ.
 - c. ANSWER 3: He also promised that they would all live in a renewed Promised Land, be held in high esteem around the world, and that their king would be the King of Kings and reign over the entire earth.
3. Who would some of the "famous ancestors" be that Christ descended from?
 - a. ANSWER: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David and Solomon, just to name a few. You can find the entire list in Matthew Chapter 1:1-17.
4. In Romans 9:6-13, Paul speaks to the fact that the descendants of Abraham were chosen by God, and not by something that they did to earn it. In fact, he points out that only the descendants of Abraham and Isaac are the true chosen people. And then Paul gets even more specific about God's direct role in creating His chosen people. What did God do, using His sovereign power, to ensure that specific descendants became his chosen ones?
 - a. ANSWER: He specifically said that Jacob, and not Esau who was the oldest, was his favorite; and that Esau would serve Jacob.
5. When does Paul say God made this choice of Jacob over Esau? What had Esau done that caused God to make this choice?
 - a. ANSWER: Paul uses this example to show us that this was God's will and not because of anything that Esau or Jacob did. He made this decision before they were born—and it had nothing to do with either of them doing good or bad.
6. Why is Paul making an example of Jacob and Esau, what two things is he trying to show us?
 - a. ANSWER 1: He is trying to show us that the Jews came into being as a result of God's will, and nothing that anyone did earned them the right to be a part of God's chosen people. Paul wanted them to see that works do not earn you anything.
 - b. ANSWER 2: Secondly, he wanted us to see that God can do as He wills, and we don't necessarily get a say in the matter. His sovereign rule is perfect.
7. How does the Pharaoh of Egypt come to power during Moses' time, and for what purpose?
 - a. ANSWER 1: As with every ruler on earth, God allowed the Pharaoh to come to power, and God had a specific reason. (See ANSWER 2 below.)
 - b. ANSWER 2: God said, "I let you become Pharaoh, so that I could show you My power and be praised by all people on earth."
8. In Romans 9:19-21, Paul tells us that we should not question God. It is God who is the potter, and we the clay. Knowing this, what can we learn about ourselves and our relationship to Christ?
 - a. ANSWER 1: Christ chose us, we did not chose him.
 - b. ANSWER 2: We are blessed beyond measure. Christ, the Creator, has chosen to include all of us who believe in him to share eternity with him
 - c. ANSWER 3: Rather than complain about our lot in life, griping about every little annoyance, and wishing for a different life; we should celebrate our salvation and serve the Lord with gladness.
 - d. ANSWER 4: We should recognize that nothing we did earned us our salvation, or our right to be called one of his chosen.
9. Paul states in Romans 9:24 that we, the followers of Christ, are also a part of the chosen ones. He says, "Whether Jews or Gentiles, we are those chosen ones." How can Paul make this statement? What does he offer as evidence?
 - a. ANSWER: He shows us that, in Hosea, God tells us that he will "make them my people" and that he will "love those nations that have never been loved." He goes on to say "they will be called children of the living God."

10. Paul closes the chapter in Romans 9:30-33 by making a significant distinction between the Jews, the Gentiles, and the Gospel (or the Good News). What is it?

- a. ANSWER: The Gentiles were saved by faith, not works; and the Jews were not acceptable to God because they were trying to be acceptable through works—trying to obey the Law instead of having faith in God. This is the single biggest distinction between the Gentile who follows Christ in faith and the Jew who continues to try and become acceptable by following the Law. The Good News is available to all, but in the closing verses Paul points out that Christ, the rock of our salvation, is also the stumbling stone for the Jews.
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Paul clearly sees that his people have strayed from the faith that God wanted them to have in Him; further, they have become so reliant on following the Law, that they've become blind to the truth of Christ and the Gospel. Paul also recognized that anyone who placed their faith in Christ became one of the chosen people of God; and that the very Gospel message of Jesus had become a stumbling stone to the Jews.

As we go out into the world this week, let's pass this Gospel message to someone that God has placed in our path. Showing them that nothing they've done will keep them from Jesus, nor will it draw them closer. We are saved by God's great grace through our faith in His Only Son, Jesus.

May He richly bless you as you study with us this week.

In Christ,

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