

Romans 9

By: Charles Stanley

From: On the Epistle to the Romans

It will be noticed, there is now a change in the epistle. The next three chapters form a parenthesis. The righteousness of God has now been fully revealed and explained in His dealings with, and bringing to Himself, both Jew and Gentile. Both alike guilty, and now both alike justified; so that there is no condemnation, and no separation from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. But if this be so, what becomes of all the special promises to Israel in the prophets? This is the subject taken up in these three chapters.

Had the apostle, who had so clearly brought out this truth of no difference now in God's dealings with both, ceased to love the nation of Israel? No, his love for them was so intense, that, like Moses of old, he had, as it were, been beside himself. He says, "I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." In some cases, that intense love carried him beyond the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:22; 21:4). No doubt the Lord bore with His devoted servant, and overruled all for good — ours at least — though Paul suffered imprisonment and death. How much this must have added to his grief of heart — to be hated and persecuted in every city by those he so deeply loved. How like his Lord, whom he so devotedly served.

Verse 4: He owns their full national privileges. "Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen." What privileges! The adopted nation, with whom God had dwelt in the tabernacle. These privileges were never given to any other nation. The eternal God had become incarnate, taking flesh from that nation. All this is fully allowed.

He who is over all, God blessed forever, as to the flesh, the body, He was born of Mary, of the seed royal of that nation.

But now another principle is brought out. God had, unquestionably, made a difference, even in the seed of Abraham. The seed of Abraham were not all the elect, adopted children of promise. "But in Isaac shall thy seed be called." "The children of the promise are counted for the seed." A multitude sprang from Abraham; but Ishmael was rejected, and in Isaac alone was the chosen seed.

There was the same purpose of God in the election of Jacob. It was said unto Sarah, "The elder, shall serve the younger." It was also written, though many hundreds of years after, by Malachi, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." This matter of the free, sovereign favor of God is of great moment for Paul's explanation; and no one who believed the scriptures could doubt it, in the cases referred to above; and God had said to Moses: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Surely, then, God had a sovereign right: to show mercy to the Gentiles, the very thing that so offended the Jews. It is remarkable how all that say they are Jews now, or take Jewish ground, always dispute the sovereign grace of God.

Many learned men deny divine sovereignty, but God is wiser than men. We must not forget that man is proved by the cross to be at enmity with God. He has no desire, naturally, toward God.

Verse 16: "So, then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." This is very humbling, but sorely true.

Verse 17: Pharaoh is given as a sample of the wickedness of man, and God's just judgment upon him. How long God bore with his daring infidelity and rebellion, until, in the just government of God, he was given up; hardened, to his own destruction. Let every rebel against God beware, lest Pharaoh's doom

be his own. Pharaoh was a blasphemer. He said, “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice, to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go” (Ex. 5:2). Let the scoffer of this day beware, lest his heart be hardened’ against the Lord, to his eternal destruction. “Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will, He hardeneth.” Men may say, If that is the case, “Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will?” Did not Pharaoh resist God? Have not you resisted and refused God? “Who art thou that repliest against God?” Has the mere creature, the thing formed, a right to ask, “Why hast thou made me thus?” No, has God formed me thus? Far from it. Is He the Author of all man’s rebellion and sin? Mark, it is not a statement, but a question—“Hath not the potter power over the clay?” Is not God Sovereign? It does not say He has made some unto dishonor. His wrath against all ungodliness is made known, but how long has He first endured, with much long-suffering, the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction? Did not Pharaoh fit himself to destruction? So of every sinner.

It is, however, most blessedly true, that He afore prepares the vessels of mercy unto glory. As to that, it is all sovereign favor: according to the riches of His glory. “And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory.” Man fits himself unto destruction, as the Jews were doing. God fits the vessels of mercy to glory.

Verse 24: “Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles,” quoting Hosea in proof of this: “I will call them My people, which were not My people; and her beloved, which was not beloved.” Thus does He prove, from their own prophet, that mercy should be shown to the Gentiles.

Then he quotes from Isaiah, and shows that it is only a remnant of Israel that shall be saved. Yes, “Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom, and been made like unto Gomorrah.” Surely their rejection of

Jesus whom God had made both Lord and Christ, proved their guilt could not be greater. But human perversity did go even beyond this. They had KILLED the Just and Holy One of God, and even then clung to the law for righteousness.

Verse 30: “What shall we say, then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.” The Jews sought righteousness by keeping the law, but never reached it. Is it not so to this day? All who take Jewish ground, and seek to be righteous by keeping law — no matter what law — they never reach it. They never can be sure they are sufficiently righteous for God to justify them, thus they never attain to peace with God. The more religion an unconverted man has, the more difficult it is for the gospel to reach him. And why did they not attain to righteousness or justification? “Wherefore? BECAUSE they sought it not by faith, but, as it were, by the works of the law for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone.” And how did the Gentiles arrive at righteousness and peace with God? They heard the glad tidings of mercy to them, through the Redeemer’s blood; they believed God; they were justified; they had, believing God, peace with God. Is it not even so now?

The gospel is heard by a person brought up under law, hoping, some day, to keep it so as to be righteous, and then hopes, in another world, after the judgment-day, to have eternal life, and peace with God. Often filled with gloomy doubts — even forebodings of eternal wrath — he tries human expedients — a priesthood, to whom he unburdens, if sincere, the darkness of his soul, the weight of his sins, and the dread of the future. Does he attain to a righteousness that fits him for the presence of God? Never. will any other religious expedient give this blessed peace with God? Not one.

How different, when a poor, guilty, ignorant, heavy-laden sinner hears the gospel, and

believes it, like the Gentiles of old! They had not the law, and did not seek righteousness by its works. They heard the sweet story of the love of God to sinners such as they. They heard how God had pitied them — yes, had given His beloved Son to die for them; that He had died, the Just for the unjust; that God had raised Him from the dead. They heard the glad tidings of forgiveness of sins through Him; they heard, they believed, they were justified from all things, they had peace with God.

Dear reader, have you so heard, so believed? Are you thus justified? If so, have you got peace with God? But our next chapter will bring all this out more fully.

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