

The Sovereignty of God and the Will of Man

Romans 9:1-13

Thought for the Day: God is sovereign in His dealings with nations and individuals: He will faithfully fulfill His promises and steadfastly accomplish His purposes in spite of man's rebellion and rejection.

Following Paul's introduction in 1:1-17, Paul's letter to the Romans can be divided into four sections:

1. 1:18-3:20 – Why Righteousness is Needed
2. 3:21-8:39 – How Righteousness is Obtained
3. 9:1-11:36 – When Righteousness is Rejected
4. 12:1-16:27 – How Righteousness is Practiced

“At the end of ch. 8 Paul established that: (1) God has a purpose for believers; (2) nothing can prevent that purpose from being fulfilled; and (3) no one can separate God's people from His love. But what about the Jewish people? God had a purpose for Israel and God had said He loved Israel. Yet Israel appears to be excluded from God's program [due to their rejection of Jesus, the Messiah. How then can we in the Church be sure that God will fulfill His promises and purposes for us?] Paul addresses this problem in chs. 9-11.” (*New King James Study Bible, p. 1895*)

Ch. 9 – Israel's past election; Ch. 10 – Israel's present rejection; Ch. 11 – Israel's future restoration.

Paul uses Israel's rejection of God's plan of salvation to set forth the sovereignty and the faithfulness of God to His promises and purposes for man.

1 I speak the truth in Christ — I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit— 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, 4 the people of Israel.

Paul was willing to give up his own eternal salvation in order that his people, the Jews, might be saved. Paul's love for the people of Israel and his willingness to sacrifice himself for their salvation is a beautiful illustration of the Lord's love and sacrifice for us.

APPLICATION: How much are you willing to give up in order for others to be saved? What must we do in order to have that same self-sacrificial love for our own unsaved family members and friends?

Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. 5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

(Note the affirmation of both Christ's humanity and deity in verse 5. Jesus was God in human flesh). The Jews of Paul's day were greatly blessed by God (eight listed here). Those blessings did not guarantee their salvation, however, as seen in verses 6ff. Likewise, the blessings of God that we have enjoyed as a nation are no guarantee that we have a saving relationship with Him as individuals.

6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children.

Even though Israel, as a nation, rejected their Messiah, God remained faithful to His word (promises). His purposes for and His promises to Israel had not failed. But not all the physical descendants of Israel inherited the promises of God. Physical ancestry (being a child of Abraham) is no guarantee of spiritual ancestry (being a child of God). And God's salvation is individual, not national or racial.

On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. 9 For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

Being a natural descendant of Abraham (or of Isaac or anyone else, for that matter) did not and does not make a person a "child of the promise" (a spiritual descendant of Abraham and therefore, a child of God. Cp. Romans 4). Isaac inherited the promises of God, not Ishmael.

10 Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. 11 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad — in order that God's purpose in election might stand: 12 not by works but by him who calls — she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

God's sovereign choice of Jacob rather than Esau in eternity past was not based on either Jacob's or Esau's works (which were in the future at the time of God's choice) but on "God's purpose in election." (Cp. Romans 8:28 – "called according to His purpose.") "Loved...hated" – an idiomatic expression of comparison or degree (cp. Luke 14:26) but still a startling statement!

By the same token, God did not choose us according to our works either. His choice was based on His own sovereign will and purpose; it is proactive (according to His purpose – vs. 11), not reactive (according to man's desire or effort – vs. 16). Therefore, Christians can be assured that God will fulfill His promises to them because the fulfillment depends on Him, not them.

APPLICATION: What does it mean to you that you have been chosen by God and how should you live your life since God, in His mercy, chose you for Himself?

Suggested Applications:

1. Sadly, like the nation of Israel, America is rejecting God and rebelling against His will and purposes. Nevertheless, He remains faithful and true to His promises and committed to fulfilling His purposes. Are you joining in the rebellion or rededicating yourself daily to walk with the Lord according to His will and ways?
2. Do you question God's right to do as He chooses? Especially when "bad" things happen to "good" people?
3. Do you believe that God *causes* bad things to happen to good people? If so, what does that reveal about your understanding of the character and nature of God?
4. In practical terms, how do you demonstrate your gratitude for the mercy and compassion that God has shown to you?