

Romans 9:1-18, "The Purposes of God"

Introduction

Again, I want to greet you all with a "happy new year!" I pray that each one of you will experience God's abundant blessings. Because of the corona virus, we have not been able to meet even once to worship together since last March. Something like this was totally unexpected!

As you think about this new year, you may be wondering about this or that. However, it is difficult for us to know what will happen even in the space of one short year. But, God has a plan! It's a compassionate plan to rescue us. Today, let's look together at Romans 9 and ponder what God's plan for salvation looks like.

Romans 9:1-18

¹ I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. ⁴ They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. ⁹ For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son." ¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—¹² she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! 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 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

First, let's look at the wonderful plan that God has. When you believe this plan, you will experience assurance and certainty in your life. Secondly, let's consider the historical development of how God's plan has been realized. Here, the very

important but often misunderstood teaching of “election” is made clear. And, thirdly, let's delve into the merciful will of God. He plans, chooses, and works according to his mercy towards us. To summarize the three points: 1) God's plan, 2) The mystery of election, and 3) God's mercy.

1. God's Plan

Romans chapters 9—11 are a cohesive section under the theme of “the salvation of Israel.” The last part of Romans 8 is the climax of the first half of the book of Romans. Do you remember? The power of God's love which brings us salvation is firmly established by Christ Jesus. Paul concludes as if in a loud voice of praise:

Romans 8:37, 39. “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us . . . For I am sure that . . . [nothing] in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

And then, Paul asks a question. Does this powerful truth not apply to the many Israelites who have rejected Jesus? Most of the Jews surrounding Paul did not believe in Jesus as their Savior. Previously, Paul himself, rejected the gospel.

You may have a similar question when it comes to the Japanese people. The first proclamation of the gospel in Japan was in the 16th century. Since then, 460 years have passed, and Protestant missionary work has been happening for 160 years. However, Christians still account for less than 1% of the total population. Known as an “Unreached People Group,” most remain closed to the gospel.

Paul prays for the salvation of Israel with “great sorrow” and “unceasing anguish.”

9:3. *“For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”*

Paul's words can be compared to the words of Moses when he prayed for Israel when they lost faith and became idol-worshippers. When Moses went up Mt. Sinai and received the law of God, the Israelites were unable to wait for him to return. The people asked Aaron to make them a golden calf which they then worshiped as their god. When Moses came down from the mountain he put his life on the line and appealed to God on behalf of the people.

Exodus 32:31-32. “So Moses returned to the Lord and said, ‘Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.’”

Brothers and sisters, are you earnestly praying for family members and friends who do not yet believe the gospel? Have you thought of colleagues in the workplace who have never heard the gospel of Christ? Just as Paul took it as his role to pray for Israel, so we are being sent to tell others about Christ.

At this point, let's recall God's plan that was given to Israel. All that Paul did—his prayers for the Jewish people, his intercession, his missionary work—was based on this divine plan.

9:4-5. "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. 5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen."

The plan of God, given to Israel at the beginning, spread to all nations and to the whole world with the coming of Jesus and the new covenant. And, as indicated by what Paul says here, the Jews are still recipients of God's promises now in the 21st century, and are invited to salvation that is in Christ. Paul's source of love and passion for his compatriots was God's unchanging plan and promises.

Beloved, may your hearts burn with the plan of God that was accomplished through Christ! With hearts that are ablaze with the Holy Spirit, let's pray that God's plan will be accomplished in our family members, our friends, and the people with whom we work. Please think about this. What are the things that you can do?

2. The Mystery of Election

However, if God's plan was given to Israel, why are there people who did not accept Jesus? In fact, an overwhelming majority rejected him. Is it because God's promises and plans have become obsolete or invalidated? In the same way, the gospel of Jesus is available to the whole world—to every Japanese person. So, why don't more people accept this wonderful news?

Verse 6 summarizes the answer to this question.

9:6. "But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,"

First of all, God's word—his plan and his promises—is by no means invalidated.

Isaiah 40:8. "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

The certainty of God's word remains unchanged. Secondly, God is accomplishing his plan according to his own way. And, his ways are often different from what we are thinking.

In verse 6, the word "Israel" appears twice, but the meanings are different. The meaning of "from Israel" refers to ethnic Jews who are the chosen people of God. Some did not believe, but even so (though Paul is very hurt by this), they are still God's people, Israel. They are still called to reveal God's grace and truth.

However, the second mention of 'Israel' is not a reference to all Jewish people. It is a reference to the "true Israel" which are those Jews who have received God's grace and truth with joy, are obediently following God, and gratefully testifying to the gospel of Jesus.

Paul clarifies this in verses 7-13 by giving two examples. Abraham had two sons, Isaac (born from his wife, Sarah), and Ishmael (born from Sarah's female slave, Hagar, who is not named here). Both of these were Abraham's sons, but God's promise was passed down through Isaac.

In the second example, Isaac had twin sons by his wife Rebekah. The elder was Esau, and the younger was Jacob. God's promise was given to the younger son, Jacob. At that time, the eldest son had tremendous inheritance rights. However, contrary to all expectations and customs of the day, Jacob the younger son, was the one who received God's promise.

These are examples of what Paul calls "God's purpose of election" in verse 11. God's way of electing or choosing, is hidden from us. It happens before we have "done nothing either good or bad" (vs. 11), and "not because of works but because of him who calls" (vs. 11). In other words, God's purpose of election is based entirely on God himself. It is unconditional. It is not based on human nature, behavior, achievements, or resume.

When Paul was ministering in the prominent commercial city of Corinth in Greece, he was severely persecuted by the Jews. He was tortured and in such danger and fear, that he almost had to stop preaching.

Acts 18:9-10. "And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.'"

These words of God, "I have many . . . who are my people," are associated with election. God's plans and purposes give hope because they are effectively being accomplished. Paul knew God's purpose of election, so that even if many of the

Jews rejected the gospel, he still had hope. God's promises will never fail! They will most certainly be accomplished, and Paul believed that Israel would have a revival.

Similarly, don't give up hope if many around you aren't interested in the gospel of Christ. There is a mystery in election that we cannot fully understand. In fact, we can't understand why we ourselves were saved! It is only because of God's mercy.

3. God's Mercy

However, election seems to be a teaching that often troubles us. Opposition argues that God is unfair in his evaluation of us; that if there are people who are not "chosen" then God cannot be said to be love; or that if there is election so that God calls certain ones, then evangelism is not necessary. Paul answers the assumptions presented by these opposing arguments.

9:15, 16. "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 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy."

Brothers and sisters, the ultimate motive for God's salvation is mercy. You can paraphrase this as love or grace. If God did not choose according to his mercy, no one, in fact, would be saved. This is because as sinful human beings, no one has the right to demand salvation from God. Rather, we should all be judged.

Do you ever ask for God's justice and fairness by saying, "I am doing what is right." Would you like for God to be fair and reward your efforts? You had better stop asking for his justice! Is it not more likely that you will be destroyed? Your sin and injustice, for which you will be judged, far outweighs your rightness.

But, God is a merciful God. The words, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion," is a quote from Exodus 33:19.

Exodus 33:19. "And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."

Please come to know the deepest will and purposes of God. Let's always remember God's mercy and grace towards us, which fills us with all good things. Our mistakes and problems are a result of forgetting or not believing that God is

merciful. The God of mercy has chosen you! Again today, look to the cross of Jesus.

Just as Paul quoted from what God told Moses, Paul also references the Egyptian Pharaoh. God revealed his power of salvation to Pharaoh and made him stubborn so that the name of the Lord would be known throughout the whole earth. Moses was chosen because of God's mercy, and Pharaoh was abandoned.

Beloved, Jesus is indeed our Messiah, chosen by God. But, he was judged and abandoned for you, in your place, on the cross. On the basis of God's mercy—his love and grace—Jesus accomplished salvation for us. Yet, as the chosen one, he was judged, abandoned, and crucified for us. Even for those who object to God's election, Jesus was judged, abandoned, and put to death.

Those who come to Jesus will never be abandoned or forsaken. Let's rely on God's mercy. We don't know what this year holds for us, but we can know for sure that God has a plan and a purpose. His work at times, may be mysterious, but his love for you is con men.