

25. God's oops?

October 5, 2008

I believe that men and women are wired differently in many ways. I know you are thinking, "Wow, did you figure it out all by yourself?"

I am talking about the way we carry our conversation. For the men, we talk about one subject until a cow comes home. For the women, it is anything but like that. When there is nobody except women, they can carry conversation from one subject to next without a hitch. However, a man and a woman are conversing, it becomes rather interesting or down right dangerous. As usual the woman goes from one subject to another in her conversation. In the meanwhile, the man still is processing the last comment she made in his head. When she changes the subject, he looks at her like a deer looking at headlights. How do I know? Because I just described myself in conversations with my wife.

In my opinion, it seems that apostle Paul just pulled the same thing on us. Romans 9-11 is a case in point. After Paul exposed our sinfulness in chapter 1 through 3, he dealt with the justification that comes through Christ alone in the second half of chapter 3 to chapter 5, and he assured us of God's faithfulness and love as we grow in Christ in chapter 6 through 8, we expect him to drive straight into the great contents of Romans 12 and the rest of his epistle with practical applications.

There was a doctrinal reason to detour here. Paul had argued in Romans 8 that the believer is secure in Jesus Christ and that God's election would stand. But someone might ask, "What about the Jews? They were chosen by God, and yet now you tell us they are set aside and God is building His church with the Gentiles. Did God make an oops in His promises to Israel?" In other words, the very character of God was at stake. If God was not faithful to the Jews, how do we know He will be faithful to the church?

The emphasis in Romans 9 is on Israel's past election, in Romans 10 on Israel's present rejection, and in Romans 11 on Israel's future restoration. In Romans 9, Paul defended the character of God by showing that Israel's past history actually magnified the attributes of God.

A. PAUL'S SORROW FOR ISRAEL

Romans 9:1-5 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

Paul would even trade his own salvation in order to see his countrymen, the Jews, come to faith in Christ. Moses had the same heart when God told him that He would restart the nation of Israel with Moses after He destroyed the idolatrous Israelites in the wilderness.

God blessed Israel with His personal presence in the tabernacle and the temple in the past. He gave them His promises to protect them as long as they follow His com-

mands. God sent His Son Jesus as the Messiah to them and the world. But in spite of all these blessings, Israel failed.

Does Israel's failure mean that God's Word has failed? The answer is, "No! God is faithful no matter what men may do with His Word. Here is Paul's explanation.

B. ISRAEL'S REJECTION AND GOD'S PURPOSE

Romans 9:6-13 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, 7 nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." 8 That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. 9 For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son." 10 And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac 11 (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), 12 it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." 13 As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

Let's look at the definition of 'Israel'. It means "governed by God." Paul says here that not all Israel is really "governed by God." They chose to ignore God's commandments to do whatever was right in their eyes.

What Paul tells us is that no one is truly Israel unless he is governed by God. We have a parallel situation with the word 'Christian.' Not everyone who is called a Christian is truly a follower of Christ unless he or she is governed by Him.

Good examples are Ishmael and Esau. They are sons out of the flesh. Ishmael was born out of Abraham and Hagar, not Sarah. Esau was in the flesh spiritually all his life and God knew it before he was born. God's election is not based on the physical.

Some of you are wondering, "What is the 'election' you are talking about? It means 'choice' like you would choose McCain or Osama for the next President of the United States.

V12 shows two words – 'loved' and 'hated'. These two words can be interchanged with "accepted" and "rejected".

After the church is raptured in the end times, God's grace will return to Israel, and many Jews will place their trust in Jesus Christ. These believing Jews – more than merely the physical descendants of Abraham – will see the fulfillment of many of God's promises to His people recorded in the Old Testament.

Our greatest error in considering the choices of God is to think that God chooses for arbitrary reasons, as if He chooses in an "eeny-meeny-miny-moe" way. We may not be able to fathom God's reasons for choosing, and they are reasons He alone knows and answers to, but God's choices are not impulsive. He has a plan and a reason.

C. GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

Romans 9:14-18 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."

16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

Election is always and totally a matter of grace. If God acted only on the basis of righteousness, nobody would ever be saved.

In v15 apostle Paul was quoting what the Lord God said to Moses in Exodus 33:19. In chapter 32, the Israel people worshiped the golden calf while Moses was in the Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments from God. The whole nation deserved to be destroyed, yet God killed only 3000 people who probably were the main source of this idolatry. That is grace and mercy of God.

Please let me define grace and mercy one more time for the sake of what I am about to say:

Grace is "Getting what we don't deserve." It is God's unmerited favor. It is God's gift to the ones who deserve nothing but eternal punishment.

Mercy is "Not getting what we deserve." In other words, we are allowed to go on instead of getting punished.

We are in a dangerous place when we regard God's mercy towards us as our right. If God is obliged to show mercy, then it is not mercy – it is obligation. No one is ever unfair for not giving mercy.

Yesterday, several of us were at our church property to clean it up as we mentioned it in the bulletin last several weeks. Previously we left our cleaning supplies and roofing coating materials in the locked house. Somebody broke into the house and stole those things including a bottle of Windex. I was upset. Like many of you, I receive spam e-mails that many of them are from con-artists trying to get my personal information or trying to destroy my computer. There are many, many bad people out there to harm others. The Holy Spirit reminded me that I would be no different than anyone of them if He is not in control of my life. After all, all of us were born with sinful nature. God is simply gracious and merciful to us.

In v17-18 Paul gives us another example: Pharaoh who thought he could stand against God toe to toe. When I was a baby Christian and read this portion of Exodus, I was confused and couldn't understand why God would harden Pharaoh's heart and punished him for it.

Let's make one thing very clear here: Neither here nor anywhere else does God harden anyone who has not first hardened himself. We must bear that in mind, while God is repeatedly said to have hardened Pharaoh in the Book of Exodus.

This brings a great point to understand God's predestination which we learned last week. Predestination seems unfair from the point of view of a person who doesn't want the salvation through Jesus Christ or following the commands of God. He wants his way to heaven and expects God to be at his beck and call.

In reality, predestination is extremely fair. God simply affirms an individual's choice of eternal destination by His foreknowledge. In this case, Pharaoh decided to disobey God to his last breath and ended up in hell.

God is holy and must punish sin. But God is loving and desires to save sinners. If everybody is saved, it would deny His holiness. But if everybody is lost, it would deny His love. The solution to the problem is God's sovereign election.

D. GOD'S JUSTICE

Romans 9:19-29 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" 20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? 22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? 25 As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved." 26 "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God." 27 Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved. 28 For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth." 29 And as Isaiah said before: "Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, And we would have been made like Gomorrah."

The question in v19 is not from a sincere seeker, rather it is from a scoffer who has a heart of rebellion. The Creator does not owe an explanation to anyone about why He creates His creation: one for noble purposes and others for common use.

God prepares men for glory, but sinners prepare themselves for judgment. God is good. He is just. He is holy. He is all-wise. He is rich in mercy. His perfect character makes it impossible for Him to do anything other than that which is right. Even the unbelievers He judges, He endures with much patience before judging. Why? He gives them chance after chance to repent and turn back to Him before their death.

E. BY FAITH, NOT BY WORK

Romans 9:30-33 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 32 Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. 33 As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

Here is a paradox: the Jews sought for righteousness but did not find it, while the Gentiles, who were not searching for it, found it. The reason? Israel tried to be saved by works and not by faith. They rejected "grace righteousness" and tried to please God with "Law righteousness." The Jews thought that the Gentiles had to come up to Israel's level to be saved; when actually the Jews had to go down to the level of the Gentiles to be saved.

Heaven is not a default eternal destination for everyone. The admission fee is already paid by the Son of the Owner of heaven. But a person must take a pass from Him to enter in without any portion of his effort. Without religion, without good

works, without anything from us, a simple surrender to the Lord Jesus with a quiet humility – realizing that we need His grace and mercy through Him. Anyone who rejects that will be rejected from entering heaven.

Israel's rejection of Christ does not deny the faithfulness of God. Romans 9 does not negate Romans 8. God is still faithful, righteous, just and gracious, and He can be depended on to accomplish His purposes and keep His promises.

F. APPLICATIONS

- 1) God's predestination does not and should not bring arguments among Christians. It is the truth whether we agree or not.
- 2) God's predestination is completely fair – simply affirming men's choice for their eternal future with His foreknowledge.