

Sovereign Grace

Romans 9:6-13

Introduction

Pastor Adam Hamilton once attended a workshop on domestic violence. The instructor: after the first time an abuser beats his spouse [in most cases the abuser is the man – though not always], the abuser feels terrible remorse. He is apologetic and swears it will never happen again. He *seems* to have repented. The spouse takes him back. Often if the abused is a Christian, they believe that this is what Christians are supposed to do. Then, in many cases, a week or a month later, he abuses again. He feels bad again and she may show mercy once more.

But mercy doesn't bring change. Instead, the victim has become an inadvertent enabler of abuse. The cycle of violence, remorse, and mercy develops a rhythm, and suddenly it's a pattern. That's what can happen if mercy is extended when it should not have been. The New Testament deals with this by calling people to repentance so they may receive forgiveness.'

When Jesus rose from the dead – he told the disciples

Luke 24:46-47 - 'And He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'

Repentance is to have a change of mind / change of heart about one's sin and about Jesus Christ

One of the great events in church history was the Day of Pentecost [just 50 days after Jesus rose from the dead] - - - and the pouring out of God's Spirit upon the Apostles - - - and Peter preached to a crowd of Jews in Jerusalem and they were convicted of their guilt in crucifying Jesus

Acts 2:37-38 - 'Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" and Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'

Many of them repented and were brought into the church – 3000

But after that – things went downhill with the Jews

Many began to persecute Christians – Stephen was put to death in Acts 7

Another pivotal point in church history occurred in Acts 13

Paul and Barnabas were on a missionary journey speaking to the Jews – who resisted and blasphemed - - - no repentance / no change of heart about Jesus

Acts 13:46 - 'And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "it was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.'

Acts 13:47-48 - 'For thus the Lord has commanded us, "I have placed you as a light for the Gentiles, that you should bring salvation to the end of the earth." And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.'

For most of the Jews – they never experienced a change of heart / or a change of mind about Jesus or about their sin

That is the issue Paul is addressing in Romans 9

He is grieved over his brothers – his kinsmen in the flesh

He addresses the question: 'has the word of God failed?'

Answer: No – God's Word continues to save all whom God has foreknown / predestined / called / justified and glorified in His program of salvation

I. The Word of God Never Fails - v. 6-9

Years ago – Arnold Fruchtenbaum – who is a Messianic Jewish believer – was on a flight to Israel – where he sat next to an Orthodox Jew – a professor at Yeshiva University in New York City. When the professor learned that Arnold was a Messianic Jew – he told him outright that he no longer considered him a Jew. Arnold asked him how he defined a Jew – and the professor said it was purely a religious matter. Arnold then asked him if he would consider an atheistic Jew to be Jewish. He said he would. Arnold then asked how he could consider the atheist Jew to be a Jew – and yet not a Messianic Jew to be Jewish. He had no answer but held to his position.

That professor reflected a hostility towards the Christian religion and towards Jesus yet today

As we come to Romans 9 this morning - -

Paul is dealing with the situation of the Jews – his kinsmen or brothers – they have rejected the gospel - they put Christ to death

John 1:11-12 - 'He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.' [KJV]

Paul raises the issue: 'Has the Word of God failed?'

In our Christian theology – we would say: ‘Of course not’ – they disregarded God’s Word
God’s Word works in the hearts and lives of those who believe

I Thessalonians 2:13 - 'We thank God that when you received from us the Word of God's message, you accepted it not as the Word of men, but for what it really is, the Word of God which also performs its work in you who believe.'

That is how God works

John 3:16 - 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life.'
[kjv]

As Christians we bank everything upon the faithfulness of God to keep His Word

If God does not keep His Word then we have nothing to hope in

Wayne Grudem: 'God's faithfulness means that God will always do what He has said and fulfill what He has promised. He can be relied upon, and He will never prove unfaithful to those who trust what He has said. Indeed, the essence of true faith is taking God at His word and relying on Him to do as he has promised.'

Faith says – ‘I believe the promises of Scripture’

Now Paul goes on to speak of how there is a difference between believing Israel and unbelieving Israel

It is the children of the promise – those who embrace Jesus – they are the true heirs of the promises made to Abraham / Isaac and Jacob

Arnold Fruchtenbaum: 'the doctrine of the Remnant of Israel means that there are always some who believe within the Jewish nation as whole, and all those who believe constitute the Remnant of Israel. Thus, there are two Israels: Israel the whole and Israel the remnant. Ethnically the two are the same but spiritually, they are not. The remnant at any point of history may be large or small, but there is never a time when it is non-existent, except immediately after the rapture.'

He is referring to this great section of Romans 9-11

In Romans 11 – Paul further explains how God’s Word has not failed

Romans 11:1-4 - 'I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed Thy prophets, They have torn down Thine altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life." But what is the divine response to him? "I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

Romans 11:5-7 - 'In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened.'

Paul says, 'Look – In Elijah's day – there were a lot of Jews that worshiped Baal / Ashtoreth - - - idol worshipers.' - - - that did not belong to God

Their Jewish ethnicity did not guarantee a relationship with God - - - they had turned from Him

But God says: 'I have kept 7000 for Myself'

That is something God does - - - the whole nation could have fallen into apostasy – but God 'kept' 7000 for Himself

There is a remnant – in Paul's day

It's mysterious but very real

James Boice: 'The reason why some believe the gospel and are saved by it is that God intervenes in their lives to bring them to faith. He does it by the new birth or regeneration. But those who are lost are not made to disbelieve God. They do that by themselves.'

Rosaria Butterfield - - - was a homosexual activist – she was not pursuing God

She had given speeches at gay pride marches and was invited by major universities – such as Harvard to come and lecture on gay and lesbian studies

She was going to write a book on the religious right -- so she began to examine some passages in the Bible - - - and got intrigued with what the Bible actually says

Eventually she became a Christian

Rosaria Butterfield: 'I often wonder: God, why pick me? I didn't ask to be a Christian convert. I didn't seek the Lord. Instead, I ran like the wind when someone would start peddling the gospel to me.'

But her resistance was overcome by God's Spirit

The rejection of Jesus by many Jews – was used to bring about the cross – and then also to extend the blessings of the covenants outward to include Gentiles as well

Arnold Fruchtenbaum: 'It was in the program of God that Israel would reject the Messiahship of Jesus, and it is because of Israel's rejection of His Messiahship that mercy was extended to the Gentiles.'

Paul argues that the history of Israel in the lives of the patriarchs foreshadows and displays this kind of reality

God chose Abraham out of all the people on the earth – to give His promises to – to make a great nation out of – to bear witness to God's truth

It was a wicked world - God called Abraham

Joshua 24:2 – says that Abraham's father [Terah] was an idol-worshiper

There were other people God could have chosen – but He chose and called Abraham

It wasn't because of anything great about Abraham – He was chosen by God to be an instrument of blessing to the world

It wasn't because of anything great in Isaac or Jacob either why God extended the promises to them – it was because of God's purpose of grace

For that reason – Paul now says – simply being a Jew is not going to save you or include you in God's family

John Flavel: 'If Abraham's faith be not in your hearts, it will be no advantage that Abraham's blood be in your veins.'

Abraham had two children Ishmael and Isaac - -- but God purposefully said that the promises would extend thru the line of Isaac – not of Ishmael

The Messianic line – would extend thru Isaac alone

Paul is making the point that this selectivity is a picture of what God was doing in His day

Paul moves on to give another example with Jacob and Esau – the children of Isaac and Rebekah

II. Jacob and Esau - vv. 10-13

Paul says – consider Jacob and Esau

Neither one was particularly impressive on their own

Jacob was a schemer / deceitful

Esau was impulsive / violent / squandered spiritual privilege – sold his birthright for a single meal

The quote [v. 13] comes from – not Genesis but the book of Malachi and refers to God's disposition against the Edomites – who had given Israel all kinds of problems

Douglas Wilson: 'The corporate love which God showed to Israel did not mean that every Israelite was saved. Neither did His hatred of Esau mean that every Edomite was lost. Job was one of the godliest men to ever live and he was almost certainly an Edomite.' [Job 1:1]

In the 1st century - - - Jesus met hostility from both - - - Herod the Edomite tried to kill the baby Jesus - - - and Caiaphas and the religious leaders of Israel had Jesus put to death on the cross

Esau himself became an example of one who squandered great privilege

Hebrews 12:15-16 - 'See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God . . . that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.'

But still: 'Jacob I loved but Esau I have hated' – is a shocking statement and debated amongst theologians

This may be one of the most difficult verses in all of Scripture to interpret – [so we'll just skip it!]

Mark Twain: 'It ain't the parts of the Bible I don't understand that trouble me. It's the parts I do understand.'

One woman once came to Charles Spurgeon on this verse

She said: 'I cannot understand why God should say that He hated Esau.'

'That' – replied Spurgeon, 'is not my difficulty madam. My trouble is to understand how God could love Jacob.'

We don't marvel at God's love for sinners

There was nothing in Jacob that made him deserving of God's favor – it was sovereign grace

All of humanity on our own – what does Scripture say?

There is none who seeks for God

There is none good

There is none righteous

All we like sheep have gone astray

Spurgeon: 'rest assured, the only reason why any of us can hope to be saved is this, the sovereign grace of God. There is no reason why I should be saved, or why you should be saved, but God's own merciful heart, and God's own omnipotent will.' [MTP 5, p. 118]

One of the great pictures of grace is found in the OT - - - when God was on the verge of destroying Sodom and Gomorrah – a very wicked place

He told Lot and his family to leave - - the two sons-in-law thought Lot was joking

Lot himself hesitated to leave

Genesis 19:15-16 - 'And when morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, "Up, take your wife and your two daughters, who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city. But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the Lord was upon him; and they brought him out and put him outside the city.'

That is grace / that is mercy

We want to say – 'Lot – what are you doing - - - go!'

Lot – on his own would have dilly dallied - - - until it was too late – and have been swept away in the judgment - - - but God had compassion upon Him – and they brought him out

Even that – wasn't enough for his wife – who looked back – and was turned to a pillar of salt

D. James Kennedy once gave an analogy of mercy

Salvation is a bit like me tackling a man before he can rob a bank with his 4 buddies.

The 4 go on and rob the bank all the same- - - and shoot a guard – killing him – and are later arrested and put in jail for life. But – the one who was tackled - - - he is free

Can this man take credit for his freedom?

Of course not

Why did you come to believe? / Why does anyone?

The question goes behind the scenes

MLJ: 'We should approach this by saying to ourselves something like this: "Here am I in this house of God while there are thousands of people who are not, and who are in their beds reading their Sunday newspapers or perhaps listening to the radio. Why am I different, what has made me different, why am I interested in these things, why bother myself about them at all - why am I a Christian? Seriously consider what it is that has separated you from those others, what has put you into a different category.'

Some Jews looked at Jesus and hollered ‘crucify!’

A few – a remnant according to grace - - - bowed down and said – ‘He is Lord’

John 6:37 - 'All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.'

Salvation – from our side is like a bridge with a sign above – as you enter – ‘Whosoever will – let him drink of the water of life freely – without cost.’

When you cross that bridge and look back – you see another sign up above which says: ‘Chosen from the foundation of the world.’

Conclusion

There is an interweaving of divine sovereignty and human responsibility

Scripture comes to us and tells us to choose

Joshua 24:15 - 'Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve . . . as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.'

God’s Word comes to us and says – ‘make your choice’

Romans 10:13 - 'For whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Put your faith in the Savior – believe that His death and resurrection are sufficient for our salvation

It also speaks of Divine Grace

Jesus came to the disciples and asked: 'Who do you say that I am?'

Matthew 16:16 - 'And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Matthew 16:17 - 'And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

C.S. Lewis gave comfort to one woman making an appeal to sovereign grace

C.S. Lewis: 'Continue seeking Him with all seriousness. Unless He wanted you, you would not be wanting Him.' [Letter to Sonia Graham, June 13, 1951]

God made a plan that you would be here in this world at this time and juncture

You and I played no role in that choice

He has given us a certain number of days with which to live

He has exposed us to His gospel and the good news of Jesus Christ

He calls us to decide: 'What will I do with Jesus Christ?'

David Jeremiah: 'There are two tracks that run side by side from the beginning to the end. One is the sovereignty of God and the other is the responsibility of man. Those two tracks never meet in this life. But like two railroad tracks that meet in infinity, when you look all the way down the road, you can see that they come together. And some day in eternity we will be able to resolve the issue of God's sovereignty and our responsibility.'

For now – our job is to believe/ make our calling and election sure – put our trust in the One and only Savior