

Are God's Ways Fair?

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[0:00] Well, Romans chapter 9. In fact, I really want you to start in chapter 8. Romans chapter 8.

And I'm going to begin reading with verse 35. I want us to, before we get into this, before I start reading, I want us to be sure and keep Paul's flow of thought.

So that when we go into chapter 9, we don't see a break in it. We see his thoughts continuing and his focus continuing on.

Because otherwise we'll misunderstand chapter 9. Okay? I know I've made that point a number of times, but to risk belaboring it, I'll risk that so that we can keep it straight in our minds.

What does Paul say or write in verse 35? For, or who, shall separate us from the love of Christ?

And his answer is implied. The answer is no one.

[1:24] And no thing. Shall tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword? As it is written, for your sake we are killed all day long. We are accounted as sheep. We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Then verse 3 of chapter 9. And I skip to that for this reason. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ.

Or separated from the love of Christ. Really more than that. Accursed. First, anathema. For my brethren, my countrymen, according to the flesh. So on the one hand, Paul says it's impossible to be separated from Christ.

And then, just in a few verses, he said, I could wish that I would be. But for what purpose? For his kinsmen. Now, he knows he cannot be separated.

[2:49] He has just made the case. It's impossible. But he could wish it for his kinsmen, according to the flesh.

And what is their condition, according to Paul? They're separated. Anathema. Cursed from Christ under the condemnation of God.

And then he goes on to describe them. They're Israelites to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came.

Who is over all and eternally blessed God. Amen. These are the Israelites. These are the ones. My kinsmen. But they're accursed. I could, if it were possible, could wish that I would be accursed for them.

But it's not possible. But they're accursed. Anathema. Cursed from God. And so then we have this first question that he asks.

[3:58] This is the point of chapter 9. To answer some objections, some questions. And the first question, and we covered this last week, really started a couple of weeks ago.

Has God's Word failed? Has it failed? Has it fallen to the ground? And that's what he asks. Well, he doesn't ask it.

It's not placed in the form of a question. But the question is implied. And Paul says, but it is not that the Word of God has taken no effect. That's failed.

That's fallen. That's fallen. And so that's his answer, short answer, to a supposed question that has been asked him, or he's anticipating the question.

Has God's Word failed? But again, as we discussed, the question really is this. If Paul is saying in Romans chapter 8 that when God saves, God brings you into covenant with him, that it's for keeps.

[5:06] Isn't that what he said in chapter 8? He certainly did. Who can separate. It's for keeps. If that's what Paul is saying in chapter 8.

If Paul is saying that there is never a possibility, even a possibility, of separation from God to those who are in Christ, then what about the Jews? What about them?

They had a covenant with God. They were God's chosen people. But they have apparently lost it. For at least for a time. But what makes you think that God won't change his relationship with us? It's a logical question.

So considering what happened to Israel, what reason do we have to hope in the promises of Romans chapter 8? And Paul's answer comes in the next several verses here.

[6:06] And in his answer, he establishes the sovereignty of God in all he chooses to do. In all that he chooses to do.

The sovereignty of God in that. And that is clearly revealed in God's Word here in these verses in Romans chapter 9. In his choosing of Abraham over all those who lived in Ur.

I mean, he starts with Abraham. The implication being he chose Abraham out of all those living in the land of the Chaldeans in Ur. And then he moves from there to Isaac.

His choosing of Isaac over Ishmael. All right, so we're talking about Paul's answer to the question. Has God's Word failed? And the answer is no, because of God's choosing.

God is sovereign in his choosing. He chose Abraham over those living in the land of Ur. He chose Isaac over Ishmael and all the other brothers of Isaac.

[7:07] He chose Jacob over his brother Esau even before the two were born. I mean, he makes that clear in Scripture. And so here's his answer.

In fact, let's just look at how that unfolds for us. Just so we can, again, keep this flow in our minds. But it is not, he says in verse 6, that the Word of God has taken no effect.

And here's his partial answer. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, who have come out of, or descendants of Israel. That's Jacob.

Because God has only selected some. Not all. And he never promised to save all of Israel. Is the point there.

And he then goes on, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham. But in Isaac your seed shall be called. So he's being selective.

[8:09] He's narrowing it down. It's in Isaac that my chosen ones will come. And that is those who are the children of the flesh. These are not the children of God.

Children of the flesh just because they're born. Even just because they're born of Isaac. They're not necessarily the children. Not the children of the flesh. These are not the children of God.

But the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise. At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this, but when Rebekah also had conceived of one man, even by our father Isaac.

For the children not yet being born. Nor having any, had done any good or evil that the purpose of God according to election might stand.

Not of works, but of him who calls. And so it was said to her, the older shall serve the younger. I've chosen the one over the other. And as it is written, Jacob, I have loved, but Esau I have hated.

[9:13] So there is Paul's answer to that first question. And we covered all that last time. And it's really pretty clear, isn't it? God's choosing.

God's selection. God's selection. Now, let's just be honest. And I don't even have to frame it in that way. We understand that there are many who have a problem with this.

And all of us to some degree are uncomfortable with this. Seriously. There are certain aspects of this that don't seem quite right to us.

And we have a problem with it. It makes us feel uncomfortable. That God is sovereign in his choosing. In regard to everything, including salvation.

But the scripture is pretty clear when it teaches that. Let me just give you a few passages to ponder. In Daniel chapter 4, verse 35, the Bible says, All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing.

[10:21] He does, speaking of God, does according to his will in the army of heaven. And among the inhabitants of the earth. He does according to his will. Now, that ought not to cast a negative feeling about God.

Now, from a human, when we come at it from a human perspective and from our flesh, that seems negative to us.

Why? The audacity that it would be said that he does according to his will. And does according to his will, even among the inhabitants of the earth.

And it goes on to say, And no one can restrain his hand or say to him, What have you done? Now, he can say that to us. We can't say that to God.

We're not his counselors. We're not in judgment of his works. See, but as humans, from our fleshliness, that's what we want to do.

[11 : 30] We want to question God in this. And ask him, Is this fair? And we're going to get to that question here in just a minute.

How about 1 Timothy 6.15? We'll go right to the New Testament. Then I'll go back to some other Old Testament passages where Paul says, He who is the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

That establishes his absolute sovereignty. Revelation 4.11, You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power.

For you created all things, and by your will they exist and were created. So God's sovereignty extends to everything that he has made. Proverbs 16.4, The Lord has made all for himself.

Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom. I don't tell you, we have a problem with that, but that's what the Bible says. Job 23.13, But he is unique.

[12 : 33] And he is, isn't he? He is unique. One of a kind. He's not like anybody else or anything else. And who can make him change? That's what Job said.

And whatever his soul desires, that he does. Now, that won't work for us. Because we're sinners and imperfect.

But God is holy and absolute and sovereign. And so, whatever his soul desires, he does. And he's perfectly right.

Isaiah 46 and verse 9. Remember the former things of old. For I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is none like me.

Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times, things that are not yet done. Saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.

[13 : 30] That's who God is. 1 Samuel 2 and verses 6 through 8. The Lord kills and brings to life.

He brings down to Sheol and raises up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich. He brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust.

He lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world.

God's in control of all things, and he does according to his pleasure. Now, the answer to the first question, and again, what's the first question?

Has God's word failed? And the answer, of course, is no. But the answer to that leads to the second question. It naturally just brings this question up.

[14 : 28] And the second question is, are God's ways fair? Are God's ways fair? Verse 14 is where that question comes to us.

Verse 14, what shall we say then? That is, what shall we say to what I've just said? If all this is true, and the reason why God's word is not failed is because God is a choosing God.

He does according to his sovereign will. So, what shall we say to that? Is there unrighteousness with God? We might word it this way.

Is God unjust? Or I've chosen to frame the question this way. Is he fair?

I mean, is this really fair? Now, Paul, again, has just said in verse 11, that before Jacob and Esau were even born, before they had done anything good or bad, God chose Jacob.

[15 : 38] And he rejected Esau. He's just said that in verse 11. And why? Why did he choose Jacob and reject Esau?

He tells us that the purpose of God, according to what? I know we hate this word. According to election.

That the purpose of God, according to election, might stand. Not of works, but of him who calls.

We could rearrange that, you know, in a different order and say the purpose of God was not based on any human works. Or merit.

It was for his purposes of election. That gives him the glory. And so it's not according to works, but it is all according to the one who calls.

[16 : 41] And that's God himself. Now, is that fair? Is that just? Well, what about Esau?

Let's just think of it from his perspective. Because normally we approach the fairness of God's sovereignty. We approach it from the perspective of those who lose out rather than those who gain, don't we?

And so we ask the question for Esau. Is it fair that God did not choose him? Or what about Ishmael?

The offspring of Abraham. Is it fair that God did not choose him? What about the millions of Jews who have died over the centuries who were, according to Paul, anathema, cursed from Christ? Is it fair that God did not choose them? But rather that he only chose a remnant out of Israel? Is that fair? Or to make it even more applicable to where we live, what about your friends?

[17 : 56] Or even family members who have died without ever believing in Jesus? Is it fair that God did not choose them?

Now, this is the way, you see, we're conditioned to think. I mean, just honestly, it's part of our human nature. Our humanness, and we can't help it.

This is the way we're conditioned to think. It's not fair that God would, quote, arbitrarily choose some for salvation and not others. So, we might reason.

Then it must not mean that. Since I can't bring myself to even consider, entertain the notion that God is not fair, then maybe it's a faulty theology.

Maybe it doesn't mean that. Maybe it means something else. And yet, the Scriptures are plain, very blunt.

[19 : 10] We can't avoid it. And so, it causes us to ask the question, is that fair? Or really, we want to allow it to rise up in us to say, that's not fair.

That's not just. What's Paul's answer? Well, even his answer doesn't seem very fair to us.

What's his answer? It's a short one. Certainly not. That's the New King James. God forbid, if you have the King's English Bible out there.

God forbid. And I like that translation. God forbid. That's very strong. And that is the idea. Those of you who have ESV, by no means.

Got some NASB people out there. May it never be. Personally, I think that's a little weak. God forbid. Really is the idea.

[20 : 16] And, by the way, this is the strongest no that Paul could come up with in the Greek language. Strongest no. The strongest negative.

He could not have made it any stronger with his language. And so his response to the question concerning the injustice of God is, no, no, no, no, no.

Never, never, never. Never. It is just this short of blasphemy to think that way about God. Is in a sense what Paul is saying.

And really, I think he would like that to settle the argument. Settle the objection. God is not unjust. God is always just. Always fair. And his choosing of Jacob and rejecting Esau is fair. It's just.

[21 : 14] Actually, just would be the better word. Remember what Moses said in Genesis 18.25. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?

In that case, he's reminding God of that. But he is affirming the reality of it. The judge of all the earth always does right.

Always does right. Whether it makes sense to us or seems fair to us has nothing to do with it. It ought to be enough for us to acknowledge that whether we understand it or not, God always does right.

He's always right. Always just. David testified of the absolute righteousness of God in Psalm 119, verse 137. Righteous are you, O Lord, and upright in your judgments.

And later in that same Psalm, Psalm 119, 142. Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness. How about Jeremiah chapter 9, verse 23.

[22 : 21] Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man glory in his might. Let not nor let the rich man glory in his riches. But let him who glories glory in this.

That he understands and knows me. And what are we to understand and know about him? He goes on to say that I am the Lord, exercising loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight, says the Lord. That's how you say scripture reveals the absurdity of such a question.

Such a suspicion that maybe God is not fair. And so Paul answers the question with scripture. And that's what he's going to do as we go along here. Paul does not offer to us some kind of rational

argument that's going to appeal to our minds.

He doesn't use logic or reasoning. Often we try to defend the sovereignty of God through reasoning or rationalism.

[23 : 34] We try and we fail because you can't do it that way. So Paul's not offering something here to appeal to our intellect so that we can just put the things together and say, Well, I see what he's saying.

I think this may be true. That's not what Paul is doing. He simply uses scripture. And so I would suggest to you that you really cannot come up with the answer to the question by appealing to the human intellect or reasoning.

If you approach this question purely from a mental approach or the intellect using reasoning skills, then you will always come up with the answer that God is not fair.

I don't care how you organize your thoughts about it. If you try to bring in reasoning to answer this question, you'll always come up with the same conclusion.

God is not fair. Or God is impotent. That's the only other option. Either he's not fair, he's not just, or he just can't do it.

[24 : 51] Can't save everybody. And he's impotent. Those are the only two answers you can come up with if you approach this from a human standpoint. And, in fact, it is human reasoning that got us into trouble in the first place.

We can go all the way back to Genesis. All the way back to the very beginning. It started there in the Garden of Eden. And God placed that tree in the Garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Remember? And God said, you shall not eat of it. Don't even touch it. And along comes the serpent, the embodiment of Satan.

And he gets Eve to thinking that God is not being fair. I mean, just look at that tree. I mean, surely, you know, God knows that, you know, if you eat that, you would become as him, as God.

And so, Eve, God is holding out on you. God is not fair here. And so he got Eve and Adam to thinking that way. Satan tempted Adam and Eve into questioning the justice of God.

[26 : 01] And they fell for it. And they fell. And so Paul just gives us Scripture, doesn't he? And he points us to two Scriptures.

And this is how he answers the question about the justice of God. Paul first points to Exodus 33, 19. He's going to quote that verse, Exodus 33, 19. And Paul quotes it here in verse 15. Look at what he said. This is the quote. For he says to Moses, God says to Moses, I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy.

And I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion. There's his quote from Exodus 33, 19. Now, what does that mean? Well, it's really pretty clear.

God has the sovereign right to choose to be gracious to some and not to others. God has the choice. God has the right to choose to be gracious to some and not to others.

[27 : 30] to his grace and mercy. Now, we think that we can. And we're mistaken about that. We have no claim to it.

To his grace and mercy. And so, none of us are treated unjustly if grace and mercy are withheld. Do you understand?

Do you understand? Just in case you don't. All of us are sinners. All of us deserve judgment. Then none of us have a claim to the mercy and grace of God. And so, none of us are treated unjustly if God chooses to withhold it.

That's the sovereignty of God. And so, God's choice to give grace and mercy is not based on anything outside of himself. Is it? Is it? In fact, that's what Paul is saying in verse 16.

[28 : 36] Look at it. So then, it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. It's not then according to those who desire it.

God's grace and mercy. It's not giving because of those who run for it. In the sense of striving, deserving, working for it, meriting it.

So, if not in those two ways, then how? It's simply God who shows mercy. That is, it's not based upon anything outside of God.

It's all within himself that he makes his choices. Then Paul quotes Exodus 9, 16. And he quotes that in verse 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.

[29:44] And so, God raised up Pharaoh. He raised him up. That means he gave Pharaoh his kingdom. He brought him to power. Yes, God did that.

He brings all kings and rulers to power. He ordains them. And he holds them in the palm of his hand, the Bible says. And he, like water, and he moves them in the way he wills. And so, here the idea is, when he says he raised him up, that is, he put him there as the supreme ruler of Egypt at that very time.

And he did so for a purpose. So, in a sense, a very real sense, Pharaoh was elected. Not to salvation. But for purpose.

He was elected for a purpose. And what was the purpose? Well, God tells him. And he tells us. That I may show my power to you, in you. And that my name may be declared in all the earth.

That's quite a purpose, isn't it? And so, let me ask you, did God accomplish that purpose? You bet he did. Today, even today, when the Jews celebrate redemption, or they would use the word deliverance, their salvation.

[31:00] When they celebrate that, even today, how do they do it? Or what is the celebration called? Passover.

Passover. The highest celebration of the Jews. Passover. Now, you already know. What event does Passover celebrate?

God's deliverance of Israel out of Egypt. All right, that's what it commemorates. His deliverance of Israel from Egypt. And so, the Passover commemorates the monumental event of redemption that was accomplished there in Egypt.

Our son, I put all this together. That event. Just think of it step by step. And I've listed them here. So, let me throw them to you.

God raised up Pharaoh. Gave him his kingdom. God hardened Pharaoh's heart. God. So that Pharaoh would oppress his people.

[32:05] God's people. So that God would send the plagues. So that Pharaoh would eventually release God's people. So that God could further harden Pharaoh's heart.

So that Pharaoh and his army would pursue Israel to destroy them. So that God would part the Red Sea. So that Israel could walk over and escape.

So that he could bring the waters back and drown Pharaoh's army. So that God would display, could display his glory in all of this to everyone in the world of the day.

And so that his name would be declared in all the earth. And it was. In fact, very quickly. So that the Gentile Rahab, for example, would say in Joshua 2.10, But we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt.

She's just a Gentile. They're in Jericho. And she's heard about it. They've all heard about it. We've heard about this. And what you did to the two kings of the Amorites, who were on the other side of Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.

[33:24] And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted. Neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you. For the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

God accomplished his purpose, didn't he? He did all that through Pharaoh. And he raised up Pharaoh for that very purpose and hardened his heart for that very purpose, God's purpose, to bring him glory.

And so to cap off his argument from Scripture that God is always just, we have verse 18. This is kind of a summarization. Puts the two illustrations together.

He says in verse 18, Therefore, he has mercy on whom he wills, and whom he wills he hardens. All right? And so he brings both Scripture references together in that statement.

The first part of it, therefore, he has mercy on whom he wills, is a reference to the first Scripture illustration where God speaks with the words that God gives to Moses.

[34:29] And then the second part of verse 18, on whom he wills he hardens, is a reference to the second Scripture illustration, God's words to Pharaoh. He puts the two together.

And he does it to cap it off. And so we could ask then, why was Pharaoh's heart hard? Why did he have a hard heart? Because God made it that way.

Exodus 4.21 says, God said, I will harden his heart that he shall not let the people go. And why did God do that? Because he wanted to.

He wanted to. And he had every right to do that. For his own glory.

You know, Judas is, in the New Testament, an example of this. Judas was chosen. He was chosen, appointed by God.

[35 : 31] Before he was ever born. To betray the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus says he was the son, a child of perdition.

Appointed for this. You see, that is the sovereign justice of God. And God has always been that way. Always will be.

John 15.16. Jesus said to his own disciples. He said, you have not chosen me. But, what does he say? I have chosen you.

And he said, no one. Comes. Unto me. Except the father draws him. Now, he also says, him who does.

Them who do come to me. I will in no wise cast out. So, are God's ways fair? Are his ways just?

[36 : 38] Is God just? Well, consider this. Based on the human reasoning out of which that question comes. Those who ask it are really saying, God is not fair.

God is not just. And they're saying, I want God to be just. Want him to be fair. When he comes to salvation.

Do you really? Do you really? Do you really? Do you really want God's justice?

Now, in our salvation, God is just. He did not wink at our sin. His son took it for us.

God's justice that we deserve. Was reserved for him. Spent on him. On Jesus. His son.

[37 : 49] Next time we'll consider this question. Is God's will fatalistic? And that is the natural question that comes from the second question.

Pharaoh was just doing what he was born to do. And why or how could God find fault with him?

Well, that means that God's will must be fatalistic.

It's just what will be, will be. So why should we try? And we'll deal with that question next time.

Thank you.