

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND MERCY
(SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2012)

Scripture Reading: 10 Words; Rom. 9:22-29

Introduction

Man is self-centered.

We cannot be the judge of what God does.

God's righteousness is not determined by man.

God's righteousness "consists most basically in God's unswerving commitment to preserve the honor of his name and display his glory. Thus if God ever abandoned this commitment and no longer sought in all things the magnifying of his own glory then there would be unrighteousness with God."¹

However, this does not lead to fatalism or lack of purpose. Rather, because God seeks what is most important we are assured that He will act for the glory of His name which brings about that which is best for us.

Know that God's sovereignty and the pursuit of His glory is also our greatest good.

We will look at Romans 9:22-29 in two parts, vv. 22-23 and vv. 24-29.

1. THE RICHES OF HIS GLORY, VV. 22-23

Rom. 9:22 *What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, **23** and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory*

Verse 19 – How can God find fault in men? Who can ever resist God's will?

Paul puts the one who questions in his place.

Paul asserts God's freedom.

We have continued answer to the question here.

¹ John Piper, *The Justification of God*, 119.

The structure of this section is a bit difficult. It begins with an **IF** statement but there is no completion with a **THEN**...

These verses are understandable. Essentially Paul is asking us to consider that there is no objection that we can make when we consider the full purpose of God's sovereignty and freedom.

There are three things in v. 22 and 23 that God desires to do:

- 1) Show his wrath
- 2) Make his power known
- 3) To make known the riches of His glory to vessels of mercy that he prepared before for glory.

To accomplish these first two things we read that God endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.

How does God's patience – His great longsuffering – show His wrath and make His power known?

Wrath in Scripture can both be a present reality as well as a terrifying end. Romans 1 speaks of God's present wrath revealed from heaven. Romans 2:5 speaks of the ultimate expression of God's wrath, the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

What we find here in Romans is very important also in light of other passages in Scripture which command us not to be filled with sinful worry and despair when the wicked seem to be the ones winning. God will bring full justice and judgment. What seems to be a delay from our perspective is certainly not from God's perspective. And yet what we do see is God's tremendous patience. That is hardly a sign that Satan is in control. God's present patience is designed to actually show His wrath – the fullness of His wrath which will come on the last day.

God's present patience also gives opportunity for His power to be made known.

Look again back to verse 17.

Rom. 9:17 For the Scripture says to the 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."

God's patience with Pharaoh and Egypt hardly meant that Pharaoh in the end was going to win. When it seemed that Pharaoh was winning the contest, God was actually bringing about a purpose which would even more show His wrath and power.

Need to consider the expression – vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.

What kind of verb is prepared? It is passive. Some want to try to understand this as meaning, vessels that prepared themselves for destruction, but this would not be the best reading of this text.

No, Paul is talking about vessels who have been created by God in such a way as to be vessels of wrath predestined for destruction.

Very strong language. I don't see any way of getting around what is made quite clear.

Rom. 9:13 As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

Rom. 9:18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

There is no need for apologizing for what Scripture says. We do seek to understand as best we can. We want to properly apply God's Word, of course, but we must not soften or dull the sharp point of God's Word.

All men enter this world deserving of God's wrath. Some will be sovereignly shown God's mercy. Others will deservedly receive God's wrath.

There are then vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.

We have to again keep in mind the context of this important and yes, even difficult, instruction. Paul is again explaining why God's purposes have not failed in light of so many in Israel not responding to the message of the gospel in Jesus Christ. This instruction is important.

As I asked before, should you worry about whether you are one of the elect? Should you be filled with the fear, maybe I am a vessel prepared for destruction? Is this the application that Paul makes here? No. You are not to try to determine the secret will of God rather you are to make sure your hope and trust are found fully in Jesus Christ. See the glory and beauty of Jesus Christ and know that no one who trusts in Him for salvation will be brought to shame.

WCF – Chapter 14: Of Saving Faith

14.3. This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong; may be often and many ways assailed, and weakened, but gets the victory: growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance, through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith.

Let's return to Paul's main argument here and the third great purpose found in verse 23. God shows His incredible patience with the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction in order to show His wrath and His power and greatest of all so that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory.

God's sovereign purpose in salvation is not given to make you sad and scared about the future or to make everyone uncertain about the end.

In Islam there is no assurance of salvation except perhaps for that which comes if you die in fighting in Holy War, otherwise you have no idea whether Allah will determine you fit for eternal bliss.

But what Paul states here is quite a contrast with the uncertainty of Islam. God is sovereign and the great end that God has determined is to make known the riches of His glory to those that He has sovereignly determined to show mercy.

God's sovereignty should never be understood to mean that God is somehow stingy with His blessing or that He can only be known at a great distance. Verse 23 shows just the opposite.

God delights in showing us His glory and is working all things for the blessing of eternal glory. We know in part the riches of God's glory. We have already been given the blessing of eternal life, but we also at this point only have the downpayment on the fullness of our salvation. This is not our best life now, but the preparation for blessings beyond comprehension.

Martin Luther in agreement with what is said here stated,

If we knew what we were saved from, we would die of fear. If we knew what we were saved for, we would die of joy!

Does Paul truly answer the question of why God finds fault if He has sovereignly determined the destiny of all men and women?

I believe He does answer the question, though not in the form that some might want or expect.

What is Paul's answer? Why does God find fault, because God is just.

Daniel Fuller has written:

But He is indeed righteous, not only in preparing vessels of wrath, but also in finding fault with such vessels and visiting wrath upon them. To prepare such vessels but then to fail to visit wrath upon them would be to act with complete disregard for His own glory. God acts consistently with His love for His glory only as He opposes all who disdain finding delight in His glory. If he did not act this way in the world He freely created, He would cease to be God. Hence the objection of verse 19 that God should not blame those whom He hardens is shown to be without substance.²

² Quoted by John Piper, 216.

Earlier in Romans, Paul also shows quite clearly man's responsibility. God's sovereignty in no way goes against the responsibility of men and women and children. Those who argue that man cannot be responsible if God has predestined all things are making an argument that goes against what Scripture teaches. As I mentioned before, most people in our nation might think God's sovereignty would go against man's responsibility, but I don't care what most people think. I want to know what God's Word teaches. God's Word is the standard not what seems to be logical according to fallen men and women.

Others try to teach that God's predestination would somehow mean that our love for God is not real. But this attempted argument misses by 1000 miles what Scripture teaches about God's mercy. When God shows mercy to a undeserved sinner, that mercy is what changes your heart so that you can respond now with love to God. Our love for God only makes sense not in terms of human freedom but in terms of God changing our hardened and rebellious hearts so that we might respond in love and thanksgiving.

2. GOD'S MERCY TO JEWS AND GENTILES, vv. 24-29.

Rom. 9:24 *even* us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? **25** As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved." **26** "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God."

Rom. 9:27 Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved.

28 For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth."

Rom. 9:29 And as Isaiah said before: "Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, And we would have been made like Gomorrah."

Verse 24 can be understood as the end of the discussion of verses 14-23 or the beginning of a new part which includes verses 25-29. I like to see verse 24 as an important transition verse.

Verse 24 is a reminder of what Paul said earlier in Romans.

Rom. 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

Paul in dealing with the failure of so many Jews to believe understands that in God's sovereign power, Jews will still be called. The rebellion on the part of so many, does not mean that God's promises have failed. Not all who are part of Israel are truly elected of God, but that also doesn't mean that there is no hope for the Jewish people.

Why have so many Jews not come to saving faith? From the eternal perspective we understand that they were not ordained to come to saving faith, rather they were vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. But as Paul will later show, there is a great reason for this. God is not being arbitrary or stingy, but in the wonder of His plan, the rebellion of Israel is part of God's plan to call many from the nations. God is calling both Jews and Gentiles and making them part of His one true people.

The discussion at the end of chapter 9 here brings us back to the main argument of Paul that will continue throughout chapters 10 and 11. We also have some key words in verses 25-29 that connect back to verses 6-9.

Verse 8 – children of God & Verse 26 – sons of God

Verses 7 and 8 – seed & Verse 29 – seed

Verses 7 and 12 – call & Verses 24 and 26 – call³

The quotations of verses 25-29 are very interesting in that they show again the relevance of the OT for understanding the NT. It is true that we understand that OT in light of the NT, but it also can be said that we understand the NT in light of the OT. God's Word is one!

Let us consider some of the other details found in Paul's quotations.

Paul makes it clear that he is quoting from Hosea and Isaiah.

Verse 25 – Hosea 2:23, though the last part of the verse is not a direct quote.

Verse 26 – Hosea 1:10 in our English versions

Verses 27 and 28 – Isaiah 10:22-23

Verse 29 – Isaiah 1:9

Hosea is one of the fascinating characters of the OT. Hosea is told in chapter 1 to marry a prostitute and to have children with her. Hosea married Gomer and had three children. God told Hosea what to name his children. The first was named Jezreel for God would avenge the

³ Moo, 610.

bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu and bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. The power of Israel would be broken in the Valley of Jezreel.

Hosea next had a daughter named Lo-Ruhamah. Lo in Hebrew means no. Ruhamah is a word for mercy. What a name for a little girl, No-Mercy.

Hosea's third child was a son and was to be named, Lo-Ammi. Am in Hebrew means people. The "i" ending means my. Lo as I just mentioned means no or not. Lo-Ammi, not my people.

Israel because of her rebellion became just like the nations, even to the point of God calling Israel – Lo-Ammi, For you are not My people, and I will not be your God. Israel was cursed with the reversal of God's covenant blessing.

Yet this is not the end of the book of Hosea. Paul slightly changes the language of Hosea 1:10 announcing that God in His sovereign power is calling both Jews and Gentiles and calling them "My people," when formerly they were known as Lo-Ammi.

Further then Paul adds, and her beloved who was not beloved.

Is this not the beauty of God's grace and mercy, where He takes literally and figuratively, harlots, drug abusers, murderers, cheaters, disgusting people and other perverts, and changes them through His matchless grace and calls them now, loved of God.

This is the freedom, sovereignty, and power of God displayed to miserable sinners, both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul doesn't quote the end of Hosea 2:23, but only because it is not the central part of his argument. Hosea 2:23 ends with the response that we bring. We respond to God's grace by declaring, **"You are my God!"**

The second quotation from Hosea 1:10 in verse 26 is somewhat similar emphasizing the work of God to both Gentiles and also Jews.

Notice the reference in the first part of verse 26 – **in the place where it was said to them.** To Gentiles scattered around the world, and to Jews scattered in the nations, it is the word of God that comes to them and announces the work of God's mercy and love. You once were not my people, but now you are called sons of the living God.

Both of these quotations from Hosea have a similar thrust. God in His sovereign power can create vessels of wrath reserved for destruction, but God may also in His perfect freedom bring His grace to those who had no hope and nothing in them that would cause God to choose to love them.

We also see an important interpretive principle in Paul's application of these two passages from Hosea, which when first given had application to the restoration of Israel and its return from exile. Paul sees that Israel's return from exile was only a foreshadowing of a much greater work – the calling of both Jews and Gentiles to come to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul next quotes from the book of Isaiah. If you consider the quotations that are found throughout Romans 9, you get a glimpse of the history of Israel retold, starting with Abraham and including Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, the children of Israel in slavery, and then the later history of Israel as recounted in the prophets.

We might wonder why Paul turns from Hosea to Isaiah, but there is a likely connection. In verse 26, Paul quotes part of Hosea 1:10. The first part of Hosea 1:10 which is not quoted in verse 26 speaks of the children of Israel as being as the sand of the sea. This phrase brings a verbal connection then with Isaiah 10:22-23.⁴

We obviously don't know how Paul wrote the book of Romans in terms of what OT Scripture he had before him. Some of the quotations of Paul are almost identical quotes to the Greek translation of the OT. I get the feeling that Paul likely had much of the OT memorized. He certainly was not doing what I end up doing, which is using Bible software to search the Bible for parallel passages. I think we can definitely say that Paul was able to make these connections by memory. And obviously the training Paul received, is not something we could ever hope to duplicate, but as an application, I think we can at least make the point of how important it is for Christians to be familiar with the OT. It is not that simply all of our problems would go away if we just knew the Bible better, but I think we can certainly say that part of the confusion today among Christians is that we have so neglected large portions of Scripture. For too many Christians, they would miss nothing if 80% or more of their Bibles were removed.

Look at how Paul in verse 27 introduces his first quotation from Isaiah.

Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel.

This chapter begins with Paul expressing his great sorrow and continual grief for his fellow Jews. Paul is simply following the previous examples of Jesus and also Isaiah.

Isaiah 10:22-23 are verses of both judgment and deliverance. Look carefully at verse 27. There is a great deal of theology from the OT and NT packed into verse 27. The language speaks of the covenant promises given to Abraham. His descendants would be like the sand of the sea. And yet the OT and the NT also make clear that not all in Israel are part of the true Israel. God in His sovereign power did not determine to bring eternal salvation to all in Israel. Verse

⁴ Moo, 614.

28 is a difficult verse to understand and there are some questions about translation, but what is clear from Isaiah is that God is speaking about His sure judgment which would come upon His people. And yet the hope of this passage is found in the word remnant. The remnant will be saved. God's word will not fail. This was Paul's hope even in the face of so much rejection by his own people. There was a remnant of Israel that would be saved.

The final quotation in verse 29 comes from Isaiah 1:9. Likely it is the important word seed which is found in the Greek translation that is the reason why Paul quotes from this passage in Isaiah.⁵

The only thing that kept Israel from becoming so wicked and finally scorched from the face of the earth like Sodom and Gomorrah was the sovereign work of God who left a very small remnant or as we read here, a seed.

It is not for us to judge how God determines to work but rather to recognize His sovereign mercy in history and in our own lives.

The hope that we have as a local church is not found within us. If our own future rested in the men and women and children gathered here for worship today, we would rightfully leave with little hope. Rather we rest in God's continued work. It is only through His mercy that we do not become like modern day Sodom's and Gomorrah's.

This final quotation as we will later observe helps prepare the way for the continued note of hope that is found in Romans 11.

Know that God's sovereignty and the pursuit of His glory is also our greatest good.

CONCLUSION:

Preparation for Communion

Prayer

Hymn: 95

Benediction – Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race

⁵ Moo, 616.

that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.