

# ROMANS From Wretchedness to Righteousness

Study 15  
 How it Works with Israel  
 Romans 9:1-29  
 God's Sovereignty

Part 1 of 3: Has God Failed the Jews? (Romans 9:1-5)  
*The Problem of Jewish unbelief*

**Recap**

After making a declaration of God's promise to all Christians in Romans 8:37-39, Paul then addresses the issue of Jews who don't believe that Jesus is the Messiah (and therefore are not Christians).

**Verse 1-5**

Romans 9:1-5  
 I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

**1) a) Fill in the blanks. God made promises to the Jewish nations, but since some of the Jews don't believe does that mean that God failed to fulfill that promise and therefore Christians should be wary of any of God's promises? The video lecture says no for reasons based on the following verses:**

Reasons	Verse	Evidence that
a) Paul says that God's word has not failed	Romans 9:6a	But it is not as though the word of God has failed.
b) The basis of our security is so sure-to-happen that it is described in the past tense.	Romans 8:30	And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.
c) The Jews have privileges (they had extra access to God and	Romans 9:4-5	They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them

exposure to the promised Messiah that Gentiles didn't have)		belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.
	Deuteronomy 7:6	"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

**b) Reflection question. Verse 2-3 says: "that I (Paul) have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I (Paul) could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh." Paul was willing to go to hell for eternity so that his people, his Jewish family, his Jewish friends who don't believe will be able to believe in Christ. Do you have as much love as Paul for people around you who do not believe?**

Kx: I definitely don't have as much love as Paul, considering he is a human, this shows that it is humanly possible to love people as much as God or Jesus (who actually went to hell for us). Although this is not an actual possible bargain for us, it just shows that my love for others is still very much lacking.

Part 2 of 3: Is God's Sovereign Choice Unfair? (Romans 9:6-24)

**Verse 6-13**

Romans 9:6-13

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

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

**2) Fill in the blanks. After Paul agonized over Jews that do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah (Saviour), he proceeds to explain that God is sovereign (that God has supreme power**

or authority), even over those who will inherit the promises. Fill in the verses to match Paul's explanations according to the video lecture.

Paul's explanation	Verse	Evidence for God's sovereignty (Content)
a) Not all Israel is true Israel	Romans 6b-7	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."
b) The Promises are not based on physical descent (not biological)		
c) The promise is made to SPECIFIC persons (Abraham had kids with other women but God specified it was through only Sarah's kid where the promise will be fulfilled)	Romans 9:8-9	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."
d) God exercises sovereign choice (before Jacob and Esau did anything God made his choice/decision on who to choose, no merit-based works)	Romans 9:10-13	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."

### Verse 14-16

Romans 9:14-16

What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses,

"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,  
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

**3) Fill in the blanks. Paul expects an objection from the audience after revealing the fact that God is sovereign. Based on verses 14-16, fill in the objection, Paul's answer, reason, and conclusion.**

Objection	Paul's answer	Paul's reason	Pauls' conclusion
What then shall we say? Is God unjust?	Not at all!	For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."	It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

### Transition Explanation

The saying "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." is taken from Exodus 33:18-19 where God accedes to Moses' request out of mercy, not because Moses deserved it. Paul continues to use the story of Moses and the Pharaoh in the old testament during the time of Exodus to prove that God priorities His own glorification.

### Verse 17-18

Romans 9:17-18

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.

**4) a) Fill in the blanks. Based on the video lecture, fill in the blanks below:**

If God chooses to saves a sinner, it is...	mercy	If God doesn't, it is...	justice
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**b) Fill in the blanks. Based on the video lecture, fill in the blanks below:**

Act of Hardening	How many times?
i) God declares He will harden Pharaoh's heart	3
iii) Pharaoh hardened his own heart	7
ii) Good actually hardens Pharaoh's heart	6
Conclusion: Both God's sovereignty and Human Responsibility work hand in hand.	

**c) Fill in the blanks. Based on the video lecture and Romans 1:24, fill in the blanks below on what is hardening:**

Hardening is	Solidifying something	in its current position, accelerating its natural course
Hardening is not forcing a 'neutral' person not to believe, but reinforcing....		A person's prior decision to not believe

**Quick Verse Reference**

Romans 1:24

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

**d) Fill in the blanks. God shows using the 10 plagues that He is more powerful than the Egyptian 'gods' as shown in the picture below. What are the 2 principles we can draw from this example?**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Plagues and the Gods and Goddesses of Egypt</b></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Plagues</th> <th>References</th> <th>Possible Egyptian Gods and Goddesses of Egypt Attacked by the Plagues*</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1. Nile turned to blood</td> <td>Exodus 7:14-25</td> <td>Hapi (also called Apis), the bull god, god of the Nile; Isis, goddess of the Nile; Khnum, ram god guardian of the Nile; and others</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2. Frogs</td> <td>8:1-15</td> <td>Heqet, goddess of birth, with a frog head</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3. Gnats</td> <td>8:16-19</td> <td>Set, god of the desert</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4. Flies</td> <td>8:20-32</td> <td>Re, a sun god; or the god Uatchit, possibly represented by the fly</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5. Death of livestock</td> <td>9:1-7</td> <td>Hathor, goddess with the cow head; Apis, the bull god, symbol of fertility</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6. Boils</td> <td>9:8-12</td> <td>Sekhmet, goddess with power over disease; Sunu, the pestilence god, Isis, goddess of healing</td> </tr> <tr> <td>7. Hail</td> <td>9:13-35</td> <td>Nut, the sky goddess; Osiris, god of crops and fertility; Set, god of storms</td> </tr> <tr> <td>8. Locusts</td> <td>10:1-20</td> <td>Nut, the sky goddess; Osiris, god of crops and fertility</td> </tr> <tr> <td>9. Darkness</td> <td>10:21-29</td> <td>Re, the sun god; Horus, a sun god; Nut, a sky goddess; Hathor, a sky goddess</td> </tr> <tr> <td>10. Death of the firstborn</td> <td>11:1-12:30</td> <td>Min, god of reproduction; Heqet, goddess who attended women at child birth; Isis, goddess who protected children; Pharaoh's firstborn son, a god</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Plagues	References	Possible Egyptian Gods and Goddesses of Egypt Attacked by the Plagues*	1. Nile turned to blood	Exodus 7:14-25	Hapi (also called Apis), the bull god, god of the Nile; Isis, goddess of the Nile; Khnum, ram god guardian of the Nile; and others	2. Frogs	8:1-15	Heqet, goddess of birth, with a frog head	3. Gnats	8:16-19	Set, god of the desert	4. Flies	8:20-32	Re, a sun god; or the god Uatchit, possibly represented by the fly	5. Death of livestock	9:1-7	Hathor, goddess with the cow head; Apis, the bull god, symbol of fertility	6. Boils	9:8-12	Sekhmet, goddess with power over disease; Sunu, the pestilence god, Isis, goddess of healing	7. Hail	9:13-35	Nut, the sky goddess; Osiris, god of crops and fertility; Set, god of storms	8. Locusts	10:1-20	Nut, the sky goddess; Osiris, god of crops and fertility	9. Darkness	10:21-29	Re, the sun god; Horus, a sun god; Nut, a sky goddess; Hathor, a sky goddess	10. Death of the firstborn	11:1-12:30	Min, god of reproduction; Heqet, goddess who attended women at child birth; Isis, goddess who protected children; Pharaoh's firstborn son, a god	<p><b>Principles</b></p> <p>The highest purpose of the universe is to glorify God</p> <p>God's negative actions also serve a positive purpose, it is a demonstration of God's power</p>
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<p>Picture reference(John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), Ex 7:8-13.)</p>																																		

Romans 9:19-21

One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?” But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

**5) Fill in the blanks. Paul expects another objection from the audience, translate this objection and the meaning behind Paul’s response to it according to the video lecture.**

	Verse	Translation/Meaning
<b>Objection</b>	“Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?”	How can men be made accountable?
<b>Paul’s response</b>	But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?	Creator has the absolute right to determine the future of the creature.

**Verse 22-24**

Romans 9:22-24

What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

**6) a) Comprehension question. Paul expects another objection from the audience, translate this objection and the meaning behind Paul’s response to it according to the video lecture.**

Verse	Reasons to delay judgement from the verse	In other words	Paraphrase the reasons in your own words in the way you understand it easily
v.22	to show his wrath and make his power known	Magnify the glory of His final victory	Winning a kid at chess is not as satisfying as winning a professional chess player. Winning against the professional shows that you are more pro.

			Therefore the more evil God allows humans to be before He steps in to intervene and judge shows His power and glory over evil.
v.23	to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy	Magnify the extent of His mercy	If we see God's glory so power, like the 10 plagues, it helps us believe in Him. If I sin a little and God forgive me, my response is : "Meh" If I sin a lot and God forgive me, me response is : "Wow"

**b) Fill in the blanks. According to the video lecture, how are the different vessels prepared?**

What type of vessel?	Vessels of Wrath	Vessels of Mercy
What happens to the vessels?	Prepared for destruction	He has prepared beforehand
Original Greek word	Katartizo (καταρτίζω)	proetoimazo (προετοιμάζω)
Verb form	Passive participle middle voice	Aorist Active participle
Who is preparing?	Unbelievers preparing themselves	God actively preparing

**Background information**

Taken from Tim Keller's Romans study guide:

Next Paul makes a further case for why God is not unfair. To have mercy on some and to pass over others.

A. vv.20-21.

Here he says that God made us, and that therefore he has rights of ownership. All by itself, this would probably be a sufficient answer to the question of "fairness." "Who are you, O man, to talk back to God?" We are so far below God, that we have neither the wisdom nor the right to question our creator.

B. vv.22-23.

Here he says that God is showing the riches of his glory through having mercy on some and passing over others. This is the heart of the mystery! Somehow, if God had mercy on all or condemned all we would not see his glory. I don't think Paul is giving us much more than a hint here, but it is a very suggestive hint. For the biggest question is: If God could save everyone, why doesn't he? And here Paul says that God's chosen course (to save some and

leave others) will in the end be more fit to show forth God's glory than any other scheme we can imagine.

C. vv.22-23.

Here Paul also says that "while God is the author of our salvation, we are the authors of our damnation." Notice the important differences between the vessels of wrath and the vessels of mercy.

(1) God "bore with great patience the objects of his wrath." This shows that evil people are not made evil by God. He bears with them. He never gives anyone quite what they deserve. He is unjust to no one.

(2) Notice that the vessels of wrath are prepared for destruction, but it doesn't say by whom. But it says clearly that the vessels of mercy are prepared for glory by he, God. By implication, the vessels of wrath are prepared for destruction by themselves (remember Romans 1:24).

In summary, in election, God comes in and softens our hearts and makes us good, but in hardening, God simply passes over and lets people have the way they have chosen.

*"If anybody is lost, the blame is theirs, but if anybody is saved, the credit is God's. This antinomy contains a mystery which our present knowledge cannot solve; but it is consistent with Scripture, history, and experience."*— John Stott

#### **Transition Explanation**

After saying God will save Christians, he says "even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?" in verse 24, then he is proceeding to give evidence from the old testament scripture that points to Gentiles and Jews will be saved

Part 3 of 3. God's ultimate plan includes both Jews and Gentiles (Romans 9:25-29)

#### **Verse 25-29**

Romans 9:25-29

As he says in Hosea:

"I will call them 'my people' who are not my people;  
and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one," and,

"In the very place where it was said to them,

'You are not my people,'

there they will be called 'children of the living God.'"

Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

"Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea,  
only the remnant will be saved.

For the Lord will carry out

his sentence on earth with speed and finality."

It is just as Isaiah said previously:



“Unless the Lord Almighty  
had left us descendants,  
we would have become like Sodom,  
we would have been like Gomorrah.”

**6) a) Comprehension question.**

**i) Which verses allude to the inclusion of Gentiles in God’s Salvation plan?**

**Verse 25-26**

**ii) Which verses allude to the inclusion of some Jews in God’s Salvation plan?**

**Verse 27-29**

**b) Reflection question. From a scale of 1-10, how at peace are your with the doctrine of predestination (God’s will and sovereignty) vs human moral agency (human’s free will) co-existing at the same time? Go one round to share your feeling.**

Very confused					Still processing					At peace		
<-	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	->

**Practical Questions**

**Case 1**

**There are five people who are planning to hold up a bank. They are friends of mine. I find out about it and plead with them. I beg them not to do it. Finally they push me out of the way and they start out. I tackle one of the men and wrestle him to the ground. The others go ahead, rob the bank, a guard is killed, they are captured, convicted, and sentenced to death. The one man who was not involved in the robbery goes free.**

**7) a) Discussion questions.**

**i) Whose fault was it that the other men died from the death sentence?**

**ii) Can the other man who is walking around free say, ‘Because my heart is so good, I am a free man,’?**

**Background information**

The only reason that he is free is because of me; I restrained him. So those have no one to blame but themselves. But those who go to heaven have no one to praise but Jesus Christ. Thus we see that salvation is all of grace from beginning to its end.”

– D.J.Kennedy, Truths That Transform

“The world fell into sin, but God put a limit, a restraint upon it, and this world would be complete chaos and hell if He did not do so. But the moment He draws back his restraining influence [at any point] there is hardening [there]... The withdrawal of the sun produces

hardening ground. So that is one of the ways God produces hardening — he leaves them to themselves...”

– D.M. Lloyd-Jones

**8) Discussion question. If God is so powerful and so loving and willing that none should die and go to hell why doesn't he save everyone? You may use the model answer to help you.**

**Model Answer**

Someone says: “But I believe that though God doesn't want us to be lost, some are lost because they choose wrong and God will not violate their freedom of choice.”

But why is freedom of choice sacrosanct? I try to honor my child's freedom of will, but not if I see he is about to be killed by it! Why can't God “insult” our freedom of will for a moment and save us for eternity?

No — regardless of whether you think we are saved by our choice or by God's election, you still have the same question: Why couldn't God save us all if he has the power and desire to do so? It is a hard question, but it cannot be used as an argument against the doctrine of election.

We can go further. Suppose election is not true, that eons ago, God set up salvation upon this system — that every person will have equal ability to accept or reject Christ, who will die and be raised and be presented through the gospel message. But the moment God determined to set up salvation on that system (assuming for the moment that he did), he would have immediately known exactly which persons would be saved and which condemned on that basis. So the minute he “set it up,” he was de facto electing some and passing over others.

We all come out to the same place. God could save all, but he doesn't. Why not? We can only know two things:

1) The answer must have something to do with his perfect nature. He is perfectly loving and perfectly righteous and neither can be preferred over the other or he would not be God. So somehow the answer has to do with his being consistent with himself.

2) We cannot see the whole picture. Why? If we can conceive of a more merciful system of salvation than God has, we must not see it aright, for God is more merciful than us or even than our imaginations. When we finally see the whole plan and answer, we will not be able to find fault with it.

**9) Discussion question. Many people immediately question how it can be fair for God to choose some people for salvation and not others. Look at Romans 9:14-16 and discuss the logic of Paul's argument. You may use the model answer to help you.**

### **Model Answer**

Paul clearly has taught this material before. He has just stated that when people don't believe, it is because God has not chosen them. Immediately he says, "What then shall we say, that God is unjust?" (v.14) He writes that question, of course, because he knows that is always the first reaction of everyone who hears this teaching! It is normal to ask: "To choose only some and not all — that is not fair!" But Paul counters, "Not at all!"

Here in vv.14-16 he reminds us that God had mercy upon Moses. Why? "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." At first that sounds almost like the words of an arbitrary bully, until we reflect. Mercy, by its very definition cannot ever be an obligation. To say, something is "unfair" is to say that it is owed. But a mercy is undeserved, and thus is totally free. See Paul's argument? To say, "It is unfair for God to only have mercy on some," is a self-contradictory statement. Paul is reasoning: "Are you saying that God owes anyone salvation? Of course not! But if he owes no one salvation, then he is free to give it to a) all, b) some, or c) none."

John Stott says:

"Paul's way of defending God's justice is to proclaim his mercy. It sounds like a complete non sequitur. But it is not. It simply indicates that the question itself is misconceived, because the basis on which God deals savingly with sinners is not justice, but mercy. For salvation "does not... depend on man's desire or effort" that is, on anything we want or strive for, "but on God's mercy" (16).

As an example, remember the rich person who decided to choose 20 inner city kids to guarantee their full college tuition. The analogy is not perfect — we know that this man screened people for families who were better prospects than others. But the point is, there were literally thousands of equally worthy recipients. We also know that the rich man could have helped a lot more than 20. But did anyone say that, since he helped some, he was being unfair to everyone else? No. He had no particular obligation to help any of the children. Since all he gave was sheer mercy, there could be no talk about being "unfair."

"[Paul is saying]: 'If you want to bring in the notion of justice, very well — you will get your wages, you will get what you deserve, and the wages of sin is death! If God's [salvation were totally] a matter of justice and righteousness, all would be damned; nobody has any claim upon God's mercy.' The fact that anybody has ever received mercy is entirely because of the character and nature of God. The real mystery is not that everybody is not saved, but that anybody is saved — that is the mystery! God owes nothing to anybody..."

— D.M. Lloyd-Jones

### **Meditation**

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.'"

26 "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  
(Romans 9:25-26 ESV)

What wrong attitudes do I need to repent of?

What is it in these verses that bring comfort?

What is it in these verses that build me up?

Meditate on these for the next week and come back to share with each other how God has spoken to you through the Holy Spirit.