



## God Is Sovereign Over All Romans 9:14-33

### Introduction

Paul has expressed loving concern for his fellow Israelites who rejected God's mercy and grace presented in His own Son, Jesus Christ. The Israelites were God's chosen people of the Old Testament, called to be His special possession, and entrusted with the law and the promises. They were a privileged people through whom God would bless the entire world. Through Israel, the Savior had been born into the world, but the Jewish people as a whole had rejected their Savior, Jesus Christ. Although this broke Paul's heart, he understood that it was all part of God's sovereign plan and purpose. Israel's unbelief was not a sign that God's word had failed, it was a part of *the purpose of God according to election...not of works but of Him who calls* (Romans 9:11). Paul understood that *they are not all Israel who are of Israel* (Romans 9:6), but that there were faithful believers within ethnic Israel which God had chosen (elected) to be the recipients of His promises.

In the first part of Romans 9, Paul explained that God's purpose has been according to election (His sovereign choice) all along. God had chosen and called Abraham out of a pagan culture and family to bless him and make him a blessing to *all the families of the earth* (Genesis 12:3). Abraham was the father of many children, but only Isaac, the child of promise, was chosen to inherit the promises. Isaac had twin sons, but only one was chosen by God to receive the promises. The case of the twins, Jacob and Esau, is a clear example of God's election. It shows that God's choice of individuals is entirely according to His good pleasure and that it has nothing to do with a person's parents, birth order, character, actions, or works.

This is contrary to human pride which insists that one's self must have something to do with God's choosing. Men and women like to think that God should choose to save them because they are better than others; they go to the right church, or they come from a better family, work harder, are kinder to others, are more spiritual, or have done more good deeds. Paul understands the objections of fallen human nature. He realizes that when confronted with the doctrine of election, many try to find fault with God and question His justice. In Romans 9:14-33, Paul tackles that problem head on. He does not need to make excuses for God, but patiently explains that God's judgments are sovereign, merciful, and just (righteous). Furthermore, God is a God of grace. We may not understand fully why God

works the way He does, but it should suffice to know that God deals with us on the grounds of grace. Anyone who has studied and understands Romans chapters 1 through 3 should be humbly grateful for that.

In Romans 9:14-33, Paul presents the sovereign power of God over all men and all history. God *has mercy on whom He wills and whom He wills He hardens* (Romans 9:18). In other words, some are the recipients of God's electing grace and some are not. There is nothing in the exercise of this sovereignty inconsistent with either justice or mercy. God only punishes the wicked for their sins, while he extends undeserved mercy to the objects of His grace. "There is no injustice done to one wicked man in the pardon of another...God does nothing more than exercise a right inherent in sovereignty..., that of dispensing pardon at his pleasure" (Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Charles Hodge).

### Outline of Romans 9:14-33

- I. The Sovereign Power of God - Romans 9:14-21
- II. The Sovereign Grace of God - Romans 9:22-33

#### I. The Sovereign Power of God - Romans 9:14-21

Paul has described *the purpose of God according to election...not of works but of Him who calls* using examples of Isaac and Jacob. Both of these men were chosen by God, not on the basis of works they had done, but simply because God called them by His grace. But if God's distinguishing between people does not depend on their works but on *Him who calls* (Romans 9:11), isn't that unjust? Paul raises the question here, *Is there unrighteousness with God?* But the very thought of injustice with God is intolerable to Paul, and his answer is quick and sure: *Certainly not!* (Romans 9:14). He then goes on to explain that God is a God of mercy and righteous judgment.

##### A. The mercy of God - Romans 9:14-16

Paul quotes from the Old Testament to show God's justice by demonstrating His mercy.

##### 1. God's mercy to Moses and Israel - 9:14-15

Paul uses Exodus 33:19 which records God's response to Moses' intercession for himself and Israel (Exodus 33:13-16), seeking assurance of God's favor and presence. When Moses asked to see God's glory, God

told Moses that He would make His goodness pass before him and proclaim His name before him. God told Moses, *I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion* (9:15). This shows that the mercy of God is not given out as justice. It is bestowed freely by God's sovereign grace.

2. *It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs but of God who shows mercy-* 9:16

God's mercy does not depend upon the choices or actions of men and women. In fact, it should be remembered that no one deserves God's mercy. We are all sinners and God owes us nothing but judgment and condemnation. God's mercy depends solely upon God's being merciful. The very fact that anyone is able to turn to Him or to act in obedience to Him is because of His mercy! *For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure* (Philippians 2:13).

B. The righteous judgment of God -  
Romans 9:17-21

Paul again quotes from Scripture (Exodus 9:16) to show the negative side of mercy which is hardening. The example is of Pharaoh who hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:32 and 9:34) and whose heart God hardened (Exodus 4:21, 7:3, 9:12, 10:1, 20, 27, 11:10, 14:4, 8).

1. God raised up Pharaoh to show His power and to glorify Himself - 9:17- 18

God raised up Pharaoh to become a powerful man, not for the purpose of exalting Pharaoh but to show the power of God. God made Pharaoh the most powerful man in the world, but when God demonstrated His own power in the destruction of Pharaoh's army, Pharaoh's power was shown to be nothing (Exodus 14 and 15). God used evil Pharaoh to bring about His purpose in delivering Israel. This proved God's power to Israel and to the whole world. It demonstrated that the power of deliverance was in Himself alone and it brought glory to His name.

a. God's name was declared in all the earth - 9:17

When God used evil Pharaoh to bring about the deliverance of Israel, His name became known throughout the world (Exodus 15:13-16, Joshua 2:1-11, Joshua 9:1-9). When the Bible speaks of the *name* of God, it is referring to "the character of God revealed in His words and acts, His self-manifestation and its inherent, overflowing glory" (Romans, A Shorter Commentary, C.E.B. Cranfield).

b. *Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens -* 9:18

This is Paul's conclusion from the entire passage beginning in verse 14. He has taught God's perfect sovereignty in His choice of individuals as objects of His mercy and of His judgment. "The reason of Pharaoh being left to perish, while others were saved, was not that he was worse than others, but because God has mercy on whom He will have mercy; it was because, among the criminals at His bar, He pardons one and not another, as seems good in His sight" (Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Charles Hodge).

Neither those who receive mercy nor those who are hardened deserve mercy. All are sinners who deserve only judgment and condemnation. Those who are shown mercy are undeserving objects of God's grace. Those who are hardened are given over to their own sins and warped thinking, as Paul previously described in Romans 1:24, 26, and 28. Thus, when God *hardens* He does not create evil in a person's heart but merely gives that person over to his or her own wickedness. Hardening is God's judgment upon the evil desires and actions of sinners. *So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, To walk in their own counsels* (Psalm 81:12). God did nothing to Pharaoh beyond what he fully deserved. God did not make Pharaoh evil. He simply did not give Pharaoh the grace which he did not deserve anyway. "God's action is not arbitrary. When Pharaoh (or anyone else) chooses to reject the right, he will be hardened in the wrong...It is true that God used Pharaoh, but the monarch was not a mere puppet. He did what he willed to do" (The Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris).

For those still having difficulty with these concepts, R.C. Sproul explains it well. "Pharaoh was already wicked, already ill-disposed towards the things of God. Out of Pharaoh's heart came only wickedness continually. To do evil was Pharaoh's sheer delight. The only thing that could stop him would be the restraints and constraints that God placed upon him...All that God had to do to accelerate the wickedness of Pharaoh was to remove the restraints from him. God had been keeping Pharaoh's wickedness in check, providentially. Even though Pharaoh was powerful, he was not all-powerful, he was still under the control of the providence of God. Pharaoh would have liked to perform more wickedness than he actually did...All God had to do was remove the restraints. He did not have to create fresh evil in the heart of Pharaoh. The evil disposition was already there,...God removed the restraints and therefore passively hardened Pharaoh's heart...had not God hardened Pharaoh's heart, He would have been gracious to Pharaoh. But Paul is emphasizing the point that grace is voluntary. God doesn't owe Pharaoh any grace.

So God lets him go on, knowing that he is going to sin, and knowing full well that when he sins he is going to be brought to judgment. Hence God's activity towards Pharaoh is an act of punitive judgment. Pharaoh gets justice. The people of Israel get mercy. So there is no injustice involved in this act of hardening" (The Gospel of God, Romans).

## 2. The arrogant question - 9:19

Paul anticipated the weakness of the human mind in grasping the magnificence and power of God. So he puts forth the question, *Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?* In other words, if no one can actually resist God's will, and those who are hardened are hardened by the will of God, why does God still blame them?

## 3. The answer - 9:20-21

"Paul shows, it is unreasonable and irreverent for anyone to question the rightness of God's ways. Potters have every right to do as they please with their clay (Isaiah 64:8). (So God has every right to do as He pleases with His creation.) All human beings belong to "the same lump" of fallen humanity in Adam (Romans 5:12-14); all actively sin even before God hardens them in sinning (1:18-29). That God should show mercy to any from the Adamic lump and create vessels of honor from it is the kindness of grace; that others should become vessels for lesser use is a matter of His sovereign prerogative and is itself a display of perfect justice towards men" (New Geneva Study Bible, Thomas Nelson Publishers).

- a. *O man, who are you to reply against God?* - 9:20

Paul begins his response by putting man in his place. He contrasts weak, ignorant, arrogant *man* with the majestic, sovereign *God*.

- b. *Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?"* - 9:20

Paul is pointing out that if you understand what he has just said, and you oppose it, then you are showing your own fallen nature by attacking God who made you.

- c. *Does not the potter have power over the clay?* - 9:21

Paul uses a picture which is common in the Old Testament; the potter and the clay. He argues that the potter has power and authority over his lump of clay to make whatever he wishes. He can make a beautiful platter for serving food or he can make a container for the garbage. Similarly, God has power and authority

over the sinful lump of humanity to have mercy or to harden. Paul has already shown in Romans 5:12-21 that we are all of the same lump. We are all condemned sinners as descendants of Adam.

## II. The Sovereign Grace of God - Romans 9: 22-33

This is a continuation of Paul's answer to the question posed in 9:19, *Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?* Paul has already stated that God, the Creator, has a perfect right to exercise His sovereignty over His creation. Now he shows that God is neither unreasonable nor unjust in exercising His rights. God is gracious in his dealings with His creation.

### A. God's grace is for His glory - Romans 9:22-26

God is patient in putting up with sinners in order to eventually display His magnificent glory in those upon whom He has mercy.

#### 1. God endures the wicked - 9:22-23

Paul answers the question of why God tolerates sin. He could destroy wicked people immediately, so why does He put up with them? God's endurance of evil is not a sign of His favor or of weakness, but a display of His power. He endures wicked people to make known the riches of His glory to the objects of His mercy. He endured Pharaoh to show mercy to the Israelites. "There is a sense in which even the wickedness of the wicked is redeemed by God to be a blessing to the righteous" (The Gospel of God, Romans, R.C. Sproul). *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose* (Romans 8:28).

- a. God endures *vessels of wrath prepared for destruction* - 9:22

Pharaoh is an illustration of a vessel of wrath *prepared for destruction*. The inference is not that God made him wicked and hardhearted. Pharaoh was a sinner and God punished his sin by giving him over to the wickedness which was already in his heart (Romans 1:24, 26, and 28). In this way, Pharaoh's heart was hardened and Pharaoh displayed such evil that he became a necessary object of God's wrath and judgment.

- b. God makes known the *riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory* - 9:23-24

In contrast to God's wrath and destruction, *vessels of mercy* will know the riches of His glory. The *vessels of mercy* are those whom God has *effectually called*, *not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles* (9:24). They were



*prepared beforehand for glory.* This means they were foreknown and predestined (Romans 8:29). Moreover *whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified* (Romans 8:30).

In this passage, we find the whole point of Romans 9: God's word has not failed (Romans 9:6). The promises of God have held true to the Jews who were called; the faithful of ethnic Israel. We also see that there is a wideness in God's mercy: He pours out His mercy on Gentiles as well as Jews.

2. God's grace is by His call - 9:25-26 and Hosea 2:23 and 1:10

Paul quotes from the prophet Hosea to show that God's rejection of Israel and election of Gentiles was prophesied in the Old Testament. It was not something new. God's word had not failed! It was being fulfilled!

a. Hosea 2:23

In Hosea's prophecy God declares the nation of Israel *not my people* and *not beloved* because they had been unfaithful. God cast them out, meaning that they were reduced to the same level as the Gentiles as far as their relationship to God was concerned. The distinction between Jew and Gentile was removed. But God also gave Israel words of comfort, saying that *I will call them My people, who were not my people, and her beloved, who was not beloved.* In other words, God promised to have mercy and restore some who had been cast out because of their unfaithfulness to God.

b. Hosea 1:10

This passage places further emphasis on God's call. *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.* The Jews were cast out into the Gentile lands. It is from that same place, from among the Gentiles, that they (along with Gentiles who have also been called to faith in Jesus Christ) will be called to be *sons of the living God.*

Paul's point is: "In Scripture it is the call of God and the love of God that make the people of God" (The Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris). It doesn't matter whether one is Jew or Gentile. All are called in the same way.

3. God's grace is to the *remnant* - 9:27-29 and Isaiah 10:22-23 and 28:22

By His grace, God's promises are fulfilled to the remnant of Israel. Paul quotes from Isaiah to show that the *remnant* was foreseen in Old Testament prophecy. In the midst of judgment God promised to preserve a

*remnant.* Again we see that God's word has not failed! It is this *remnant* which is being called along with the Gentiles. The *remnant* are the Jewish believers. *The remnant will be saved* (Romans 9:27).

a. *The Lord will execute His word  
...thoroughly and quickly* - 9:28 (NASB)

God's judgment will be complete and decisive.

b. *Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a  
seed, we would have become like  
Sodom...and Gomorrah* - 9:29

Preservation of the remnant, or *seed*, is by God's grace and mercy. If it were not for God graciously preserving a remnant in Israel, the whole nation would have become like Sodom and Gomorrah. See Genesis 19:24-25.

B. Man's righteousness is only by God's grace - Romans 9:30-33

Paul concludes his argument in these last verses of chapter 9. Verse 30 explains that Gentiles are being saved by faith. Verse 31 explains that Israel, as a whole, is not being saved. Verses 32 and 33 explain why. Israel pursued righteousness by works and not by faith in their Messiah, the Lord Jesus. Righteousness can only be attained by *faith that it might be according to grace* (Romans 4:16).

1. Gentiles obtained righteousness by faith - 9:30

The word *righteousness* is synonymous with "justification" or "salvation." In the Greek, both righteousness and justification have the same root. They both refer to right standing before God. Gentiles were not seeking a right standing before God. They were not zealous for God's law. But by his mercy, God granted them faith to believe unto righteousness.

2. Israel did not attain the righteousness they were pursuing - 9:31

The Jews had the *law* and sought God's acceptance by trying to keep the law. But they were unable to keep it (Romans 2:17-24) no matter how zealously they pursued it. Because they failed to perceive their inability to keep the law, they also did not see the true purpose of the law: to show them that the way to righteousness is faith in Jesus Christ.

3. Israel stumbled at that stumbling stone - 9:32-33

Paul further explains why Israel did not attain righteousness. They sought righteousness in the wrong

way, pursuing it by works rather than by faith. They stumbled over Christ, the *stumbling stone*, because they were determined to rely on their own works, their own righteousness. This made them blind to the witness of Christ.

The Old Testament prophets had predicted that Israel would reject her Messiah. Jesus understood this when He told the parable of the evil vine-growers who killed the vineyard owner's son. He finished the parable by quoting Psalm 118:22, *The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone* (Luke 20:9-17). In the same way, the apostle Peter preached to the leaders of Israel, *He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone* (Acts 4:11, NASB).

Paul's quote in Romans 9:33 is from Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16. Peter used the same passages in his epistle (1 Peter 2:6-8) to show Israel stumbling because of disobedience to the word. Both Paul and Peter picture Jesus Christ as *the stumbling stone and rock of offense*. Israel tripped over their *rock* because they failed to pursue righteousness by faith in Him who was their Messiah. They tripped over Him and stumbled because He was an *offense* to their pride. It is only those who humble themselves and *believe on Him*, forsaking their own petty, prideful efforts, who will *not be put to shame*.

### Applications

1. Which teachings of Romans 9 have been difficult for you to accept? Is it not better to put your confidence in the sovereign God of justice, mercy, and grace than to put confidence in your own worldly wisdom and human efforts?
2. Does it alarm you that God *hardens whom He desires* (Romans 9:18, NASB), by giving them over to their own sin and its consequences? If so *Today, if you will hear His voice: Do not harden your heart* (Psalm 95:7-8). Obey God's call to repent and turn to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in faith.
3. If God's desire is to make known the *riches of His glory* (Romans 9:23), then shouldn't you also live to make His glory known? Are you living for your own glory or for God's glory?
4. Do you rely upon your own power and your own efforts to please God, or do you live by faith? See Galatians 2:20.



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## QUESTIONS

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

### Day One: Read all notes and references.

1. What did you learn about God that was new to you?
2. ♥ (Heart Question) What can you be especially thankful to God for after studying Romans 9?

### Day Two: Romans 10:1-4.

3. a. What was Paul's concern for Israel? Give verse.  
  
b. What was he doing about it?
4. a. From verse 2, what was the Jews' problem?  
  
b. How do the following Scripture passages describe those who *have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*?  
Isaiah 66:3-4  
  
Acts 26:9-11  
  
Galatians 1:14
5. a. On what important subject did the Jews lack knowledge? What did they do as a result?  
  
b. How does Paul express this same idea in Romans 9:31-32?  
  
c. Why was it useless to pursue righteousness by *works of the law*? Give verse from Romans 10.  
  
d. How do the following passages help explain this?  
Romans 3:20-22  
  
Romans 7:4  
  
Galatians 3:24  
  
Colossians 2:13-14

### Day Three: Read Romans 10:5-10.

6. a. What did Moses have to say about the person who practices the *righteousness which is of the law*?

- b. According to Galatians 3:10 and James 2:10, what is a major problem with trying to obtain righteousness through living by the law?
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- 7. a. Who *speaks* in Romans 10:6-8?
  - b. What two things does the speaker tell us not to say?
  - c. What does the speaker say concerning *the word*? Give verse and explain what this *word* is.
  - d. ? (Thought Question) In light of all Paul has written in this passage, why is this very good news?
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- 8. a. What two things does Paul say are necessary in order to be saved? Give verse.
  - b. According to 1 Corinthians 15:14-19, why is it necessary to believe in your heart that God has raised Christ from the dead?
  - c. What has Paul previously taught about the significance of Jesus' resurrection in Romans 1:4, Romans 4:25, Romans 5:10, Romans 6:4, and Romans 6:5?

**Day Four: Read Romans 10:11-13.**

- 9. a. What does Scripture say about those who believe on Christ?
  - b. What does this mean to you?
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- 10. a. Who can call upon the Lord? Why?
  - b. From Ephesians 1:3-14, list as many ways as you can find that the Lord is *rich* to all who call upon Him.
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- 11. a. Who *will be saved* according to Romans 10:13? Why is this good news to you?
  - b. Which Old Testament prophet made this statement? (See references in the margin of your Bible.)



**Day Five: Read Romans 10:14-15.**

12. List the things which must necessarily precede calling on the Lord.
13. ♥ (Heart Question) Where did you hear the gospel preached which led you to believe and call on the name of the Lord?
14. What do you think Paul means when he speaks about the necessity of preachers being *sent*?
15. a. What Old Testament prophet does Paul quote in verse 15? (Check the references in the margin of your Bible.)  
b. How do you think this quotation applies to preachers?

**Day Six: Read Romans 10:16-21.**

16. a. What was the problem with some of those who had heard the gospel?  
b. From what Scripture passage does Paul quote to confirm this? How is it a confirmation?  
c. Read Isaiah 53:1-6 to put Paul's quote in context. With this passage in mind, what is the report which was not believed? What specifically is the *word of God* Paul speaks of in Romans 10:17?
17. a. Why is it necessary for people to hear the *word of God*? Give verse.  
b. How does Paul show that people have indeed heard? From what Old Testament passage does he quote?  
c. Read Psalm 19:1-11 to put Paul's quote into context and explain some ways God has made Himself and His message known.
18. a. What did Israel *know* (10:19) because it had been prophesied in the Scriptures?  
b. How do the passages Paul quotes from Deuteronomy and Isaiah foresee what Paul said in Romans 9:30?
19. How did God show His love for Israel? How had Israel responded?
20. ? (Thought Question) What reasons can you think of that Israel should not have responded in such a way?