

Sent: Wednesday, February 21, 2018 1:59 PM  
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Romans 9

Last week's lesson on Romans 8:19-39 ended on a high note as a "hymn of praise" and one of the greatest affirmations of faith in the Bible--including a great reminder of the believer's "eternal security" in Jesus Christ, with the assurance that God can be depended upon to keep His promises! But Romans 9 begins on a more somber note--a "pause" in the action--as Paul, now an "apostle to the Gentiles," grieves over Israel and his "kinsmen" who have rejected their Messiah, and who now recognizes the questions raised among some about whether God has abandoned His "covenant promises" for them! Have the believers and followers of Christ (the church) --now mostly Gentiles--replaced Israel and the Jews as God's "chosen people"? And if God could "abandon" Israel, could Christians themselves feel less secure?

Paul's sorrow and remorse for Israel is intensified, realizing (having been there once himself) that it was to the "Israelites to whom belong the adoption of son, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh..." How tragic that they would fail to recognize the One for whom all these things and more, in the Old Testament, pointed!

Paul's "wish" that he might himself be accursed for their sake resembles the response of Moses, in Exodus 32:30-32, when he came down from Mt. Sinai and his meeting with God, only to find the people of Israel worshiping a golden calf! Or of Jesus, "weeping over Jerusalem," in Matthew 23:37, in His last days on earth before going to the cross!

And so, what happened? "It's not as though the word of God has failed," Paul notes! And then he proceeds to explain the "nature of God's promise to Israel" (as Douglas Moo describes it). "For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel!" (Romans 9:6) It's a message of God's sovereignty and "election." Pastor Jesse sums it up with one word: predestination!

And so, Paul shows how God chose Isaac over Ishmael, and Jacob over Esau! And it had nothing to do with their works or personal merit, but only on the "prerogative" of God! Moo says it's about "grace and not race"! Paul even goes on to quote Malachi 1:2 as saying that God "loved Jacob and hated Esau." John MacArthur explains that the context of this quote is that it was written more than 1500 years after their death and that "in looking back at these two men, and by extension at the nations that came from their loins (Israel and Edom), God chose one for divine blessing and protection, and the other He left for divine judgment"!

Dr. Tom Constable relates this story: A woman once said to Spurgeon, "I cannot understand why God should say He hated Esau!" "That," Spurgeon replied, "is not my difficulty, Madam! My trouble is to understand how God could love Jacob!"

Nevertheless, it raised the question of God's justice! To which Paul absolutely took exception--with words he used before: "May it never be!" And he quoted God's words to Moses: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion!"

And so, "it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy!" (Romans 9:16, our memory verse for this lesson) And Paul goes on to use the example of Pharaoh and his "hardened heart"--and how God used it to demonstrate His power, and so that His name "might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth"! And that He might receive all the glory, as Jesse emphasized last nite!

And so, we again see how God sovereignly chooses who will serve His purpose and how!  
Which again raises the question of how God can blame anyone for sin and unbelief when He has sovereignly determined that person's destiny!

And how does Paul respond? "Who are you, O man, who answers back to God? Does not the potter have a right over the clay...?" All of which only reinforces the bottom line message of this text! The sovereignty of God! Predestination! And "Election"!

Moo writes: "The search for philosophical/theological explanations of the relation between God's sovereign decision-making and human responsibility is not wrong, but we must begin where Paul and the Bible begin: with a vision of a God who is absolutely free to make whatever decision He wants to make about His creation! (And) Paul would be the last to deny the importance of human decisions! His repeated pleas to people to believe in Christ and to reject sin reveal his belief in real human responsibility. Paul's purpose, however, is not to offer an explanation of how God's sovereignty and human responsibility fit together. He affirms both without resolving the tension between them! And perhaps this might offer a clue that cannot finally be neatly resolved at all!" (We will pick up on this thought in next week's lesson!)

Well, we're not done with chapter 9! What about Israel in all this?

Verse 24 makes it clear that among the objects of God's mercy and grace are both Jews and Gentiles! And Moo notes that Paul wants to show that the "prophets agree with the patriarchal history in confining the true people of God to those whom He has specifically called"! And so, he ends our text with quotes from Isaiah and Hosea to show that God planned all along to invite Gentiles to be part of His people--along with Israel!

"I will call those who are 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!"

As for Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be like the sands of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved..."!

And so, is there a future for Israel? Yes! Is there a future for us? Yes! Thanks be to God for His sovereign working in our world--and in our lives--to create a people for His own!

Special thanks to Pastor Jesse for his great insights into this lesson!

And so on to Romans 10, which will help clarify some of the difficult issues raised in Romans 9!

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