

Divine Sovereignty-Romans 9

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[0 : 00] Chapter 9, we'll ask you to stand as he reads the Word of God, and we'll follow with a message from the book of Romans.

Romans 9, 1 through 13. I am telling the truth in Christ. I am not lying. My conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.

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, 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.

Whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all? God blessed forever. Amen.

But it is not as though the Word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel, nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants.

[1 : 49] But through Isaac your descendants will be named. 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.

For this is the word of promise. At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this, but there was Rebecca also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac.

For though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to his choice would stand.

Not because of works, but because of him who calls. It was said to her, the older will serve the younger.

Just as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. Thank you. Be seated, please.

[3 : 17] The passage that we have just read together is a principal passage that is used by those of the Calvinist persuasion to support the doctrine of election.

And there can be no question as to the wording that is here. And yes, this is a very good translation. We do not dispute the translation at all. And the words mean what they say, and words mean things.

Verse 12, the older will serve the younger. The end of verse 11, according to God's choice, might stand. Not because of works, but because of him who calls.

And then the coup de grace. In verse 13, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. These verses, coupled with others that we have considered and will be considering in the future, are used to buttress the argument of unconditional election.

That is, that individual believers have nothing whatever to do with their believing. The capability of believing was given to them by God because he elected them or chose them to salvation.

[4 : 29] And they believed because they were programmed to believe. Everyone else is equally programmed to perdition. They do not believe.

They will not believe. They cannot believe because they are not of the elect. In an effort to, I think, emphasize the absolute sovereignty of God, this position has been taken by a number of scholars going all the way back from St. Augustine.

And their position, of course, is that God is so sovereign, and God is so utterly, completely, totally in charge, you didn't have anything whatever to do with your salvation.

And if you respond by saying, well, I did too, I believed, I exercised faith, their response would be, aha, yes you did. But you exercised faith only because God elected you and made you alive spiritually, even though you might not have known it.

And his making you alive spiritually is what enabled you to believe. So even the believing is not of your own. Even the faith that you have to believe is a gift from God.

[5 : 50] And there's no question about it, that kind of an attitude certainly does elevate God to a position of unquestioned sovereignty where he is totally, absolutely in charge of everything.

And as I've told you in the past, this is a position that I personally took and taught here at Grace for a number of years.

And subsequent study of the New Testament as we pursued these books verse by verse led me to conclude that that is just not a viable position.

And I've had to reverse myself. And I am trying to make some kind of amends now, although my great regret is that the people to whom I taught this 25 years ago here at Grace, many of them are no longer here.

Many have moved on to other states or other churches. And many have been promoted to glory. And I'm grateful for those who've gone on to glory because they now know even more than I do.

[6 : 55] So they know that they got straightened out. And when we get there, we'll all get straightened out too. But this doctrine of election is something that has divided Christendom for centuries.

And it goes way, way back. Just how in control is God? Well, he's very much in control. But despite the fact that God is sovereign and God is in control, he has still endowed us with this marvelous, marvelous thing that makes us human beings and that makes us rational thinking creatures, he has given us a volition.

He has given us the power to make choices. He has given us an ability to choose one course from another course. And he has not taken that from us.

In fact, it is the fact that we have volition that becomes the very basis for our being accountable to him. If we did not have volition, if we were powerless to make choices, then the accountability for any choice we make just goes right out the window because we can always shrug our shoulders and say, hey, I was just a robot.

I was just programmed. I couldn't make any choice. It wasn't my fault. I didn't choose that. Yes, you did. You did choose that. And you are stuck with the consequences, whether they are good or whether they are bad.

[8 : 28] We are free moral agents. And that becomes the basis for our accountability. And to my thinking, it's the only basis for accountability that we have.

So, this passage in Romans 9, as I mentioned, is often used by our Calvinist friends and was used by me as slam dunk evidence that God makes all the choices and you had nothing to do with it, even though you might think you did.

You didn't. God was behind it all. And you were unconditionally elected. And here the example is given. God chose Jacob, not Esau.

Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. Could anything be any clearer? Does this mean then that God hates people? Well, this is what the text says. He hated Jacob.

But what about God so loved the world? What do we got to do with that? And what about God hating? And what about people hating?

[9 : 38] Today, we are told that we are not supposed to hate anybody. And one of the most solemn things that anybody can lay on you is that you are a hater of this or a hater of that.

And, you know, we really ought to be. We ought to be selective haters. There are a lot of things we ought to hate. The psalmist said, I hate every evil way.

Is there something wrong with that? Is there something wrong with hating an evil way? I think not. We are told to hate treachery.

We are told to hate lying and to hate duplicity. So, Christians ought to engage in hatred of a lot of things. We are to love the brethren and we are to love one another, but we are to hate anything and everything that is contrary to the character and nature of God.

And when the text says, Jacob I loved, Esau I hated, we ought to know how does that square with what the scriptures teach about God loving the world and loving everybody.

[10 : 44] And, you know, it's verses like this. It's verses like this that cause some people to say, ah, another contradiction in the Bible. Here it says hate. Other places it says love.

You can't take the Bible seriously. It says one thing in one place and something else in another and it's just full of contradictions. And there are people who take great comfort in that. But there are no contradictions when you understand.

What does this mean? Hate. Hatred. Hatred. And in the Jewish context and the cultural context and the historical context in which these terms were meant, it's merely a basis for comparison.

And it has nothing to do with an abhorrence of an individual or a detesting of an individual. Isn't that at all?

It's a comparative term. In fact, our Lord used it when he said, He who does not come after me and serve me and hates not his father and mother for my sake in the kingdom of heaven cannot be my disciple.

[11 : 55] What is that? Jesus is saying that we're supposed to hate our father and mother? No, of course not. Not in the sense that we would use the word hate to have an abhorrence for or reject them.

Not at all. It is a comparative basis. And all Jesus is saying is this. Look. The love, the devotion, the affection, the loyalty you are to have to the one who is the giver of all life ought to be compared as hatred to anything or anyone else.

It is simply saying this is to be the supremest of our affections. And the words love and hate are used as contrasting terms. And it doesn't mean that Jesus is saying, you're supposed to go home and tell your mother and father that you hate them.

Of course not. But when you understand the culture and the Jewish idiom and what is involved, then of course there is no contradiction. It's simply a comparative basis that is being used.

And he is doing it to illustrate a point. And it's the same way that he loves Jacob and hates Esau. It simply means that Esau was not the chosen one.

[13 : 13] Jacob was the chosen one. Now, we who are on an egalitarian kick, and just about so many in our culture today are, they insist on everything being equal, everything being the same.

They just can't stand the idea that one should be chosen over another. God is supposed to choose everybody. Well, in a sense, he did that.

In a salvific way, in a redemptive way, for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. And we'll develop that later, but we won't take time for it.

Now, however, in this particular context, if God is going to do anything and use human instrumentality to do it, he can't choose everybody.

God chose one man to build an ark. Now, he could have said to the entirety of the population that existed at the time, I want you all to build an ark.

[14 : 19] Everybody's to have a part in it. Well, not everybody was interested. Not everybody wanted to. Not everybody. You know why? Because they had this thing called volition. And they made a decision with their mind.

And their mind was, Noah is a crazy old coot. He's involving his sons in this harebrained scheme, building this monstrosity out there on his front lawn.

Have you seen that thing? Have you walked past it? Have you seen that? Well, it's the most ridiculous thing you could ever imagine. So, God chose one person. He chose Noah. And God chose one person.

He chose Abraham. And of Abraham's seed, he chose one, and that was Isaac. Not Ishmael, Isaac. And of Isaac's seed, he chose one, Jacob.

Now, when God is intending to do something and bring something to pass and he's going to use human instrumentality to do it, please don't tell him he has to choose multiple people to do anything.

[15 : 20] We ought to be just so grateful that he chose anybody to do anything. And these are those whom he chose. But do you know?

He chose them with the intent that out of his singular choice, the entirety of humanity would be benefited, would gain the benefit and the blessing.

So, it is in you, single individual, Abraham, in you and in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

Does that sound like God is cheating people, leaving people out? No. He's just choosing strategically placed individuals to bless and benefit the totality of humanity.

And humanity is blessed by that. So, in this context here, and by the way, context is, how many times have I preached this to you over the years? Context is king. Context is king.

[16 : 25] Well, you know what? If your pastor had rigidly followed that principle when he was teaching Calvinism from this passage, I wouldn't be in the mess that I'm in now, trying to extricate myself from it.

Because the context is all about the nation. It's not about individuals. And what is confusing is that personal, individual names are used, like Jacob and Esau.

That's very personal. These are individual human beings, flesh and blood. But that's not what he's talking about. You say, but that's what it says.

That's what the names are. Yes, but. The context. The context is king. And when you look at the context, which in this case, is not only the whole book of Romans, the larger context.

Actually, the larger context is all of the Bible. But just for a more immediate context, we want to look at Romans chapter 9 and verse 1.

[17 : 36] I am telling the truth in Christ. I am not lying. My conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit. I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.

About what? For whom? 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 they? Who are Israelites? He is not talking about two individual beings, Jacob and Esau. He's talking about Israelites. How do we know that? And if he isn't talking about Jacob and Esau, why does he use their names?

Because their names are synonymous for the nations that they represent. And we will see that established in other places as well. We automatically think when we see the name Jacob, it means one literal individual, one man, one head, two legs, two arms, guy lived thousands of years ago.

[18 : 51] That's Jacob. No. Well, that's Jacob historically. Biologically, that's Jacob. But the context is talking about a different Jacob.

It's talking about all of the descendants of this man, Jacob. And all of these thousands, all of these millions of Jews are referred to as Jacob.

And their names in Jacob at all. Their names are whatever the millions of names are. But they are all out of the loins of Jacob.

And they are referred to that way. He identifies them and he says they are Israelites. And this should set the stage for understanding that all of these verses that follow are talking about the dynamics of the nation Israel.

And up to this point in Romans, he has been dealing with salvation and justification by faith on the basis of the grace of God extended to Jews and Gentiles alike.

[20 : 01] And that God has brought on board on the same level as the Jews, non-Jews. And he has placed them in this peculiar new thing called the body of Christ, the spiritual body of Christ, which is not revealed in the Old Testament.

It's a whole brand new thing brought on the scene by Paul the Apostle. And he is saying that there is neither Jew nor Gentile bond or free male or female.

You are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Well, then the question automatically surfaces. Well, well, well, no, wait a minute. Wait a minute. What about Israel?

What about God's chosen people? What about the law of Moses? What about the commandments? What about the covenant? What about Sinai? Where's all that?

And it is as if Paul is saying, I'm glad you asked. Let me explain to you what God is going to do with the nation of Israel now that they are set aside judicially in unbelief until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.

[21 : 15] And Paul says, I've never lost my burden for these people, and I am concerned about them. I wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for them who are Israelites.

And then he goes on in Amos. Could it be any clearer as to whom he is speaking of? Not two individuals, Jacob and Esau, but the nation. Now, come over to chapter 10.

Romans chapter 10. Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.

Whose salvation? Israel, the nation. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.

Who's he talking about? He's talking about his fellow Jewish countrymen who were in the same position that he was in before he came to faith in Christ. And he says, they not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

[22 : 22] Of whom does that plural pronoun speak? They, they, they. Who's he talking about? He's talking about Israel. His covenant people. God's chosen people.

And then, chapter 11. I say then, by way of conclusion, God has not rejected his people, has he? Who are his people? The same as his people have always been. The seed of Abraham. Israel. 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. All of this content in these three chapters is all about Israel, the nation, and their future, and what God is doing with them in the meanwhile.

And what is their status as this new group called the body of Christ, Jew and Gentile amalgamated together, has come into focus. What happens to Moses and the prophets and all the rest of that.

[23 : 24] That's what Romans 9, 10, and 11 is all about. And it's not about two men, Jacob and Esau. It's about two nations.

The nation of Israel. And in this case, the Edomites. The Edomites are descendants of Esau.

Now, what I want to do for just a few moments that we have left is come back to the more remote context and see where this is taken from that Paul is speaking about here in Romans 9.

And come, if you will, to the last book in the Old Testament. The book of Malachi. The last book in the Old Testament.

Malachi chapter 1. A very obscure prophet. Most people have never spent much time in Malachi.

[24 : 22] Malachi. Over in Italy, they call this Malachi. The prophet Malachi. The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel.

Through Malachi. I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, how hast thou loved us?

Was not Esau Jacob's brother, declares the Lord? Yet, I have loved Jacob. But I have hated Esau.

And I have made his mountains of desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness. What is this all about? Same thing as in Romans 9.

Why did God choose Jacob and not Esau? And why is it that Esau has his mountains made a desolation, appointed his inheritance for the jackals?

[25 : 23] What's that all about? What it's all about is this. And it's really quite simple when you look at the whole context of scripture. Because as I've said, you have to allow the Bible to be its own interpreter.

When you don't, you arrive at things like extreme Calvinism. But when you let the Bible be its own interpreter, the Bible tells us what it means.

And who was the one who despised his birthright? Esau, remember? Well, what is that all about? Now, we don't know anything about that in our culture.

Because we don't have birthrights per se. And we don't despise them. Do we? No. No, this is a Jewish thing. It's a cultural thing.

And what it means is this. In the Jewish context, Old Testament culture, the firstborn son had the birthright.

[26 : 22] That meant the firstborn son, when it came time at the death of the father to carve up the family estate, the firstborn son got a double portion of everything.

He was considered the heir. He received a double portion of everything. He received the prestige and the position of being the head of the clan.

That's the firstborn. But who was the firstborn? Esau was. Do you know how highly Esau regarded that?

He had contempt for it. Esau despised his birthright. That means he looked down his nose at it. He did not value it.

He did not treasure it. He did not see it as any kind of a special blessing at all. He just despised his birthright. He said, huh, who cares?

[27 : 30] Hey, what is that you've got on the stove there? Sure smells good. Let me have a taste of that.

No, you can't. I just made it for dinner. Well, what will it take to buy some of that? Remember, Jacob says, well, sell me your birthright.

What was he asking for? He was asking for, he was, Jacob was saying, if you will turn over to me your legal right of inheritance, I'll give you some of this soup.

You got a deal. Who cares about this crummy old birthright anyway? I'm hungry. He was the most infantile, ridiculous, undisciplined individual that you could ever know.

He had no respect for spiritual things at all. He was a thoroughgoing, modernist, what shall I say, a materialist.

[28 : 46] Through and through, his only concern was material. If you can't eat it or drink it or do something with it, it's worthless.

And as a result, he despised his birthright. He relinquished that. And do you know, God knew all along exactly what kind of a guy and what kind of an attitude Esau was going to have. And that's why he told the mother, Rebecca, when she was pregnant with these babies, he told her, two nations are in your womb.

Well, weren't they two individuals? Yes, they were two individuals, but they were two nations also. It was the nation of Israel and the nation of Edom were in her womb.

And then he said, this is back in Genesis 25, he said, and the older shall serve the younger. Well, now, wait a minute, that's not the way it's supposed to work.

[29 : 54] It's the younger serves the older because the older has the primogenitor, the birthright. He is to be the top dog and the younger is to serve the older.

And God says, no, it's not going to work that way. The younger is going to be served by the older. And the reverse of that is really significant.

And how this all plays out is very dramatic. And we'll have to look at it in Genesis 25. And we will do that when we resume this study. But for now, let's pray.

Father, we recognize that in your word you have provided all that is needed for understanding, for enlightenment, for appreciation.

And we so often in our flawed natures overlook the wholeness of the truth. And sometimes we zero in on just the parts. And we emphasize that.

[30 : 53] And we do so at the expense of all the rest of it. And we don't want to be guilty of that. Certainly not anymore. So enable us as we continue to examine this rich subject that is so filled with drama and so filled with eternal consequences that you will give us the enlightenment that we need from it.

Thank you for having built these truths in and for having put them in different places that require us to search and to dig them out and to compare scripture with scripture.

Most of all, we thank you for being a sovereign God and for also not being threatened in your sovereignty, but willing to give us volition that allows us to cross you and contradict you and oppose you as well as love you.

And yet, you are such an incredible God. You are still going to conclude all things after the wisdom and counsel of your own goodwill.

We stand in awe of a God such as yourself. And we are so grateful that you are who and what you are. Thank you for these people and for their openness and responsiveness to the truth.

[32 : 20] In Christ's name, amen.