



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Romans

Lesson 15: Romans 9:19-33

Romans 9:19 picks up after Paul has reminded the Roman Christians that God will have mercy on whom he wills and harden whomever he wills. He was re-enforcing the idea of the sovereignty of God, and that after all God has done to demonstrate exactly who he is, we have absolutely no right to question him. As we continue on in chapter nine the text will be slightly reminiscent of Job 38-41 when God responds to Job's complaints. While Job's life had been turned physically upside down, leaving him hurt and confused, the Jew's spiritual lives had been turned upside down leaving them hurt and confused. In both situations God's response is the same; I am God, and who are you to question me?

Throughout this section Paul is going to be answering the question he believes his readers will inevitably have: If God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, then how can he find fault in man? If man has no choice or say in the matter, how can a just God condemn anyone? We may think that the idea of predestination is new, however this is exactly what the Jewish Christians were grappling with. In verses 20-29 Paul will bring some clarity on this issue.

Before you begin, read Romans 9:19-33 and mark any key words or phrases.

Read Romans 9:19

Here Paul is responding for his readers, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will? This sounds remarkably similar to modern day comments such as, "My God wouldn't send anyone to Hell." Paul's answer to these questions will be twofold: he is God and can do as he sees

fit, and through the prophets God has told you from the beginning this was his plan.

Read Romans 9:20-21

Here Paul provides his first answer, "Who are you to talk back to God?" Using an analogy, they would have been familiar with, he compares humans questioning God to a lump of clay questioning its potter. Just as a common bowl would have no right to complain about not being made into a fancy ware, we have no right to question how God made us or what he expects of us.

I believe we frequently see the same struggle today, particularly in regard to denominationalism. Where the Jews were struggling with God allowing the Gentiles into Heaven, as Americans we struggle with the idea that, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven..." Matthew 7:21. We see those that we care about who are sincere in their love for the Lord but are not obedient to God's plan of salvation (Romans 6) and we justify their state. We question what God has clearly stated in His word.

The difficult truth is that when we believe someone should be saved, or condemned, when God's word says otherwise (based on their actions) the reality is that we are saying we are more just, more merciful, and wiser than God Almighty.



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Are there parts of Scripture we refuse to submit to because we don't understand? Are there parts of Scripture where we question God?

Make a list of teachings in God's word that you struggle with, or maybe even disagree with. Pray for an open heart and search the Scriptures for God's truth.

Read Romans 9:22-24

Paul once again brings the comparison around to the idea of selection as we saw earlier in this chapter. However now the tone is beginning to change as Paul starts to elaborate on why some are chosen while others are not. The "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction" are the same as the vessel for dishonorable use he just discussed, just as the vessels of mercy are those made for honorable use. While we may be tempted to take the idea of "selection" to mean that those who will be saved eternally have been predetermined regardless of what we do, Paul is describing for us exactly how God's selection is determined: it's based upon those who choose to live by faith (vessels of mercy) and those who refuse to live in obedience (vessels of wrath.) God has told us what we need to do to live with Him forever as His chosen, His selection, however it is ultimately our decision where we will spend eternity.

In this text we also see a contrast between God's wrath and his mercy. God desires to show his power and wrath on those who are dishonorable, and the longer they remain dishonorable the greater God's wrath becomes. Yet he waits. He waits for us as Paul states in

verse 22. He waits for both the Jews and the Gentiles, to show his patience and mercy in giving the dishonorable the opportunity to choose to become honorable.

Do you believe that we often focus on God's mercy and ignore his wrath? Why or why not, and how can we ensure to teach a balanced view of the nature of God?

How does Paul compare and contrast the vessels in this text? How can we know which category we are in?

According to this text, how is God's selection determined?

Read 9:25-26

This section is quoted from Hosea 2:23 and 1:10. The entire book of Hosea is an analogy of God's relationship with the nation of Israel. God's prophet Hosea marries a prostitute who continually commits adultery, and the names of their children are symbolic of the future awaiting the Israelites. Much as we see with the analogy of Hagar and Sarah in Galatians 4, God completely switches things around. In Galatians the Jews are happily going along assuming they are Sarah when, wham! Paul says, "Judaizers guess what, you're really Hagar and the faithful Gentiles are Sarah!"

Paul does something similar with the text here: he turns it on its head and says, "Guess



Finer Grounds Bible Study

what! Those of you who thought you are God’s people, you’re really not. And those you didn’t think were God’s people, they are!” This would have been very difficult for the Jewish Christians to accept. Paul is telling them that their understanding of what it means to be God’s people, the understanding their entire world has been based on for thousands of years, the understanding that has been passed down from generation to generation, is wrong.

What would this have been like for the Jews?

How do we react when we are approached with a passage that contradicts what we have always believed?

Study the original passages in Hosea, what was happening in the original text? What was Hosea’s point to his readers, and how does it fit with Paul’s overall point here?

When we are studying with someone who is not a Christian, we are asking the same thing of them that Paul is asking of these Jews. We are asking them to put aside everything they have been taught by everyone they love and respect throughout their lifetime. How can we be more compassionate and understanding in this situation?

Read Romans 9:27-29

Paul is pulling out all of the stops to try to help these brethren understand God’s plan. He has given them the examples of Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob and Esau and even Pharaoh to demonstrate God’s sovereignty. He has reminded them of all that Hosea had prophesied concerning God’s people. And now he gets straight to the point: God said only a remnant would be saved.

Until this point it is likely that the Jews had understood this to refer to the remnant that returned from the Babylonian captivity. However, Paul is saying that the meaning is much more severe: God didn’t just mean that a remnant would be saved from captivity, he meant only a remnant would be saved eternally. Yet verse 29 shows God’s love and mercy for the national of Israel because even after all the times they rejected him, even after they were instrumental in crucifying his son, God preserved some of their offspring.

Read Matthew 7:13-29. What do we learn here about the way that leads to life? Do we, like the Jews, assume that because we have a godly heritage our passport to Heaven is already stamped?

While it was true that only a remnant of the Jews would receive salvation, in fact God has said that only a remnant of all humanity will be saved. What do we learn here about the way that leads to life? How can we ensure that we are among the vessels prepared for glory?



Finer Grounds Bible Study

In this text who does Isaiah compare the nation of Israel to, and what was the purpose of this comparison?

Read Romans 9:30-33

This section begins with, “What shall we say, then?” Paul is about to answer a vital and looming question, *why*? We saw in Romans 2:11 that God shows no partiality. How then are some chosen and some not? This has been sounding an awful lot like predestination, but here Paul puts together the final piece of the puzzle for us.

Basically, the Gentiles were obedient by faith, and the Jews were trying to work their way to Heaven. The Jews were not truly pursuing righteousness, or conformity to God’s standards, they were merely trying to be so good that God would “owe” them salvation. Whereas, in contrast, the Gentiles had a sincere belief in God and desire to be right with him. The implication is that many of the actions were the same, however the difference was the motivation, the heart.

What are other Scriptures that address the idea of having the right actions with a wrong heart?

The works being described here by Paul are works of merit. What is the biblical difference in a work of obedience and a work of merit?

According to this text, why were the Jews unable to obtain righteousness?

Verse 33 gives us another Old Testament quote. The old covenant was necessary for God’s plan, and a blessing for the Jews in many ways. Yet it would also prove to be a stumbling block for the Israelites.

In what ways can our blessings become stumbling blocks if we are not careful? How can we be proactive in protecting ourselves from the fate many of the Jews suffered?
