

God's Sovereignty

Lesson Scope: [Romans 9:1-29](#)

Lesson Focus

The fourth section of the Book of Romans (chapters 9-11) is a close-knit unit of thought. A question comes into focus; Will the blessings of chapter 8 be poured out on the Gentiles while God turns His back on the Jews? The theme of the book (Romans 1:16-17) clearly states that the Gospel is not closed to the Jew. God's plan of justification and sanctification (Romans 4-8) is for all men.

God is God and is answerable to no one. We dare not call God unrighteous (9:14) or unjust (9:19, 20) in His dealings with men. Men can choose to accept or reject God's offer of redemption, and the consequences of that decision are part of their choice. Since God is sovereign, He is able to accomplish His will even while man exercises his free will.

Our finite minds stop short of understanding God, who is absolutely sovereign as well as omniscient. Because He is both sovereign and omniscient, God is fully able to deal with both the righteous and the wicked in absolute justice even while they fully exercise their free wills.

This lesson becomes practical to us in the question, How am I responding to the skillful touch of the master Potter? He will make us into vessels as He sees best, but our own responses may limit His work in our lives.

God's promises for salvation are realized by all those who meet the conditions. But God does choose differing roles for individuals, based on His foreknowledge of their choices, character, and abilities.

Lesson Aim: To explain principles related to God's sovereignty.

Theme Verse: [Romans 9:20](#). Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

Lesson Text

God's Purpose

Romans 9:6-13 ⁶ Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel: ⁷ Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, *are they* all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. 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. ⁹ For this *is* the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son. ¹⁰ And not only *this*; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, *even* by our father Isaac; ¹¹ (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;) ¹² It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. ¹³ As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

God's Prerogative

Romans 9:14-18 ¹⁴ What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? God forbid. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. 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. ¹⁸ Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth.

God's Power

Romans 9:19-24 ¹⁹ Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? ²⁰ Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus? ²¹ Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? ²² *What* if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: ²³ And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, ²⁴ Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

God's Plan

Romans 9:25-29 ²⁵ As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. ²⁶ And it shall come to pass, *that* in the place where it was said unto them, *Ye are* not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God. ²⁷ Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: ²⁸ For he will finish the work, and cut *it* short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth. ²⁹ And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha.

Questions for Study

God's Purpose

1. What does "for they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" mean?
2. What are some misconceptions we might harbor concerning the benefits of a godly heritage?

God's Prerogative

3. Was Moses predestined to receive mercy and Pharaoh to receive condemnation regardless of their personal choices? Explain.
4. Why might God sometimes place corrupt leaders in power?

God's Power

5. What is the main teaching in the illustration of the potter and the clay? How does man differ from the clay?
6. Why is our holy, sovereign God long-suffering with the wicked (Romans 9:22)?

God's Plan

7. List some lessons to be learned from God's turning to the Gentiles when Israel rejected Christ.

Analyzing the Passage

This passage does not teach unconditional election (predestination). Actually, it teaches the opposite. The Israelites believed that as children of Abraham, they were automatically in line for God's blessing. Paul pointed out that God had called Israel to be His chosen people, but they forfeited that position by rejecting their Saviour.

Paul used two illustrations to show God's perfect right to accept one and

reject another. Ishmael was older than his brother Isaac, and Esau was older than his twin brother, Jacob. Yet in both cases, God chose the younger. His election was based on His foreknowledge of their personal choices.

Verse 13 quotes Malachi 1:2-3. The word hated can mean "loved less." Jesus used the same word—"If any man ... hate not his father, and mother" (Luke 14:26). This statement of election deals with Jacob and Esau with regard to their national roles, rather than to their personal salvation.

This introduces a new question. Is God unrighteous to exercise mercy on whom He will? Paul emphatically declared that He is not! We may not understand it all, yet we do know that God always deals with individuals and nations according to their responses to Him (Jeremiah 18:7-10).

Principles and Applications

God's Purpose

1. Man's failure never negates God's Word or His sovereign purpose (Romans 9:6). Through ages past, God had promised abundant blessings to the children of Israel (Romans 9:4-5). But they failed as a nation when they rejected their Saviour.

On a human level, when one person drops his side of a commitment, the whole agreement is usually nullified. Not so with God. His Word and purpose stand as sure as ever, even though His chosen Israelite people reject His offer.

2. Only those who accept the sovereignty of God can claim the promises of God's Word (Romans 9:6-7). Israel's rejection of the Saviour automatically distanced them from God's blessings, even though they were descendants of Abraham. Yet those individual Israelites who accepted God's plan became "heirs of God."

No favor with God is gained by birth into a solid Christian family line. Only through personal submission to our sovereign God can we experience His blessings.

3. God's promises are based upon His sovereign foreknowledge (9:713). God sees the past, present, and future of each individual, family line, and nation. Thus when He chose a family line for the Saviour to be born into, He purposely chose a line where a seed of righteousness would be

upheld from generation to generation. For this reason, God elected the children of Israel to be His special people and to receive His special blessings.

God's Prerogative

4. God is totally just in His dealings with men (Romans 9:14). Man's tendency to charge God with injustice reveals both inability and unwillingness to understand Him. His perfect righteousness makes unrighteous dealings impossible. God rightly designates roles and responsibilities because He has perfect knowledge.

5. God's sovereign will is the basis of His mercy (Romans 9:15-16). The election of God does not condemn those deserving to be saved; rather, it saves those deserving to be condemned. Mercy is not shown toward us because of our will or excellent running (Romans 9:16), for God gives even the ability to will and to run (Philippians 2:13).

6. God sovereignly overrules in the affairs of men to bring glory to His Name (Romans 9:17-18). He turns the heart of the king "whithersoever he will" (Proverbs 21:1). He causes even the wrath of man to praise Him (Psalm 76:10). We must trust the Lord to work and overrule in these evil days.

God's Power

7. God has the right and the power to perform His purposes in His creation (Romans 9:20-24). Verses 17 and 18 indicate that Pharaoh performed as God knew he would. God did not force Pharaoh to respond as he did. But he did foreknow Pharaoh's hard heart and therefore chose him to be ruler of Egypt at that time.

We dare not question either the skill or the desire of the Potter. He has the right to apply pressure wherever He desires, to mold us into a useful vessel for His service.

8. God is long-suffering toward both the righteous and the wicked (Romans 9:22-24). In order for God to make a public display of His wrath against disobedience, He sometimes withholds destruction for a time from those who He foreknows will remain obstinate. How much more wonderful to experience the long-suffering that displays His mercy!

God's Plan

9. God's plan incorporates only those who accept His offer of salvation (Romans 9:25-29). The plan of salvation was offered "to the Jew first," but because many did not accept His plan, the time of the Gentiles has

come (Acts 13:46-47). Now Gentile believers as well as the believing remnant of Israel can experience the blessings promised to the faithful family line throughout history.

Important Teachings

1. Man's failure never negates God's Word or His sovereign purpose (Romans 9:6).
2. Only those who accept the sovereignty of God can claim the promises of God's Word (Romans 9:6-7).
3. God's promises are based upon His sovereign foreknowledge (Romans 9:7-13).
4. God is totally just in His dealings with men (Romans 9:14).
5. God's sovereign will is the basis of His mercy (Romans 9:15-16).
6. God sovereignly overrules in the affairs of men to bring glory to His Name (Romans 9:17-18).
7. God has the right and the power to perform His purposes in His creation (Romans 9:20-24).
8. God is long-suffering toward both the righteous and the wicked (Romans 9:22-24).
9. God's plan incorporates only those who accept His offer of salvation (Romans 9:25-29).

Answers to Questions

1. What does "for they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" mean?

Israel means "having power with God," and not all Israelites had power with God. Some Jews were blood relatives of Abraham but were not his spiritual sons.

2. What are some misconceptions we might harbor concerning the benefits of a godly heritage?

That we can scarcely lose our standing before God. That we are somehow superior to first-generation believers. That we are worth more to God than others are.

3. Was Moses predestined to receive mercy and Pharaoh to receive condemnation regardless of their personal choices? Explain.

No. God had mercy on both Moses and Pharaoh because of who He is, not because of who they were. Because Pharaoh did not respond repentantly to God's mercy, God ultimately withdrew His mercy. Moses did

not despise God's mercy, but Pharaoh did. Read Romans 2:4-11.

4. *Why might God sometimes place corrupt leaders in power?*

God is able to show His power in them (verse 17). He used Pharaoh to get Israel ready to leave Egypt and to transfer the wealth of Egypt to His people. He used Pilate to fulfill prophecies of Christ. He used Felix to get Paul to Rome. He used Nebuchadnezzar to punish Judah.

5. *What is the main teaching in the illustration of the potter and the clay? How does man differ from the clay?*

God works after the counsel of His own will (Ephesians 1:11). "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves" (Psalm 100:3). Man has a will and the power to choose.

6. *Why is our holy, sovereign God long-suffering with the wicked (9:22)?*

It is not His will that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. His long-suffering with the wicked is a reminder to us how long-suffering He was and is with us personally.

7. *List some lessons to be learned from God's turning to the Gentiles when Israel rejected Christ.*

God's will was to bring salvation to all men and to redeem the earth by Jesus Christ. The Jews' rejection of Christ was not going to stop His plan. "For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee" (Romans 11:21).

Summarizing the Lesson

God has made ample provisions for man's salvation, and He gives opportunity for all to repent (John 1:9). "The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). If we choose to submit to God's working, we will enjoy personal salvation and a place of blessing in God's kingdom. If we choose to resist God's authority, we will experience His wrath.

Research Guide

1. Read "God's Plan of Salvation" in *Doctrines of the Bible*.
2. Read the account of God's dealings with Pharaoh in Exodus 7-12. Notice that God never caused Pharaoh to decide as he did. God simply arranged circumstances that a haughty man like Pharaoh chose to stubbornly resist