

God's Sovereign Election

Please turn with me to Romans 9:19-33, the second part of Romans chapter 9, we will read the verses. This is from Darby Translation:

“Thou wilt say to me then, Why does he yet find fault? (speaking about God) for who resists his purpose? Aye, but thou, O man, who art *thou* that answerest again to God? Shall the thing formed say to him that has formed it, ‘Why hast thou made me thus?’ Or has not the potter authority over the clay, out of the same lump to make one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour? And if God, minded to shew his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering vessels of wrath fitted for destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared for glory, us, whom he has also called, not only from amongst the Jews, but also from amongst the nations? As he says also in Hosea, I will call not-my-people My people; and the-not-beloved Beloved. And it shall be, in the place where it was said to them, Ye are not my people, there shall they be called Sons of the living God. But Esaias cries concerning Israel, Should the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant shall be saved: for he is bringing the matter to an end, and cutting it short in righteousness; because a cutting short of the matter will the Lord accomplish upon the earth. And according as Esaias said before, Unless the Lord of hosts had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom, and made like even as Gomorrah.

What then shall we say? That they of the nations, who did not follow after righteousness, have attained righteousness, but the righteousness that is on the principle of faith. But Israel, pursuing after a law of righteousness, has not attained to that law. Wherefore? Because it was not on the principle of faith, but as of works. They have stumbled at the stumblingstone, according as it is written, Behold, I place in Zion a stone of stumbling and rock of offence: and he that believes on him shall not be ashamed.”

Let us have another word of prayer.

Father, we are so grateful that You have left to us this Bible, heavenly words, life-giving words. We pray You will breathe upon those today that we would hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches, that we would receive those words that are spirit and life. Unless You do something this morning to speak to us, it will all be in vain. But when You speak to us, we are quickened in life. And so we yield all this time, both the hearing and the speaking, to our sovereign Lord, that You will move, and You will speak. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction

Well, we are going back to Romans. We had a two-month break, I think, partly due to people's schedules. And now we are back, and we are going to finish the second half of chapter nine today. You might remember the first message we shared in Romans 9:1-

18: God's purpose according to election. That is very important. If we do not understand election, we cannot enter into the kingdom of God that we heard about this morning. I mentioned that Romans is in three parts. Now we are in that second part in Romans 9-11. The thing we will be dealing with today is God's sovereign election.

Outline of Romans

Now these three parts might just help you as a broad outline. Chapters one through eight: Just remember the word “works.” It is the mighty works of God. Works of justification, where we have a righteousness not our own, where we are seen before God as righteous, which is impossible. But the mighty works of God made it possible. Those mighty works of God also deal with sanctification, which means making holy. He has committed the Holy Spirit, in this lifetime, as we are waiting to be with Him forever in the kingdom, to transform and conform us to the image of the Lord Jesus. That is Romans 8. And that is what sanctification is. When we see Him, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And then glorification. You know, Romans 8 talks about glory a lot. One day glorification, the redemption of the body, we will be fully glorified. How wonderful! You have to agree, these are mighty works.

Then the part we are in now deals with the ways of God. How unsearchable His judgments, it says in Romans 11:33, how untraceable His ways. Brothers and sisters, if we do not understand the ways of God, we will never understand who He is, what He does, and how He works.

And then finally, when we get to it, Romans chapters 12 to 16 deal with the will of God. Have you ever wondered about that phrase of those who give themselves as living sacrifices in chapter 12, that it says: “Ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” The will of God is that Christ would be literally expressed in a people, the testimony of Jesus expressed. The last four chapters deal with a practical expression of the Lord in a people. That is the will of God. Remember those three words. They may not speak to you the way they speak to me, but works, ways, and will.

Outline of Today's Word Ministry

Today we are going to look at God's Sovereign Election. There are three things we would like to consider:

1. God's Sovereign Ways (verses 19 to 21).
2. Vessels of Wrath or Vessels of Mercy. That can sound rather foreboding. We need to know what this means. (verses 22 to 29).
3. And then finally, something so important in this section, two paths: The Law of Righteousness versus The Righteousness of Faith (verses 30 to 33).

God's Sovereign Ways

Let us begin with God's sovereign election, Romans 9 verses 19-21. This matter of God's sovereign ways is so important that unless we understand it, we will never be that

testimony of Jesus that He has called us to be. And the will of God will never be fulfilled. Everything in the Bible, from Genesis to the end of Revelation, depends on us understanding that God is sovereign. So often that is the problem. We are in the foreground, He is in the background. He is not on the throne, even in the lives of believers in the church. Unless we get the fact that God is sovereign, we will never be made into that testimony of Jesus that He is looking for. By this we know who He is. By this we know what He does. By this we know why He does it. That is how important sovereignty is. I think this is the first thing we need to know. Everything starts with it. It is a secret that unlocks all of His ways. The context is in sovereign election.

Man Questioning and Objecting to the Sovereignty of God

First of all, we need to understand it, so may the Lord help us. This talks about His sovereign ways. These verses 19 to 21 are connected to the previous verse that talked about Pharaoh.

What Paul said in the end of verse 18 is, “to whom he will he shews mercy, and whom he will he hardens.” Now there was an immediate reaction to that. It is recorded in these three verses. It is man questioning the sovereignty of God. If you look at this, there are five questions: two from man and three that are God's answers. It explains to us His sovereignty and His authority. As believers there is nothing more important we must know than His sovereignty and His authority. As the church of God there is nothing more important we need to know than God is sovereign, and He is the only authority. That is what these five questions have to do with.

First of all, they are man's objections. You read in verse 19, “Thou wilt say to me then, ‘Why does he yet find fault? for who resists his purpose?’” That was the reaction of man. They are questioning God. Now, can you imagine us as human beings questioning the Almighty God and testing His sovereignty and authority? But that is exactly what Paul is dealing with here. You know, I have told you before, the whole context of the book of Romans has to do with the court. Not the human court, the divine court. And this God, this sovereign God, sits upon the throne, and He is judging righteously unrighteous man. That is what this is all about. And here the question raised by the apostle is, “Why does He find fault?” You know what that is like? That is putting God on trial. Can you imagine us putting God on trial? Can you imagine us saying to God, “Who do you think you are?” But sometimes by our lives, by our words, by our actions, we do exactly what these ones did. This is a terrible beginning of all rebellion, and original sin comes from this, “Who does He think He is?” That is what they are saying; how serious this charge was.

Then they say, “for who resists His purpose?” It is what we might call a snarky comment in today's vernacular. “Who does He think He is?” Think about that brothers and sisters. Can there be any greater sin than questioning God, His sovereignty, and His authority? How can unrighteous man put the God of glory on trial? How could it be? I think this is very important and we need to understand. They dare, with their feeble and failing questions, to question the very sovereignty, righteousness, and authority of God

who made them. Now, brothers and sisters, you know what happens when you were saved. You know what happened. You used to be on the throne. This is the simplest definition I can give you of true salvation. You used to be on the throne. You were the one that was on the throne of your heart: self, I, me. You remember those repeated words in Romans 7? You were on the throne. But one day you met the sovereign. And when you met the sovereign, you bowed the knee to the sovereign, and you accepted Him as Lord and Christ. You were dethroned on that day, and He was enthroned. That is what salvation means.

People of God Also Questions the Sovereignty of God

It is strange that even many of us saved ones say, "How can He do this? Who is He?" This is the secret that is in the beginning of these verses. I will tell you a little story, because sometimes illustrations help more than reading and trying to expound verses. We have seven grandchildren. You know that. All grandparents talk about their grandchildren, forgive me for being one of those. The youngest of which has a very spiritual name: Levi. Now Levi, I think he was five years old. And Linda will correct me, I know, if I am wrong, but Levi questioned sovereignty one day in our household. I do not know what Linda did to provoke him. I think I was away at work, I am not sure, but I heard the whole story, and it has become a family favorite story. Levi did not want to do something, Ms. Linda said. So, he said in his deepest ghetto voice, "You're not the boss of me." And I am so thankful that Linda did not strike him first of all, maybe she should have. Maybe it would have helped, a little corporal punishment, and do not tell the parents. But she said to him, "When you are in Gigi's house [that is her, Gigi] I *am* the boss of you."

Do you understand? We are in His house. He is our boss. He is sovereign. He is the authority. He is over our lives. We have bowed the knee to Him. And the way we are transformed into His image is to respect this sovereignty and authority and allow Him to do His work. You see this horrific sin is the spirit of rebellion. It is the very spirit of rebellion. You remember what it says in I Samuel, that the spirit of rebellion is like witchcraft. It is that serious. But you remember when Satan rebelled, what was he doing? He was questioning the authority of God. He said, "I will be like God." I think you all know those passages. We will not read them. They are in Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekiel 28:14-19. Satan desired to be like God and to have God's power. Can you imagine a created being, even though he may have been the covering cherub? And even though it says, "son of the morning," can you imagine saying, "I will ascend to the throne, I will go to the heavens, I will do this" five times? It says, "I, I, I." And then he ends by saying, "I will be like God." Brothers and sisters, this is the sin of rebellion. You want to understand original sin? I often hear authors and writers say, "explain original sin." But this is original sin.

You remember even this one, Satan, appeared in the creation scene we read in Genesis; and even provokes Adam and Eve to question God's authority and power and sovereignty. He is the most subtle of all the beasts it says when you read that story in Genesis. And he said: "Did God say?" "Did God say?" All these questions are at the

heart of original sin. They are the introduction to original sin. And then he proves it by saying, "He knows that when you eat of this tree, you will be like God." You remember, that is diabolical deception, diabolical. That is the beginning of original sin. That is what Satan did. "I will be like the Most High." That is what mankind thought, "I will be as God." Brothers and sisters, how we need to understand the sovereignty and authority of God.

The Sovereignty and Authority of God

Now let me read to you a definition. I think this is a good definition. You may not like it, but it at least helps me to understand. What does it mean, Sovereign God? Why is this such an important part of His ways? What does it really mean? I read this and I thought it was quite good. "God has ultimate authority and control over all things." That is pretty comprehensive, I think you would agree, right? But that was not the end of it, "Including the universe, creation, and human history. He has authority over all these things, and nothing can limit or restrict His power or purpose." What a comprehensive definition of the sovereignty of God. Well, I think we see that this diabolical questioning is the origin of sin and rebellion. It was the cause of the fall of Satan, who was cast down to the earth, and cast out of heaven. And it was the fall of mankind that has been the ruin of mankind until the Son of Man came and saved us from our rebellious spirit. This is God's sovereign ways. I think it is quite precious.

Another thing you will notice in these first three verses we read, 19 to 21, are man's very clear objections. We are always objecting. You know, it is not just our grandson Levi that is objecting. Think how often we object: "Why are you doing this, God? Why have you allowed this? Why have you brought me through this? What are you doing? Who are you?" That is what man does. Here they are raising objections. "Why does He find fault? for who resists His purpose?" I want to go back to the scene of the divine courtroom. You may know this already. We have at least one lawyer in the room that can correct me if I am wrong. But the prosecution and the defense attorneys have a right to object in court. If you have ever watched Perry Mason or any other trial or remember anything about trial, you remember somebody says, "I object." The lawyer stands up. He did not like what was said, he did not like the evidence from the other so-called lawyer, who he thought did not know what he was talking about. And he wanted it stricken from the evidence. So, he said, "I object." You have that right as a lawyer, do you not, brother? To object to anything. If I am wrong, tell me, because I do not want to be wrong.

God Is the Sovereign Judge

But then there is a sovereign on the bench. He is called the judge for a reason, and he has absolute and sovereign control of his courtroom, nobody else. And all he has to say is "overruled." And that is the end of it. What that objection was stated was eliminated from the evidence and the trial, and has no place because the sovereign alone could overrule man's questions. You get it? I think this is very clear to me. And of course the judge has another way to rule, he can say "sustained." I know you have heard that before, and you might wonder, "What in the world does it mean, sustained?" And that means he agrees. He agrees with the objection, and he will let whatever is brought

out of the objection stand as evidence in the trial. But never forget this one thing, and you understand God's ways. There is a judge that rules over that court, and whatever he says, without explaining it, is what goes.

Now, if you want to test me on this theory, the next time you go to court, ask the judge who does he think he is? And the dear brothers and sisters will pray for you and try to get you taken out of the jail he sends you to for contempt. But I hope you get the point. This is man's objection and God's rule. There is only one sovereign in the divine court, and He rules over everything. You know, God does not ever have to explain Himself. Neither does the judge on the bench. You cannot say, "Well, judge, let us have a sidebar." I do not know if that brother ever does it, but you see how you walk up to the bench and you try to say, "Can we have a little discussion, Judge?" And he says, "No, sit down please." But brothers and sisters, here God explains Himself. Is that not wonderful?

God, the Sovereign Judge, Full of Mercy

We think of our God as some unapproachable sovereign. Sometimes we think of God as a despot who rules over mankind in the earth, maybe sometimes in a cruel and harsh way. He never has to give an explanation. But the last three questions are His answers to man's objections. If you read 20 and 21, it says, "Aye, but thou, O man, who art thou that answerest again to God? Shall the thing formed say to him that has formed it, 'Why hast thou made me thus?' Or has not the potter authority over the clay, out of the same lump to make one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour?"

Did you notice that? That was the whole explanation. He did not have to give it. But through the Apostle Paul, we understand His ways. We understand that we are clay; He is the potter. Do you get the big difference? Sometimes we reverse the roles. We think we are potter, but we are never the potter. We are always the clay. This comes from a wonderful part of Scripture that is in Jeremiah 18:1-12. And God instructed Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, to go down to the potter's house, and there you will hear my words. That is what he did. And then when he went, he saw this potter, and this potter had a work upon the wheels. And he had his hand on the outside of this wet clay, and he had his hand on the inside of this wet clay. And he was forming a vessel that would be meet for the Master's use. In other words, useful to the Master. Now, brothers and sisters, I do not want to offend anybody here that has a high opinion of yourself or has high self-esteem, but you are just clay. Do you understand? He is the potter, and you are the work on the wheel. And He is forming you, and He is conforming you. This was about Israel. He said, "This is the word of the Lord to Israel." But it is not just about Israel. It is about us. We are always the clay, only the clay, and we are always the work upon the wheel.

Now, when you read that story, you discover something else happened. This is not uncommon by the way, it says the clay marred in his hands. In other words, the vessel just folded, collapsed, and then there is something beautiful that talks about how merciful our God is. And he made it again as it pleased him. He did not have to do that.

These are His ways. He did not have to do that. He could have taken that clay and thrown it away, up against the wall, and said, "That clay is impossible." But He did not do that. He made it again as it suited Him because He is a sovereign God who is full of mercy.

Well, I think you will get the picture. I hope it makes sense to you when you hear it, maybe with some of these illustrations. You know, this is consistent. This idea of us being clay is throughout Scripture. I will never forget Brother Kaung used to always read his version of the Bible, I think it is Genesis 2:7, about God having made man from the dust of the ground. He actually would transpose and read the Hebrew definition of that. And I do not know if you ever remember, but it stuck in my mind because I was using the same version of the Bible. I thought he was misreading it, but it says in the Hebrew translation of dust, "red clay." Man was made of red clay. And Brother Kaung used to always say, "And man was formed." You remember this when I say it? "From the red clay." We are always the clay. He is always the potter. He is always the sovereign.

And when you think of II Corinthians 4:7, this was Paul's whole explanation of us as the people of God. It says, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels." Do you know what that means, earthen vessels? It means clay. In fact, most of the English translations that I looked up have a very good expression of that, a rendition of it that says, "We are jars of clay." That is what we are. But then he goes on to say something so remarkable, "That the surpassingness of the power may be of God, and not from us." That treasure, His own life is in us. By the indwelling Holy Spirit, Christ lives in us. You can read it clearly throughout the Scripture. We are vessels of clay, but we contain the most valuable treasure that has ever been known. This is an explanation. I hope it helps. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has before prepared that we should walk in them." We are prepared for those good works. I think this may be helpful.

We read one last thing in here, "He can make from the same lump of clay one vessel of honor and one of dishonor." Now you may object to that. You may want again to put on your lawyer suit and say, "I object. How can you make one vessel of dishonor and one vessel of honor?" It is because He is the sovereign God. I think it is very wonderful to know the sovereign ways of God. It will settle many of your issues in your Christian life. When you do not understand, when you cannot comprehend, when you begin to hear these questionings that the enemy tries to sow in your thoughts, you can at least do this: you can bow and say to Him, "You are the sovereign God. Do with me as it pleases you." How many times have you done that? It is the secret to growth.

Well, I think you probably get it. I like what Brother Newell said, explaining these verses about man's objections, "that which thou hast said may be correct human reasoning, but against God's sovereignty, thy reasoning is out of place and irrelevant. The verse implying that thou hast neither the right nor the power to call God to account on this matter." We need to first of all understand God's sovereign ways, that is what all of election is about. Remember, these three chapters are about election. Some people

describe it as the mystery of election. The mystery of election is founded upon this one principle. And this is what we need to know.

Vessels of Wrath or Vessels of Mercy

The second thing we want to talk about this morning is vessels of wrath or vessels of mercy. It is in Romans 9 verses 22 to 29. I will just read 22 to 23 because I think that is enough. "And if God, minded to shew his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering vessels of wrath fitted for destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared for glory." There are only two types of vessels brothers and sisters. I know I have bored you over the years with my fascination with the two's in Scripture. You know, two trees: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. The two gardens: you think of the garden in Genesis, you think of the garden in Gethsemane where the Son of Man did not fail. It goes on and on. You think there are only two choices when it gets down to it, in this Christian life and in this world even: we can either be, according to Romans 12:2, conformed to this world; or according to Romans 8:29, we can be conformed to the image of His Son. There are only two choices. We make things so complicated. I am so thankful that God can bring this down so even I can understand it.

Two things, you are either a vessel of wrath or you are a vessel of mercy. Which one do you want to be? I think the choice, when you put it in that context, is very clear. I think the only thing we stumble at is we think maybe God is this despotic sovereign. You know, how can He have vessels of wrath? But you know, if you look at the context of this, it is all about mercy. Even with those vessels of wrath, it says something of exceptional encouragement. It says, let me read that again, "And if God, minded to shew his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering vessels of wrath fitted for destruction." So much of the world, when you talk to them and they have their opinion of God that is so strong, how can God judge the world? They do not know God's ways. God's ways are such that even these vessels of wrath - and notice the wording, it is quite profoundly clear - who are fitted for destruction, God is long-suffering that they may turn. That is mercy even to them.

Even when you read Jeremiah 18:8, it says "If that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turn from their evil, then I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." Is that not marvelous? I think we need to change our thinking of God. He is not a despotic sovereign. He is a merciful sovereign! And even with those that contest Him at every hand, who are fitted for destruction, He bears long hoping that the mercy of God will overrule their hard-heartedness. This was Paul's revelation. This was his understanding of the sovereign ways.

The Bent of God's Election Is Always Towards Mercy

Does not that change the equation? Think about it. The bent of God's election is always towards mercy. Even with the vessels of destruction, He will wait to the last moment. I know you have read some of those wonderful deathbed confessions of ones

who resisted Him for all their life, refused to bow to the sovereign, refused to consider He was the only authority in heaven and earth. And one day the continuing mercies made them bow the knee. This is God's ways. I hope you get it. It is so beautiful. It would be different if He excluded that phrase "long-suffering" in mercy, that they themselves would be found to be, at the end, vessels of mercy. This is the secret of election. I know people get confused about election. I had people come and ask me questions, right? Say, "What did you mean?" You should feel comforted if you did that.

Let me explain it this way. I am a Calvinist. I know that is going to upset some that came. And I am an Arminianist. Now I know that confuses you. How could you be both? I believe in election, sovereign election, but I believe in free will, Arminianism. You get it? These two are conjoined twins. God has not made us, programmed us as AI robots. And I thank God He never will. He is always giving us choice. He is always giving us free will, hoping at the last, when His long-sufferings endure with us, we will accept Him as the sovereign God.

Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen

I think Brother Kaung said it so well, better than I can. For years he took that complicated and hard verse, and he explained it to my complete satisfaction, because I never understood it. He said, "Many are called, but few are chosen." Do you remember how Brother Kaung used to explain that? I thought that was marvelous. "Many are called." That is election. He calls, He is always calling, He never stops calling. And Brother Kaung said, "The few that are chosen are those that respond out of their free will." We have an opportunity in this life to take the long-suffering of God. And even if we do not know for sure if we were part of the divine election from the foundation of the world, as a good Calvinist we can at last turn, and He will repent of what He thought He would do. Is that not marvelous? Now if I confused you more, just forget it. Talk to another brother. I just may be confusing, but I do not think you can ever get away when it comes to the mystery of election, of sovereign election and free will; they will never be separated.

Remember I told you the story of when I, years ago, later on in life, got my Master's degree. And I was tired of all the engineering courses, and so they actually gave me the opportunity to do an elective. And I took an elective. I took the history and aesthetics of jazz. Now why in the world was I doing that? How would that help my career as an engineer? It did not. But I loved the course. I seem to forget everything about these courses and never remember them. But I remember one thing that has never left me about that course. They said the beginning of American jazz was all about "call and response." Now I think that is what the Bible is all about. God is always calling. He is always long-suffering. He is always plenteous in mercy, and He is waiting for a response. These two things solve the problems with Calvinism and Arminianism. That is the best I can do, folks.

Well, thank the Lord. He is this merciful sovereign. I think of Psalm 103:8-11. "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor

rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear Him.” What will you be? Will you be a vessel of wrath? Or will you be, at the end, a vessel of mercy? And it says the most wonderful thing about a vessel of mercy. They are Sons of the living God, they are His real sons. We were talking this morning, at the start of the meeting, about the kingdom. David was talking about being prepared to rule with Him for all eternity. The only ones that rule with Him are the sons of the living God who are matured in His image. They will rule with Him. They are vessels of mercy.

God's Mercy Endures Forever

Well, I think maybe this explains it. Another thing, in Romans 9:24-29, we read about how mercy is extended to the Jews, right? The nation of Israel. Think of it, this is the nation that rejected Him. This is the nation that He sent into captivity, as Jim said, out of loving discipline, to turn them around and make them come back to the living God and the loving God. His mercy, we read, is extended to the remnant of the Jews it says in those few verses, is not that wonderful? God in the end will find a remnant among the Jews. The whole church in the first century began with Jews. Gentiles did not come in until later. And then we read His mercy is extended to the nations. Now this gets back to my understanding of two's in the Bible. There are only two classes of people in this world as God sees us. You are either a Jew, now I do not know that there are too many Jews in this room, or you are a Gentile. If you do not like that and think that is offensive, you are of the nations. There are only two classes of people, just like there are only two vessels.

May the Lord cause us to see His mercy that endures forever. It is extended to all mankind. The Bible declares it true. You know, when we come to these verses near the end, we see the prophecies of the minor prophet Hosea. I wonder, these men of God like Paul and all the other apostles, they cite the most obscure things out of the Old Testament. Have you ever noticed that? And when you go back and read it, you somehow say, “How did they get that out of the Old Testament?” That is divine revelation. Read the word again and again and again and ask the Sovereign God to reveal what is in the Scripture. And then when He does, you understand His ways.

Well, the prophecies, let me go down to verse 25-26. “As he says also in Hosea, I will call not-my-people My people; and the-not-beloved Beloved. And it shall be, in the place where it was said to them, Ye are not my people (that is a strong word), there shall they be called Sons of the living God.” Is that not marvelous? Brothers and sisters, for all of you that are not Jews, that are of the nations, that are Gentiles, we were not God's people. In the Old Testament, like it or not, fight it or not, come into this new interpretation or not: there was one nation, Israel, and there was one people, the Jews. They were His people. But the mercy of God tells us the ways of God, that was never His complete design. His complete design, even from the Old Testament prophets that spoke to those people, was to call the nations and the Gentiles, that we who were not His people can now be His people. And more than that, we who were not even loved, beloved, can be Beloved, that we may be Sons of the living God. What mercy. Can there

be more mercy than that? Not a people, now a people; not beloved, now Beloved. So great is His mercies towards us.

And then we read that He did not forget the children of Israel. In verses 27 to 29, I will read that again. Paul pulled these three verses from Isaiah. "But Isaiah cries concerning Israel, Should the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant shall be saved." He never forgets His people. You know that is the whole mystery of Romans 9, 10, and 11, the whole explanation is He never forgets His people. How wonderful! They may forget Him, they may turn from Him, but He will never forget them. That is the height of mercy. And then it says, "for he is bringing the matter to an end, and cutting it short in righteousness; because a cutting short of the matter will the Lord accomplish upon the earth. And according as Esaias said before, Unless the Lord of hosts had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom, and made like even as Gomorrah." This is the mercy of God. He will not forget the Jews. He will not forget the remnant of the Jews. He will not forget the nations. In His mercy the grand plan is in this sovereign way of election. He is calling everyone to Himself, and thankfully many will respond. Keep those two things at least in your mind. This is the revelation of the mercy of God in election. Surely it is manifest what it says in verse 16, "but of God that shows mercy." That is the whole explanation of vessels of wrath or vessels of mercy.

The Law of Righteousness versus the Righteousness of Faith

The last thing: the law of righteousness versus the righteousness of faith. When you read these last four verses you discover there are two paths men can take. One is a law of righteousness, and the other is righteousness by faith. And it is very explicit. One leads to absolute failure, the law of righteousness. And one leads us to be the people of God. Now let me read verses 30 through 32 and see if I can explain it to you. "What then shall we say? That they of the nations who did not follow after righteousness, have attained righteousness, but the righteousness that is on the principle of faith. But Israel, pursuing after a law of righteousness, has not attained to that law. Wherefore? Because it was not on the principle of faith, but as of works." This is the whole explanation. Again, I want to at least tweak you to say there are only two things in the end. There are only two ways to righteousness. The Bible is clear about this. There is a law of righteousness. If you can do it, keep it. But there is a righteousness by faith that is the only way you will arrive.

Obtain vs Attain

Now, I wish Darby had not used the word "attain" here when it is speaking of the Gentiles, the nations. Because attain, in the English language, has the thought of you, by your efforts and by your work and through your own success, being able to lay hold and grasp something. Very often it is connected to success and career and all these things. Look at what I have attained! The Hebrew word, on the other hand, means both attain and obtain. Now I think "obtain" is a far better word when you read the first five chapters of Romans, because we never attained a righteousness of our own. The Bible is very clear. We have obtained a righteousness that is not ours, an imputed righteousness.

The righteousness of Christ has been given to us. We never could attain that righteousness. And as a matter of fact, when he talks about the law of righteousness, it says they never arrived. Two of the literal versions I like to use, more literal than Darby, said, "They never arrived." They sought it; they never arrived. You know, it is impossible through laws, divine laws, and rules, to please God. If you try to please God through a law of righteousness, you will never arrive. You will never be a son of God. The Bible is very clear about this. Romans says the whole purpose of the law was to give knowledge of sin. No man can be justified by works of the law.

You know, when I was a young boy, I was sort of a Dennis the menace. I know some of you may find it hard to believe. But we used to take long trips in a car without air conditioning. Can you believe that? Does your car have air conditioning? It used to have a hard steel dash with no padding. If all the sudden my dad hit the brakes, I lost all my teeth. We never had iPads to entertain ourselves. On these endless trips, I always thought, we will never arrive. I used to say to Dad every 15 minutes, "Have we arrived yet?" And Dad was so impatient, we would not even stop for a bathroom. I do not want to tell you what we had to do. But we would not stop for the bathroom because he was determined to arrive. And he said, "No, we have not arrived yet. Do not ask me that question again." Brothers and sisters, if you pursue righteousness that is according to law, you will never arrive. It is impossible. But if you obtain, do you mind me using that word? If you obtain a righteousness that is of faith, that is from the Lord Jesus Christ, you have already arrived. That is what these verses mean, the difference between these two things regarding righteousness.

By Faith

Well, may the Lord help us to really understand this. I think this is God's way of righteousness by faith. You might begin to raise another one of your human objections and say, "Why then did He give them the law?" Linda and I are reading the Old Testament. I do not know if we will ever get through the Old Testament together, but we are reading the Old Testament, and the Bible does not shy away from "and you shall keep all my commandments." And I think almost every time we are finished reading, Linda says, "Why did the Lord say that if you could not do it?" Why did He say that?" If you read the first part of verse 32, "Wherefore? Because it was not on the principle of faith." That is the reason they failed. "But as of works." And then the last part of verse 32 and 33 says, "They have stumbled at the stumblingstone, according as it is written, Behold, I place in Zion a stone of stumbling and rock of offence: and he that believes on him shall not be ashamed." You may think that is hard, right? Why would God do that? He needed to prove to them once and for all, as the only nation of God and the only people of God, that righteousness that comes from you will never happen. It was a stumbling stone. I agree. I agree with the prophet. It was a stumbling stone. They tried to keep the law; they failed to keep the law. They would try again to keep the law. They could not keep the law and so they never arrived. But if you will read Jeremiah the prophet, I think this is wonderful. Jeremiah 23, this was the word. They never saw it. Those that failed never saw it. But those that saw it believed it. And they even had faith,

the righteousness of faith. It is Jeremiah 23:6. This is from King James Version, "In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

"THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS"

Now if you look, the reason I mentioned the King James is that I love the King James here, if you look at it, it is big, bold, all capital letters. It is not like that in the Darby. It says, "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." And every letter is a capital letter. This is the One He wanted them to see, where righteousness is possible. This is not a bridge too far. But until you discover the Lord our righteousness, you will continue to stumble and fall. I think that is His ways, that is His sovereign ways. And in the end, all that come to Him will be through the righteousness of faith. When Paul wrote this letter to the Roman church, it says, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel; for it is God's power to salvation, to everyone that believes, both to Jew first and to Greek." And then he says very clearly, Romans 1:17 is a very famous portion for understanding the ways of God. "For righteousness of God is revealed therein, on the principle of faith to faith: according as it is written, But the just shall live by faith."

Conclusion

Well, do you understand His sovereign ways? His sovereign election? I think this is so very clear and so very precious. Have you seen God's sovereign election? Have you seen God is the only sovereign? Only then can we understand His sovereign ways. Remember, in the end there are only two outcomes. You are either a vessel of wrath fitted for destruction; or you are a vessel of mercy destined for glory. There are only two paths. One is you can try to please God by your own works and through your own efforts, and hope one day you arrive at an acceptable destination. Paul, revealing God's ways, was here to say that can never be done. The only solution that will work is through a righteousness, not our own, a righteousness of faith.

Well, it is all God's mercy. I think you have to agree with that. It is never us. We have to respond. Remember I am an Arminianist; remember I am a Calvinist. For those of you who object to the word election, brothers, and sisters, all of this is the mercy of God.

Shall we pray?

Lord, we thank You for Your Word. Where would we be without Your Word? We thank You for the clarity that is in Your Word, even if we cannot express it. We thank You for the clarity, the absolute clarity, which is in Your Word. We pray that as a merciful judge, as a sovereign judge, You will open Your Word to us and we will be a people that walk in Your ways, and we will be a people that know Your ways. Only then will we be vessels of mercy. We ask You to do something we can never do. And we thank You that You will do it. All of our confidence is in You. None of our confidence is in us. But for You to do this work, we must bow to the sovereign God and say, "Lord, do what pleases You with us as individuals, and do what pleases You with us as a church." That in the end we

*may be that testimony of Jesus, the will of God. We ask this in Your precious name.
Amen.*

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