

• LESSON 15 (July 27) •

Romans 9:1-33

Is There Injustice on God's Part?

In Acts 9, Luke tells the story of Saul's conversion. Before the end of the chapter, certain Jews were plotting to kill Saul (9:23). In Acts 14, Jews from Antioch and Iconium stoned Paul, drug him out of the city of Lystra, supposing that he was dead (14:19). In Acts 17, Jews who were jealous of Paul took "some wicked men of the rabble," formed a mob, and set the city of Thessalonica in an uproar (17:5). Paul knew all too well what it was to be at odds with his fellow descendants of Abraham.

And yet, Paul would not shrink back from or stop proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (Eph 3:1-6)

In Romans 9-11, Paul specifically focuses in on what the revelation of this mystery now means for Israel.

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off



How would you summarize the feeling of many unbelieving Jews towards Paul? Why did they feel the way that they did?

Why do you think Paul says what he says in Romans 9:1-3?

from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. (9:1-3)

How would you summarize what Paul is saying about his kinsmen in Romans 9:4-5? What do these phrases mean?

- ❖ They are Israelites –
- ❖ To them belong the adoption –
- ❖ To them belong the glory –
- ❖ To them belong the covenants –
- ❖ To them belong the giving of the law –
- ❖ To them belong the worship –
- ❖ To them belong the promises –
- ❖ To them belong the patriarchs –
- ❖ From their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ –

Where, then, is the breakdown?

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” (9:6-7)

Overall, what is Paul communicating with this rehearsal of Israel’s history and blessings in Romans 9:4-5?

How did these great blessings ultimately lead Israel to the point of being “without excuse”?

Don’t miss how Paul describes Jesus in Romans 9:5—“the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.” What does this mean?

Remember what Paul has already established in Romans 2:25-29.

For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

The selection of Isaac as the branch of Abraham's family tree through whom great blessings would flow was God's choice, not Abraham's or Sarah's. Just because a Jew could trace his physical heritage directly to Abraham did not automatically align him or her with the promises of God.

This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son." And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (9:8-13)

God had the right to choose Isaac over Ishmael as the family line through whom the Messiah would come. God had the right to choose Jacob over Esau—not on the basis of works or law-keeping—the children had not yet even been born! The basis was God's choice, plain and simple. And in the same way, God has the right to include Gentiles right along with Jews in his church.

Even though Abraham already had Ishmael as a son, in Genesis 21:12 God said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." What is Paul's point in bringing up this example?

In your own words, what is the difference between being merely "children of the flesh" in contrast to being "children of the promise"?

Before Esau and Jacob were even born, God said in Genesis 25:23, "The older will serve the younger." What is Paul's point in bring up this example?

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. (9:14-18)

The question is, who is willing to yield to God? Who is willing to be shaped by God? Whether Jew or Gentile, who is willing to respond with the obedience of faith?

You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? (9:19-24)

Think about just how longsuffering God had been with the Jewish people. Why? First, that they might repent (Rom 2:4). Second, "in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy." A spectacular mystery was finally being unveiled—the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Physical descendants of Abraham can most certainly also be a part of the same body, *if* they are willing to submit to God on God's terms.

As indeed he says in Hosea,

"Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,'
and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'"

Romans 9:13 contains a quotation from Malachi 1:2-3. Why is it important to recognize that God is referencing Jacob and Esau as representative of the nations of Israel and Edom, not simply two individuals?

Throughout Exodus we read of the hardened heart of Pharaoh (7:3; 8:15; 9:34-35). What is Paul's point in bringing up this example?

How would you summarize what is being communicated in Romans 9:19-24?

“And in the very place where it was said to them,
‘You are not my people,’
there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”

And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.” And as Isaiah predicted,

“If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,
we would have been like Sodom
and become like Gomorrah.” (9:25-29)

Even though an entire nation of men and women had descended from Abraham, only a remnant of them would be saved. Why? Because “no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly” (2:28). Not all who have been circumcised are willing to “walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised” (4:12). “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (9:6).

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written,

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense;
and whoever believes in him
will not be put to shame.” (9:30-33)

CLOSING THOUGHT: Jesus Christ is the chosen and precious cornerstone of God’s entire plan for mankind’s redemption. Whoever believes in him will not be put to shame (1 Pet 2:6). To trust in our family heritage, physical circumcision, the record of our own works, or anything else is to turn our backs on our only hope. “There is salvation in no one else” (Acts 4:11-12).

Pay careful attention to Paul’s summary statement beginning in Romans 9:30. What does this mean?

- Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith

- Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works

In what way is Jesus and the gospel “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense?”