What About The Jews - Part 2

August 16, 2015

I. Review

A. Today marks the third Sunday on Romans 9. Most of the first two Sundays were spent laying the groundwork for pursuing an understanding of this chapter that remains faithful to the context in which this chapter exists. As I made clear two Sundays ago, here in Romans 9, Paul begins dealing with the question, "What about the Jews, are they really separated from God's love?" And the answer is a qualified, Yes!

1. It is a qualified "yes" because not all Jews are separated from God's love, but sadly, too many of them are, in spite of the fact that –
   a. they worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
   b. they are, by birth, God's chosen people, having Abraham as their father,
   c. they have a covenant relationship with God and promises from God,
   d. and they have the seal of circumcision, the Law, and the Temple with its religious ceremonies and worship.
2. Yet in spite of these marvelous spiritual benefits, many are separated from God's love, because these benefits do not automatically or eternally make anyone secure in God's love.
3. However, Paul goes on to say that the fact that many Jews are unjustified and without eternal life doesn't mean that God's covenant and promises have failed to produce their intended results.
4. And this is the truth we began examining two Sundays ago, but did not finish. So today will continue Paul's presentation as to why God's word has not failed even though so many Jews are not justified. Now a word of warning, working our way though Romans 9 will take longer than you might expect, because there are controversial issues along the way, and I want to point them out with the hope that we can gain some understanding of them within their context.

B. Prayer

II. What about the Jews – are they really separated from God's love?

A. Romans 9:6-9 . . . But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; [7] nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "Through Isaac your descendants will be named." [8] 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. [9] For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son."

1. Just to remind you what we talked about two weeks ago, it was the custom of the Jews, and the surrounding nations, to pass the family leadership from the father to his first born son.
2. The significance of this cultural practice was included in the Mosaic Law where God said: “If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him sons, if the firstborn son belongs to the unloved, [16] then it shall be in the day he wills what he has to his sons, he cannot make the son of the loved the firstborn before the son of the unloved, who is the firstborn. [17] But he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; to him belongs the right of the firstborn” (Deuteronomy 21:15-17).
    a. Now I want to take a moment and point out that this Deuteronomy portion has caused some controversy in relation to what Romans 9:6-13 says about God’s dealings with Ishmael and Esau.
    b. According to the Law, a father could not show partiality to any son in any way that denied what was due his first born son, even if his first born son was born by a wife the father did not love.
    c. However, Romans 9:6-13 implies that God showed partiality by choosing the second born over the first born in both Isaac’s and Jacob’s case. And as is pointed out by the skeptics, God seems to break His own law.
    d. So how do answer those who make this an issue? We don’t, because there is no answer that would satisfy them. However, Paul is not pitting the NT God against the OT God or the NT Gospel against the OT Law. Paul is pitting God’s sovereign rule against the Jew’s belief that their combined birth heritage and religious heritage automatically and eternally put them in good standing with God. In other words, the Jews believed God owed them eternal life, where Paul is teaching that God owes no one anything and answers to no one. He alone decides who He justifies and to whom He gives the gift of eternal life.
3. However, connecting Deut. 21 with Romans 9 raises an issue we must all come to terms with if we are going to trust God explicitly, love God supremely, and submit to God whole-heartedly. And this vital issue is the recognition and confident trust that God is always

and perfectly good – regardless of what He does or doesn't do. We cannot answer every question or reconcile every seemingly contradictory portions of scripture. We cannot defend God in a way that will bring every doubter to faith. But we can trust God and hold Him in highest esteem, regardless of what people say about Him.

4. So let us return to the point Paul is making.
   a. It was the common belief among Jews that – based on what they believed to be valid and irrevocable scripture proof texts – they were automatically justified and guaranteed eternal salvation.
   b. Yet Paul counters their beliefs by pointing out that their theology and teachings neither control God nor decide for God who is or who isn't justified and given the gift of eternal life. God, and God alone, decides these things, and He does not decide them on the basis of our cultural or religious customs, our religious beliefs and practices, or whatever efforts we make to put God in our debt.
   c. And Paul confirms this truth by pointing out that it was not Abraham's first born son, Ishmael, but his second born son, Isaac, whom God chose to carry on the promise He made to Abraham of becoming a great nation.
   d. There is one more point I want to make here, and it is important to the overall picture. Before Isaac was born, Abraham asked God to look on Ishmael as the son God would bless to carry out His covenant with Abraham. And God said no. In other words, God also went against Abraham's wishes on this matter. Therefore, not even Abraham's beliefs or will influenced God. God alone chose who He wanted as the son of promise (Gen 17:18-22).
5. And that brings us to –

B. Romans 9:10-13 . . . And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; [11] 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, [12] it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." [13] Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."
   1. This is Paul's second example of God making His choice of who would carry on the covenant He made with Abraham about becoming a great nation – a nation that would ultimately produce the Savior of the world. And because Paul is affirming that only the God-chosen ones are justified, this portion is understood as dealing with who God saves.

2. But beyond this focus, this example contains a few statements that infer things which have caused some debate and disagreement within the Body of Christ, and which have spawned a particular theological teaching on the ways of God.
    a. Therefore, in fairness to the beliefs and views of others, and in the interest of at least addressing some of the controversy, we will look at these inferences. However, as we do, I urge you to keep in mind that we are treating Romans as a whole book where each part is to be understood by its immediate context, the larger context of the entire book, and the largest context of the Bible.
    b. Therefore, though some portions of Romans 9-11 appear to support Calvinism, and other portions Free Will, and some portions seem to support eternal security while other portions appear to teach that we can lose our salvation, our goal is to see the unity of God, the unity of God's will, the unity of God's truth, and the unity of God's ways in all these seemingly different or even contradictory things.

C. With that in mind, I want to read this portion again before giving a bit more attention to four phrases or inferences in these verses that have led to some confusion, debate, and even division within the Body of Christ. Romans 9:10-13 . . . And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; [11] 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, [12] it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." [13] Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."
    1. First, though Esau and Jacob were twins, Esau was Isaac's first born son, and in being the first born, he held the right to the privileges and blessing of the first born. However, God chose Jacob over Esau as the one through whom He would fulfill His covenant and promises with Abraham, and through whom the Messiah would come.
    2. Second, from scripture we learn that Esau was Isaac's favorite son, while Jacob appears to be Rebekah's favorite.
        a. In Isaacs old age, he asked Esau to prepare him his favorite meal, after which he would give Esau the blessing of the first born son (Genesis 27:1-4). And Isaac told Esau he would bless him in spite of the fact that before the boys were born, God told Rebekah that the older would serve the younger (Genesis 25:19-26). And

though it is possible, it is unlikely Rebekah never told Isaac about God's word to her about Esau serving Jacob.

b. As Rebekah's favorite son, she coached and helped Jacob deceive Isaac into giving him the blessing (Genesis 27:5-29).

c. My point here is to show us how often God's will and God's doings are resisted, subverted, or thought to be improved upon by man's doings, man's plans, man's thinking of what is right, man's beliefs, and the customs of the culture.

(1) If you can see my point, then you can see how easily man's involvement in religion can result in altering or trying to improve upon or make more acceptable what our perfectly righteous, impartial, all-wise and loving God says about who He justifies and to whom He gives eternal life.

(2) And if you can see this, then you can see why people within the Christian religion today will be shocked, and convinced God has made some great mistake, when Jesus says to them on the Judgment Day, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matthew 7:23).

3. Third, in vs 11-12, Paul says, "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, [12] it was said to her, 'The older will serve the younger.'"

a. I am pointing out this statement because it is used (*by Calvinism*) to support the teaching that God's predestination or election have nothing to do with what we have done, are doing, or will do in this life. Rather, God's election is based solely on His sovereign will.

b. Now it is true that these two verses can be used to support this teaching, for Paul says God made the choice before the twins were born so that their behavior would have no influence over His choice, or become a reason to alter His choice.

c. However, these two verses are not the only truths presented in Romans regarding justification and eternal salvation. For example, in Romans 10:12-13, Paul says "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; [13] for 'Whoever will call on the name of the LORD will be saved.'"

(1) In other words, God choosing one and not choosing another is not the only explanation for the basis on which we are

justified and given the gift of eternal life. Paul also teaches that whoever chooses to repent and turn to God for salvation through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ is also included.

(2) And my point is simply this: Paul is not building a theology of salvation that supports God's sovereignty (*Calvinism*) to the exclusion of man's free will (*Arminianism*), or visa-versa. Rather, he is making it clear that man's ideas of what God requires for justification and eternal life are suspect and too often misleading and therefore unreliable, just as Abraham's request that God chose Ishmael, and Isaac preferring Esau were not just suspect, but misled.

d. Does this mean God does not elect or does not choose? Of course not. The scripture is clear about God's election and choosing. But the scripture is just as clear that whoever repents, trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation from sin, and faithfully obeys the Lord Jesus will be justified and given eternal life. So let us not choose one over the other, but rather let us accept that God presents both even if we cannot fully explain how both fit together.

4. Fourth, Paul supports his example of God choosing Jacob over Esau with these words from the OT: "Just as it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'"

a. This is a shortened quote from Malachi 1:2-3, which says: "I have loved you (*Israel*), says the LORD. But you say, How have You loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? declares the LORD. Yet I have loved Jacob; [3] but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness (*based on his works*)."

(1) In Malachi, God is reminding Israel that His love for Jacob and hatred of Esau is proof He has loved Israel all along.

(2) And in Romans 9:13, Paul is using this quote as proof those whom God has chosen are NOT separated from His love.

b. Now the difficulty arises because the scriptures teach that God is love, that He loves everyone, and He commands us to love everyone, including our enemies. So if God is love, and if love is the Christian norm for living, how is it that God hated Esau?

c. Some resolve this issue by saying that the word "hate" does not mean hate; it means "to love less." Therefore, they say Romans 9:13 should read like this: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I loved less."

(1) And they support this interpretation of loving less by pointing to Jesus words in Luke 14:26 . . . If anyone comes to Me, and does not HATE (*love less than they love God*) his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

(2) Now whether you choose this interpretation or another, the fact remains that the word "hate" appears in both Malachi and Romans in relation to God and Esau – which seems to at least imply that God loved Jacob, but He did not love Esau. And we know that God chose Jacob but He did not choose Esau, and that He blessed Jacob but He did not bless Esau.

d. Another way some resolve this issue is to say that God did not hate Esau as an individual, but rather as the nation of Edom, which is the people group Esau's descendants became.

(1) And in a similar way, they say God loves the nation of Israel, which is the people group Jacob's descendants became.

(2) However, is there really a difference between God loving a particular nation while hating another – on the one hand, and God loving one man and hating another – on the other? I don't think so, because a nation is a living organism made up of individuals. So to hate a nation is to hate, by implication, the individuals who make up the that nation.

e. Therefore, I am urging us to accept Paul's choice of words without trying to alter their meaning to fit a more gentler view of God or to make unbelievers and skeptics feel more comfortable with or accepting of our God.

III. Conclusion

A. It is possible you still have unanswered questions about these few verses. However, like the book of Job, this portion of Romans explains what God has done and is doing while giving us little or no explanation of the why God is doing it. Therefore, I urge you not to be discouraged by this, but rather to strengthen your trust in the wisdom and goodness of God.

B. Romans 11:33-36 . . . Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! [34] For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? [35] Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? [36] For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.