

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 9, Verses 14-24
Notes from Tuesday January 18, 2011
Last Revised on January 23, 2011

Songs

Opening Prayer

Introduction

This evening we continue our study of the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

Last week we began Chapter 9, and covered the first 13 verses.

Tonight we will read Verses 14 - 24 of Chapter 9

But first let's review.

Review

As we have repeatedly reminded ourselves,

the **overall** theme of Paul's letter to the Romans is ... the **gospel**,

which as Paul reminds his readers in the first four verses of the letter,

is God's good news concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord

who was descended from **David** according to the flesh,

and declared to be the Son of God in power,

by his resurrection from the dead,

as God promised beforehand through his **prophets** in the **holy Scriptures**.

This gospel is, Paul says in Chapter 1, Verse 16,

the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,

to the Jew **first** and also to the Greek.

Everyone who has ever lived, including **even** the most law abiding Jews,

even David ... even Moses... even Abraham,

has been ungodly and unrighteous,

Therefore nobody, not **even** the most law abiding Jews, ever has been or ever will be saved,

except by the **mercy** and **grace** of God.

The good news is that such mercy and grace **is** given as a free gift to everyone who believes,

because the Son of God (who is the Messiah of Israel) has been put forward,

as a propitiation for sin.

This is ultimately **how** God saves us.

Everyone who believes God and accepts the salvation which He freely offers in Christ is saved.

This is the gist of the first **four** Chapters of Romans.

Chapters 5-8, then, go on to discuss some of the implications of our salvation.

This marvelous peace with God which we now have through Christ,

has **more** than overcomes the estrangement caused by the fall of Man in Adam.

The fact that all of our sins (past, present, and future) have been forgiven,

does not encourage us to to sin more but, on the contrary,

such forgiveness finally makes it possible for us to **stop** sinning.

God Himself, the Holy Spirit, comes to live in us,

and He leads us to live our lives according to the Spirit and so longer according to the sinful flesh.

Life lived according to the Spirit may be, often is, and probably will be **characterized** by **suffering**,

after the example of Christ.

But such suffering is as **nothing** compared to the glory to be revealed in us,

and in all **creation** because of us,

we who are **children** of God, and **brothers** of the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

We wait patiently and confidently for the end of this age

and for the final coming of His Kingdom.

Praise God! Hallelujah! Amen!

So ends Chapter 8.

This might have been a happy place for Paul to end the main body of his letter to the Romans and begin working toward a conclusion,

possibly skipping ahead to Chapter 12 and the more practical moral admonitions we find there and in the concluding chapters of the letter.

But this is not what Paul does.

Instead Paul first turns aside, in Chapters 9, 10, and 11, to examine a question of extraordinary difficulty.

The question was difficult in Paul's immediate environment.

But it has remained difficult and troubling on several levels until this very day.

The question is: "**What about Israel?**"

And for Paul this was a very painful question,

as we read last week.

Let's read those verses again now.

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 9, Verses 1-5 (Review)

Will someone please read Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 9, Verses 1-5, in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read these some verses in English.

1 I am speaking the truth in Christ---I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit---

2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.

5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

Thank you.

From the surpassingly happy and triumphant words spoken to Christians at the end of Chapter 8,

Paul moves at the beginning of Chapter 9 to an expression of his deep personal anguish,

over the fact that most of his fellow Jews have rejected Christ.

This is an anguish that he wants us to believe is deep and real and unselfish and loving.

And I for one believe it.

And because Paul speaks as an Apostle of Christ,

filled with and inspired by God, the Holy Spirit,

I believe that the anguish which Paul expresses is an anguish of which God approves

and that it is even, in some sense, an anguish which God shares! (if we are permitted to say this)

It was certainly an anguish which the Son of God manifested during his earthly ministry.

That the majority of Jews have violently rejected Christ was, and is, a very serious matter.

One which we cannot set aside or ignore or put behind us. It remains a pressing concern.

 But even so, it would be a big mistake to suppose that this represents a failure of God's plan.

 as Paul goes on to explain.

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 9, Verses 6-13 (Review)

Will someone please read Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 9, Verses 6-13, in Japanese.

 Thank you. Now will someone please read these some verses in English.

6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,

7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."

8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

9 For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son."

10 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac,

11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad--- in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls---

12 she was told, "The older will serve the younger."

13 As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Thank you.

 Hopefully you see Paul's point here.

 What was called Israel in Paul's day, was a very small remnant of all the descendants of Jacob.

 Most of the descendants of Jacob had been scattered to the four winds.

And all the descendants of Jacob (wherever they may have been dispersed by the time of Paul) were a very small remnant of all the descendants of Abraham --- those who were given to Abraham as a blessing and who God promised to bless.

Did this mean that God's original purpose in creation of the universe and his subsequent promises to Abraham had been frustrated?

The answer is an enthusiastic "No!" and "Of Course Not!"

And nobody in Paul's day who considered himself to be a Jew would have thought so.

This was skimpily how God had chosen to work out his purposes and fulfill his promises in the history of Israel, as documented in considerable detail in the holy Scriptures of Israel, our Old Testament.

That God would continue to work out his purposes and to fulfill his promises in and through an increasingly smaller remnant of the descendants of Jacob, should not have been surprising to any serious student of the Torah. That was how God had always worked.

Such was the pattern of Biblical history and such was the content of most of the prophesy of Israel.

That is Paul's point, I believe, in what we have read so far.

But this leads naturally, in the minds of some at least, to the question of whether God's way of working in human history isn't really rather unfair.

After all, don't rather a large number of people get left behind?!

That is where Paul turns next.

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 9, Verses 14-18

Will someone please read Romans, Chapter 9, Verses 14-18 in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!

15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has

mercy.

17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

Thank you.

So having made the point, that the rejection of Christ by most Jews, is typical of Biblical history, Paul asks whether Biblical history is itself evidence of injustice on the part of God.

Verse 14 reads

(Verse 14)

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!

This is a bit of a rhetorical question.

Or rather perhaps a reflective question, such as we sometimes ask ourselves when working our way through a difficult problem.

Certainly Paul himself does not entertain the unthinkable thought of God being unjust.

And neither do any of Paul's brothers: be they Jewish, Christian, or both.

So what Paul is doing is exploring and explaining how the fact that most Jews have rejected Christ, in keeping with the characteristic pattern of Biblical history, can be consistent with God's justice.

He begins by looking to the Old Testament Book of Exodus, Chapter 33, Verse 19, in which God says to Moses:

(Verse 15)

[For he says to Moses,] **"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."**

Notice here that God is speaking only of his mercy and compassion,

and he is claiming only his right as God to be merciful and to show compassion to anyone he

pleases.

Would anyone wish to deny God this right? The right to forgive? The right to overlook sin?

Because that is what is in view in the 33rd Chapter of Exodus.

In Chapter 32 we read the sad tale of the Golden Calf.

Justice would seem to have demanded that Israel be destroyed,

or, at the very least, cursed forever, disinherited and cut off from God.

How could **such** a sin **ever** be overcome?

Yet Moses interceded and God showed his mercy and compassion,

first by telling Moses that the children of Israel may go ahead and occupy the promised land,

and that God would send an angel ahead of them to make certain that this happens,

but that God, Himself, would not go among them, for fear that in their sinfulness, they would be consumed by his righteousness and his glory.

But Moses appeals to God again, asking that God should go among them, thereby proving to the world that he is their God and that they are his chosen people.

It is in response to this plea of Moses, that God's words include the ones quoted here by Paul in Romans 9:15.

But let's read the whole paragraph from which Paul quotes.

Please turn to Exodus, Chapter 33, and let's read Verses 17 through 23, first in Japanese.

Thank you. And now will someone please read that in English.

(Exodus 33:17-23)

And the LORD said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."18 Moses said, "Please show me your glory."19 And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."21 And the LORD said, "Behold,

there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock,²² and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.²³ Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

Thank you.

Do you see that, despite everything that has just happened with the Golden Calf,

and indeed despite everything that has happen in human history since the fall of Adam,

and despite everything that will happen until the crucifixion of Christ and beyond,

all of which is eternally present in God's sight,

God promises Moses that he will make all of his goodness pass before Moses.

Before Moses God will proclaim his name: YHVH

Which means something like:

"I am who I shall be" or

"I shall be who I am" or

"I am who I am"

God's name expresses the fact that he is perfectly self determining, perfectly free

but, also, that he is perfectly consistent with himself, now and forevermore

And it is just here, then, that God adds the part that Paul quotes:

God says: "I will be gracious, and will show mercy upon whom I will show mercy."

This, too, is part of God's freedom,

the freedom to forgive and to be merciful towards whomever, whenever, and however he will!

This (i.e. God's propensity to forgive sin) does not make Gog unjust.

Grace and mercy display goodness beyond what justice requires.

Just as God has always done,

and just as God has done ultimately in Christ.

Once again: God's freedom is limited only by his goodness.

And his goodness has been displayed most fully in Christ.

But it was also glimpsed ahead of time,

as behind a veil, here in Exodus 33.

Israel deserved nothing from God except punishment and rejection.

They received instead mercy and grace, beyond all reckoning.

So coming back to Romans, Chapter 9, Verse 16, we read:

(Verse 16)

So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

Because God is always merciful beyond what people deserve,

but absolutely free to do so in whatever ways he sees fit,

We observe differences, one from the other, in the histories of nations and in the lives of men.

This, too, is clearly seen in holy Scripture.

Paul moves next, then, to the example of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, who in the history of Israel was set forth as sort of the counterpart of Moses.

Moses as we have seen was the recipient of God's grace,

or we might say the vessel or instrument of God's grace.

but what of Pharaoh?

He was, Paul reminds us, **also** an instrument of God's grace.

albeit not in the same way that Moses was.

Verse 17 reads

(Verse 17)

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

It is by the grace of God that Pharaoh was born into this world

and, indeed, it is by the Grace of God that there was a world into which Pharaoh might be born.

It is by the grace of God that this man became the mighty Pharaoh who wielded such great power.

God gave this life and this power to Pharaoh and placed Israel in his power in order that he might show mercy to his servant Moses and to Israel and through them to Mankind for all time.

Both Pharaoh and Moses, Egypt and Israel, were involved in the outworking of God's eternal purpose which in the fullness of time was made manifest in Christ.

Even within the part of God's work which Pharaoh himself could see and understand he had no basis for bringing a charge of injustice against God.

Certainly we who are the recipients of so much grace, some of it transmitted through the history of salvation of which Pharaoh is so important a part...certainly we have no basis for bringing a charge of injustice against God in the name of Pharaoh!

The simple fact is: God is never unjust. Faith know this without explanation.

But God is always free to work however he wills to display his grace and mercy, and so we observe differences in the histories of nations and of rulers and of ordinary men and women,

and most often we have only the dimmest idea of what our gracious God is up to!

Verse 18 reads

(Verse 18)

So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

But if everything is always unfolding in accordance with God's perfect plan,

if Pharaoh no less than Moses is a part of it, and God's chosen instrument,

then doesn't this somehow excuse the sins of Pharaoh?

I mean, when God opposes Pharaoh and violently overcomes him, isn't that unfair?

This is where Paul Goes next.

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 9, Verses 19-24

Will someone please read Romans, Chapter 9, Verses 19-24 in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read these same verses in English.

19 You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?"

20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?"

21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?

22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,

23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory---

24 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

Thank you.

Let's remember Paul's argument so far.

First he reminds us of the sad fact that most Jews have rejected Christ,

and then he and reminds us that this is what has been happening in the history of Israel all along.

The children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have been constantly falling away, falling away,

and falling away, from God.

Yet God has always preserved a small remnant who remained faithful to Him.

In Paul's day this remnant consisted of a relatively small number of Jews (several thousand at least and perhaps tens of thousands) who had accepted Christ as the Messiah of Israel and Lord of the Church. Paul himself was one of them.

Conversely, the majority of Jews in Paul's day who rejected Christ had, by so doing, rejected God, just as the majority of Jews had rejected God throughout Biblical history.

Paul was sad that more of his brothers had not accepted Christ, but this did not fill him with a sense of God being unjust.

God was simply exercising his right to be merciful and gracious in the manner of his own choosing.

God is free to deal with different people differently: Moses and Pharaoh are prominent examples which Paul has given and particularly meaningful for his Jewish brothers.

Now Paul Continues in Verse 19

(Verse 19)

You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?"

This is a very tricky question.

And perhaps the safest way to deal with it, as Paul does, is by setting it aside.

Verse 20 reads:

(Verse 20)

But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?"

Paul's point clearly is NOT that God is free to be unjust and arbitrary because he is powerful, like an evil stepfather or some capricious demon.

The God whom we come to know on the cross at Calvary is free to be no such God.

Paul's point is that God's freedom in achieving his gracious and merciful purposes is quite beyond our understanding,

like the wisest and best of loving, earthy fathers whom we revere and do not question because we know that he is so worthy and able that all his actions will certainly come to the best possible end.

It would be unseemly for us to question God about such things and probably impossible for us to understand the answer were God to give it.

Faith knows this, and more besides. It knows that God is always within his rights, for he takes nothing from us and we can give him nothing.

Verse 21 reads

(Verse 21)

Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?

Us asking God why this man is like Moses while that man is like Pharaoh,

makes about as much sense as a lump of clay sitting up and asking a potter why one bit has been made into plate and the other into a chamber pot.

The clay simply can not raise up to the level of the potter and have such a conversation with him.

Likewise men cannot raise up out of time and space and enter into heaven and eternity and have such a conversation with the One who is our creator and the Lord of eternity.

Continuing with this analogy, Verse 22 reads

(Verse 22)

What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,

What Paul is saying here can only be allegorical.

He has after all just made the point that there is a vast difference between the ways of God and man,

and so I think we cannot see here in Verse 22 anything like a strict analogy.

Nevertheless the grammar here suggest that Paul is not being merely hypothetical.

Paul means positively to advance a particular teaching with this admittedly crude allegory.

His point is that God clearly **does** raise up certain men, such as Pharaoh, in order to show his power and his wrath,

and surely we see all around us many such men which defy God and whom God endures with great patience at various times and places,

I dare say that many of us have ourselves been such men,

and more often Pharaoh than Moses!

and why has God raised up Pharaoh and the rest of us?

Verse 23 reads:

(Verse 23)

in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory---

God's ultimate purpose, Paul means to say (I think) is to display his mercy

and to glorify those who are ultimately the objects of his mercy.

His wrath is revealed in service to his mercy.

and all of this is finished on the cross.

It is the finished work of the Cross, where God's wrath and his mercy are poured out without measure, which calls to all those whom God would glorify.

Verse 24 reads

(Verse 24)

even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

Everyone is invited to the cross

and all are accepted who believe.

Including all of the descendants of Israel and also we gentiles who have accepted Christ.

That is all I have prepared for today.

Any questions or comments?

Closing Prayer