



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Romans

Lesson 14: Romans 9:1-8

Our study of Romans chapter eight concluded with this powerful statement of hope, “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord,” (Romans 8:38-39.) Wow! If we choose to follow him faithfully, nothing on this earth can separate us from our God!

While for us, as 21st century Americans, these verses bring incredible comfort, peace and joy, this was not necessarily the case for Paul’s original readers. We must keep in mind that the saints in Rome were comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, and the Jewish brethren were still struggling to reconcile how both they and the Gentiles fit into God’s scheme of redemption. In fact, it appears that some were questioning God’s faithfulness to his promises to the nation of Israel at this point in time. While I’m sure this idea provided them with hope as well, it appears that there is also some confusion that Paul will attempt to clarify.

Chapters 9-11 begin a new section in Paul’s letter in which he will begin to more fully address the continuity of the old law and the new law. He will begin by reminding them that God is God and will show mercy on whom he will show mercy (9:15), and will then walk us through how both the nation of Israel and the Gentiles fit into God’s plan from the very beginning. It is also interesting to note that 30% of these chapters are comprised of Old Testament quotes (Pollard 319).

Read Romans 9:1-18 and mark any key words or phrases.

Read Romans 9:1

Right away Paul begins with three affirmations of his sincerity:

1. I am speaking the truth in Christ
2. I am not lying
3. My conscience bears witness in the Holy Spirit

With these statements Paul makes his sincerity clear, identifies Christ as the authority for what he is teaching, and for the second time in Romans (8:16) identifies the Holy Spirit as his witness.

Read Romans 9:2-3

What is it that he’s so sincere about? His sorrow and anguish for his kinsmen according to the flesh, the Israelites. Many of the Jews have gone from being God’s chosen people to completely rejecting God and his plan, and this has left Paul completely heartbroken. This word “sorrow” refers to a deep, emotional sadness, and the word “anguish” refers to torment, or an almost physical pain. Paul is saying that he is in agony over the souls of his kinsmen.



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Do the lost souls around us affect us in the way they affected Paul?

If so, what are we doing about it? If not, why not?

Allow the Gospel, and the lost souls around you to truly cut you the way they did Paul, and then do something about it! Speak to a lost soul about your Savior this week.

Verse three is particularly powerful, as Paul states that he could wish his own soul accursed (anathema) to save his kinsmen. Romans 8:35-39 make it clear that nothing can separate the faithful from their Savior. Yet the fact that Paul could sincerely, with the Holy Spirit as his witness make such a statement leaves me trembling.

Paul was willing to give his own soul for others, what are we willing to give? How does it show in our lives?

Read Romans 9:4-5

Here Paul gives eight descriptions of the Israelites:

1. The adoption - the same idea that was seen in 8:15
2. The glory - some believe this was God's glory that was shown repeatedly to the Jews, some believe this refers to the renown bestowed on the Jews as a result of being God's chosen people.

3. The covenants - it is interesting that this word is plural. We often only think of one covenant, however God made covenants with Abraham, Moses, David, Josiah and Nehemiah (Pollard 324).
4. The giving of the law - the law of Moses distinguished the Jews from every other nation in the world. These statutes and regulations also kept them safe both physically and spiritually.
5. The Worship - Some versions translate this as "temple service." The Greek word here is LATREIA which refers to service done to worship God, so in this context it may be referring to the sacrificial system (Zodhaites).
6. The Promises - God made many promises to the nation of Israel, however the primary promises that come to mind are the promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, 17:5-21). (As a side note as we continue the study, God's promises were always contingent on obedience.)
7. The patriarchs - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the men through whom the Jews identified themselves.
8. The Christ - greatest of all, the Messiah. Even though many of the Jews rejected Jesus, they still had the tremendous privilege of being the race through which the Savior would come into the world.

It is interesting to note that each of these identifiers has the definite article in the original language, this implies that Paul had very specific meanings in mind for each of these descriptors.



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Just as God's promises in the Old Testament were contingent on obedience, his promises to us are the same. Do we live as though we expect God to save our souls without being willing to give him our full obedience in return?

Read Romans 9:6-13

First Paul states that God's word has not failed in adoption being offered to the Gentiles, and then goes on to prove his point. Through tracing what the Jews know of their heritage, Paul demonstrates that it has never been about genetics alone. Abraham had two sons: Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was the older son, yet Isaac was the son of promise. Before he was even conceived God had set aside Isaac for a purpose, and God did not allow his plan to be thwarted because Abraham took matters into his own hands. The descendants of Ishmael were biological descendants of Abraham, yet they were not children of promise.

This is demonstrated again with Jacob and Esau. Before they were born God set aside Jacob for his purposes, even though Esau, according to Jewish tradition, should have been the favored child. Yet God chose Jacob, and as God he has the power and authority to do so. Verse 11 specifically states that, although the children had not even been born, and therefore had clearly done nothing wrong, God chose Jacob over Esau.

None of this indicates a "failure" on God's part, but rather his authority to use those who, in his providential wisdom, he knows will further his plan for man's redemption. This is spelled out for us in verse 13, "As it is written, "Jacob I love, but Esau I hated." While we typically think of "hated" as meaning, "loved less" in Scripture, Paul Pollard

in the Truth for Today Commentary on Romans states that this could better be understood as, "election and rejection," which fits with Paul's overall emphasis (Pollard 330).

This is also an amazing example of God's infinite wisdom and foreknowledge. While man's wisdom would have Esau being the child of promise, God knew that Jacob's descendants would consistently return to him, where Esau's did not. Psalm 137:7 records for us the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, cheering on the destruction of Jerusalem. Can you imagine if God had operated by man's wisdom and made Esau the child of promise?

Verse 8 is particularly important for Paul's point going forward, "This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise who are counted as offspring." From the very beginning, while man focused on the flesh (circumcision), God was focused on the promise. As we see in Galatians 3:16 that promise was all about Jesus, and Romans 1:16 makes it clear that the promise of Jesus was intended for all of mankind.

It is also important to keep in mind that the "election" mentioned in verse 11 is for the fulfillment of God's promise, bringing Jesus into the world. Paul is in no way teaching that individuals were elected for salvation and others were not (think back to our study of "called" and "predestined" in lesson 13). Rather he is demonstrating that God chose certain individuals for specific roles, and not others. We will see more how individual choices (including those of the nation of Israel) impact our standing with God in verses 30-33.

God's divine intervention in our world does not always make sense to us. We must remember Isaiah 55:8, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares



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the Lord.” God’s view is of eternity, where in our humanity we can only see the here and now.

How are we at trusting God when the here and now does not make sense?

Read Romans 9:14-15

Here we once again see our phrase, “By no means!” The very idea that God has been unjust in his treatment of the Jews is ludicrous to Paul. He has demonstrated through Isaac and Jacob that God has consistently chosen whom to extend his mercy to. He chose Isaac not Ishmael, Jacob not Esau, and now he has chosen to extend adoption to the Gentiles rather than limiting “his people” to the nation of Israel. Paul’s point is that this is as much God’s right as everything else has been, and that we have no authority with which to question God’s decisions.

Read Romans 9:16-18

Paul has used positive examples from Israel’s history, and now he will use a more painful example. A major theme throughout the book of Daniel is the idea that God rules over the kingdoms of men (Daniel 4:17), and that is what Paul is saying here. God intentionally brought Pharaoh to power because he knew how Pharaoh would respond to that power, and to that power being challenged by the creator of the universe. Did God literally harden Pharaoh’s heart so that Pharaoh had no choice in his actions? Not at all, but rather God allowed Pharaoh to harden his own heart in response to God.

What was the purpose of all of this? It was all to demonstrate God’s power throughout the earth. Throughout Scripture we see examples of other nations fearing the Israelites because of the

power God demonstrated in Egypt. Additionally, throughout Scripture we see the power God demonstrated in Egypt used to remind the Israelites of God’s care and protection of them.

In what ways have you seen God’s power demonstrated in your life?

Are you using these experiences to proclaim Him to all those in your sphere of influence?

This section of Paul’s letter has become necessary because the Jewish Christians were struggling. They were struggling because God, and his plan, were not fitting into the box they had created for him. Do we try to put God in a box today? If so how, and what can we do prevent this?

Pollard, Paul PhD. (2018). *Truth for Today, Romans an Exegetical Study*. Searcy, AR. Resource Publications.

Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.