

Romans

- I. Review – In Romans 9, Paul – who is writing these words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit just as much as in the rest of Romans – is explaining why many of the Jews have been separated from God’s love even though he said at the end of Romans 8 that nothing can separate God’s children from God’s love.
 - A. However, one of the challenging aspects of Romans 9 is that Paul explains WHAT God is doing, but not WHY God is doing it. For example:
 - B. In Romans 9:6-13, Paul explains that the word of God, that is, God’s covenants and promises to Abraham and Israel, have not failed to accomplish their purposes even though many Jews are not justified, in spite of their family and religious heritage. Paul supports this truth by saying it is those God chooses who are the true descendants of Abraham, and the true Israel, and the ones justified in the sight of God.
 1. In other words, such things as social customs in relation to the first born son, or man’s will made known through individual appeals to God, or man’s efforts at keeping the Law, do not decide for God whom He justifies.
 2. However, we are not told why God chose Isaac over Ishmael, or Jacob over Esau, or even why God loved Jacob and hated Esau.
 - C. In Romans 9:14-18, Paul explains that God is completely and perfectly just (*righteous*) even though, in God’s own words, He shows mercy to whom He chooses to show mercy and has compassion on whom He chooses to have compassion.
 1. So not only are we left with a description of God’s ways that to the earthly, human mind hardly seem like justice, but we are not given any explanation as to why God shows mercy to some and not to others, or why He is compassionate toward some and not toward all.
 - D. In Romans 9:19-21, Paul explains that even though God decides, according to His own will, who He chooses and to whom He shows mercy, we still must answer to God for the way we live, and if we do not live a life of faith and obedience, we will be condemned. Then Paul supports this truth by using the example of the potter and the clay, where the potter has the right to make whatever he wishes of each lump of clay. Yet once again, we are not told why God makes one lump of clay into a vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

- E. In Romans 9:22-29, Paul explains that it is God's mercy toward sinful Israel – a mercy that patiently bore with their sinfulness, from the time of Moses until Christ – that opened the door for the church to become the chosen people of God so that people from every nation, tribe and tongue could become members of God's family and join the ranks of those who are God's own possession. Again, we are not told why God put up with sinful Israel for so many years, yet He did, and out of Israel came our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
- F. So why am I pointing this out? Because it is very tempting to add to the text our own ideas of "WHY" God does what He does, and in so doing attribute motives to God that are not His motive.
 - 1. In other words, when we assume a "why" when no "why" is given, we move out of the realm of faith and into the realm of speculation, which easily leads to unorthodox theology, and an image of God that is not God, and a depiction of God's motives that are not His.
 - 2. Therefore, when the scripture does not tell us "WHY," let us not assume and then treat our assumption as fact. Rather, let us exercise our faith, and trust in the goodness, righteousness, justice, wisdom, and love of God, and in so doing, rest in the confidence that God is doing something good, even if we don't know why He is doing it.

II. What about the Jews? Why are they not all safe in the love of God?

- A. Romans 9:14-18, Paul . . . What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! [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 (*mercy, compassion*) does not depend on the man who wills (*wants mercy*) or the man who runs (*works for mercy via good deeds*), but on God who has mercy. [17] For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth." [18] So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.
 - 1. In this section, Paul is dealing with skeptics' conclusion that if God chooses one and not another, and if His choosing is based on something other than man's deeds (*a conclusion taken from God choosing Jacob over Esau before they were born or had done anything good or bad*), then God's choosing must be biased or partial, and if biased, then God cannot be perfectly and completely just.
 - a. Paul responds to this argument that God is unjust with the words, "May it never be!" And these words not only deny that God is

unjust, they proclaim that God has always been and always will be just in all His ways.

- b. Moses said this same thing in Deuteronomy 32:4 . . . "The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He."
 2. Therefore, though God's choosing one and not another may to the skeptic's mind clearly say that God is unjust, those who trust God are convinced that God is completely and perfectly just.
 3. However, when God tells us what He is doing but not why, we can more easily sympathize with the skeptic, the unbeliever, and even distrusting Christians who think God acts in ways that are unjust. Therefore, Paul provides two quotes from the OT – one from God's dealings with Moses at the time of His giving the Law, and one from God's dealings with Pharaoh in Egypt – to prove that God is completely and perfectly just.
 - a. However, both quotes, if allowed to stand alone, can leave the reader wondering if God is just in who He chooses.
 - b. Therefore, my goal is to take us back into the OT and examine the stories from which these two quotes are taken so we can see from the context of the stories that God is just in all He does.
 - c. And today we will look at the story in which God said to Moses that He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and compassion on whom He will have compassion.
- B. The words in Romans 9:15, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" were spoken by God to Moses, and they were said at the end of a well known story. And this story begins with Moses being up on the Mountain for 40 days and nights receiving the Ten Commandments from God. Somewhere near the end of those 40 days, the people coaxed Aaron into making them a god who would lead them, because they did not know what had become of Moses.
- a. So Aaron told them to take off the gold rings which they had gotten from the Egyptians on their way out of Egypt, and which were in the ears of their wives, their sons, and their daughters, and bring them to him. The people did this and Aaron fashioned them into a golden calf, and the people said: "This is our god who brought us up from the land of Egypt."
 - b. When Aaron saw them worshiping the calf, he built an altar before it and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." So the next

day the people rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play (*dancing, sports, singing*).

2. Back up on the mountain, the LORD said Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them – having made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, “This is our god who brought us up from the land of Egypt!”
 - a. Then the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and they are an obstinate people. Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.”
 - b. At this, Moses entreated the LORD (*Moses begins acting as the mediator between the people and God*), giving Him three reasons not to destroy the Israelites. (1) Moses said, “These are Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand.” (2) Moses said, “Why give the Egyptians a reason to say that You brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth?” (3) Finally Moses said, “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (*Jacob*), Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, “I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.”
 - c. So the LORD changed His mind about doing immediate harm to the people.
3. Then Moses went down the mountain, and being angry with the people, he threw down the tablets and broke them. Then he ground the golden calf to powder, threw the powder into the water, and made the people drink the water. Finally, he directed the Levites to kill anyone who was still partying, so that 3000 were killed by the sword that day.
4. On the next day Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the LORD, perhaps I can make atonement (*propitiation*) for your sin.” (*Moses was not only willing to act as a mediator, he was willing to act as a redeemer.*)
 - a. Then Moses went back to the LORD, and said, “Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not,

please blot me out from Your book which You have written!" (Exodus 32:30-32)

- b. As the mediator, Moses asked God to forgive the people. As a hopeful redeemer, Moses said that if God wouldn't forgive, He should punish Moses in place of the people by blotting him out of God's book (*do you see Christ in Moses' actions here?*)
5. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin" (Exodus 32:33-34).
 - a. God makes three important points here. First, the penalty for sin is death (*being blotted out of God's book*), and God will exact that penalty from every sinner.
 - b. Second, even though death is the penalty every sinner owes, God does not demand immediate payment. He patiently waits for a period of time before exacting the penalty owed.
 - c. Third, though God had relented from His original decision to punish the Israelites immediately, He did not relent of punishing them eventually. Therefore, He affirms that a day is coming when He will judge and punish them for their sin.
6. But there is more in this section of Exodus, for God tells Moses to take the people to the Promised Land, and that He would send an angel before them to drive out the current inhabitants of the Land. However, sending an angel is not the same as God, himself, going with them, and Moses picked up on that. Then God told Moses that the reason He would not go with them was because if He did, He might end up destroying them for the evil they had done. However, God said that if they would put away their jewelry, He would take His time deciding what He should do with them.
 - a. At this, the people went into mourning and took off the jewelry they had gotten from the Egyptians on their way out of Egypt.
 - b. And, at this, Moses went to the Tent of Meeting, where God and he talked face-to-face.
7. Exodus 33:12-13 . . . Then Moses said to the LORD, "You say to bring up this people! But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. (*You've only said you'd send some yet to be named angel.*) Furthermore, You said that You have known me by name, and that I have found favor in Your sight. Therefore, I beg of You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways (*that is, the WHYS of what God does*) that I may know You, so that I may continue to

find favor in Your sight. Consider too that this nation is Your people." Here again, Moses makes three points:

- a. First, though God told Moses to continue leading the people to the Promised Land, and though God said an angel would lead them, Moses really wanted God to lead them.
 - b. Second, since God says He knows Moses personally and that Moses has found favor in God's sight, Moses wants to use that goodwill to motivate God to show him God's ways so Moses can continue to find favor in God's sight.
 - c. Third, Moses slips in a reminder that the Israelites are God's chosen people.
8. In response to Moses' first point, God responded by saying He, himself, will lead Israel to the Promised Land. To which Moses said, "If you don't go with us, don't send us, for it is Your presence that distinguishes us from all the other people on the face of the earth" (Exodus 33:14-16).
 9. In response to Moses' second point, God said He would show Moses His ways because He did know Moses intimately and because Moses had found favor in His sight.
 - a. Upon hearing this, Moses made one more request, "I pray You," Moses said, "show me Your glory!"
 - b. To which God said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion" (Exodus 33:17-19). And as we know, God did show His glory to Moses, a glory that revealed God's compassion, grace, patience, lovingkindness, truth, forgiveness, and judgement of unrepentant sinners.
 10. The most important point from this story in relation to Romans 9 is that God, alone, decides who He shows grace to and to whom He shows compassion. And why is this so important? Because like the Jews who believed their family heritage and religious zeal automatically assured them of eternal life – regardless of how they lived, we too tend to think our Christianity or our inflated beliefs about our own goodness put us in such good standing with God that we are guaranteed eternal life – as if He owes it to us as a reward, or as if justice demands He gives eternal life so people such as us.
 11. For example, if there was anyone God might be the least bit indebted to, it would be Moses, for he bore the burden of shepherding God's chosen people from Egypt to the Promised Land. And if there was

- anyone who had good standing with God, it would be Moses, for he was labeled, by God, the most humble man on the face of the earth.
12. However, in spite of all the goodness Moses had and the position Moses held, it did not put God in his debt, or obligate God to anything Moses might ask concerning his own or Israel's standing with God.
 - a. And if this is true for a man of the stature of Moses, it surely is true for everyone else, including all of us here today.
 - b. In other words, there is nothing innately in us, or in our heritage, or in our religious practices, or even in our repentance or our serious pursuit of godliness that puts God in our debt or obligates Him in any way to treat us with mercy and compassion, to forgive our sins, to justify us, and to give us eternal life.
 - c. What God does for us in saving us and giving us eternal life is wholly undeserved, and therefore totally based on God's choosing and God's doing – which is why we call it GRACE.
 13. The second most important point from this story in Exodus is that even though God shows mercy to some and punishes others, His decisions are not arbitrary or biased. All such decisions are based on His complete and perfect justice and His eternal wisdom – as He seeks a people for His own possession who are zealous for good deeds.

III. Conclusion

- A. The reality is, God owes no one mercy and compassion because we have all sinned, and therefore have both earned and deserve eternal damnation. Therefore, though we may have a rich religious heritage, a genuine repentance, a refined theology, and a serious pursuit of godliness, we can never put God in our debt regarding justification and eternal salvation. If He shows us mercy, it is because He chooses to do so. We can ask for mercy, but saving grace is always an undeserved gift, and nothing we do or don't do changes that.
- B. Therefore, God cannot be unjust in deciding to whom He shows mercy or on what basis He makes His choices. And though the skeptic sees God's justice as arbitrary, we know from the larger context of Romans and the rest of scripture that God is completely and perfectly just.
- C. And so, though scripture does not answer all our questions, let us trust God implicitly with the information He, in His eternal wisdom, reveals to us.