

ROMANS BIBLE STUDY

Romans 9:09-13

Lesson #26

Introduction

I find myself compelled to say more than we did in our last lesson on verses 9-13 before we move on. The theme of God's sovereignty over humanity is clearly introduced in verse 11, and the explanation that He uses this sovereignty to affect the course of events in time and space to accomplish a specific plan of His own design. The plan and design are all God's, we ourselves are but a functional part of that plan, though ours is indeed a glorious part. Let's look again at these verses. I've titled them:

God's Purpose, According to His Choice

9 For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son." 10 And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; 11 for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, 12 it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." 13 Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Romans 9:9-13 (NASB)

In these verses we must not fail to recognize and comprehend the intention. When Paul writes *so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand*, he brackets this statement between two distinct opposites. The first, the preceding is: *for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad*. And then he follows it with: *not because of works but because of Him who calls*. The meaning of these verses simply can't be made any clearer. This declaration of Paul says that God's sovereign choices regarding man and our ultimate use and disposition are made by Him alone before we individuals are even born. Then to make it absolutely clear, he says it is not man's works (meaning the sum total of our actions and choices) but rather because of Him (God), who calls each to play their part in His eternal plan for creation. No matter how difficult it might be to accept this, there is no denying that it is the meaning of these verses. Before Jacob was ever born He had been chosen by God to be the object of His love. And conversely, before Esau was ever born he was chosen by God to be the object of His hatred and wrath. Now please, don't get angry with this preacher for attacking the fairness of God, I didn't write these verses. But Paul did, so now what are we going to do with them?

Let's stipulate that Paul has drawn these quotes from Old Testament Scriptures. The first ones are from Genesis but the last is from Malachi, so there's a significant time difference. But Paul has put them together in his epistle to make a specific point. Because the verse from Malachi is after the death of Jacob and Esau it might be argued that only the previous verses from Genesis are referring to God's foreknowledge, and the verse regarding loving Jacob and hating Esau is one based on experience of their lives. But this is not the point that Paul is making here. He is pointing out that God makes choices of people and destinies before they are ever born, and that He loves whom He will and He hates whom He will based on His own sovereign choice, not on man's works.

Again I want to say that everything in this chapter about the sovereignty of God is only difficult for us in one single regard. The only problem we really have is that it does not align with our human perspective of God and His righteousness toward us human beings. So, let's examine our perspective to see if it has any flaws. We believe that we were all born with certain inalienable rights as human beings. And between one human and another this is certainly admirable and true. Every human should be as free and valuable as every other human being. So we write constitutions detailing the individual rights of every citizen of our nation, and we establish governments to protect those rights. This is good and acceptable for human beings in the sight of God. But can this same concept be applied to our relationship with God? Do we consider asking ourselves if there is a difference in the relationship of man to man, and man to God? Obviously there is, comparing another man's authority over us is entirely different than examining God's authority over us. As for man to man, we are equals, but as for man to God there isn't even a means of comparison, and perhaps it's even blasphemous to try. Most of us will acknowledge this truth with our words, but then we go right on thinking the same way, like we're equals with God, and we have rights that He simply cannot violate. Okay then, just what are those rights? Where are they recorded in the Holy Scriptures? What are man's rights and entitlements before God?

We can try Exodus 20, and examine those things God inscribed on the tablets. Is this our Bill of rights given by God? So what are those rights? We shall have no other gods beside Him, and we shall make no idols of any shape or form, and we shall not take the name of the Lord in vain. We shall remember the Sabbath to keep it holy, we shall honor our fathers and our mothers, we shall not commit murder, we shall not commit adultery, we shall not steal, we shall not lie or give false witness, and we shall not covet the belongings of our neighbors. Now Wait a minute, these don't sound like rights, in fact they're kind of like the opposite, they sound more like commandments. They don't establish a single right or entitlement on our part in the sight of God. Then are we to conclude that God does not consider us His equals? Is it possible that He doesn't consider that we have any inherent rights of any kind whatsoever in His sight? Yes, that's exactly what the whole bible, from Genesis to Revelation tells us. It tells us of a single sovereign God, who does all things according to His own good pleasure, with everything and every creature He has or ever will create. This is simple to understand, it's clearly portrayed in the entirety of scripture, and the only thing that's difficult about it, is that it humbles us to our very core and eradicates every vestige of self importance and self determination, and we simply won't accept this without a fight. Pride has been loosened in the hearts of man and the result is that we will not humble ourselves in the sight of God and submit willingly to His absolute authority over us. We have the same disease that destroyed Satan, we are too prideful to kneel before our sovereign God and accept His will. We have lost the fear of God, and this, like Satan, is the beginning of our ignorance and self destruction. The scriptures declare:

"And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.'" (Job 28:28)

10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever. Ps 111:10

10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Pr 9:10

33 The fear of the Lord is the instruction for wisdom, And before honor comes humility. Pr 15:33

18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Romans 3:18 (NASB)

At this point I want to introduce you to the writing of one of my all time heroes. I was one of those who had only been taught of a tender and loving God who loved everybody exactly the same and wanted every single person ever born to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1Tim 2:3-4) After all, this makes sense. But that concept must square with other scriptures as well. And here in Romans 9 we are told that God himself loved Jacob and He hated Esau, and felt this way about them before they were even born. The Apostle Paul is the writer of both of these sets of verses. So my question obviously was, does God actually love everybody exactly the same? Well not if these verses in Romans 9 are telling the truth. These verses say that God made the voluntary choice to love Jacob and hate Esau. Yes, time separates these reference verses, but Paul's intention is crystal clear. The implication is that God made this decision before they were ever born. So, can it be true that God loves everybody exactly the same, and that He loved Jacob and hated Esau from before their birth? Can both of these be true? The answer is that it cannot possibly be true, these are mutually exclusive. My previous concept that God loves everybody the same was not taken directly from any scriptures, but was something I was taught. It was an assumption made by men from loose interpretations of various scriptures for the purpose of describing the mind and character of God from a human perspective. For example, if you were asked if you love humanity you might answer that you do, but does that mean that you love everybody exactly the same? Of course it doesn't, and suggesting it does is a deliberate misuse of your words. Man wants God to be something they like Him to be, something loving and gentle, and forgiving, not something frightening and powerful. But the problem is, according to scriptures, He is definitely both of these, He is a forgiving God to some, but to others He is a consuming fire, and ignoring one of these and paying attention only to the other is a recipe for disaster. I once had a lady in church tell me that she ignored the sin and wrath parts of the bible and chose to focus only on the positive. I wonder how she would feel if she took her car in for inspection and the mechanic ignored the bad brakes and tires and told her that the engine and transmission were all great, because he only chose to dwell on the positive? For some reason that I can't comprehend, this idea didn't seem absurd to her. It was her way of displaying a loving attitude. I wonder if she would feel the same about the car mechanic if he returned the car with a smile and never said a thing about the bad brakes? Was he just being loving by failing to warn her?

The most common understanding of God, in my lifetime at least, has been that He is a gentle God who loves everybody the same and forgives pretty much everything. For the most part we don't even know who the real God of the bible is, and when someone points it out to us we're immediately shocked and aghast. I myself was somewhat shocked when I first read these following words from Arthur W. Pink, in his book *The Attributes of God*, where he states the following words: (quoting)

The most dishonoring and degrading conceptions of the rule and reign of the Almighty are now held almost everywhere. To countless thousands, even among those professing to be Christians, the God of the Scriptures is quite unknown. Of old, God complained to an apostate Israel, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether as thyself" (Ps. 50:21). Such must now be His indictment against an apostate Christendom. Men imagine that the Most High God is moved by sentiment, rather than actuated by principle. They suppose that His omnipotency is such an idle fiction that Satan is thwarting His designs on every side. They think that if He has formed any plan or purpose at all, then it must be like theirs, constantly subject to change. They openly declare that whatever power He possesses must be restricted, lest He invade the citadel of man's "free will" and reduce him to a "machine." They lower the all-efficacious Atonement, which has actually redeemed everyone for whom it was made, to a mere "remedy," which sin-sick souls may use if they feel disposed to; and they enervate [weaken] the invincible work of the Holy Spirit to an "offer" which sinners may accept or reject as they please.

The god of this twentieth century no more resembles the Supreme Sovereign of Holy Writ than does the dim flickering of a candle [resemble] the glory of the midday sun. The "god" who is now talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday school, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in most of the so-called Bible Conferences is the figment of human imagination, an invention of maudlin sentimentality. The heathen outside of the pale of Christendom form "gods" out of wood and stone, while the millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a "god" out of their own carnal mind. In reality, they are but atheists, for there is no other possible alternative between an absolute supreme God, and no God at all. A "god" whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, whose purpose is checkmated, possesses no title to Deity, and so far from being a fit object for worship, merits nought but contempt.

End of quotation from Arthur W. Pink. When I first read these words I was profoundly affected. Someone before me had already put into clear and eloquent words all the thoughts and suspicions that I had acquired by attending denominational churches and simultaneously continuing to diligently study the scriptures. The "god" we were preaching bore little or no resemblance at all to the God that the scriptures revealed. Arthur Pink had very succinctly diagnosed the ailment in a couple of paragraphs. We don't believe what the scriptures say about God because we don't know who God really is in the first place. The god we think we know wouldn't make such choices without our consent, that would be invasive and unfair. The thought of a sovereign and majestic and omnipotent God that has His own eternal plan, and uses people as He pleases, as part of His intentional means to implement that plan, completely overwhelms us. How could God be so arrogant, just who does He think He is? Well, He knows full well who He is, and my I suggest that it's us humans who seem to have the identity problem. God feels quite free to use us humans and all the angels as He sees fit, so if we have a problem with that then we don't see God like He sees Himself. And if our definition of fairness and righteousness doesn't seem to match His, then may I suggest that we examine ours to see where it's gone astray. What happened to those who understand who God is, those who understand the words of Isaiah proclaiming: *"But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.* (Isa 66:2)

Why do we feel like God has no right to do with us as He pleases, to suit His own purposes, when the scriptures teach us from cover to cover that He does; and how is it that we don't understand that the creature has no inalienable rights in the presence of his God and creator? We have lost that distinction, we have denied that vast gulf of separation, and dare to think of ourselves as having some kind of rights and privileges that God simply must not violate. There is no such teaching anywhere in the Holy Scriptures. (Repeat) Every verse, every word is precisely the contrary. God has sent us a list of Commandments, not a Bill of Rights, because we don't have any rights from His perspective. The scriptures reveal a completely omnipotent, sovereign, all-knowing God who rules His creation with absolute unchallenged authority. We must know who God is, and who we are, and the nature of the relationship between us to rightly understand the way God deals with us. God does not act unrighteously, so His ways and means are righteous, even when He ordains that evil will exist in His creation. Evil of itself is never good, and we must never call evil good, but yet God brings eventual good out of evil by His sovereign control of all things that come to pass. (Ge 50:20; Ro 8:28)

It is dangerous and destructive for man to think more highly of himself than he should. (Ro 12:3) Just because the scriptures tell us that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son to preserve it, doesn't mean that He loves every specific individual in it the same, or that we have earned or been awarded any specific rights in the plan of God. Everything we get from God is an unearned gift of His grace alone, and we must know that and thoroughly understand the significance of it, to ever become the acceptable eternal worshipers that God has planned. It is impossible to rightly and acceptably worship a God that you don't even know or understand, otherwise, what exactly would you be worshipping? What would you be thankful for, and why would you esteem Him as Deity? No one who argues their rights before God will ever enter into the kingdom of God. Entry is predicated on our believing and accepting that we have no merits, and therefore no rights whatsoever to enter into His kingdom, and thus we fall at the feet of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, and plead His merits on our behalf. And in doing so we realize just what God has done for us, and we have ample and understandable reasons for worshipping Him. God's chosen, His redeemed and regenerated, have no objection to submitting wholly to His sovereign authority, and do not seek to argue or debate over His sovereign use of that authority in the lives of men.

Let's use an example: A man on the street stops you and asks to see your identification. What do you do? Do you simply comply and show him everything he asks, or do you first demand that he identifies himself and make sure he's duly authorized to make such a demand from you? At this point he produces credentials that identify him as a police officer, so you accept his authority and comply with his demands. It isn't that the demand itself is any different or less intrusive, it's who it is making the demand and whether or not he or she has the rightful authority to do so. Some people have authority over us that others do not have, we readily accept this every day. So how is it that we think that our God has no rights over us, or only has limited authority over our lives and activities? Where do we get such an idea? Certainly not from Holy Scriptures, we get that idea from our own prideful natures and rebellious hearts.

When Moses wrote of his experience on Mount Sinai in Deuteronomy chapter 5, he recounted the situation. The whole mountain was trembling, and a huge fire engulfed the whole thing. And the word of God came out of the fire on the mountain. The people trembled with fear, and responded that they could not hear the words of God and live, so they asked Moses to go up on the mountain and hear God's words and then come back down and tell them all that He said. Moses recounts back to Israel God's words in response to that decision:

*28 "The Lord heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me, 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They have done well in all that they have spoken. 29 'Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would **fear Me and keep all My commandments** always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!*

Deut 5:28-29 (NASB)

We do not fear a god that we do not know. Especially if our concept is that he's some kind of cream puff grandfather sitting in his rocking chair in heaven and grieving over his mischievous children that he just can't seem to control. So he has no choice but to ignore or overlook their misconduct because he loves them all the same. Then there's the group who refuse to acknowledge that He even exists at all. (Rom 1:18-32) Those who hold such ideas are not motivated to keep the Commandments that God has given to mankind, and for all intents and purposes the two groups are pretty much the same. One group has no god, the other has a fictitious god that they've manufactured in their own carnal minds, as Arthur Pink said in our previous quotation. This verse from Deuteronomy, and countless others, explains the outcome; that it does NOT go well with us, nor with our children after us. No **fear of God** means no **obedience to God**, and that brings inescapable repercussions upon a whole nation when it takes this path. Somewhere in the mid 1960's to 1970's our nation officially and belligerently abandoned any fear of God, and we are reaping the repercussions now in these violent and godless times. I graduated from high school in 1962 and it was absolutely unheard of to bring weapons to school, and having police officers and metal detectors was unthinkable. It can only possibly get worse and worse as we grit our teeth and shake our fist at a God whom we've abandoned and staunchly refuse to obey.

Neither Israel nor any nation on earth, including our nation, has ever been able to completely keep the Commandments of God. But when our nation as a whole feared God, and showed respect for the word of God, and passed laws and enforced rules that were in compliance with His Commandments, it went well with our nation, and we prospered and grew in influence and in power. And yet, in spite of this, we've done exactly what Israel did, we've abandoned our fear of God and no longer think we have to obey His Commands. We think we can make our own way by our own power, but alas we

will find out exactly what Israel found out, that it will end in disaster. It will take time, just as it did for Israel, but the outcome is set in stone, in as much as God's plan for the Gentiles is as immutable as was His plan for Israel. The times of the Gentiles will fulfill God's predetermined purpose and then come to a conclusion. (Rom 11:25) Every generation since the New Testament writings has thought that they were the one's who would see this fulfillment, and we feel the same. Sooner or later one generation will be right. Is our generation the one, maybe, and it's only right for us to think so, and to hope so as well.

In the verses we're examining the Apostle Paul is bringing us a message from God that He is the One who determines the fate and the function of all created beings. That He has a definite purpose for everything that goes on and He's planned it in advance, and He guarantees the outcome by His own declaration. (Isa 46:8-11) Life is not random, things are not random, triumphs and tragedies are not random, and the sovereign God of all creation uses all things that come to pass for His own purposes. No one at the time could possibly comprehend how Jesus could suffer what He did if He really were the Son of God, it made no sense to them at all. They openly taunted Him as He hung there on that cross saying, "If you're really the Son of God then come down off that cross and we'll believe in you." (Mt 27:40, 42; Mk 15:30, 32) They were absolutely sure that if He were really who He said He was then God would have saved Him from all that. This was the ultimate example of the popular term "*I just can't believe that a loving God would allow something like this to happen.*" How many times have we heard a statement similar to this from heartbroken relatives or friends of a person who has suffered a tragedy? But tragedies do occur, and we often don't know why at the time, but God has said that He has planned everything in advance, and that same God has said:

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. Romans 8:28-30 (NASB)

These verses we've already covered are often called the "golden chain" of God's sovereign election and salvation. Just as He caused all things to work out for good in the life of His Beloved Son, (Who died on that brutal and humiliating cross) so He will cause all things to work out for good in the final lives of each and every soul whom He has known and loved from before creation. There is a process that is long and often painful, and usually beyond our immediate comprehension, in the conforming of us to the image of Jesus Christ. (v.29) When the writer of Hebrews speaks of Jesus Christ he says: *7 In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. 8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. 9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, 10 being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.* (Heb 5:7-10) It would seem that the process of perfection, even for Jesus, involved obediently suffering serious wrong from mankind before He was glorified by His Father. If we are to be eventually glorified with Him, by being conformed to His image, then is this possible without our learning the same lesson of unquestioned obedience to our same Father?

When the time is right He calls, He justifies, and then eventually, through this conforming process, He glorifies every chosen child without exception. Thank God he has a plan, and even more, thank God that he has chosen us to be His own personal possession in that eternal plan. (Eph 1:14; Tit 2:14; 1Pet 2:9) And understand that He has not chosen everybody for this honor, in fact, very few by comparison. Multitudes have been selected to demonstrate an entirely different aspect of God's nature, and we'll see this in the forthcoming verses. But, these verses that we're looking at in this lesson, make it very clear that it's His choice, and His plan, that is the final determining factor in the use and outcome of every created being. God loves whom He chooses to love, and He hates whom He chooses to hate. He has both the divine right and sovereign discretion to do so in all righteousness, and so He does. Period, end of discussion on that matter declares the Apostle Paul. These are humbling words, and Paul goes on in the next verses to discuss this further. But we'll have to wait for the next lesson to get into this. For now, to God be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

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