

Eternity Daily Bible Study

Romans 9-16 The Implications of Salvation

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Verses: Romans 9:9-18

Topic: Election

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Romans 9:9-18 MKJV *For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son." (10) And not only this, but when Rebekah also had conceived by one, by our father Isaac (11) (for the children had not yet been born, neither had done any good or evil; but that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who called,) (12) it was said to her, "The elder shall serve the younger." (13) As it is written, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." (14) What shall we say then? Is there not unrighteousness with God? Let it not be! (15) For He said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." (16) So then it is not of the one willing, nor of the one running, but of God, the One showing mercy. (17) For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "Even for this same purpose I have raised you up, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth." (18) Therefore He has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will, He hardens.*

This is one of the most difficult theological passages in the Bible and has a few varying interpretations. I will give the view that I think best fits the facts, the other views can be found in a good commentary or theological text such as the systematic theologies by Grudem or Erickson. I simply do not have the space to deal with them all.

God has the right to set the destiny of any individual, for greatness or humility, but how we react to that destiny is up to us. God said the Esau would serve Jacob "the older shall serve the younger" and that was His choice. Esau had a very physical nature full of carnal appetites and sold his inheritance for a bowl of soup when he was hungry. His nature was that of a person enslaved, so of course he ended up serving Jacob who had a higher and more spiritual nature. The fate decreed by God and the nature of the people involved were closely intertwined.

Genesis 25:29-34 MKJV *And Jacob boiled soup. And Esau came from the field, and he was faint. (30) And Esau said to Jacob, I beg you, Let me eat of the red, this red soup, for I am faint. Therefore his name was called Edom. (31) And Jacob said, Sell me your birthright today. (32) And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point of dying, and what profit shall this birthright be to me? (33) And Jacob said, Swear to me this day. And he swore to him, and he sold his birthright to Jacob. (34) Then Jacob gave Esau bread and soup of lentils. And he ate and drank, and rose up and went his way. And Esau despised his birthright.*

Similarly Pharaoh was an ego maniac, he would never truly listen or repent. Such a person when shown clear spiritual signs only hardens their heart. God knew this and put Pharaoh in a place so that through this powerful and most unreasonable man He could show His might. God's hardening of Pharaoh consisted of showing him miracles that would have made any reasonable person believe. But because of Pharaoh's inner nature, his pride, his arrogance, his need to be in control, it only hardened him!

The compassion of God consists in His allowing our conscience to function, of enabling us to see and believe the truth so that we might be saved. Some people, like Esau, are spiritual blockheads and place no value on anything except their immediate sensory needs. We never see Esau building an altar or engaging in worship. Rather he is always out hunting or eating or marrying the wrong kind of women and making all the worst moves at the wrong times. He even sells his inheritance and is cheated out of his blessing - despite the wishes of Isaac in this regard. In fact Esau later becomes a symbol of the carnal man:

Hebrews 12:14-17 MKJV *Follow peace with all, and holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord; (15) looking diligently lest any fail of the grace of God, or lest any root of bitterness springing up disturb you, and by it many are defiled, (16) (lest there be any fornicator, or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. (17) For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected; for he did not find any place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears).*

Paul's point is that we don't make our own destiny. That is God's to apportion.

(11) (for the children had not yet been born, neither had done any good or evil; but that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who called,)(16) So then it is not of the one willing, nor of the one running, but of God, the One showing mercy. .. Therefore He has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will, He hardens.

The opposite to God's mercy and election is given in active words such as 'works', 'willing', and 'running'. Human exertion cannot change divine destiny. Jacob did nothing but was made the heir. Esau worked hard, strove, clumsily tried to please his father and sought the blessing with tears - but was excluded.

Election stands in the calling and appointing of God. I cannot make God choose me by being very, very good. And I cannot make God not choose me by being very, very bad (e.g. Saul, the thief on the cross, the Samaritan woman, Mary Magdalene etc). Sometimes we can glimpse a reason for God's choosing someone, at other times it is a complete mystery.

To some extent this also applies to success in ministry. We can think "why does so and so have that big church and I only have this little church when my sermons are so much more biblical than his..." etc. It is not Billy Graham that I envy but the pastor down the road!

I believe that I was called to be a missionary from birth or even before the womb, even though I only became a Christian at age 21. Now I can see God's hand preparing me right from day one or earlier! I did not choose to be a missionary, in fact it was the furthest thing from my mind, in fact I wanted to be a scientist, but God's calling was effectual for me.

Why isn't everyone called to serve as a missionary overseas? That is God's doing, God's decision, and He has the right to order the world, just the way He wants. Where then is

human freedom and dignity? In how we respond to our calling. I can be a good missionary or a bad missionary, a faithful servant, or a lazy and wicked servant, that is my choice to make and if I am faithful I will be rewarded for making the right choices on those issues.

A certain portion of our life is pre-set and determined, the rest is ours to choose. God has saved us by grace, through His calling and election, and given us good works to do, but how we do them is up to us:

Ephesians 2:8-10 MKJV *For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, lest anyone should boast. (10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.*

We cannot ever get a handle on God so that we can manipulate Him so that He is good to us and always gives us what we want. If we could, then God would be our servant, and we would effectively be god. And that is simply not going to happen! That is why God says to Moses: *"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."*

By way of analogy, if you go to the animal shelter to adopt a pet you can have mercy on only one or two animals out of hundreds. You "elect" one to live in your home and that is your choice and no matter how cute the other dogs or cats are, they are not chosen. You have mercy and compassion only on the one you have chosen. And no one can argue with your choice!

God looks down from heaven on broken mankind and chooses some to be redeemed and to live in Heaven with Him. Now He wants all to hear the gospel, but He knows that only a fraction will respond to the gospel. Those that choose to believe are the ones He chooses to take into His heavenly home.

Here the theological schools of thought differ widely. Some say that God even appoints who will believe and who will not believe and that God has selected each person who will be saved before they were born, and that He has also selected those who will not be saved before they were born. Others say that God wants all to be saved and chooses on the basis of their faith response. And there are in-between views as well.

For me it is as if there were two trains, a gospel train with its destination pre-set to heaven and a worldly train with its destination pre-set to Hell. If we get on the gospel train, if we are in Christ, then we are pre-destined to go where the destination of the train is, that is to Heaven. And if we choose to stay on the world's train then we are pre-destined to go to its terrible destination as well. Some people seem born on one train or the other (John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb and Judas was the "son of perdition") but that does not preclude them being able to switch trains at some point. God send us missionaries into the world to persuade people to switch trains and to be saved. My view is that while some people are like John the Baptist or Judas and have iron-clad destinies most of us have a real choice, we are in the middle of the bell curve so to speak, not at the extremes. For us our spiritual destiny is not so firmly set and there is a need for someone to come with the gospel and to offer us the means of salvation.

The Jews thought they had a hammer-lock on God, that He would have to save them, all of them, and that their sufferings, or their obedience of the Law, or their determination and effort would ensure this. But God replies – it is not the amount you have suffered, or your good works, or your strong will or your athletic (“running”) exertion that matters. You have no hammer-lock on Me. I am God and I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and compassion on whom I will have compassion – and yes even upon the Gentiles who have not sought My salvation!

Blessings,

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