

**The Promise Problem**  
**Tom Rempel – Faith Bible Church**  
**May 19, 2019**  
**Romans 9:1-33**

Good morning, Faith Family, it's great to have you here this morning. If you're a guest with us, a special welcome to you. We're thrilled that you're here. In your bulletin there's a registration sheet, and we'd encourage you to take that out. Hold that folder as long as you need to to take time to complete that. If there's any way we can minister to you or your family personally, you just indicate that and place it there. We'd be honored to do that.

I want you to take your Bible and turn to **Romans 9**, believe it or not. We're almost out of **Romans 8**, but I'm not promising we'll stay out. We're going to tag back and come this way. I could identify with a number of our high school senior graduates when they are undecided. I, too, am wondering what I will do when I grow up, so I felt right at home with them at this time.

**Romans 9**, we come to what is labeled The Great Divide. Regrettably an unnecessary theological divide for sure. People have taken strong positions on this text, on **Romans 9, 10, and 11**, and it's caused havoc in fellowship unnecessarily. I think we just want to give it a chance to speak. Also some authors say that it's the Great Divide in that what Paul really wanted to write to the Romans was the first eight chapters and that his letter finished there, and these are just parentheticals that he added on.

Others have said that this **9, 10, and 11** really doesn't fit in the full what he's saying at all, so we should just jump over that, go to **Romans 12**, and then if we have time, come back fill in the blanks.

As I weighed this text over several morning walks with Linda, I said, "I think I see it differently, and I think I'm understanding it maybe a little bit more clearly," but if I'm wrong, in your opinion, you can reach me at [mikeh@fbclnk.org](mailto:mikeh@fbclnk.org). Send him all of your notes.

Notice how he started ...

**Romans 9:1**

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying;  
my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—

Two things I want to point out there:

In the law in the Old Testament, **Deuteronomy** and others, in order to validate an accusation or to validate your innocence from an accusation, you needed two witnesses. So what Paul starts out with here is two witnesses. I want you too know that Christ testifies on the purity of my motive of my heart, and The Holy Spirit as well.

A second thing that jumps off the page is that after coming through **Romans 8**, which as you recall took several weeks to wade through, he's got twenty times he highlights the ministry of the Spirit in **Romans 8**. Then you come to **Romans 9, 10, and 11**, and he mentions them one time. But you also remember when we started **Romans 8**, and I begged your grace that we would take our time going through it. I said, "I trust that maybe God would be so gracious as to bring about revival in our church, a revival in hearts as a result of understanding the forgotten God, again, and seeing again what the Spirit of God marvelously and graciously does.

It's exciting to report that He did. He did. Some heard and in their hearts were stirred to faith in Christ for the very first time. Others were just encouraged with the hope that He who loves them loves them faithfully to the end and that Spirit's holding power would not let them go.

So just before we go to **Romans 9**, I want to go back and just give you a summary of some observations taken from this great text on the ministry of The Holy Spirit.

Number one is that the Spirit of God applies redemption's payment to my desperate needy soul. What Christ did on the cross, the Spirit of God in His amazing grace applies it to me, the sinner.

Secondly, He reorients my heart toward heaven. He said, "The mind set on the flesh and the mind set on the Spirit." The mind set on the Spirit thinks in terms things that are eternal.

I went to two memorial services this week and sat in a hospital room as a brother breathed his last breath here on earth and breathed his first breath in heaven's air, and it's a reminder that this life is not life. This life is just the beginning of a life that is to come and that when we enter His presence, we live like we've never lived before. He reorients us toward heaven when we're so bogged down in the things of this earth.

He remakes us from the inside out. He loves us too much to ask us to change so that He can love us. But He also, when He draws us to Him by faith, He loves enough not to leave us in the condition in which He found us. He changes us, and that's the cleansing work of the Spirit within. And He arms me for battle. **Romans 8:12-13**, the spiritual life is the life of war. It's not a Sunday School picnic. We're constantly under assault, we're constantly in a battle, and the Spirit of God enables us.

Then the next one is that He guides me through the minefields of life. Those who are led by the Spirit, those are the children of God. There's a danger around every corner, and not relying on the Spirit Who knows where those minefields of temptation and trial and discouragement and challenge are, then you will certainly fail.

He also affirms our adoption. He reminds us that we were chosen being fully known. He knew everything about us. He knew more about us than we knew about ourselves, but He chose us, and He affirms that we are now forever God's children.

I think the greatest is as wraps up in **Romans 8:17-39**, He guarantees us that the best is still to come. What can separate us from the love of God? And he lists all these things. I am confident of this, we are super-conquerors through Him, those who are in Christ Jesus. So that's the background.

Suddenly as I'm in **Romans 9**, I think that there is a thread that ties these together, and so I ask you to just kind of stay alert and see if I've found something here that ought to be taught or if I've preached some heresy. If we start to hear heresy alarms going off in the hallways, then just drag me out.

#### **Romans 9:1-3a**

<sup>1</sup> I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— <sup>2</sup> that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3a</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed ...

... to be “accursed” means “to be separated forever from God,” carrying the weight, the penalty, of my condemnation upon myself so that I could be accursed, separated from God, rightfully condemned and ...

#### **Romans 9:1-3b**

... cut off from Christ (no line of hope, no lifeline whatsoever)  
... for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

**Paul, like Moses in Exodus 32** said, “God, take my life and spare theirs.” Paul here says my burden for my own people who are not believing is that if necessary, if possible, I would be willing to exchange my eternal destiny for theirs.

And you read that, and you have to ask yourself the question, “Who do I love enough to be willing to surrender my eternal relationship with God in order that they might have one?” What person or people?

I’ve got to be honest. I’m a narcissist. Nobody loves me more than I love me. Paul says, “I would be willing to do that. You see, the problem was that Moses couldn’t give his life for the children of Israel because he was a sinner who himself needed a deliverer.

And Saul himself was a certified sinner who needed a savior.

But the beauty is, and what he’s been trying to tell us for nine chapters is that there is One Who was both willing to be cursed by the Father and separated from Him for our salvation, and He displayed that on the cross.

There was One, and He was worthy to die in our place because He had no sin for which to die. If ...

**Romans 9:3-4a**

... I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. <sup>4a</sup> They are Israelites ...

... he uses the words “Israel, Israelites, and Jews” here over and over in **Romans 9, 10, and 11** ...

**Romans 9:4b**

... to them belong the adoption ...

Now let me help you understand a bit of the tension that is felt by theologians as they grapple with this.

**Romans 9:1**

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness ...

He says ...

**Romans 10:1**

Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

His burden is that Israel is rejecting their Messiah and continue to do that. He wants to see that turn.

**Romans 11:1**

I ask, then, has God rejected His people?

That's the big question: Has God rejected His people?

This whole thing is set up in ... the reason I say that, I think there's a thread from **Romans 8** that goes through **Romans 9, 10, and 11** is this: You tell me that on the basis of God's promise that I will never be separated. You tell me that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. You say that on the basis of God's Word. But what about Israel? Didn't God promise Israel that they would be His chosen people? Did He not promise Israel that He would provide all that they have? How do we explain the fact that God's plan for Israel seems to have failed? I mean, early on it looked like it was going to succeed.

**Acts 2** the day the Spirit of God came and Peter preaches, and there's this great move of the Spirit among the people. Three thousand of the children of Israel believed. By the time you get to **Acts 5**, they quit counting the wives and the children. Not because they're not important, they just had so many. They'd grown to five thousand who are now believing, and even some of the priests are believing, and you're thinking, "WOW! This mass revival all nations will repent. All the Jews will come to Him. All the Hebrew descendants will be followers of this Jesus. It looks like it's working, except that in **Acts 3**, they're assaulted by the Jewish leaders. In **Acts 4**, they're imprisoned by them, and in **Acts 7** one of their members is stoned for his testimony of faith, and **Acts 8** begins with, "A great persecution arose among the Jews," and they were scattered, and wherever they went, they went out preaching the Gospel.

And wherever Paul went, he would start with a synagogue and would preach the Gospel from their Old Testament there, and they would soon run out of patience with him, and they would throw him out. What happened to this, "I will lead all of Israel to faith in Myself"? If God can't keep that promise, how do I know that I have no condemnation, I'll never be separated?" That's what Paul's asking in these three chapters.

I asked that? Has God rejected His people. And the strong answer is, "By no means," not at all.

And then, unless you arrogantly think ... and I promise you that we will unpack these three chapters with the greatest humility theologically we possibly can because we don't have all the answers, and some great, great men of God and theologians have come to a different conclusion than I do, and they can be wrong if they want ... that's OK, it's fine.

### **Romans 11:33**

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

When Paul gets all done meandering through this, he comes to that conclusion, "Who can plumb the depths of the wisdom and the understanding of God?"

So with that humility we come back to this. What happened with Israel? He says they had all the benefits. He lists eight of them here ...

### **Romans 9:4-5a**

<sup>4</sup>They are Israelites to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. <sup>5</sup>To them belong the patriarchs, and from their (very) race, according to the flesh, is the Christ ...

... and it's like Paul is just going on with these thoughts, and he just kind of spontaneously bursts into doxology ...

### **Romans 9:5b**

... blessed forever. Amen.

When he starts to think about God becoming flesh in Christ Jesus in order that He might redeem those who are bound in their sin, he just can't help but say He is the Eternal God, He is forever God, and He, from birth onward, is forever fully man, as well. "Blessed be His name forever. Amen."

Let me unpack these just rapidly. Every one is a sermon all its own, but we'll not go there

The adoption. **Exodus 4** when God sends Moses to Pharaoh, He says, "I want you to tell Pharaoh, 'You let my firstborn son go. He is my son.'" He says in **Exodus 4**, **Deuteronomy 14**, and **Jeremiah 31**. "Israel is my firstborn. Let Him go. You don't let my firstborn go, I'm taking your firstborn out." The adoption – God knew what they were, and yet He chose them to be His own.

The second one is the glory. The glory speaks of the shekinah cloud of His presence. It's introduced to us in **Exodus** when the children of Israel, they got in a place where there was no wi-fi service, and Moses kind of gets stuck between two great mountains and a sea, and the people are like, "Whoa, some great leader he is," you know, "Check that map one more time."

And then the armies of Egypt are closing in on them, and God shows up in the cloud, in the shekinah glory, and on the Egyptian side it is so dark they just call it a day. They pitch their tents, and they camp out.

On the Jewish side of the cloud it is as bright as noonday, and God opens up the sea and lets them go. It became the cloud of protection.

When they get across to the wilderness, they hang a sharp right, they go down to Mt. Sinai, and at Mt. Sinai this shekinah cloud of the presence of God covers the holy mountain. It's the same shekinah cloud that would show up as a cloud during the day and as a pillar of fire at night. It always demonstrated God's oversight, His care, that when it would move, they would see it move, and they would pull up their tent stakes, pack it up, put their pots and pans away, and they would go to wherever the cloud led them.

It's the same cloud that at the end of the creation of the Tabernacle that at that moment when they dedicated it to God's presence, that cloud, the shekinah presence of God moved into the Tabernacle, and it filled it in the midst of the center of the camp of a sinful people.

It's the same thing in **1 Kings 8** when Solomon dedicates the Temple to the Lord, it says, "And the glory of God (the Shekinah Presence of God) filled the Temple, and they could no longer enter there. It's that they had the very presence of God with them. They had the covenants. The covenants that are, I think, referenced here involve four and maybe some others, but certainly the Abrahamic Covenant from **Genesis 12**. It said. "If you will follow Me and obey Me, I will bless you. I will make your name great. All the world, all the nations of the world will be blessed through you." We've got the Abrahamic Covenant, the promise of a great nation.

The Palestinian Covenant that flows out of it, the promise that there would be a land that will be forever theirs. The Davidic Covenant that promises that a descendant of Abraham will forever sit on the throne. And the New Covenant, the promise that their hardened hearts will be changed into new hearts. They had the glory, they had the covenants.

Most often when I do a marriage ceremony down through the years, right when the couple is about to exchange their vows, I remind them that, “What you are about to do is not sign a contract. A contract is based on two individuals that know each other well enough to distrust each other. They assume that the person that I am about to commit myself to is made of the same nature that I am in that they are not going to keep their word, so they sign a contract that’s based on, “I’m going to hold you to it.” You get it notarized so that it’s certified because, “I know that at some point you’re not going to keep your end of the bargain.” Usually there’s an escape clause written into a contract. Marriage vows are not contracts.

A covenant is not based upon the faithfulness or the response of the other person, but a covenant is a declaration that one individual makes that depends on their commitment alone. “Whatever you do, however you respond, my word stands before God. I promise you I will love you for the rest of your life.” That’s a covenant.

Here He gives them a covenant that is not based on a contract. If Israel responds in a certain way, I will bless them, but it’s based on the fact that God says, “I give you My word. It’s based on my character.” They had that. No other nation of the world had that from God. And they had the law.

And on Mt. Sinai: Remember when God came, and He spoke to the people, and they were like, “Whoa, don’t let God talk to us anymore. You go up and talk to God. You come back down and tell us what God said.” The mountain shook, and it scared the people.

Moses goes up on the mountain, and there God takes two pieces of stone, and with His own finger He writes the Commandments for His people. They heard God’s voice. No other people had heard God’s voice, and they saw God’s fingerprint on the tablets.

Coming down off the mountain after forty and forty nights, Joshua, not as skillful, not as mature, not as discerning as Moses, he hears this great thing happening in the camp, and he thinks it’s the celebration of a war victory. Moses knows that it’s not, it’s a celebration of unfaithfulness. The people of God had made their own god. They’ve made a golden calf, and they’ve said, “That’s the god that delivered us from Egypt.” In great frustration Moses takes the autographed copies of the law, and he breaks them on the stone.

He turns to God, and he says to God, “What am I supposed to do with this people.”

And God said, “Here, take these two tablets and call me in the morning.”

He goes back up on the mountain, and this time He says, “Now you pick out the stones, and you write the law on them.”

They had the voice of God. They had the autograph, fingerprint of God.

And they had the worship. What other people could approach a holy unapproachable God, a sinful people. But He provided for them lambs and birds and sacrifices that would shed their innocent blood for the guilty. They had God living in the midst of their camp in the Tabernacle, meeting them there. They had the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies. They had the Day of Atonement where they would bring two rams, and one of them was the ram of sin sacrifice, and the other was the scapegoat, and they would shed the blood of the one and apply it to the altar, and they would lay their hands on the other, and they would name their sins, and they would take it into the wilderness as a picture of God removing their sins from them. What other people had the opportunity to worship God on that level?

And they had the promises. The promises are referred to over and over in **Romans**. For those of you taking notes, write in the margin of your Bible **Romans 1:2, Romans 4:13, 14, 16, 20, and 21**, and then, again, in **Romans 15:8**.

For those of you doing that, Warren Wiersbe said, “If people are taking notes while you’re preaching, you’re failing. (Laughter) So, I’m failing with some of you, and I really like that. I’m going to say it again so you can get in the margin of your Bible: **Romans 1:2, Romans 4:13, 14, 16, 20, and 21**, and we’re going to see it again, **Romans 15:8**. They had the promises. What are the promises? That the Head Crusher of **Genesis 3:15** was ultimately the Messiah, the Anointed, the Appointed One, would come. God continued to remind them through their nation would come that One, the Anointed of God that would bring the deliverance to all people.

And they had the Patriarchs. The Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are simply fallen, fallible men, faithfully loved by a faithful God. They had them as role models. How does God respond to people that disappoint, break His heart? Look at how He related to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. They had them as their role models.

And then, bottom line, they had the Christ. That through a young teenager, a virgin from Nazareth, the Eternal God became incarnate, He became a man. From that moment on to continue to be forever fully God but also from that moment on to be fully man. They had the Christ in their nation. Jesus, the Savior, was a Hebrew. But they had all of that, and yet, they failed to believe.

So Paul raises the question of the portrait. How do we explain that? If our bold confidence is then His word that says that, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, and there is no separation for those who are in Christ Jesus." It is based on His word, but it looks like His promise failed in the relationship to Israel, what am I supposed to do with that?

**Romans 9:6a**

... it is not as though the word of God has failed.

He reminds them right up front, what God promised didn't fail. So, write in the margin of your Bible **Isaiah 55:11** where it tells us that His word having been sent out will not return to Him until it is accomplished, the very thing for which He sent it to do. They had God's word, and His word does not fail, it will not fail. If you're worried about whether God can love you to the end or not, you have His promise.

**Romans 9:6b**

For not all (Here's the explanation) who are descended from Israel belong to Israel ...

... so the false assumption is that if you could trace your DNA, Ancestry.com, and it goes back to Abraham, you're as good as in. Everybody that can trace their ancestry to Abraham gets to go to heaven. The Hebrews taught that. The rabbis believed that. They had a whole system to enforce that. But Paul says, "Read your own Bible."

Who's this guy in Atlanta that says we need to unhitch the church from the Old Testament ... duhh! ... it's going to fail, big time. It's like go back, read your own Bible.

**Romans 9:7**

... not all the children of Abraham, because they are his offspring, but (it is) through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

After years of waiting on God for an unfulfilled promise, Abraham in **Genesis 15** goes, "How dumb could I be? I thought when God said that

‘You’re going to be the father of a great nation, as many as the stars of heaven and the sands of the sea, that will be your descendants,’ I thought He literally meant that I would be a physical father. I get it. What He meant was is that there would be a baby born into our family via one of our servants, and that baby would be the heir of God’s promise.”

And God said, “No ... no.” **Genesis 15**, “Go outside here tonight, look at the stars, if you can count the stars, that’s how many your descendants will be.”

And the great Gospel declaration ...

**Genesis 15:6**

... and Abraham believed God.

He counted to him as righteousness. What’s the next thing he does? His wife comes in and says, “You know, you’re getting old. I’m getting old.” I’m sure they were both thickheaded, tried to ignore that reality.”

Linda said, “What happened? All of a sudden we have to check the senior box. How did we get there?”

If you refuse to die, you ultimately get there. “We’re getting old. Maybe what you need to do, it’s culturally acceptable, socially acceptable. We’ll have a surrogate, so why don’t you take Hagar, and let’s have a child by Hagar.”

And God said, “That’s not the plan.” So was born Ishmael. Ishmael is a descendent of Abraham, but he is not the son of the promise. That’s what he is saying here.

**Romans 9:8**

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.

What is God’s plan and purpose Has? God failed? No! The failure is on our part. We haven’t interpreted, read the story rightly.

**Romans 9:9a**

For this is what the promise said ...

... going back to **Genesis 18**. They were entertaining three guests, and one of them says,

**Romans 9:9b**

“About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.”

... and Sarah is hiding behind the curtain preparing the dinner, and she goes, “HA! That’s pretty funny.”

And he goes, “Why did you laugh?”

She said, “I didn’t laugh.”

“You certainly did laugh.”

So she named the son that was born a year later, “Laughter, Isaac.”

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... here’s another illustration. You have Ishmael and Isaac, now you’ve got Esau and Jacob. But also Rebekah, that is the daughter-in-law of Abraham and Sarah, the wife of Isaac, had conceived children by one man, our forefather, Isaac, and I struggle with that. Why did he make that statement there? But Rebekah and Isaac got married when Isaac was forty years old. He is sixty years old, and they still haven’t had any children. But they didn’t make the mistake that his father ... she could have said, “You know the problem here on the fertility thing is you not me, so we’ll just use one of the servants, and we’ll have this other thing going.”

He said, “No. It is by one man, that is your forefather, Isaac.”

She becomes pregnant ...

**Romans 9:11a**

though they were not yet born ...

They are still in the womb. They don’t have ultra-sound, they don’t even know they’re twins. They had done nothing, not good or bad. You could’ve looked at them and said, “WOW! Their personality of this one, he just makes a great leader, and that one he’s a troublemaker.” Nothing, they hadn’t done a thing ...

**Romans 9:11a**

... in order that God’s purpose of election might be continued.

That’s the key to **Romans 9, 10, and 11.**

It is the purpose of God in His elective, His freedom to choose and to orchestrate history as He chooses ...

### **Romans 9:11b**

not because of works but because of him who calls ...

You see, the problem with the nation of Israel is they thought they could ramp up enough good deeds that God would overlook their bad deeds and he would accept them on the basis of their keeping the law. And Paul, a Hebrew himself, is arguing against that.

So it says ...

### **Romans 9:12**

(Rebekah) ... was told, “The older will serve the younger.”

... that is totally counter-cultural, but that was God’s plan.

### **Romans 9:13**

As it is written, “Jacob (Oh, this is really painful – Jacob), I loved, but Esau I hated.”

That statement ... God chose Jacob, and He rejected Esau not on the basis of anything they did, not because Esau was an outdoorsman, was a great hunter, and God’s more effeminate, kind of liked housework kind of guy, none of that. His parents chose on that. The father liked Esau because he was a MAN, and the mother liked Isaac because he helped her cook in the kitchen. It’s not on the basis of that, it’s on the basis of God’s plan. The second-born will be the leader over the first.

“As it is written, Jacob I loved ... Esau I hated.”

Jacob. His very name means “The Deceiver.” Jacob was not a nice guy. Even his mother taught him how to lie to his father. We don’t call it lying anymore, we call it “spinning.”

“Just go in and spin a little bit about Esau when you’re really not him. Here, put these skins on your arms and your dad will never know.”

And he goes, “You smell a whole lot more like my son that lives in the kitchen than my son that lives in the prairie.” He had this smell.

And he said, “No, no, Dad, I’m Esau.”

This is one of the saddest stories ever. His brother gets so angry he’s going to snuff him out, and his mom says to her favorite son, “I think you need to

go travel over to my family for a while. As soon as your brother's anger subsides, I'll call you, and you can come home."

He's gone for twenty years. His mom died while he was gone. He never saw her, again?

What in the world is God doing?

**Romans 9:14a**

What shall we say then? (The next question) Is there injustice on God's part?

... and before you have a chance to muse on that, he slams you with the greatest negative statement possible, Absolutely NOT!

**Romans 9:14b**

By no means!

... You're going to see that over and over in **Romans 9, 10, and 11**. God is not unjust. He is not unfair. Justice on God's behalf means that there is "none righteous, not even one." All are condemned. All are deserving of judgment. If God is just, none of us has a chance.

So, is God unjust? NO!

**Romans 9:15**

For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

Compassion is simply seeing a need and being stirred emotionally, thus motivated to do something to meet the need.

He says, "I will see the need. I'll emotionally become engaged in the need, and I will take action to resolve or meet the need. So, I will have compassion, I will see the need, be stirred by emotion and meet the need for anybody I choose. And I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." That's a key phrase that runs through these three chapters.

You see, grace is God giving to us what we do not deserve. "For by grace," God's undeserved favor, we are saved.

Mercy is God not giving us what we deserve.

Is God not just? If he's just, He would give us what we deserve, and there's none righteous, not one. But He's a God of mercy. He doesn't give us what we deserve.

**Romans 9:16**

So then it depends not on human will or exertion ...

... it is not that we are choosing Him, but it says He is choosing us. You see the reality is, if you read the Bible, if left to our own, no one in their sinful condition would ever choose God. "While we're still sinners, Christ died for us." We by nature reject Him and everything that He stands for and everything that He offers us. So it's not on the basis of or decision or our exertion. The problem with the Jews as he has unpacked all the way through, is that they think that by keeping the law that they can offset their failures enough that God will say, "Well, your good stuff outweighs your bad stuff, therefore, you're my children." And he said, "It is not on the basis of exertion." You see if **Ephesians 2:8-9** were not true, heaven would not be heaven.

**Ephesians 2:8-9**

<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. (And that's not of yourself) it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> (it's) not a result of works, (lest anyone should) boast.

You see, the problem is if we get to heaven and we got there because we ramped up good deeds, we got all kinds of AWANA awards and everything, and God said, "WOW! Impressive! Come into my heaven," then we would be bragging to each other about what we did to get there. That's not heaven.

And there would be some slug sitting in the corner, and he's just kind of gloating, "You can't believe how cheap I got in here. I just did a couple of good things, and, BAM! He let me in." That's not heaven. It says it's not on the basis of your decisions, not on the basis of your exertion. What is it on the basis of? But on God Who has mercy, unmerited kindness, choosing not to give me what I justly deserve.

**Romans 9:17a**

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh ...

... he adds a third illustration, now it's King Pharaoh. Pharaoh was treated, he was recognized as a god in Egypt, so he uses the illustration of Pharaoh, and He says ...

**Romans 9:17b**

"For this very purpose I have raised you up ...

... that is, Pharaoh. Pharaoh thought he was a self-made man. He took his SATs and his ACTs, and he passed well, graduated with honors, he had the right DNA, he had the right family lineage, Ancestry. com, BOOM! yeah, you're qualified to be the Pharaoh, you've made yourself some kind of a god over the people, and God says to him, "You didn't put yourself there, I put you there. Why did You put him there?"

**Romans 9:17c**

... that I might show my power in you ...

... I put you on the throne, one of the most powerful influential individuals in all of history so that the world can see how powerful I really am in order

...

**Romans 9:17d**

... that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

Pharaoh wanted his name to be proclaimed. He's conquering nation after nation, so everybody is afraid of Pharaoh. He is writing this to a church in Rome where Caesar has the same egotistical mindset. "I'm a god. Worship me as a god. Put my figure on all your coins. Worship me." And he says – so there's a subtle sub-tweeting going on, here. If God put Pharaoh on the throne, Nero, who's sitting on the throne in Rome, he's only there because of God's choice as well.

Why? So that God's name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

Summary ...

**Romans 9:18a**

So then he has mercy on whomever he wills...

... no one can claim merit before God. God, you owe me not to give me what I deserve. I don't know what kind of a child you were. I have a sneaky feeling you were just about as bad as I was. It was like every time you got caught doing something wrong, it was time to start negotiating. You know.

My mother was pushover. It was like, "Mo-o-o-m," you know, it was like, "would you tell Dad I didn't really mean it," and all that.

My dad, he was not a pushover. He was the sovereign over our house. It was, "Dad, I know I deserve this, but don't give me what I deserve."

God the Father says, "I will give mercy to whom I will, but ...

## **Romans 9:18b**

(Paraphrase) I will harden whomever I will.

“Harden,” weigh down with the guilt of sin ... overwhelm with the consequences of rebellion. For those of you that Warren Wiersbe would say, “I am failing to arrest your attention,” write in the margin of your Bible, **Exodus 4:21, 7:3, 9:12, 10:1, 20, 27, and 11:10**. And I can hear your silent pleas, “Please repeat that, again.” So here, I’m going to do it: **4:21, 7:3, 9:12, 10:1, 10:20, 10:27, and 11:10**. Seven times God declares in **Exodus** to Pharaoh, “I will harden” his heart.

But ... four times he declares that Pharaoh hardened his heart. Those texts are **Exodus 7:22, 8:15, 8:19, 9:35**. “I will harden your heart.” “You harden your heart.” What’s the point? God gave Pharaoh every opportunity to repent, to obey, but with every opportunity God gave to Pharaoh, when Pharaoh said, “No,” another callous was added to his heart.

The more opportunities you have to say, “Yes,” to Jesus, and the more times you say, “No,” when you’re given an opportunity to say, “Yes,” the more insensitized your heart becomes to the Gospel. That quite honestly is the scariest thing about our children’s ministry. From the very beginning one of the greatest stewardships, from day one, one of the greatest stewardships God’s given Faith Bible Church is children.

Last Sunday six families celebrated that God had trusted them with babies, and we as a church know that two hundred of us is going to touch their souls and their lives before they stand up here as graduating seniors being launched out to make a difference for the Gospel. But the sad thing is this, every time a child hears the Good News of Jesus and says, “No,” another callous is formed on the heart.

Does that mean that we should not teach the Word? No, because it’s planting the seeds of the Gospel in their hearts, that the Spirit of God brings to their memory and those challenging moments in life, and they go, “I know what wants here, then they can choose whether to do it or not, so we’re planting the seeds. The shocker is that we had to put a lid on children’s ministry at 250 children in AWANA because we just couldn’t come up with enough adults for a leader-to-child ratio.

In VBS we had to put a lid at 225 children because we just couldn’t facilitate that many children. Have we lost our mind? People want to hear the Good News of Jesus, and we’re telling them, “Sorry, we don’t have room for you”?

But you know, every time they hear the Gospel, if they say, “No,” there’s a callous formed on the soul.

So then He has mercy on whom He wills, and he hardens everyone whom He wills. And the way He hardens is giving them an opportunity and letting them decide.

**Romans 9:19a**

You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault?”

... wait a minute! If God is sovereignly saying, “This one I’m going to make my own, and that one, I’m going to just let them say, “No,” to every offer, then how can God blame us?”

**Romans 9:19b**

For who can resist his will?”

I love this. Paul doesn’t even answer that. He just goes to another illustration, he says, “Let me spin this one on you like this ...

**Romans 9:20a**

... who are you, O man, to answer back to God?”

In our Thursday morning men’s Bible study, we often say, “Your arms are too short to box with God.”

“Who do you think you are,” you’re saying to God. “Who are you to answer back to God?”

**Romans 9:20b**

Will what is molded say to (the) molder,  
“Why have you made me like this?”

You see, the question that we should not be asking is, “Why did God not save Pharaoh?” Or, “Why did God not save Esau?” Or, “Why did God not save Ishmael? Or, “Why did God not save my cousin?” Or, “Why is God not saving my child?” That’s not the right question.

The question that should be asked is this, “Why in the world did God save me?” There was nothing in me. “All have sinned and come short of His glory.” “There’s none righteous, not even one.” We get our shorts in a wrinkle afraid that somebody wasn’t chosen, and they didn’t believe, and it’s all on God,” and the question is, “Why did He choose YOU?”

So I cite C.S. Lewis, again. Three things will surprise me when I get to heaven:

Number one, when I get to heaven, I will be surprised by those who are not there that I thought would be there.

Number two, when I get to heaven, I think I shall be surprised at those are there that I never thought would be there.

But most of all, when I get to heaven, I will be surprised that I myself am there.

Why would God choose me? “Will that which is molded say to the molder, “Why have you made me like this?”

**Romans 9:21a**

Has the potter no right over the clay, to  
make out of the same lump one vessel ...

... finely made, artistically crafted, every detail attended to so that it can sit on the top shelf and sell for \$150, a vase [“vauze”] – the difference between a [“vauze”] and a vase is about \$100 –

**Romans 9:21b**

and another for dishonorable use?

... I just kind of rushed through this. It’s going to make a great trash can in somebody’s office. It’s good enough. Does the potter have the right to decide this will be a [vauze”], and this will be a vase?

**Romans 9:22**

What if God, desiring to show his wrath ... to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction ...

WHEW! How hard is that to hear?

**Proverbs 16:4**

The Lord has made everything for its purpose,  
even the wicked for the Day of Trouble.

So what if God endures with patience vessels, rebellious ones, the children of Israel who refuse to believe, the Gentiles who hear and want nothing to do with it?

What if He chose to be patient with them, even though their ultimate destination is just destruction ...

### **Romans 9:23**

... in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy ...

What if God paints this dark canvas? Artists, they start with a blank canvas, and they begin to layer on the colors and the background, and they continue to work it until they come to the focal point of the portrait.

I sold my PT Cruiser in the most amazing way. We did a little negotiating, and he says, "You could take a little bit more money off," and I did some research and found out that was selling it to a well-known artist. So he asked me for one more slice off the price, and I sent him a thing back, and I said, "I think I could go to that price if you gave me a small original." And then I texted him back and said, "I was just kidding about the original, I'll take the price." When I took it to deliver it, I handed him the key, he gave me a small original.

That's what he's talking about. What if He painted the canvas in these dark colors of condemnation and judgement rightfully, rightfully deserved so that when He chooses to paint a picture of mercy, it explodes off of the scene?

### **Romans 9:24**

even us whom he has called, not from the  
Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

... and now he cites **Hosea** ...

### **Romans 9:25b-26**

<sup>25b</sup> "Those who were not my people (those  
who are not Jews) I will call 'my people,'  
... her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'"

<sup>26</sup> "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.'"

... writing to a church in Rome that has more Gentiles than Jews, and he says they all rightly belong. Why? Because God, hundreds of years before prophesied that not all Israel would believe, but that was not the end of the plan, but His plan included those who were not naturally His children.

### **Romans 9:27**

<sup>27</sup> And (even) 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 ...

I want you to highlight that, “a remnant” of Israel will be saved. He’s going to highlight that in **Romans 10** and **11**.

**Romans 9:28-29**

<sup>28</sup> for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.” <sup>29</sup> And as Isaiah predicted, “If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.”

The reason that I don’t believe these texts teach a replacement doctrine that Israel has been replaced by the church, that there is more continuity and dis-continuity in the Old Testament is this: Had God chosen to replace Israel and the promises to Abraham telling Abraham, “I’m sorry, when I said I was going to make you a great nation, I didn’t mean actually your children. I was going to give you land, I didn’t really mean land. I was going to put somebody on the throne, I didn’t really mean that,” not if He’s sub-tweeting him.

If God wanted to replace Israel because of their failure, he says, “You would have wiped us out like Sodom and Gomorrah, but you didn’t.”

**Romans 9:30-31**

<sup>30</sup> What (are we supposed to) say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; <sup>31</sup> but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching (it).

Why? Because they determined they would do it their way. They were so committed to doing it their way that they were unwilling and unable to see it His way. They wanted a salvation that they could credit to themselves, and He offered them a free gift.

**The Connection:**

I believe that **Romans 9, 10, and 11** is a fulfillment and explanation of ...

**Romans 8:28**

We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose.”

It seems so unfair that Ishmael should be sent away and that the blessing should come through Isaac. It seems so unfair that Esau, the firstborn by culture who should have been the heir apparent and the leader of the family

is instead is replaced by his younger brother Jacob who is the deceiver and not a nice guy. It seems so unfair.

It seems so unfair that God would say to Abraham in **Genesis 15**, that He says, “I want you to go outside and look at the stars, and if you can count them, that’s how many your descendants will be. And Abraham believed God, and He counted to it to him as righteousness.” But then He went on to say, “And for four generations your descendants will languish in a foreign land because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.”

And then four hundred years later they’re liberated, and you say, “What about those people that suffered under the oppressive hand of Pharaoh and his people for four generations?”

And what about when Moses tried to deliver them at age forty and failed and had to go into the wilderness and work for his father-in-law for four decades herding his sheep and not his own sheep and then comes back as an octogenarian becomes the great deliverer. What about all those people who were afflicted and suffered. And in they’re suffering they cried out to God, and He heard them? How fair is that?

But God causes all those things to work together for good to those who are called according to His purpose.

It was 1972. I was a Bible college student, and I was a custodian at what in its day was the Mall of America, Cinderella City. Some of you are old enough to remember. I was mopping up your spilled Orange Juliuses and other things. A not very respectable job, but I’ve never known a pastor that was ready to be a pastor until he had first fixed a few broken toilets and mopped up a few spills.

They created in 1972 what is called the Artisans Street. I can still remember I had just read the story of Isaiah and the potter and the clay, and I had just read the story of Jeremiah, and I stood on company time and watched a potter with the clay.

### **Jeremiah 18:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> The word (of the Lord) ... came to Jeremiah, <sup>2</sup> “Arise, and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.” <sup>3</sup> So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. <sup>4</sup> And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and (in a fit of rage, he threw it away and started with something else. Absolutely NOT!) he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter

to do. <sup>5</sup> (And) Then the word of the Lord came to me (and he said):  
<sup>6</sup> “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? ... .  
Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand ... .

And I watched the artist and take from this. He had prepared all the clay, and he just took a select amount and he put it on the wheel, and he began with his feet to spin it. Suddenly I began to realize that when you’re the clay on the wheel, your equilibrium is like toast is like. I’m spinning around going, “OK, I think from my perspective what you ought to do as the artist is that you ought to make me like this.”

I never one time saw the artist say to the clay, “What do you think you would like to be, and I could make you that.” It didn’t say that at all. He began to apply pressure with his hands and slowly began to mold something. Then when it had reached a certain height, he took his hands, and he put it in the top, and as it continued to spin, not one time did whatever he was making say to him, “I think you’ve got a dumb plan, I certainly don’t like what you’re doing.” He didn’t. He just continued to mold it. And then this is what really got me ... the closer to the finish he got, the greater the pressure and the more intense the attention. Because at that moment any distraction would destroy a work of art.

Some of you are just living in a situation ... and say, “I don’t think I can take any more pressure.” You feel tempted to say to the potter, “Why are you ... what are you doing?”

Remember that He is the Potter, and you are the clay, and the closer to the finish you become, the greater the pressure ... but the more intense the attention of the One Who is making you.