

## **A Study in Romans**

### **Study Nine Romans 9:1-29**

#### **Day One**

9:1 I speak the truth in Christ-I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit-

2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race,

4 the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises.

5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

v. 1 – As we begin this week’s study, I am impressed with two things. The first is how well the Bible “reads.” The Bible is well-written literature; and it makes good reading in other languages as well. When I read other so-called “holy books,” they often confuse me. But the Bible is easy to read; not always easy to understand. I write that at this point because I am impressed with what a good writer Paul was. He was writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, but the Spirit had something to work with. Paul made orderly arguments and had obviously spent much time processing and clarifying his positions.

The second thing is that Paul, like Jesus, had to reiterate that he was speaking the truth. Falsehood can be so prevalent and so affect our minds that when new hear truth, it seems to be untruth. How often did Jesus say, “Truly, truly, I say to you”? Why did He find it necessary to do this? Because people had been so conditioned by untruth that they considered Jesus’ truth to be false. At this point, Paul had to make the same statement. Why?

Because many of the Jews and Jewish believers felt that Paul was against his own people. When Paul came to Jerusalem, the apostles said to him:

When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law (Acts 21:20-25).

Paul was telling the truth, but the truth was so far removed from the truth that had been presented as truth that it seemed like he was lying.

v. 2 – The truth was that Paul was not against his people; Paul was a prophet of God who was proclaiming God’s truth. God wasn’t against his people, the Jews. God was now willing to include others in addition to the Jews as His people. Paul wasn’t proclaiming this message because he was against his own people. Paul was simply proclaiming God’s truth.

The real truth was that Paul was in anguish over his people because they were rejecting the message of Christ. The Jews were so disappointed over the message of a suffering Messiah that after the first generation of Jewish believers had died, there has never again been any significant evangelism among Jews. I think Paul realized that his people would eventually reject Jesus and he was in anguish.

What does all this mean? Just because you proclaim truth doesn’t mean that people will receive it as truth. That doesn’t make your truth any less true, but it may mean that people misunderstand you and even persecute you on account of the message you bear. They obviously said about Paul, “He has an attitude against his own people. That is why he is going to the Gentiles.” Remember what Jesus said:

"You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Mark 13:9-13).

I have known some nutty people who felt they carrying truth and were bizarre people. They relished their role as a self-proclaimed “bearer of truth.” The fact that people thought they were crazy was the price these crazy “prophets” had to bear. But I have found that true prophets who carry a heavy word agonize over the word, their ability to carry it, and the people’s ability (or inability) to receive it.

v. 3 – Paul so loved his people that he was willing to see himself cut off from God so that they could find Him and His truth. Now that’s love!

v. 4-5 – Paul then reviewed how he saw his people and their special position in God’s plan. And of course, the most important fact was that Jesus was a Jew! So Paul had nothing against the Jews; in fact, he loved them if for no other reason than Jesus was a Jew Himself.

## **Day Two**

6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.

7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."

8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

9 For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

v. 6 – God's Word was and is true. While Israel has a tremendous history of God's covenant with them, God's promises are for his spiritual Israel. I have always been impressed that Paul, a Jew, had such prophetic insight that would include the Gentiles in the economy of God. Here Paul pointed out that to be part of Israel is more than a genetic or ethnic privilege.

vs. 7&8 – Isaac was a son of promise, as opposed to his half-brother Ishmael who was a son of Sarah's plan and Abraham's execution of that plan with Hagar. While both Isaac and Ishmael were physical descendants of Abraham, God did not number both as his children. Paul was saying that the Jews had no exclusive rights or claim to the blessings of God because of their physical heritage.

v. 9 – Paul did not review the entire story of God's promise to Abraham that he would have a son. In Genesis 18:10, the Lord told Abraham that in one year's time, the promise would be fulfilled and 90-year-old Sarah did indeed give birth. God may take His time to act, but when He acts, none can stop His deeds. Isaac was a result of God's promise, just as the Gentiles were an act of God's promise as well.

## **Day Three**

10 Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac.

11 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-in order that God's purpose in election might stand:

12 not by works but by him who calls-she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

v. 10 – Then Paul referred to Isaac's wife Rebekah, who was pregnant with twins (see Genesis 25). Three things interest me about this story.

Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. The LORD said to her, "two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be

stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger. When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb” (Genesis 25:21-24).

The first is that Rebekah was barren and could not have children, just like Sarah had been. But the Bible says that Isaac prayed for Rebekah and she got pregnant. My point is that prayer has always “worked.” When people have turned to God, something has always happened—maybe not what they were praying for, but something happened.

The second point was that Rebekah asked the Lord what was happening because of the struggle she felt in her womb between the twins. When she asked, the Lord revealed to her the reason for the struggle she was feeling. When you ask the Lord the right questions, you get the answers you are looking for.

Finally, the struggle between Esau and Jacob began in the womb, not once they were born. Purpose begins at the time of conception, not at the time of birth. When Mary spoke to Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, Elizabeth reported that the baby jumped in her womb. Here we have Esau and Jacob fighting one another in their mother. Parents and grandparents should pay attention to these signs as soon as the mother is found to be pregnant, for God can reveal His purpose for children at a very early stage.

vs. 12&13 – Before the twins were born, God made His choice of which would rule over the other. Paul was pointing out that God’s choice was sovereign—it was not based on anything the children had done to that point, for they were incapable of doing anything. Jacob was God’s choice simply because it pleased the Lord to do so. Now the Lord was choosing to include the Gentiles in His family. That was God’s right and He did it not based on the Gentiles worthiness but on His great mercy. Paul was showing that this inclusion wasn’t so hard to understand and was providing the readers with a biblical context to understand God’s plan.

It is wisdom to recognize and cooperate with God’s plan and purpose. You don’t have to understand it or like it, but you must submit to it. Paul prophetically saw what God was doing and did not exert any energy fighting it, as did many Jewish believers who refused to believe that God would make the Gentiles equal to them in the kingdom of God. Paul saw what God was doing and did not work against God but with Him.

Are you working with God’s plan or stubbornly resisting it? Are your efforts and energy going with the flow of God’s purpose or trying to oppose it?

#### **Day Four**

14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!

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."

16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

vs. 14&15 – I know many people who are uptight with God. They won't admit it, but they don't like what God is doing. They don't like that God will have mercy on people who aren't worthy or who don't deserve God's mercy. The truth is that these people don't see themselves as needy people. While they will admit that they have done some things wrong, they feel they are better than some other people. They can't justify that those other people would also receive God's blessings.

Prison ministry helped me with this attitude. I have preached before many inmate audiences and I have always been amazed at the presence of God in those settings. Now these men and women were murderers, child abusers, and thieves, yet God was pouring out His blessings and mercy on them. I finally came to the conclusion that if God wasn't "uptight" with these people, then neither was I going to be uptight. God can have mercy on whomever He chooses to have mercy.

v. 16 – God will bless whom He wants to bless and will have mercy on whomever He chooses. I don't have to understand that or like it, but I must cooperate with it. And I must not be jealous of what God does for others, especially for those whom I feel are less deserving than I.

Are you uptight about God giving mercy to anyone who is less than deserving in your opinion? If you are, then you need to decide to get with God's program.

v. 17 – Even Pharaoh, who opposed Moses and gave him such a hard time, was God's idea. God could have chosen to have mercy on Pharaoh and allowed Israel to remain in slavery, but He did not. Why? Because the Jews were more worthy than Pharaoh? Absolutely not! It was because God chose to do what He did.

v. 18 – One preacher jokingly said, "God has only one problem. He thinks He's God and can do whatever He wants." And the preacher was correct. God can and does do whatever He wants without consulting you or me. God chose to harden Gentile Pharaoh and was now choosing to "unharden" the Gentile world so they could respond to the gospel. Who is to say that God is wrong to do this? Only a fool would try, but there are many fools in the world and in the church. Are you a fool?

### **Day Five**

19 one of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"

20 But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"

21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

vs.19-21 – Here is where those who believe in predestination claim to have a strong case that God chooses those who are saved and unsaved. But then someone hearing this would say, “What’s the use? God has already predetermined everything. How can He hold anyone accountable for accepting or not accepting Him?” And that is the major drawback with predestination. It does eliminate any freewill for man (although a hyper Calvinist would dispute this point).

But let’s look at Pharaoh again, who we are told was created by God for a purpose (see verse 17 above). We see on two occasions that Pharaoh hardened his own heart:

But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said (Exodus 8:15).

But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go (Exodus 8:31-32).

But then after Pharaoh hardened his own heart, then God hardened it for him.

But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said to Moses (Exodus 9:12).

Man does have a choice in the matter, although the choice is still in the context of grace—grace that God would even allow man a choice after Adam’s sin.

Romans began with Paul describing how sinful man had given himself over to sin and how God had turned him over to the full effects of that sin. It seems like man started the process and God finished it.

No man can “talk back” to God concerning what God has done. God used Pharaoh as a bad example of what happens when someone resists the will of God. But Pharaoh was a willing participant and that must be balanced with the fact that Paul wrote to Timothy:

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

### **Day Six**

22 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath-prepared for destruction?

23 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory-

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

25 As he says in Hosea: "I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one,"

v. 22 – This verse seems to present a better case for the fact that God could create and choose some to be first examples of His ongoing mercy and then objects of wrath when His patience is ignored. But we must always be careful not to develop a doctrinal position based on a few verses. We must look at everything the Bible says about a topic before we come to a conclusion.

Even then, we must realize that we can never see everything there is to see about anything. Those who claim they do are only fooling themselves. Have you believed one thing at one point in your life only to come to understand more and change your position later in life. If you haven't, you will, or you are dogmatic and not open to growing in your understanding of God. I had a friend jokingly say one time that he no longer set his doctrine in concrete. Instead he put his doctrine up on a bulletin board. That made it easier to take down and replace with another. There is much wisdom in that.

While Paul wrote that some were objects of God's wrath according to the purpose of God, we must also take into account what Peter wrote:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Then there is the statement in Luke 7:29-30: All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law *rejected God's purpose* for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John (emphasis added).

vs. 23-24 – We who are objects of God's mercy tend at times to "look down" on those who are apart from the Lord. We see ourselves as superior because we know God. But Paul puts this issue in perspective, for God has used those vessels of wrath to show all the more how great is His love and mercy toward the vessels of mercy. My attitude should not be one of superiority, but an attitude of humility and a desire to reach out to as many vessels of wrath as possible before it is too late.

If you are more disposed to believe in predestination, and that is fine with me, then what you are doing about it? You should be reaching out to "find" as many as are appointed to eternal life. God can't do that without you. If you believe more in the freewill of man and less in predestination, what are you doing about it? Are you working to find the most persuasive (not manipulative) arguments as possible to convince men and women to accept Christ and His atoning work?

v. 25 – Paul had an excellent grasp of the Old Testament as one would expect a Pharisee of his stature to have. I urge you to work hard to have a good grasp of Scripture as well. God can't get out of you what you don't spend time putting in, and that involves study and memorization. I have never known anyone to quote a Bible verse word for word as

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led by the Spirit unless that person first spent time memorizing that verse. There are people who are more gifted in their insight, but all of us should grow in our familiarity and understanding of the Bible. That is why you are reading this study right now, I presume. I congratulate you for the effort you are putting into your studies. I pray that God will give you even more insight and the wisdom of how to share that insight with others.

In every letter Paul wrote, he referred to his life purpose of taking the gospel to the Gentiles and he did it by showing that this was God's plan in the Old Testament. You have a life purpose and a verse, passage, chapter or book from the Bible that goes with it, that helps explain who God created you to be. Do you know your purpose? Do you know your life-defining passage? If not, go to <http://www.purposequest.com> where you will find many resources to help you clarify your purpose.

Remember what Paul wrote to Timothy and you will have all the understanding you will ever need on why your familiarity with Scripture is so important:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17).

My goal is to do a Bible study like this for every book in the New Testament. It should take me about five years to complete. While I send these studies out to others, I am in part doing this for myself so I can learn and grow in my own understanding of God's word.

### **Day Seven**

26 and, "It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"

27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved.

28 For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality."

29 It is just as Isaiah said previously: "Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah."

v. 26 – Paul referred to Hosea 1:10 in this verse, which was a poignant statement that God was rejecting the 10 tribes of the kingdom of Israel and would raise up a people that previously were not so called. Of course, Paul was referring to the grace poured out on the Gentiles through his ministry.

vs. 27&28 – Here Paul referred to Isaiah 10:22-23, another prophetic message that God was going to have many, many children, but that only a remnant of Israel would be numbered among them. Keep in mind that this is a Pharisee, a Jew, who was teaching this truth. God had clearly shown Paul what He was doing and Paul went back and found

abundant reference in Scripture to show that this was God's plan all along. A Gentile could not have done what Paul did, for he could have been accused of favoritism toward his people. A Gentile could never have had the Old Testament background to explain this new work of God to Jewish believers and potential believers. Yet Paul paid a high price to preach this prophetic message to his people, the Jews.

There will be a cost for you as well to do God's will. Are you willing to pay the price?

v. 29 – This reference is from Isaiah 1:9. The Lord left a remnant of true believers until such time as He opened the door for the Gentiles to come in. Zachariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, Simeon, and Anna all provide a picture of God-fearing, believing Jews at the beginning of the New Testament account. Then the Lord added more Jews from the ministry of Jesus to the family of faith. But in Paul's day the door was open to both Jews and Gentiles who had faith in Christ. No matter how bleak it may look at any time, God always has enough to work with and accomplish His purpose and will.

No matter what you are going through, you should be encouraged that God is in control. Often it seems like things are bleak and that God has forgotten you or will not save you from your situation. But He will.

Just the other day, I was fretting a bit over my finances (or lack of them). At 10 pm, my doorbell rang and there was a woman who I did not recognize. But she had attended a church where I was on staff and just felt impressed to stop by to see me. No, she did not give me any money. But she told me how she always prays for me and how I had impacted her life. God sent her to let me know He had not forgotten me. And He hasn't forgotten you either. You must accept God's encouragement, even if He doesn't send what you need or are praying for. But He will always let you know He is in control and mindful of your situation. Will you be open and discerning enough to see His encouragement when it comes, even if it is in "disguise"? I hope so.