



Is This Your God? (Part 1)

Romans 9:1-18

1. The Problem (verses 1-6a) - Israel doesn't believe
2. The Solution (verses 6b-13) - Salvation depends on God's choice
3. The Objections (verses 14-24) - God isn't fair
4. Jews and Gentiles (verses 25-33) - Some are in and some are out

We have been expositing through the gospel of Matthew. In recent weeks, we have reached the end of Matthew 11 where some very important theological truths emerged. Within the span of 10 verses, Jesus pronounces woes on unrepentant cities (Matt. 11:20-25), praises God that He is the one who hides and reveals truth, according to His good pleasure (Matt. 11:25-27), and offers rest in Jesus to all who come to Him (Matt. 11:28-30). What is remarkable about these verses is that Jesus demonstrated His belief that people will repent only if God chooses to reveal Himself to them. God will hide the truth from some people, and God will reveal the truth to others. It is His pleasure to do as he wishes. In these same verses, Jesus also demonstrated His belief that people are entirely responsible for their sins if they fail to repent and believe in Jesus. For those who fail to believe, they may expect eternal judgment to come. We see two truths side by side: (1) God is sovereign in the salvation of men, and (2) Man is responsible for not believing.

Last week I sought to give you a Biblical perspective on how the sovereignty of God in salvation relates to the responsibility of man to believe. My premise was that they are both true: (1) God is entirely sovereign, and (2) Man is entirely responsible. It is not left for us to debate how all of this works out. It is left for us to believe them both. It is left for us to embrace them both. It is left for us to cherish them both. Now, I know that whenever these things are discussed, there are many who simply cannot accept them and cannot believe them to be true. Many who are Christians, do not believe them. Perhaps there are some of you who are having difficulty in accepting these things. If you fall into this category, let me simply tell you that I will be patient with you with these things. I trust that you will find this church to be patient with you in these things as well.

The difficulty of accepting these doctrines often does not relate to the portion regarding the responsibility of man. We know that we are responsible. Each of us have a conscience that teaches us that we are responsible for our actions (Romans 2:14). This is not a problem. The difficulty normally comes with the belief in the absolute sovereignty of God. Most Christians, when they came to faith, experienced the process of realizing a greater and greater understanding of their sin before God. They experienced in their own soul how they needed a Savior. They have experienced an increasing knowledge of Jesus, which has led them to make a choice to believe in Jesus. These experiences often lead them to conclude that they have decided their own destiny in choosing Jesus, rather than God deciding their destiny, which would be the case if God is sovereign. When they are finally confronted with the biblical teaching that God chose them from the foundation of the world to receive mercy, they have a difficult time believing it.

Now, hear me carefully, please. These experiences are not wrong. Those who become Christians have all gone through this process of coming to understand more and more of their spiritual state apart from God, and have willingly chosen to follow Christ. Yet, these experiences tell only part of the story. They simply understand the story from a human perspective, without the divine perspective. Because of the focus upon the human choice, God has been understood to be passively waiting for them to make a decision to follow Christ. Therefore, people have difficulty in believing that God was sovereign over their own salvation. But, were the whole truth known, you would see that God is the one who initiates the salvation process. The Bible says that before the foundation of the world, God chose and predestined those who would believe in Jesus and become children of God (Eph. 1:4-5). The Bible says that people are blind to the truth until God shines in the heart "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). The Bible says that people come to Christ, only because God the Father draws them to Christ (John 6:44). In the case of Paul, he was at the height of his own rebellion against God -- off to murder Christians -- when God struck him blind and saved him (Acts 9). In the case of Lydia, "the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14). In the case of those at Psidian Antioch, "as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). Certainly Paul chose to believe in the Lord Jesus. Certainly Lydia chose to believe in Christ for her salvation. Certainly those at Psidian Antioch chose to believe that their freedom was found in Christ. But, when the lens of the camera pans back, you see that it was all at the initiation of God that these people believed. Charles Spurgeon illustrates this very well in his autobiography. He says, ...

When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me. I do not think the young convert is at first aware of this. ... One week-night, ... the thought struck me, "*How did you come to be a Christian?*" I sought the Lord. "*But how did you come to seek the Lord?*" The truth flashed across my mind in a moment--I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to *make me* seek Him. I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, *How came I to pray?* I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. *How came I to read the Scriptures?* I did read them, but what led me to do so? Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the Author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day, and I desire to make this my constant confession, "I ascribe my change wholly to God" (emphasis his, Autobiography, vol. 1, pp. 164-165).

This is the question that I want to ask you this morning, "What is your God like?" When you think of God's role in salvation, what type of role do you think that He has? Does your God have a passive role, waiting for a sinner to finally see the truth and come to embrace Jesus Christ

in faith? Does your God knock at the door of a sinner's heart, pestering him until the sinner finally says, "Jesus, I want you to come into my life?", before He enters? Does your God initiate the salvation process, actively granting faith and repentance, and drawing the sinner to Himself?

This morning I would like for us to examine Romans 9 in light of God's role in the salvation process. When we are finished, I will ask you, "Is This Your God?" Open with me in your Bibles to Romans 9. Romans 9 is a difficult chapter for some people. In fact, some people and even churches that read through Romans deliberately skip over this passage. We are going to look at the message of Romans 9 this morning, and I hope that we will embrace it and own it. If you have difficulty accepting or understanding this passage, pray to ask God to show you why this passage is here. My first point is simply,

1. The Problem (verses 1-6a) - Israel doesn't believe

The problem that Paul begins to deal with is the unbelief of Israel. As we begin this chapter, we are immediately confronted with Paul's heart for the Jewish people who have rejected their Messiah and are lost in their sins. Paul writes,

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, [separated] from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons 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, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 9:1-5)

This is the thought that drives the next three chapters in Romans. Paul is acutely aware that God's covenant people are lost in their sins and on the way to hell. Look over in chapter 10. Beginning with verse 1, Paul writes,

Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them [i.e. Israel, see verse 31] is for [their] salvation. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

The people of Israel sought to establish their own righteousness by a very zealous pursuit of the law (verse 2). If ever there was a religious people who walked on earth, these were the people. If ever there was a religious people who were exposed to the truth of God's word, it was these people. They weren't zealously pursuing some fabricated God in their own minds. They were pursuing the true God. They were pursuing the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Neither were they zealously pursuing some man-made law. They had the very "oracles of God" (Romans 3:1). They had the law that was given to Moses (Exodus 20). Though they were zealous for the true God, and though they had the law given to them by the true God, they were ignorant of the righteousness that God requires. Back in Romans 9:31-33, we have an explanation of what happened:

Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at 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 lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believe in Him will not be disappointed." (Romans 9:31-33).

Here you have highly religious people, who are lost. Here you have God's covenant people, who are lost. This is a **heart-wrenching** problem for Paul. The Jewish people are his relatives (9:3 - my kinsman). He loves the Jewish people and would willingly be accursed and condemned to hell for eternity if it meant that his fellow Israelites would come to faith in Jesus, their Messiah. This is also a huge **theological** problem for Paul. Think about the facts surrounding Israel. God promised great blessing upon Abraham's descendants, who became the Jewish people. God delivered the Hebrew people from Egypt precisely because "God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Ex. 2:24). God gave a wonderful law to His people. Moses once asked them rhetorically, "What great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?" (Deut. 4:8). God gave the land of Palestine to them as He had promised their fathers that he would. "Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass" (Josh. 21:45). When the nation rebelled and was in difficulty, God continually raised up judges to deliver them, because God was "moved to pity by their groaning" (Judges 2:18). Even when the nation was taken into exile to Babylon, God was faithful to remember them and to bring them back into the land. He was faithful to provide resources for the building up of Jerusalem and the temple.

The people of Israel were God's people. Yet, they failed to believe in the culmination of all of God's promises: Jesus Christ. They had rejected Him. They had crucified Him. In Paul's day, many were still unrepentant. As Romans 9:33 says, they have stumbled over the stumbling block which is Christ. They have missed the message of Messiah. Here's the theological problem: Has God failed in His efforts to redeem Israel, His chosen people, from their sins? The storybook ending of the nation of Israel would have Israel receiving their Messiah, experiencing the forgiveness of sins, being reconciled to God, and "enjoying Him forever" (as the Westminster Catechism says). But, that's not happening.

It is a huge theological problem for Paul to see the covenant people of God as strangers to His grace in Christ Jesus. God has poured out tremendous blessings to His people, and yet, they have rejected His word. His covenant people have not come to faith in their Messiah. It appears to be the case that God's word of promise to His people has failed. But look back in chapter 9, verse 6. Paul says, **"But it is not as though the word of God has failed."** If you like to write in your Bible, (like I do), this is a great verse to highlight or underline. I have a big box around this verse in my Bible with an asterisk to the left of this verse. This verse is the key to understanding why Paul wrote Romans 9-11. At first glance, it appears as if God has done everything that He could do to save His covenant people, but that He failed in His task because the Jews rejected Him and are still lost in their sins apart from their Messiah!

Paul describes the tremendous blessings upon his kinsmen in verses 4 and 5. Paul identifies them as "Israelites," which traces their physical lineage back to Jacob. Paul gives a description of 7 things they possess:

- 1) To them belongs "the adoption as sons." Everything that we know in the New Testament of being adopted as sons, really belongs to them. They are the people of God.
- 2) To them belongs "the glory." This probably refers to the glory that the people of God experience for all eternity. Romans 8:18, 19 speaks about the "glory that is to be revealed" which takes place at "the revealing of the sons of God." Romans 8:30, speaks about those whom God saved, will be "glorified." These blessings belong to the Israelites.
- 3) To them belongs "the covenants." These are official contracts that God has made with His people. This refers to the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the New Covenant. When you read these covenants, you realize that they were given to the people of Israel.
- 4) To them belongs "the giving of the Law." God has revealed His righteous standards for living to one nation: the nation of Israel. The first five books of our Bible were written for Israel.
- 5) To them belongs, "the temple service." No other nation had a temple like the Jewish people did. The temple was where the sacrifices took place. The temple was where God chose to dwell and be with His people.
- 6) To them belongs, "the promises." God made his promises to Israel.
- 7) From them came "the Messiah." Jesus came from the Jewish people. He was one of them. He was part of them. He belonged to them.

The people of Israel rejected their Savior, despite these tremendous blessings, benefits, privileges. Now, it may appear that God is powerlessly pleading with His covenant people to come back to Him, but is unable to convince them to come to saving faith. Some people have a tendency to picture God like that. They picture God pleading, begging, asking, and needing help; that He desperately wants men and women to repent but is powerless in effecting their repentance. Fortunately, that is not how it is. God has not lost control. Rather, God is on the throne, and is in control, and things are proceeding according to His plan. To use Paul's phraseology, "It is not as though the word of God has failed" (verse 6). **Romans 9 was written to demonstrate that God's word has not failed in the salvation of the people of God.**

An implication of Paul's problem at hand is the trustworthiness of everything that Paul has said about us in Romans 8. If God's word in the Old Testament failed to save Israel, what sort of promise do we have that the great words of Romans 8 are true? How do we know that there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus?" (Romans 8:1). How do we know that God will adopt us as His children (Romans 8:16)? How do we know that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28)? How do we know that "whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Romans 8:29-30)? How do we know that "God is for us" (Romans 8:31)? How do we know that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39)? If God's covenant people are lost in their sins, then what sort of promise do we have?

2. The Solution (verses 6b-13) - Salvation depends on God's choice

Paul writes,

But [it is] not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are [descended] from Israel; neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. For this is a word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON." (Romans 9:6-9)

In these verses, Paul is making the point that you can't claim that you are a child of God simply because you can trace your ancestry back to Abraham. The Jewish leaders prided themselves saying, "We are Abraham's offspring" (John 8:33). The Jewish people certainly followed suit. But Paul points out that physical lineage doesn't imply that you are a child of God. Abraham had two sons: Isaac and Ishmael. But, God said that "through Isaac your descendants will be named." Paul makes this point three times by saying the same thing in three different ways: Verse 6, "they are not all Israel who are [descended] from Israel;" Verse 7, "neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants." Verse 8, "it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants." Three times he says the same thing. It isn't when you are a child of the flesh that you are a child of God. It is when you are a child of promise that you are a child of God. God chose that Abraham would be named (verse 7) through Isaac. God chose that the blessing would come through Isaac. So, it isn't the physical lineage. Rather, it is God's choice.

Paul continues on with his argument in verse 10,

And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived [twins] by one man, our father Isaac; for though [the twins] were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to [His] choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."

Paul labors to demonstrate exactly how similar Jacob and Esau were. Someone may well respond to the example of Isaac and Ishmael and point out that Isaac had a Jewish mother (Sarah), but Ishmael didn't (Hagar). They may say that there is some external circumstances involved in God's choice. However, this cannot be used of the twins, Jacob and Esau. They were in the same womb, conceived of the same man (verse 10). Before they were born, they had done nothing to merit their choice on God's part (verse 11). It was in this circumstance that God said to Rebekah, "The older will serve the younger" (verse 12). Salvation depends upon God's choice, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated"

(verse 13).

I want you to look closely at verse 11 and see why it is that Jacob was chosen and Esau was not. It wasn't because Jacob's mother was better than Esau's mother. We know that because we know Rebekah was the mother of them both. It wasn't because Jacob's father was better than Esau's father. We know that because we know Isaac was the father of both of them. It wasn't because Jacob was better than Esau. We know that because we know neither of them had done anything good or bad. It wasn't because of Jacob's works or because of Jacob's faith. Rather, it was "in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand" (verse 11). The NIV is a bit more literal at this point. It says, "in order that God's purpose in election might stand." God intentionally took every bit of human cause or merit out of the way and chose Jacob, rather than Esau, simply that "God's purpose in election might stand." Paul said that it is "not because of works, but because of Him who calls" (verse 11).

Let this sink in... Those who argue that God loved Jacob and hated Esau because He looked down the corridors of time and saw that Jacob would choose God and Esau would choose wickedness, have missed the point of this passage. The point isn't because of what God saw in them. The point is that God's purpose was going to stand, before any human decision, before any human choice, before faith was exercised, before anything good or bad was done. Theologians call this "Unconditional Election" and it is clearly taught in these verses. God's choice isn't conditional upon anything in us. It is not foreseen works, or foreseen faith -- not by works, not by faith. It is not because we are good, likable people. God doesn't choose us because we believe in Him. God doesn't choose us because of our works. Rather, we believe in Him, because He chooses us. We work, because He has chosen us and "prepared [works] beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

God chose to love Jacob. God chose to hate Esau. That is the point of the passage. God wasn't passively waiting for Jacob to choose God. God wasn't passively waiting for Esau to not choose God.

I did a little experiment this week in our home. We were finishing dinner one night and the question came up that always comes up. "Dad, can I have dessert?" I had been meditating on this text and so I wanted to try something. When one of my children asked, I said, "You can have dessert." When another asked, I said, "You can't have dessert." As you might expect, this caused some problems in the Brandon household. As Carissa was enjoying her dessert, SR kept asking me, "Dad, why can't I have any dessert?" I said, "Because I said so." He said, "Why does Carissa get dessert?" I said, "Because I said so." He pointed out how he had finished all of his dinner, and thought that he might win his case and persuade me otherwise. But I still told him the same thing: "Carissa gets dessert, but you don't." Eventually, the words that I expected to hear came out of my son's mouth. He said, "Dad, that's not fair!"

This was precisely the objection that Paul expected to hear when he wrote these things. Paul had spoken with enough people in the synagogues to know that when you begin to speak of these things, people instantly begin to object, "Well, then, God's not fair!" Have you experienced this? I have spoken with many people about this topic, and have met with this objection time and time and time again. People then refuse to believe that God unconditionally elects people to salvation from the foundation of the world, according to His good pleasure, irrespective of their faith or works or anything. People are ingrained with this notion that God is fair--which is good. God is good and fair. We call this His "justice." God is just in every way. The Bible declares this. Daniel 4:37, "All His works are true and His ways just." However, people reason that because God is just (i.e. fair), He cannot choose people apart from anything they do or believe, because that is unfair. In the end, they end up denying Paul's words here in Romans 9.

In the spirit of my sermon last week, I would exhort you to believe in both the justice of God and the sovereignty of God to unconditionally elect those whom He will draw to Himself. Accept them both. If you believe that God cannot be just if He unconditionally decides who will receive His love and who will receive His wrath, then I would encourage you to find your scissors and start cutting verses out of the Bible that you don't like. But realize this, if you do so, you will be setting your own reason above God's word. You will be saying, "I can reason better than God." Furthermore, your God is not the God of Romans 9. My sermon this morning is entitled, "Is This Your God?" For many, the answer is "no." Rock Valley Bible Church, I plead with you that if God says it, let's believe it despite its theological and philosophical difficulties.

Let's now turn our focus to,

3. The Objections (verses 14-24) - God isn't fair

Paul writes in verse 14 using the negative approach,

What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! (Romans 9:14)

You could equally well use the positive approach and say, "What shall we say then? God is fair, isn't He? Of course He is!" You ought to be encouraged that Paul is addressing the same trouble that we naturally think of when we think of these doctrines. This shows us that we are thinking along the same line as Paul is reasoning. What is the answer? Paul begins to give the answer in verse 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."
(Romans 9:15)

By this answer, God is saying, "I will be God! I will determine those who will be recipients of my mercy." God is free to exercise His mercy upon whomever He wishes. If God wasn't merciful to any, we would all be in hell and God would be perfectly fair and just. Back in Romans 3, we read,

There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one. (Romans 3:10-12)

Nobody could ever claim that they deserve heaven, except Jesus. We all deserve hell. Yet, there are those who walk the earth, whom God has chosen (before they were born, and had not done anything good or bad), to whom He would demonstrate His mercy. He begins to reveal his sin to that one. He begins to show how he is deserving of wrath. He begins to show that he deserves to burn in hell forever, because he had rebelled against his creator. But, God opens his blind eyes to see that he can escape the punishment that is due to him, through faith in Christ. God grants him repentance and faith. The sinner cries out for mercy like the publican saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). By faith, he embraces Jesus, and God, under no constraint or pressure to be merciful, fully forgives and pardons us from our sin, on account of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

None of us deserve to be forgiven. But, God, in His freedom, will choose to be merciful to Him who has faith in Jesus. If you are ever going to claim that God is unfair, consider the following issues: You cannot make a case that He is unfair in sending people to hell. You might be able to make a case that He is unfair in allowing anybody to be in heaven.

If ever there was a doubt salvation was entirely in the hands of God, verse 16 ought to solve the doubt. Paul says,

So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. (Romans 10:16)

I cannot reconcile this verse 16 with those who want to say that your salvation ultimately depends upon your own choice to follow Jesus. Certainly, there is a conditional element to salvation. This is clear in Romans 10:9-10, ...

...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)

The condition is confessing with your mouth and believing in your heart. That is the meaning of the word, "if." Election is unconditional. Salvation is conditional. Since it "does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy," then we know that God will bring the elect to faith, and that is the condition for salvation.

Paul continues in verse 17 by describing His role in the life of Pharaoh,

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.' (Romans 9:17)

God is free in dispensing His mercy. God is free in hardening those whom he hardens. In the case of Pharaoh, God hardened his heart for His own glory. It was because of Pharaoh's refusal to let the Hebrew people go that God was able to display His power in the plagues. and that God's name and fame was proclaimed in the earth. In other words, there is a greater purpose in this life than Pharaoh! The greater purpose is for God and His glory, which He seeks (Rom. 11:36). God will harden hearts and soften hearts to arrive at this end.

The summary statement of the passage comes in verse 18:

So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. (Romans 9:18)

This is simply a repetition of verse 16 with the addition of God hardening whom He desires. The mercy is the same, but the hardening has been added. The prime example of this is Pharaoh, but there are others in the Bible whom God hardened. God hardened the nations in the land of Palestine, so that Joshua could come and defeat them (Josh. 11:20). God hardened those who heard Isaiah preach (John 12:40). God hid the truth from many in Jesus' day (Matt. 11:25-27).

Romans 11 gives several other examples of God hardening hearts. Beginning with verse 8, Paul quotes Moses (Deut. 29:4), Isaiah (29:10) and David (Ps. 69:22-23).

... just as it was written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not and ears to hear not, down to this very day." And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, and a stumbling block and a retribution to them. Let their eyes be darkened to see not, and bend their backs forever." (Romans 11:8-10)

In Romans 11:25, we are told that God has hardened Israel for a time. Paul writes,

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in. (Romans 11:25)

God hardened Israel. This is why Israel did not believe. This time has lasted for some 2,000 years now, as the Jewish people are dead in their sins. But, there will be a time when Israel will be saved. Look at verse 26,

...and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion. He will remove ungodliness from

Jacob. And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins. (Rom. 11:26-27)

This will take place when "the fulness of the Gentiles" (verse 25) is reached. This means that God has His elect among the Gentiles, whom He is drawing to Himself. We are a part of that number. When all the Gentile elect come to faith in Christ, then, their fulness has been reached. When their fulness is reached, it will be revival in Israel. And when this happens, it will be a glorious time. Romans 11:12 says,

Now if their [Israel's] transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! (Romans 11:12)

There is a future for Israel. "God has not rejected His people!" (Romans 11:1). **"It is not as though the word of God has failed" (Romans 9:6).** Israel is being hardened now. But there will come a time when God will lift the veil that blinds them and they will come in flocks to see their Messiah! Verse 18 says,

So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. (Romans 9:18)

This ought to astonish you and thrill your heart! These verses are all saturated with the understanding of God's sovereignty in salvation. God is currently hardening one nation, for the nations of the world. There will be a day, when all of the elect will come to faith. Then, God will lift the hardening from Israel, and they too will be saved. This ought to lead you to true humility. When you come to see how gracious God has been to you, not only in saving you but in initiating your salvation and in carrying out the entire process, then it will cause you to continuously drop to your knees in humility and thankfulness and love to God.

This ought to lead you to be a worshiper of Him. It is by grace that God saves us that we might not boast in ourselves, but in the Lord. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). "By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord'" (1 Cor. 1:30-31; see also verse 29).

This morning, you have seen His grace. The more we understand of His grace, the more we give glory and honor to Him.

As we close this morning, let me ask you, **"Is This Your God?"** Is your God sovereign over the salvation of souls? Or, does He stand by and hope that people will be convinced of the truth of the word of God? Perhaps you can't understand how everything all works together. Join the club. How can God elect unconditionally, and yet find fault with those who don't repent? We'll look at this question next time, beginning with verse 19.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on July 20, 2003 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.
