

Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 9:22-33 – Obedience vs. Faith Sermon Notes



Background

Last week we learned that we are not saved because we deserve it, we are saved because God chose us. If we are to learn one similar truth from today's passage of Scripture it is this: We do not earn that salvation by obedience, we simply accept it by faith.

Romans 9:22-24

And what if God, wanting to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath having been prepared for destruction, and in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory— even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles?

In the preceding verses we saw that the Apostle Paul postulated that it is fair for God to declare some righteous (through His grace) and to allow the remainder of mankind to go to Hell because of their sinfulness. But that implies that there are two classes of people on the earth, unforgiven sinners and forgiven sinners. Paul is about to show that, in fact, there are two classes of people, and God has a purpose in allowing both.

The first class of people is the class of unforgiven sinners. Remember, according to what Paul demonstrated back in **Romans 3:23**, all of us are sinners. There have been no human beings except Jesus Himself who have ever lived without sinning. We all deserve Hell. Paul here states that God is desirous of showing His wrath against sin and sinners and He is also desirous of making His power known.

God continues to endure the pain of the sins of the unsaved sinners in this world. At the same time, however, he knows that they will receive eternal damnation when He finally slams down the gavel of His judgment. But what about the sins of Christians? Is God enduring our sins with patience? The answer is no, because our sins are covered by the

blood of Christ. Therefore, He sees us as sinless, holy, and righteous vessels of glory. We are the second class of people, the forgiven sinners who God has declared to be righteous.

Remember, Paul has written this letter to the Christian Jews in Rome. Part of his reason for writing it is to show them that the salvation they have does not come from being born a Jew, but from being chosen by God. The Jewish people have always considered themselves the special chosen people of God. They believed that, as descendents of Abraham, they were chosen and set-apart. They also believed that by keeping the Law they are justified before God. In the earlier portion of this letter, Paul clearly showed that justification does not come from keeping the Law but as a result of God's free gift of grace.

But, because they believed that they were a chosen nation, the Jewish Christians of Paul's day would likely miss the impact of what he has just said, namely that God has chosen the "elect" to receive His grace and only they would gain entrance into His glory in the hereafter. These Christian Jews believed that they were the "elect" because they were descendents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But Paul says that God's vessels of mercy are, "...not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles." That's why this passage would come as such a surprise to a lot of them.

Romans 9:25-29

As He says also in Hosea, "I will call those who were not my people, 'My people,' and her who was not beloved, 'Beloved.'" "And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God." And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the sons of Israel be like the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved; for the Lord will execute His word on the land, thoroughly and quickly." And just as Isaiah foretold, "Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left to us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah."

Paul now goes on to show the Jewish Christians in Rome the fact that God has always had a plan for non-Jews as well as for the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Jewish Christians in the early years of the church believed that they were a called nation. That is, the sons of Jacob believed they had a special privilege in their relationship with God simply because God chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The previous verse ("whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles") would have come as a shock to many of these Jewish Christians, therefore Paul now quotes from **Hosea 2:23** ("And I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they will say, 'You are my God!'") Paul quotes this passage to show that it has always been God's plan to select from the Gentiles as well as from the Jews.

The Jewish believers in Rome were proud of the fact that they had been entrusted with the Oracles of God (see **Romans 3:2**), and they believed, as we do, that these Holy Scriptures contained the very words of God. Therefore, this became a very powerful demonstration to these Jewish Christians that the church is to be made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Peter discovered this in a miraculous way in chapter 10 of the book of Acts. Paul also makes a very powerful argument to the Gentile members of the church in **Ephesians 2:13-14** where he says that the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross broke down the dividing wall between the Jews and the Gentiles.

God is clearly sovereign in His choice of who He will bless and who will be cast into hellfire. Paul has made it very clear that it is God's choice regarding who will receive righteousness and who will receive condemnation.

He has been saying all along that God does not save everyone and, in fact, has chosen ahead of time who He will save, and He will do so in a righteous manner. Paul is also warning the Jewish Christians in Rome that God is ending His exclusive dealings with the Jewish people (at least, until the time of the end as spoken by the prophet Daniel in chapter 9 of his book).

Paul now quotes another of Isaiah's prophecies from the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It was translated from Hebrew into Greek somewhere between 300 and 200 years before the time of Christ. It was the version of the Law and the Prophets that many Greek speaking Jews read in the Roman Empire and, therefore, is the version that the Roman Jewish Christians would have known best.

In quoting this passage, Paul makes a reference to Yahweh of the hosts of Heaven, the great and powerful leader of the mightiest of all armies. As the leader of the most powerful army ever, He will do as He has determined, and no one can stop Him.

Isaiah's point is that unless the mighty God had chosen to preserve a small number of survivors of Israel, they would have been completely destroyed just like Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed for lack of 10 righteous people. This is a reference to the fact that Abraham negotiated with God for saving Sodom if only 10 righteous people were found in the city. As it turned out there were only Lot, his wife, and his two daughters. You can read all about these events in Genesis chapters 18 and 19.

Paul's point here is the same as in the previous verse, namely that God might cast off almost the entire nation because they have followed after other gods, saving only a few as His chosen ones. Thus, Paul demonstrates that God is ultimately the one who chooses who is destroyed and who is preserved. This is especially poignant given what Paul has already told us way back in **Romans 3:23**

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

The net effect of all this is that the Jewish Christians in Rome should fall to their knees and thank Yahweh of hosts that he has not cut them off as they deserve but has chosen to impute to them His righteousness and allow them into His eternal presence.

Romans 9:30-33

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, laid hold of righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not attain that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, just as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and the one who believes upon Him will not be put to shame."

Paul starts off this section with, "What shall we say then?" With this rhetorical question, he begins his summation of this entire chapter. Even though he spent a great deal of time and energy making the case for God's sovereign choosing (election), that has only been a

supporting point of his argument. The main point is that some of the Gentiles have received the prize of justification (righteousness) without constantly pursuing after it, and the Jews, who constantly pursued righteousness, have not all received it.

You see, the Jews had vigorously pursued righteousness by seeking rigorous adherence to the Law, but they did not obtain righteousness. They believed they had to do something. They believed so strongly that righteousness came by obedience that their entire lives were consumed with being obedient to God's commandments. The Gentiles, on the other hand, did not pursue righteousness but have now been declared righteous by God through faith. They did not pursue righteousness by doing works or by following all the rules; they simply believed the gospel message. We who believe that Jesus is the Christ and that He died on the cross to pay for our sins are declared to be righteous in God's record book and we will be permitted in God's presence without condemnation.

So, why couldn't the Israelites reach the goal (righteousness) they were working so hard to obtain and why did the Gentiles obtain the righteousness which they weren't pursuing? The difference is, works vs. faith. The Israelites tried to please God and obtain His righteousness by doing works of obedience. They tried to work their way to righteousness. However, God does not reward obedience, He rewards faith. Let me say that again, God does not reward obedience, He rewards faith. God does not reward obedience ---- He rewards faith!

Let's look at another example from the Old Testament. After God led the Israelites into the wilderness and gave them the Law through Moses' leadership, he led them to the Promised Land where they began to eliminate all the inhabitants of the land. Under Joshua's leadership they were successful at driving the people out of some of the land. After Joshua's death, however, the new generation failed to drive the remainder of the people out of the land.

On the surface, this looks like a failure of obedience. After all, God told them to do it, but they didn't. However, if we look at it closely, we will see that it was not a lack of obedience that caused them to fail, it was a lack of faith. Here's how it is expressed in the book of Judges:

Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh and served the Baals, and they forsook Yahweh, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from *among* the gods of the peoples who were around them and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked Yahweh to anger. (Judges 2:11-12)

God considered His relationship with the Israelites like a marriage relationship just as He considers the relationship between the church and Christ a marriage relationship. But the Israelites were unfaithful to their husband (God). His anger against the Israelites was because of a lack of faith, not a lack of obedience. That's the point that Paul is making here. Again, righteousness is not obtained by works, but by faith.

The devout Jews did many things daily in an attempt to please God. They prayed, they fasted, they sacrificed, they gave their tithes, they studied the Law and the Prophets, and they listened to the Rabbis to learn the oral laws so that they could be sure to obey all that they were commanded to do. But, because they were so intent on earning God's favor by obedience, they denied, even rejected the one in whom they could have obtained God's

favor, Jesus the Christ, their Messiah. They tripped over the stumbling stone whom they called Jesus of Nazareth, denying that He was their Messiah.

But before we get too condemning of these Israelites, let's look at our churches and church members today. Many of us are putting our effort into faithfully attending church every week, reading our Bibles daily, giving our tithes, praying, offering our time in service to the church, fasting, and listening to all that our ministers and priests tell us, so that we can be obedient to God and to the church with all of its expectations. In short, many of us are trying to earn God's favor just as the Israelites did a couple thousand years ago. They failed - and we still do today!

In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, the writer recounts example after example of those who obtained God's favor, not because of their obedience to God or to a set of church rules but because of their faith. Tucked away in that chapter is the sixth verse which says:

And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who draws near to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

The writer doesn't say "without obedience it is impossible to please Him," he says, "without faith." Trying to be obedient causes stumbling, while living by faith produces victory! God is pleased with a life of faith, not a life of obedience. Let me say that again, God is pleased with a life of faith, not a life of obedience!

The Apostle Paul was very well versed in the Law and the Prophets. He studied them under Gamaliel, one of the greatest rabbinical teachers of his day. As a result, he had a thorough understanding of what we now call the Old Testament. And yet, he doesn't tell the Jewish Christians in Rome to be more obedient to the law, he tells them to live out their faith!

Paul now wraps up this final chapter in his letter to the Christians in Rome. So, let's look at a couple of the words he used in the final verse.

The word "stone" is from *lithos*, which refers to a stone (anything from the size of a pebble to the size of a paving stone in a street). "Rock," on the other hand, is from *petra*, which refers to "a huge mass of rock like a rock outcropping of a mountain."

Here, Paul not only demonstrates his knowledge of what is written in the Old Testament but also what is meant by these writings. He does this by quoting two separate verses from Isaiah and combining them into a single verse in a manner that reveals the intent of both passages.

Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and the one who believes upon Him will not be put to shame. (Romans 9:33)

The stone which Isaiah referred to is the Messiah, the Christ. He is the chief cornerstone upon which the church is built. But the Israelites rejected their Messiah and, as a result, He has become a stumbling stone to them and a huge rock of offence. To the Jews of Paul's day (and the Jews of our day) Jesus was an imposter who was executed for His crimes. To them He was simply a paving stone in the middle of the road, but to God He is a huge, massive, solid rock of salvation. So, instead of believing on the rock of salvation and receiving God's imputed righteousness, these Jewish Christians continued to try to earn their own righteousness by obeying all the precepts and commandments in the Law so that they

wouldn't stumble. As a result, not only did they stumble, they missed out on righteousness completely.

So What?

On the surface Paul's words may appear harsh and unfair, but keep in mind that God is looking for faith, not obedience. The unfair thing is that He has declared us to be righteous and without sin (because the penalty for our sins has been paid by Jesus Christ on the cross). Truly, that is not fair! Praise God that He is not fair with us! Thank God for His grace!

But – and listen very carefully to this, being one of God's chosen ones is not a reason for pride. It is a reason for humility. God has not chosen us because of what family we are in or what church we go to. He has not chosen us because we are wise, mighty, or noble. According to [1 Corinthians 1:26-29](#), He has chosen us because we are foolish, weak and base (we are pond scum!) He has not chosen us because we are obedient and perform the proper rituals or because we chose to believe. He chose us because it will bring glory to Him. For that we should be thankful, and we should be humbled, and we should give Him all the praise and all the glory.

Are you still trying to please God by your good works? Or do you perform your good works out of gratitude because He chose you to believe His promise of salvation through the blood of Christ. **Remember, God does not reward obedience, he rewards faith!**

So, let me ask you, why do you read your Bible? Why do you pray? Why do you give to your church? Why do you attend church regularly and listen carefully to the sermon each week? Are you trying to earn God's favor like the Israelites did? Or is it because you believe God's Word and you want to Glorify Him in all you do? Do you do it out of obligation and a hope of rewards? Or do you do it out of a grateful heart with humble actions of faith? Think about that and be honest with yourself!

The key to a life of faith is humility. Listen to what James said:

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. ([James 4:10](#))

And to what Peter said:

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ([1 Peter 5:6](#))

Are you humble before God?

In other words, does humble faith exemplify your relationship with God? It should!

God is not looking for proud obedience, he is looking for humble faith!

Let's pray