

**Romans Chapter 9**  
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In chapters 1 – 8 of Paul's letters to those in Rome, he explains the Gospel of The Grace of God and His plan of redemption. This is perhaps the greatest statement of God's grace and redemptive plan ever written, certainly the best theological explanation written in the scriptures. In these chapters, Paul shows us that we are actually helpless in any attempt to save ourselves. We have power to choose, we are expected to choose, and we are free to choose, but God is behind it all.

In chapters 9 – 11, Paul offers us an exhibition of the Grace of God. It has been written that chapter 9 lays out some of the toughest questions and accusations raised by man as he considers the actions and workings of God and then addresses them.

To illustrate this, Paul uses Israel as his example. Reading the letter Paul wrote to the faithful in Rome would have been difficult for any Jew. They would have seen Paul's letter as an indictment of Israel and Judaism. However, regarding Israel, Paul does not come in anger, or with accusations. He comes in anguish, as is evident by the words he uses.

**<sup>1</sup>I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, <sup>2</sup>that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. <sup>3</sup>For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup>who are Israelites,**

Paul knows that his words may bring on accusations that he is not being truthful and he wants to address that defensive response. He only wants to share the truth and he knows that the truth can be very painful. In this case, it certainly is, but his words and thoughts are given for the sake of those he considers to be his brothers and kinsmen. Above all, Paul considered himself to be a Jew. He was a Jew who knew Christ as the Messiah, but he was still a Jew. That is the way and the spirit in which he comes to the Israelites. To the Jews of his day, Paul no doubt came across as an enemy. In fact, his ministry everywhere was one case and then another of making the Jews angry, upset and antagonized at his teachings of Jesus as Lord and Savior and Messiah. These things were certain to bring on hostility from those who would not open their ears and hearts to listen, but Paul was never the enemy of the Jews. He tries to make that clear here. He is their loving, hurting friend. It breaks his heart that he has to tell them these things. The hurt is real.

Paul calls the way he feels, **"great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart"**

There can be no doubt that he is choosing his words carefully. Obviously, the Holy Spirit is involved because he uses the words, **"my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit"**. All of us have known the pain that comes when we see those we care for walking away from the will of God, and that is what Paul sees in Israel.

In Exodus 32, Moses expresses a similar line of thought and said something very close to what Paul writes here. When Moses came down from the mountain and found the people dancing around the golden calf, conducting themselves in riotous ways, he intervened before God on their behalf. **"Lord, if it be**

**possible, blot this sin from their lives," he said, "but if not, blot me out of your book," (Exodus 32:32).**

This is the way Paul begins Chapter 9. He has anguish in his heart – pain that won't go away, whenever he thinks of Israel – his brothers the Jews.

In my words, they had it all with God, and have turned away from all of it.

Why was Paul so distressed?

**<sup>4</sup>to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, <sup>5</sup>whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.**

The story of Israel is sad and sobering. Israel was a nation that had an inside track with God. They were His chosen, His people. They considered themselves to be in a privileged position. Regardless, they were far from God. They are like the brightest of the bright, who miss-handle everything and lose all of it.

Paul tells us eight advantages they have:

1 – They are the chosen people of God – a people separated – the descendents of Abraham and the twelve sons of Jacob. **"Behold, Israel is my son,"** (Exodus 4:22 KJV).

2 – The glory was given to them. This is the word "Shekinah" the bright cloud that followed them through the wilderness "Shekinah" is the physical manifestation of the presence of – the glory of God. What led the people in the wilderness existed within the Holy of Holies in the Temple – God was there and His Glory was there.

3 – The Jews had the covenants – The agreements God made with man – his people. The covenants were God's initiative to join with man – his creation – he has never gone back on them.

4 – The Jews had the Law – This was and still is the greatest and dearest treasure of the Jews – God's Holy Law.

5 – The Jews had the Temple Worship – The place to come to with their gifts and their hearts to worship their God. The temple was one of the most beautiful buildings ever built, and God had given it to them.

6 – The Jews had the promises of God from the Old Testament. They had the promises of a time when the Jews would lead the nations of the world, with a universal reign, a world king and when Jerusalem would be the center of the world. Those promises are still in place and God will still honor them.

7 – The Jews had the patriarchs Abraham, Moses, David. All other rulers pale under these men.

8 – The supreme blessing the Jews had is that the Messiah Jesus himself came from Israel. The ancestry of Jesus traces fully back through Jews to David. It is interesting that Paul does not say that Jesus belongs

to Israel. He says that Jesus came from Israel. It is interesting to read that Jesus belongs to the World, not Israel:

**“who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”**

Even with all of this, the Jews were violently anti-Christian. They could not stand the idea that Jesus was their Messiah.

**<sup>6</sup>But it is not as though the word of God has failed For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; <sup>7</sup>nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED**

Now Paul raises a question, and here he gets into the heart of this chapter: Did this also mean that God was faithless? Has God failed? Did Israel's failure come about because God is not able to save those whom he wants to save? Is that the problem?

**“<sup>6</sup>But it is not as though the word of God has failed”**

A lot of people think this is the problem. They wonder if God is really able to save someone whom he calls. This is the problem we have today.

Paul answers by launching upon a great statement that sets forth the faithfulness of God -- but in terms that we struggle with.

Paul begins to introduce this to us by showing us some of the principles by which God works in carrying out his great work. There are three principles involved:

1 - Great opportunities and special privileges that God may grant to nations or to individuals, such as those he has just listed for Israel, do not necessarily imply that God intended in any way to save those people. Here is how Paul establishes his argument: First, he says, salvation is never based on natural advantages, (Verses 6-7)

God made Jacob, the usurper, into a prince. But those who are his descendants are not necessarily involved in all those promises. Even those who are physical descendants of Abraham, the greatest of the patriarchs, are not all included in the salvation promise of God. Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that salvation is never based on natural advantages. It is not inherited.

Just because my family is made up of Christians does not mean that I will be one. Salvation is a gift that is given only to those who ask for it. That does not naturally include all of us.

**.<sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>For this is the word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON."**

This takes us back to the eighteenth chapter of Genesis, where God said to Abraham and Sarah, "I will come back, and Sarah, whose womb has been barren all her life -- who has never had a child, who is now ninety years of age and, from a natural point of view, couldn't possibly have a child -- is going to have a baby," (Genesis 18:10). It was a biological miracle, and that was God's promise. It involved his own supernatural activity. His promise is based on what he does, not upon what men do.

As we well know, Abraham had another son, Ishmael, the oldest boy. He was thirteen years older than Isaac, the firstborn of Abraham. By rights, he should have inherited the promises that God made to Abraham, but he didn't. Instead, Isaac inherited those promises. Ishmael stands as a symbol of the futility of expecting God to honor our ideas of how he is to act.

Remember how Ishmael was born? Sarah said to Abraham one day, **"Do you expect God to do everything? He has promised you a son, but you are getting old. Time's wasting. Surely, God doesn't expect you to leave it all up to him!" (Genesis 16:1-2).** So she suggested that he take her Egyptian servant. He did, and she conceived and bore a son whose name was Ishmael. Ishmael was brought before God by Abraham, who said, **"God, here is my son. Will you fulfill your promises to him?" (Genesis 17:18).** God said, **"No, I won't. That is not the one. He must come by divine promise," (Genesis 17:19-21).**

A lot of people who get an idea of what they think God ought to do. They ask him to do it, and, because they have asked him to do it -- in line with what they think are the promises about prayer -- they think God has to do it. They misread all the promises about prayer and think that if they get an idea of what they want, God has to do it. But what this teaches us very plainly is that God is committed to do only what he has promised to do. If you want God to act on your behalf, find a promise that he has given. We are wrong when we try to claim from God something that he never promised to do. That is why anything expected from God must rest upon a promise that he has already given. Otherwise it is merely his grace that supplies an answer to our requests.

**<sup>10</sup>And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; <sup>11</sup>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, <sup>12</sup>it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." <sup>13</sup>Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."**

Rebecca was Isaac's wife. He found her through his servant, who had been sent to find God's choice for Isaac. Now, that is a remarkable statement, and Paul confirms it with a quotation from Malachi 1:2-3:

**<sup>13</sup>Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."**

What Paul is saying is that it is clear from this story that:

Ancestry does not make any difference (these boys had the same father)

What they will do in their lives -- including the choices they will make -- ultimately will not make any difference. Before they were able to make choices -- either good or bad -- God had said to their mother, "The elder shall serve the younger." By that he implied, not only that there would be a difference in the nations that followed (the descendants of these two men) and that one would be in the place of honor and other wouldn't, but, also, that the personal destinies of these two men were involved as well. I think that is clear from the record of history. Jacob forevermore stands for all the things in men that God honors and wants them to have. Jacob was a scheming, rather weak character -- not very lovable. Esau, on the other hand, was a rugged individualist -- much more admirable when he was growing up than his brother Jacob. But through the course of their lives, Jacob was the one who was brought to faith, and Esau was not. God uses this as a symbol of how he works.

From Pastor Ray Stedman:

**"I remember hearing of a man who said to a noted Bible teacher, "I'm having trouble with this verse, 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.' How could God ever say 'Esau have I hated'?" The Bible teacher said, "I have trouble with that verse, too, but my problem is not quite the same. I have no trouble in understanding the words 'Esau have I hated.' What bothers me is how God could ever say 'Jacob have I loved!'" Read the life of Jacob and you will see why.**

**Now, I do admit that we must not read this word "hated" as though God actually disliked Esau and would have nothing to do with him and treated him with contempt. That is what we often mean when we say we hate someone. Jesus used this word when he said, "Except a man hate his father and mother and brother and sister and wife and children and houses and land, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple," (Luke 14:26). Clearly he is not saying that we have to treat our mothers and fathers and wives and children and our own lives with contempt and disrespect. He clearly means that he is to have pre-eminence. Hatred, in that sense, means to love less. We are to love these less than we love him.**

**God didn't hate Esau, in the sense we usually employ that word. In fact, he blessed him. He made of him a great nation. He gave him promises which he fulfilled to the letter. God did not hate Esau in that usual sense. What these verses imply is that God set his heart on Jacob, to bring him to redemption, and all Jacob's followers would reflect the possibilities of that. As Paul has argued already, they were not all necessarily saved by that, by any means, but Jacob would forever stand for what God wants men to be, and Esau would forever stand as a symbol of what he does not like.**

**Do you know the final confrontation of Jacob and Esau that is recorded in the Scriptures? It was when Jesus stood before Herod the king. Herod was an Idumean, an Edomite, a descendant of Esau. Jesus was, through David, a descendant of Jacob. There, standing face-to-face, were Jacob and Esau! Herod has nothing but contempt for the King of the Jews, and Jesus will not open his mouth in the presence of Herod. This is God's strange and mysterious way of dealing with humanity. Now, I don't understand it, but I have to**

**submit to the fact that God is greater than I. His ways are not my ways, and his thoughts are not my thoughts.**

**What Paul is teaching us here is that God has a sovereign, elective principle that he carries out on his terms. Here are those terms: Salvation is never based on natural advantages. Never. What you are by nature does not enter into the picture of whether you are going to be redeemed or not. Second, salvation is always based on a promise that God gives. This is why we are exhorted in the Scriptures to believe the promises of God. It includes, in some mysterious way, our necessity to be confronted with those promises, and to give a willing and voluntary submission to them. I do not understand that, but Paul brings this up a little later in this chapter when he discusses the harmony, as far as we can understand it, between the free will of men and the sovereign elective choice of God. The third principle is that salvation never takes any notice of whether we are good or bad. Never! That is what was established here. These children were neither good nor bad, yet God chose Jacob and passed over Esau.”**