

God's Righteousness Vindicated

(Romans 9–11)

Intro: In chapters 9–11 Paul discusses the subject of God's faithfulness in view of His apparent rejection of the Jewish nation. Paul's marvelous summation in chapter 8, that absolutely nothing will ever separate believers from God's love, would have prompted some of his readers, especially Jewish converts to ask, "What about the Jews?" If nothing can separate believers from God's love, why has He set aside His chosen people, the Jews? If His promises to Israel have failed, how can believers be certain that His promises to them won't fail?

In order to answer this charge against God's righteous character, Paul provides a defense or vindication of God's righteousness. He will argue that Israel's rejection of the salvation provided by their Messiah, Jesus Christ, led to the establishment of a new entity, the Church. Moreover, **Israel has not been abandoned, but only temporarily set aside**. What does the future hold for the Jewish people? Paul concludes in chapter 11, verses 25-27, that once the full number of Gentiles has been reached, according to God's elective purposes, then the Deliverer, Jesus Christ our Lord, will come forth from Zion, and all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:25-27).

In chapter 9 Paul examines Israel's past election;
In chapter 10 he explains Israel present rejection; and
In chapter 11 he details God's plans for the nation's future restoration.

I. Israel's Past Election (Romans 9:1-29)

A. Paul's sorrow over Israel's rejection (1-5)

1. The statement of Paul's concern (vv. 1-3)

1 I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, **2** that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.

It is remarkable how Paul moves from the joy of the believer's eternal security in chapter 8 into the sorrow and grief he expresses in chapter 9. When he contemplated what Christ has provided for believers he rejoiced;

but when he reflected on the lost condition of his kinsman, the people of Israel, he wept. Paul, like the Old Testament prophets before him, was grieved over his countrymen's rejection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He summons two witnesses to support the truthfulness of his professed love for the Jews. These witnesses were his own union with Christ, who is the truth, and his clear conscience, as aided by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Paul was so concerned for his fellow Jews' salvation that if it were possible, which it wasn't, he would be willing to forfeit his own eternal life, v. 3

3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites.

Paul was willing to be accursed, *lost forever*, cut off from Christ, for the sake of his brethren. He is not referring to his spiritual brethren, but to his kinsmen according to the flesh, his racial brothers and sisters, who were Israelites. This reminds me of Moses' similar words in Exodus 32:32, expressing his willingness to be accursed, lost forever, for the salvation of his fellow Israelites.

I must admit that this is very convicting for me personally. I mean, is there anyone who you would be willing to surrender your eternal life for? While we might be willing to die for our wife or kids, I don't believe any of us would be willing to give up our eternal life for anyone. Paul and Moses were willing to give up their eternal life for their fellow Jews. Thankfully, that was not a possibility for them either. But they were willing none-the-less.

This raises another question. Are you concerned about the lost going to hell? Do you pray for opportunities to share the Gospel, the good news about the forgiveness God has made available through His Son, Jesus Christ? It seems that most Christians are not concerned about the salvation of lost people. Thankfully some people do care about the eternal destiny of other people.

In the early 1900's there was an evangelist named Gypsy Smith. As he was growing up in the Gypsy community, it was not permissible for a youngster to speak to his elders, without first being spoken to. So, as he grew he prayed and waited patiently for the opportunity to share his faith in Jesus Christ with other members of his family. Well, the day finally came when young Gypsy Smith was asked by his uncle Rodney, "Why are the knees on your trousers all worn out, while the rest of your clothes look like new?" Young Gypsy

Smith replied, “Uncle Rodney, the reason the knees on my pants are all worn out is because I have been on my knees praying earnestly for you to become a Christian.” As the story goes, it wasn’t long after this that Gypsy’s Uncle Rodney accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior.

I have to admit that I have never worn out my knees praying for anyone’s salvation. Have you? Paul was willing to do more than wear out his knees. He was willing to give up his own place in heaven, if it would result in the nation of Israel coming to faith in Christ.

Having looked at the statement of Paul’s concern, I want to look next at:

2. The people for whom Paul was concerned (vv. 4-5)

Paul next lists eight great spiritual advantages that the Jews had over all the other people in the world. The eight great advantages are recorded in vv. 4-5,

4 who are Israelites, *that’s who we are talking about*, Israelites, to whom belongs *the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises*, **5** *whose are the fathers*, and *from whom is the Christ* according to the flesh, *who is over all*, God blessed forever. Amen.

1. the adoption as sons (Exod. 4:22; Deut. 7:6-8) God chose Israel to be His special people. He stated in Exodus 4:22 “Israel is My son, My first-born.” This is the language of adoption. God’s choice of Israel was in fulfillment of His oath to Israel’s forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob = **Deut. 7:6-8**

Deuteronomy 7:6-8—“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. **7** “The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, **8** but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers.

2. the glory (Exod. 16:10) The glory is a reference to God’s *shekinah* glory. That brilliant cloud of light served as the visible manifestation of God’s presence among His people. When the LORD led Israel out of Egypt, He went before them in a brilliant cloud of light by day, and of fire by night. The *shekinah* hovered over the Tabernacle, and later filled Solomon’s temple. It

was the visible symbol of God's presence with His people, Israel. Just think of it, no other people in human history have ever had that kind of a visible manifestation of God's glory in their midst. What a spectacular advantage! The glory!

3. the covenants (Gen 12 and 15; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Jer. 31:27-40)

The third advantage Israel enjoyed were the covenants God had made, first with Abraham, and then with Moses, and David; and especially the New Covenant He promised in Jeremiah 31. It promises Israel forgiveness of sins and restoration to their privileged status as the people of God. The remnant that comprises "all Israel," will in that future day share in the Kingdom and rule of their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. the Law—The Law, God's lofty revelation of His high and holy standards, written on two tablets of stone by the very finger of God. His Law was to govern every facet of His people's lives, in the political, social, and religious realms. If obeyed, God promised to bless His people in every area of their lives.

5. the temple service—This refers to the ministry of the priests in the Temple worship, with all of its elaborate ceremonies, sacrifices, and feasts. All of which pointed to the holiness of God in vivid and unforgettable symbols and pictures.

6. the promises—Of the thousands of promises that God gave to His people, Israel, none is more important than the promise of a coming Messiah, who would pay for their sins, and usher them into His glorious Kingdom on this earth.

7. the fathers—This is a reference to the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. All great men, who knew and served God. What a tremendous heritage was theirs.

8. the Messiah—The final advantage Israel enjoyed was the Messiah, the Christ. He was their crowning glory. The Israelites were the people through whom the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ, came. God Himself entered human history and acquired human flesh through a virgin descendant of King David. What an advantage, what a blessing.

The point Paul makes is that none of these advantages are of any value to the Jews apart from personal faith in their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. And the tragic fact was, they had rejected Him. When their Messiah appeared, Israel rejected Him and crucified Him. So, where does that leave them? Does it mean that God has not kept His Word? Has the Word of God failed? Absolutely not! You see, it wasn't God who failed to keep His Word. These are the very words that Paul uses in verse 6—"It is not as though the Word of God has failed," it was Israel that had failed. And the reason they had failed was because they had developed two very serious misconceptions. These same misconceptions are held by many people in our own day. Even by many professing Christians. That's the reason for Paul's concern for Israel, these two misconceptions, which he explains next in verses 6-13.

B. The reason for Paul's concern for Israel: *Two misconceptions* (vv. 6-13)

1. It does not depend on natural descent (vv. 6-10)

The first misconception is this. The Jews thought that their physical descent from Abraham actually secured for them God's blessing of salvation. I am reading in the middle of verse 6,

6 For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; **7** neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED."

The Jews thought that just because they were Abraham's offspring, they would automatically inherit God's promises. But Paul makes it clear that it doesn't work that way. It is not physical Jews who inherit the promises of God, but the spiritual children of Abraham. Only those Jews who placed their faith in the promises of God are considered children of God. **I was always PUZZLED by this. I thought all Jews were saved.**

Abraham actually had eight children. There was Ishmael by his concubine Hagar, Isaac the son God promised to him and Sarah, and six more sons by a wife named Keturah, who Abraham had married after Sarah died. Abraham's other seven sons are referred to as his descendants, but only Isaac is referred to as Abraham's child, (*tekna*, "born one") in the line of promise. Although Abraham had 7 other sons, Isaac was the chosen son of promise. Only Isaac received the promises of God.

Physical descent does not secure God's blessing. Only Jews with Abraham's faith, are his true spiritual descendants who will inherit God's blessing. It is not physical descent, but faith that makes a person acceptable to God.

Paul reiterates his point in verses 8 and 9

8 *“That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.”* **9** For this is a word of promise: “AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON.”

God had made a promise to Abraham that Sarah would bear him a son even though she was long past the age of child-bearing. They believed that promise, and God in His supernatural power, fulfilled His promise by giving them Isaac. Don't miss the obvious here. Isaac was born as a result of supernatural divine intervention. He is the product of sovereign power and grace.

This is the same way you and I get into the family of God. It is not through physical descent, right parentage, or family heritage. It is only through faith in God's promise. You see, God has promised that all who place their trust/ their faith in His Son, will not perish but will inherit eternal life. When we believe in God's Son, Jesus Christ, we are born into His family by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

Perhaps you are here this morning and you would have to admit that you have made the same mistake these ancient Jews made. You have thought that you can receive God's promise of eternal life because of physical descent. You have been trusting in your family heritage. There are a lot of people who think that. If you were to go out on the street and ask people that claim to be Christians, to explain why they are Christians; do you know what many will tell you? “I can assure you I was born into a good Christian family. In fact, my grandfather was a preacher.” Others will claim that their parents were good people who took them to church nearly every Sunday. “I have a wonderful family heritage.” The sad fact is, salvation is not through physical descent or family heritage. It is only through an acknowledgement of your sin, and placing your personal faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ. That is what provides us eternal life.

2. It does not depend on human merit [good works] (vv. 11-13)

Paul uses another illustration to show that not all of Abraham's descendants are heirs of God's blessings. He has used Isaac and Ishmael, next he presents Jacob and Esau. This exposes a second misconception that the Jews held. The misconception is that they not only thought their physical descent secured God's blessing, but that their righteous deeds secured God's blessing. Paul has dealt with this misconception earlier, back in chapter 3, and here it is again in verses 10-13,

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, in order that God's purpose according to His election might 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, from Malachi chapter 1, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."

In this illustration God's choosing Jacob over Esau, was according to His sovereign choice. Prior to the twin's birth, before they had done anything good or bad, to deserve favor or blame, God ignored the natural right of the first-born, and chose Jacob instead. Paul explains that God's choice was not based on the boy's character or conduct, but in order that His purpose according to His election might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls. God's choice is based on His sovereign purposes and not upon any foreseen meritorious works on the part of the one chosen. "This is a powerful refutation of the idea that election results from prior knowledge, that God chooses a person for salvation having foreseen that he or she will believe the gospel" (Tom Constable, *Romans*, DTS). As you read the story of Jacob and Esau, it is clear that neither one of them would seem a good choice. Esau is described as an immoral man, who profaned the spiritual promises of God. Jacob was a deceiver, who at least desired the blessings of God.

God had informed Rebekah that the older, Esau, would serve the younger Jacob. While Esau never actually served Jacob, his younger twin, his descendants, the Edomites did serve Jacob's descendants. God's divine election of Jacob is confirmed by the quotation from Malachi chapter 1 "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."

This love/hate contrast is a strong Semitic idiom designed to heighten the comparison by stating it in absolute terms. God's love for Jacob was demonstrated in His divine election of Jacob to be the heir of His spiritual promises,

and God's hatred of Esau was seen, not in any animosity toward Esau, but in His rejecting Esau's rival claim to the promises He made to Rebekah.

Following his teaching on this passage, Charles Spurgeon was confronted by a woman in his church that said, "I cannot understand why God should say that He hated Esau." "That," Spurgeon replied, "is not my difficulty, madam. 'My trouble is to understand how God could love Jacob!'"

God's choice of Jacob over Esau not only reinforces Paul's point that physical descent does not secure God's blessing, it also illustrates the point that a person's good works or righteous deeds don't either. God chose Jacob over Esau before the boys were ever born, and had a chance to do anything good or evil. Jacob's election, Paul says, was based solely upon God's own elective purposes.

Let's sum up Paul's argument in this passage. God's promises to Israel have not failed, but Israel had failed to appropriate faith in God's Son as their Messianic Savior. The Jews' claim to be physical descendants of Abraham, did not secure God's blessing, neither did their claims of performing righteous deeds. Salvation has never been based on physical descent or good works. It is only through an acknowledgement of our sin, and placing our personal faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ. That is what provides eternal life.

Have you acknowledged that your good deeds cannot earn your eternal salvation, eternal life in the kingdom of God? Have you confessed your sin and placed your faith in God's Son as your eternal Savior? Are you trusting in Christ's sacrificial death at Calvary alone, for your eternal salvation?

Closing song: **Give Me Jesus** by Horizon Praise Team