



Lesson 13 ~ "God is God and I'm Not!"

Romans 9:1-24

Discussion Starter

- What do you find most interesting about your family background?

Introduction

Romans 9 starts a new section in Paul's *Letter to the Romans*. In the first eight chapters of **Romans**, Paul discussed the themes of *Sin*, *Salvation* and *Spiritual Growth*. Before he moves on to **chapters 12-15** to address the very practical theme of *Service to God and Others*, Paul pauses in **chapters 9-11** to consider the destiny of God's chosen people, the Jews, and God's plan and purpose for both Jews and Gentiles in the church.

Scripture makes it very clear that the Jews are God's chosen people. Through this race of people the Messiah came – the One who "takes away the sins of the world." However, this does raise some questions. If the Jews are God's chosen people, why did most of them oppose the gospel? If the good news was truly God's saving

power, "first for the Jew" (**1:16**), why were they not the first to embrace it? And how does one make sense of God's choice of Israel and his promises and covenants with them when they did not even accept God's plan? Besides that, where does the conversion of the Gentiles fit in to God's plan? Does all this nullify God's promises to the Jews?

These were the questions being raised in Paul's day and they still are being asked today.

Romans 9-11 is Paul's answer to these all-important issues. And, even though the focus of these chapters is on the Jews, this text will cause us all to come face-to-face with a sovereign God and his interaction with each of us.

Preparation

1. Before you read **Romans 9:1-24**, ask God to open your eyes so that you may see wonderful truths in his Word (**Psalm 119:18**). You may want to make the following prayer your own:

Triune God – Father, Son and Spirit,

I admit that I cannot understand the truth found in God's Word with only my mind.

I agree that spiritual truth has to be understood with my heart as well as my head.

So I ask You to give me spiritual understanding as I do this lesson.

*I pray that You would enable me to see, hear and understand,
with my spirit, all that You want to teach me.*

I ask this in the powerful name of Father, Son and Spirit.

Amen

2. Read **Romans 9:1-24** slowly and thoughtfully. As you read and reread, *underline or highlight* any verses, phrases or words that are meaningful to you. Put a *question mark* beside anything you don't understand. Put a ✓ beside anything you would like more information about.

You may also want to read the Scripture in another translation. The Scripture handouts for these lessons contain the *New International Version (NIV)* and the *New Living Translation (NLT)*. The questions are phrased to be answered from **either** of these versions. Other translations and paraphrases should only be used as supplementary texts to help your understanding.

3. Sum up the Scripture passage for this lesson in a short sentence, phrase or title.

Questions

Read **Romans 9:1-5**.

1. What situation distressed Paul and how deep were his feelings (**9:1-4a**)?
2. Who, and over what situation, felt much the same way as Paul did (**Exodus 32:1-6; 30-32**)?
 - ♥ What do these two reactions reveal about the seriousness of a person accepting or rejecting God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ?
 - ♥ Express how you feel about those you deeply love who have not yet accepted God's gift of salvation.
 - ♥ What sacrifices would you be willing to make to give others a chance to know Christ?
3. If you have sorrow over loved ones who have not yet accepted God's gift of love and salvation, what is your best recourse?

1 Samuel 12:23a -

Luke 18:1 -

Ephesians 1:16-18 -

Romans 12:12 -

Colossians 4:2 -

1 Thessalonians 5:17 -

- ♥ What hope is given when praying for a loved one's salvation (**2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 5:14-15; Mark 11:24**)?
4. What eight privileges and blessings does Paul mention that God gave to the people of Israel (**9:4-5**)?

Optional Exercise. God showed Israel great favor as a nation and the blessings listed in **9:4-5** were proof that the Jews were God's chosen people. **Everything God gave Israel, pointed to Christ and prepared the way for him.** It's ironic that the very **reason** these blessings were given became the **very thing** that Israel rejected!

Provide the **name of the blessing** that God gave Israel (**9:4-5**) beside each **Old Testament description** of the blessing.

_____ Genesis 17:1-8; Jeremiah 31:31-34	_____ Nehemiah 9:13-14
_____ Deut. 7:6; Hosea 11:1	_____ Exodus 16:6-7,10; 24:15-17
_____ Exodus 3:15-16; Deut. 9:5	_____ Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6
_____ Exodus 25:8-9	_____ 2 Samuel 7:8-13

- ♥ Why do you think many of the Jews of Paul's day rejected God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ in spite of the many privileges and blessings given them as a people of God? What does reveal about why people still reject Jesus and his gift of salvation?

- ♥ What advantages do you have because of your religious heritage? What kinds of gifts, blessings and opportunities has God given you that help convince you of his love and truth?
 - ♥ Does your religious heritage determine your acceptance before God? Why or why not?
5. Some might say that God having a *chosen people* on whom he lavishes blessings and privileges is *favoritism*. What, however, is the **main reason** God created the nation of Israel (9:5; Genesis 12:1-3)?

- ♥ How do God's promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 17:4-8) affect you (Galatians 3:7-9)? How does this make you feel? Do you take these promises seriously?
- ♥ What important statement is made about the identity of Jesus in 9:5? Why does Paul make this point?

Read Romans 9:6-13

After considering all of the advantages that Israel had been given, it seems unbelievable that, on the whole, Israel has rejected Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Paul knows that there are some who wonder if God has failed to keep his word (9:6). Is Israel a testimony to God's unfaithfulness or his inability to actually do what he has promised? Not at all! Paul explains that from the beginning, God made a distinction between the *physical* and *spiritual* descendents of Abraham. It is to the *spiritual* descendents of Abraham that God made his promises and it is the *spiritual* descendents of Abraham who will receive the fulfillment of God's promises.

6. The first question Paul wants to answer is, "Who are the *spiritual* descendents of Abraham, the *true* children of Abraham?" What is Paul saying in 9:6-8 that agrees with what he already said in 2:28-29?

- ♥ Is a person a Christian just because they are born into a Christian family? Why or why not?
- ♥ Are God's promises, found in his written Word, for everyone? Why or why not?
- ♥ How do the above questions help you understand what Paul was saying about being a true child of Abraham?

Paul is drawing an analogy here. Just being Abraham's **physical** descendent did not guarantee a **spiritual** inheritance. The line of **natural descent** is not the same as the line of **promise**. Abraham had children by three different women; Isaac by Sarah (Genesis 21:1-7); Ishmael by Hagar (Genesis 16) and six sons by his second wife Keturah (Genesis 25:1-4). But God made it clear that the line of promise would be through Isaac only (Genesis 21:12). God made a sovereign choice, before Isaac was born, that his line would result in the Messiah. Just being a descendent of Abraham was not enough to receive the spiritual inheritance – one had to also be of the line of Isaac. So, Paul is saying, just being a Jew by physical descent is not enough to receive the fulfillment of God's promises and be his chosen people. One has to be a child of Abraham in the heart, *believing* those promises, just like Abraham did. As we will see later, this means that both Jews *and* Gentiles can be God's *chosen people*!

7. How does the example given in 9:10-12 further prove Paul's point that all the descendents of Abraham did not receive the *spiritual* inheritance? (You can read more about this story in Genesis 25:19-34.)

- ♥ What reason is given as to why Jacob, the second-born son, received the spiritual inheritance instead of Esau, the firstborn son (9:11-12)? Does this seem fair to you? Why or why not?
- ♥ Can you think of a time when you thought "God's sovereign choice" seemed unfair? What is a proper response to this dilemma?
- ♥ What are some reasons why we question God's actions toward us or someone else?

Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated (9:13; Malachi 1:2-3) is pretty strong language, especially in view of the fact that God is love! Two things to keep in mind: 1) This is an example of *hyperbole*, a literary device of making an exaggerated statement to make a point, but not meant to be taken literally. Jesus used this device when he said, "If anyone comes to me and does not *hate* his father and mother -- cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). Jesus did not literally mean *hate*; he meant that he must come first in our lives, even before our immediate family. 2) When Paul uses the names *Jacob* and *Esau*, he was not speaking of the individuals, but rather the *nations* they represent. In choosing *Jacob* over *Esau*, God illustrated his strong choice of *Israel* (descendants of Isaac and Jacob) over the *Edomites* (descendants of Esau) to play a particular role in history.

Read **Romans 9:14-18**.

8. Is it unfair for God to choose some people to use in a particular way, but not others (9:14)? How does Paul answer this question and why does he focus on God's *mercy* rather than his *fairness* (9:15-16)?

♥ Does anyone deserve God's mercy and compassion (3:9, 23)? What should be our attitude when mercy is given to us or anyone else?

Was it "fair" for God to harden Pharaoh's heart (9:17-18)? It is important to see that God never hardens people who have not first hardened themselves. It is plain in the story of the Exodus, that Pharaoh first hardened his own heart against God and refused to humble himself. So, God hardening Pharaoh's heart was fair and just. God was "giving him over" to his own stubbornness (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). It is important to guard ourselves against a hardened heart!

Read **Romans 9:19-24**.

9. In view of God's sovereignty expressed in 9:18, Paul knows that someone is going to ask, "How can God hold people responsible for the choices *he* makes (9:19)? What three questions does Paul ask in order to answer this question (9:20-21)?"

♥ What is the difference between *questioning God* and *asking God questions*? What attitude is Paul condemning in 9:20?

10. Read 9:22-24 in the NLT. What three "rights" does God have? Which of these rights does God most exercise? Why?

♥ How have you experienced God's mercy and patience in your life?

Response

Grappling with God's sovereignty (his right to make independent choices without explanation) can sometimes be daunting. We want to trust, but sometimes it just seems so hard to understand what God is doing - and sometimes it seems that what he is doing is so unfair! We want an explanation!

Hundreds of years ago, the prophet Isaiah explained why we don't always get an explanation. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9). Even if God did try to explain what is going on, more likely than not, we simply would not be able to understand it or be able to grasp the "big picture."

The proper response to this dilemma is *faith*. We live by *faith* and not by *sight* (2 Cor. 5:7). Faith is trusting in God's *character* (who he is) and his *promises* (what he says he will do). *What hard thing in your life, that you don't understand right now, will you trust God with?* Remind yourself of all the times God has been faithful to you in the past. He will be faithful again! You can trust God even if you don't understand!