

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

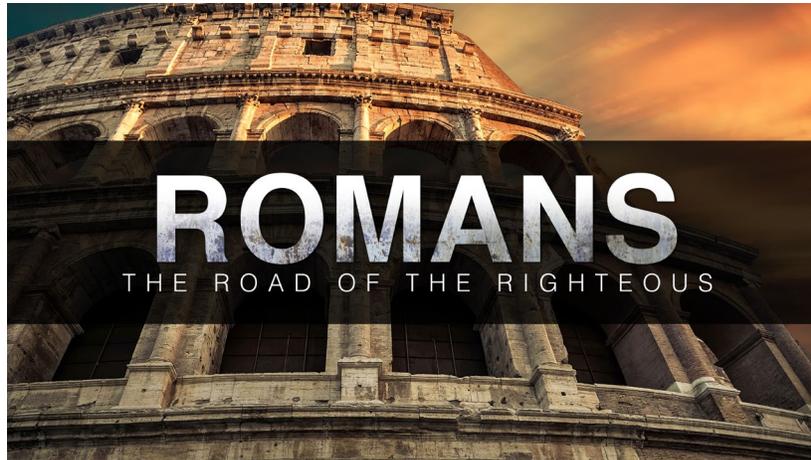
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 9:22-28

Written By

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Unthinkable tragedies, perpetrated by evil, vicious people, occurs so often it is hard to keep up with its presence in our society. Recently, a crazed and deranged nineteen-year-old young gunman in my former quaint hometown of Poway, California, walked into Chabad synagogue and opened fire on innocent worshippers. He wounded three with his rifle, and killed one brave 60-year old woman, Lori Gilbert-Kaye, who sacrificed herself in order to protect the rabbi, Yisroel Goldstein. What love she evidenced. Fortunately, the killing spree was limited because one brave American veteran rushed the shooter as his gun miraculously jammed, and an armed off-duty Border Patrol agent gave chase with his service revolver.

Where does this kind of blind, ruthless hatred come from? Why is a place of worship now a dangerous place to assemble? Just this week I received a Homeland Security document warning houses of worship they are now on an elevated warning level for experiencing random attacks. Who would have ever thought this would occur, especially here in the States?

After I returned from teaching chaplains at Fort Bragg this week, my wife asked me what I thought about the shooter at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte. “What shooter?” I asked. I had no idea a crazed young man quietly walked into a classroom, sat down for ten minutes, and, then, stood up and started shooting students for no apparent reason. Riley Howell, a student with aspirations of joining the military or being a firefighter, bravely rushed the shooter, knocking him off his feet. He died for his sacrificial act, but in so doing he saved many lives. Police and firemen honored him by escorting a black hearse transporting his body to his hometown in Waynesville by N.C. Paul prophesied in his last letter to pastor Timothy that “in the last days perilous times will come,” (2 Tim. 3:1), and, indeed they are here. This hard reality makes one wonder, “Since God is sovereign over the affairs of men, where is He as the culture goes off the

cliff?” Answer, He’s exactly where He was when His Son was given up for crucifixion by His own people, Israel. He was present with His Son as the Romans murdered him. No, He, the Lord of glory, did not *promote* the evil, He *permitted* it, He sovereignly used it, as He always does, to accomplish righteous goals which will echo in eternity.

To the Jews in the church in Rome who thought the atrocity of killing the innocent, loving Messiah must have logically moved the Father to abandon Israel (Rom. 9:5), Paul pauses in Romans 9:6-11:36, to argue that Israel’s senseless, thoughtless crime against the Messiah did not, and could not, abolish His ancient promises to them, nor thwart His plans to turn unbelievable acts of evil to ultimate good for Jews and for Gentiles. Such is the character of God. Until sin and Satan are finally subdued at the end of God’s eschatological program (Rev. 20), God is using all of His power to work in and through tragedies . . . and triumphs . . . in life to accomplish His goal of slowly, but surely, ushering in His kingdom of cosmic righteousness.

But sometimes, given the wickedness we witness (or have perpetrated), we wonder if God has thrown His holy hands up and stepped out of the picture. Some Jewish Christians and Jewish non-Christians in Rome entertained this question in light of their national penchant for rejecting God’s ways and for finally rejecting the Messiah. Paul put their fears to rest, as I have said, starting in Romans 9. His method for guiding their twisted, tainted thinking involves a diatribe format where he poses questions Jews typically posed, and then providing answers.

Just as we pose questions in the light of horrendous actions, so, too, did the Jews of Paul’s day.

Jewish Questions Naturally Arose From Paul’s Teaching About The Gospel Of Jesus (Rom. 9)

Moving from verse 6 through 21, Paul presents three thorny questions and then supplies three thought-provoking answers to the Jewish question at hand.

- *Question #1:* Does Israel’s spiritual failure and rejection of the Messiah nullify God’s national promises (Rom. 9:6-13)?
- *Answer:* No, because God sovereignly and unconditionally chose Israel.
- *Question #2:* Do God’s precise choices demonstrate He is unjust because He did not choose everyone (Rom. 9:14a)?
- *Answer:* No, because His character pulsates with righteous purpose (Rom. 9:15-18). Remember He did not chose every family member of the Patriarchs to compose His chosen people, just select ones. In so doing, He blesses some . . . apart from their works, and does not bless others. Yet in all of this sovereign choosing, God continued to work out His purpose for mankind.
- *Question #3:* Since God chooses to bless or curse, how can He hold us accountable (Rom. 9:19-21)?
- *Answer,* No, we freely act and God freely acts. This divine choice appeared incongruent to the Jewish worshipper in Rome. How can God permit wicked, ruthless people like Pharaoh to carry out God’s plan while still holding the mere man responsible for His actions? Paul’s answer is clear: We are responsible for our actions in this life, but in the end, God will take our actions, be they good or bad, and use them to accomplish His lofty eternal purposes as the Master Potter. And,

as Paul says, who are we to provocatively question Him, really?

This third question logically devolved into a fourth question intimated by Paul's discussion in verses 22 through 29.

Question #4: If God Is Just, Why Does He React Slowly To Sin (Rom. 9:22-29)?

Paul's teaching here is complex, and somewhat hard to follow because he introduces a conditional clause, denoted by the presence of the word "if" (the protasis) with no corresponding "then" clause (the apodosis).

²² What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? ²³ And *He did so* to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴ *even us*, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

Where's the "then" clause? It's not there. Why? Paul leaves it for us to supply. What do we need to supply? We need to insert the notion that God permits what He permits in order to accomplish His sovereign, providential eternal purposes.

But to the Jews who attempted to follow Paul's argument in this section, they would have naturally and logically wondered, "Okay, Paul, since God is sovereign and exercises His free will to accomplish His purposes, how can He be just by permitting a vile, godless, and ruthless man like Pharaoh, a person/a clay pot . . . to employ your imagery . . . to do what he did to innocent, defenseless Israel?" You can readily see how their question, in many respects, becomes our question in our decadent day where would-be Pharaoh's run rampant.

Fortunately, Paul supplies not one, but two precise answers to the perplexing query.

Answer #1: God Has His Purposes (Rom. 9:22-23)

Note, I said purposes, plural. For one, since God is sovereignly in control of all things, be they bad or good (Ecc. 7:14; Isa. 45:7; Lam. 3:38), it stands to reason nothing happens without divine purpose being woven into its fabric. Further, from what we know of God's vast character and plethora of precise prophecies from the Old Testament, we can rest assured He is always working to fulfill many spectacular and holy purposes. Within these two verses, Paul introduces us to two divine purposes, especially where the toleration of a tyrant like Pharaoh is concerned. How could He, the Holy One, permit this (Isa. 5:19; 17:7; 30:12, 15; 43:3, 14, 15)? Yes, why didn't He just smash this so-called clay pot called the perversion and misuse of political power?

Two divine purposes lay the prickly question to rest.

Purpose #1 Concerns the Lost (Rom. 9:22). First, let's read Paul answer and then dissect it:

²² What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

The sentence is conditional in nature; however, from what we know of God's actions in biblical history, He did, in fact, show vast amounts of patience towards evil people like Pharaoh (and

Delilah, King Saul, Jezebel, King Manasseh, King Nebuchadnezzar, and a whole host of others sordid, sinful individuals). Why did He give the likes of Pharaoh patience, knowing what he would eventually do toward Israel? Why didn't He move quicker and sooner to terminate his ruthless reign? Paul gives us two reasons, denoted by two purpose driven infinitive verbs, viz., *demonstrate* (ἐνδείξασθαι) and *make known* (γνωρίσαι), which, together, identify God's purposes in moving slowly with the wicked.

For one, God takes His time with evil people, whether they be Gentiles or Jews, *to sovereignly set things in place to showcase His holy wrath against sin*. You probably need to read that statement one more time because it is so foreign to our finite thinking. Paul definitively states that God was/is willing to patiently wait, as the Master Potter, to deal with pernicious pots like Pharaoh, so that when He does move in holy, justified wrath the just nature of His wrath will be seen and known to all. At that juncture, no one could/can possibly say He is unjust.

Paul speaks here of "the wrath," *ten orgen* (τὴν ὀργήν). The article immediately notifies us this is not just any day of divine wrath, but eschatological wrath. It is, therefore, probably the monadic use of the article, stressing the one and only nature of this particular, prophesied day. The Old Testament prophets foretold of this divine day (Isa. 24-27; Joel 2-3; Amos 5:18-20; Obad. 1:8, 15; Zeph. 1:7, 9, 10; Zech. 12:1-8; 14:3-13). In the New Testament, various inspired authors warn us of God's impending, immanent day of divine wrath:

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, (Rom. 2:5).

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him (Rom. 5:9).

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. (Eph. 5:6).

. . . and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:10).

The Lord's day of wrath will be revealed at His glorious and ominous Second Coming at the end of the seven-year tribulation, as He taught (Matt. 24-25). Our wicked world basically lives as if this day is not coming. They will be sorely mistaken when it arrives, and, then, it will be too late for them. And when His holy wrath against sin is FINALLY revealed for all to see, everyone, saved and unsaved, will completely understand His patience with sin and sinners has reached its breaking point and now His wrath is COMPLETELY justified. Had He moved quicker, which would certainly be warranted in light of His holy character, sinners could argue in eternity He was/is unjust in His wrath. By waiting, conversely, God underscores the validity of His wrath when it does break out.

While there is one eschatological Day of the Lord, any time God moves in history to definitively judge sinners, like Pharaoh, it is done to showcase the just nature of His perfect, pristine wrath for all to see and take note of. With respect to Egypt, this premise couldn't be truer. From the formation of the Old Kingdom in 2649 B.C., to the establishment of the New Kingdom (Dynasty 18), with Amenhotep II (1450-1423 B.C.), the Pharaoh of the Exodus at the helm of the evil, polytheistic, slavish empire, God gave the Egyptians time to turn toward Him through

natural and special revelation, but they did not. When God finally brought the Day of the Lord to them at the zenith of their wickedness under the vile, selfish leadership of Amenhotep II by breaking the back of their false gods (viz., the Nile, for instance, was associated with three Egyptian gods: Khnum, the guardian of the Nile, Hapi, the spirit of the Nile, and Osiris, the bloodstream of the Nile. When Moses, by means of God's miraculous power, turned the Nile's waters to thick, red blood, these so-called "mighty" gods were instantly reduced to dust.) by a series of well-orchestrated divine signs, His holy wrath was showcased and validated as sovereignly JUSTIFIED.

Likewise, Paul shares how God takes His time to judge vessels destined for judgment in order to set up conditions so His holy power is presented for all to see and consider. Again, the article appears before the noun, *the power* (τὸ δυνάτον). This is not a power, viz., indefinite, but *the power*, the power of God Almighty which is revealed when He comes in judgment. Apply this to ancient Egypt. For 1,203 years (2649-1446, the year of the Exodus), they wrongly and falsely assumed their gods were the gods and their government was the government. During that time God was merciful to them insofar as He didn't consume them in His holy wrath, but they did, in fact, store up wrath for the day of wrath when He took on their godless leader and vacuous, impotent so-called gods . . . and He did it in the most divinely powerful fashion. For instance, when He sent darkness over the land of Egypt, He not only vaporized Re, Aten, Atum, and Horus, all sun-gods, He did it in a powerful fashion by sending thick darkness just over Egyptian homes . . . not over Jewish homes (Ex. 10:21-29). Talk about power!

Do you think God has changed? Think again, my friend. He sovereignly permits evil to run its course so that when His divine wrath is finally unleashed in a way which shakes the very foundations of the cosmos (Isa. 24-27; Rev. 5-19), all sinners and saints will know His actions are the essence of JUSTICE because He has given mankind ample time to turn toward Him. Our world in currently gearing up for another revelation of the wrath and power of the Almighty. Currently, God is being patient, but one day His patience runs its course. Where will you be on that day? Will you stand with Him as a son/daughter because of your faith relationship with Christ, or will you be His Pharaoh-like foe?

A second purpose is God's slow response to Pharaoh-types is expressed in verse 23.

Purpose #2 Concerns the Saved (Rom. 9:23). Once more, I invited you to ponder Paul's intriguing words:

²³ And *He did so* in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,

The *hina* (ἵνα) clause, denoted by the connective particle at the head of the sentence (καὶ ἵνα γνωρίσῃ τὸν πλοῦτον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ σκεύη ἐλέους ἃ προητοίμασεν εἰς δόξαν), gives us the second purpose of God's seemingly "slothful" response to the evil brought to the world stage through vessels fitted for destruction. His desire is to ultimately showcase the "riches of His glory" which await His saints. I'd counsel you to read that sentence one more time. This time permit it to sink into your heart and head. Perhaps an illustration will help you grasp Paul's teaching.

When a jeweler desires to reveal the brilliance of a magnificent diamond, he/she lays it down on a piece of black velvet. Instantly, the wonder and beauty of the carefully cut stone is seen by all. By way of analogy, this is what God is sovereignly permitting with the digression and descent into cultural, personal, global, and political darkness. He is wisely setting the stage for His saints to fully comprehend the glory He has prepared for us in His spectacular presence.

What is the glory? Glad you asked. Here's a brief perusal of how it is defined and described in Scripture.

- It is the brightness of God's presence (Ex. 16:10)
- It has to be shielded from man's naked eyes (Ex. 24:16; 33:22).
- It is like a devouring fire to behold (Ex. 24:17).
- It sanctifies unsanctified ground (Ex. 29:43).
- It filled God's Tabernacle and Temple (Ex. 40:34-35; 1 Ki. 8:11).
- It will one day fill the earth (Num. 14:21).
- It can be seen and shockingly resisted (Num. 14:22).
- It appears to bring judgment against false rulers (Num. 16:19).
- Its brilliance is seen in part in the heavens (Psalm 19:1).
- It is the light of the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21:11, 23).
- It is an amazing thing to behold (Rev. 4).
- It is a light given to saints (2 Thess. 2:14).
- It is transformative now (2 Cor. 3:18).
- Its epicenter is Christ on his throne (Isa. 6: John 12:41).
- It will be the light in eternity (Isa. 60:19).
- It calls for worship in man (Ezek. 3:23).
- It will descend onto the earth one day (Matt. 25:31).
- It pulsates in our new bodies (1 Cor. 15:43).

True, God is moving slowly in dealing with the degenerative nature of sin; however, when He finally deals with it in all of its blackness and we stand on the golden yet translucent streets of heaven, we will understand and fully appreciate the glory of God our eyes behold. Question, will you be in glory? Will you see the glory? Will you be glorified by the God of glory? Entrance into God's family is but a faith statement away in the person and work of Christ.

Transitioning to verse 24, Paul gives us a two-fold answer concerning the apparent slowness of God's judgment in relation to so-called vessels of wrath. Once again, his answer informs us that God's seemingly glacier-like execution of His sovereign will is quite just. Why is it just? That flash of insight comes with . . .

Answer #2: God Has His Plans (Rom. 9:24-29)

Plans For Gentiles (Rom. 9:24-26). God could have immediately judged Rome and the nation of Israel for their mistreatment, rejection, and death of the Messiah, but He didn't. On the contrary, He worked to draw repentant Gentiles into His heavenly family, something foretold in the Old Testament. Paul understood this and this is why He quotes here from Hosea's prophecy:

²⁴ *even us*, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. ²⁵ As He says also in Hosea, "I will call those who were not My people, 'My people,' And her who was not beloved, 'beloved.'" ²⁶ "And it shall be that in the

place where it was said to them, 'you are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God."

In verse 25, Paul quotes from Hosea 2, verse 23, and in verse 26 he references Hosea 1, verse 10. Both of these verses applied specifically to Israel as a nation. Because of Israel's historical and perpetual sin as a nation, God told the prophet to name his son and daughter names which reflected His divine disdain and temporary rejection of them as His chosen people. His daughter was called *Loruhamah* (Hos. 1:6), which in Hebrew means "She is not loved." His second son was named *Loammi* (Hos. 1:9), which in Hebrew means, "Not my people." In Hosea 1:10-2:1, the Spirit of God informed the prophet that one day this divine judgment would be reversed, and once again Northern Israel (comprised of the ten tribes) would enjoy His favored status.

Paul, interestingly enough, took this divine passage of judgment and, under the authority and inspiration of the Spirit of God, applied it to Gentiles. The way Paul interpreted the rejection of Christ was directly related to God working through the terrible tragedy of the cross to spiritually reach out to the Gentiles, that's you and me. No, it does not mean God is through with Israel, which would run counter to Paul's entire argument in Romans 9-11. Yes, it does mean that God sovereignly worked in and through the blindness and badness of the Jews of Christ's day and turned that into an opportunity to touch countless Gentile lives for eternity.

Redemptively reaching the Gentile world was/is woven throughout the Old Testament as is captured by Nave's Topical Bible:

Prophecies of the Conversion of: Gen. 12:3 v. 5.; Gen. 22:18; Gen. 49:10; Deut. 32:21; Psa. 2:8; Psa. 22:27-31; Psa. 46:4, 10; Psa. 65:2, 5; Psa. 66:4; Psa. 68:31, 32; Psa. 72:8-11, 16, 19 vs. 1-20.; Psa. 86:9; Psa. 102:15, 18-22; Psa. 145:10, 11; Isa. 2:2-4 v. 5.; Isa. 9:2, 6, 7 vs. 1-7.; Isa. 11:6-10 vs. 1-10.; Isa. 18:7; Isa. 24:16; Isa. 35:1, 2, 5-7 vs. 1-10.; Isa. 40:5 vs. 4-11.; Isa. 42:1, 4 vs. 1-12.; Isa. 45:8, 22-24 v. 6.; Isa. 49:1, 5, 6, 18-23; Isa. 54:1-3; Isa. 55:5; Isa. 56:3, 6-8; Isa. 60:1, 3-5, 8-14; Isa. 65:1; Isa. 66:12, 19, 23 vs. 7-23.; Jer. 3:17; Jer. 4:2; Jer. 16:19-21; Ezek. 47:3-5; Dan. 2:35, 44 v. 45.; Dan. 7:13, 14; Hos. 2:23; Joel 2:28-32; Amos 9:11, 12; Mic. 4:3, 4; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 2:10, 11; Zech. 6:15; Zech. 8:20-22 vs. 1-23.; Zech. 8:23; Zech. 9:1, 10 vs. 9-17.; Zech. 14:8, 9, 16 vs. 8-21.; Mal 1:11; Matt. 3:9; Matt. 8:11; Matt. 12:17-21; Matt. 19:30 Mark 10:31. Luke 13:29, 30; Luke 21:24; John 10:16; Acts 9:15.¹

Think about this. From the time of Abraham (2085 B.C. when he entered Canaan) until the death of Christ (33 A.D.), God quietly, slowly, and sovereignly worked through all the ups and downs of history to bring everything to a point so He would be positioned to redeem Gentiles . . . as well as Jews. Interesting, while the Devil was working overtime to thwart the coming of the Messiah, and who worked even harder to have Him killed by His own people, along with Gentiles, the Father worked, along with the Son and the Spirit, to use the horror of the cross to save Gentiles and Jews and formulate a whole new redemptive community.

The next time you are wondering what is going on in our world, the next time you think all hope is lost, remember God is sovereign and His plan for Gentiles is right on track and nothing sin, sinners, and Satan can devise will thwart its realization. Nothing. The kingdom of Messiah is coming like a train down a divine track. It's all part of God's plan and Pharaoh-types should stand up and take note lest they wind up on the wrong side of the proverbial tracks.

¹ James Swanson and Orville Nave, *New Nave's Topical Bible* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1994).

In addition to a slowly realized plan for Gentiles, Paul educates us that God also has . . .

Plans For Israel (Rom. 9:27-29). This sovereign design is quite clear from Paul's quotes from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, verses 27 through 28 are from Isaiah 10:22-23, while verse 29 is drawn from Isaiah 1, verse 9.

²⁷ And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved; ²⁸ for the Lord will execute His word upon the earth, thoroughly and quickly." ²⁹ And just as Isaiah foretold, "Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left to us a posterity, We would have become as Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah" (Rom. 9).

Paul referenced these two inspired prophetic passages to stress two things concerning Israel and the ramifications of their rejection and crucifixion of Jesus. One, God would judge the nation, and two, God would, as He always did, make sure a righteous remnant existed to fulfill His national promises of a Jewish nation over which His Son, the great Davidic king would rule over (Isa. 2; 9; 11; Jer. 23:3ff; Psalm 2; 89).

Jesus taught in His parables how the nation would reject Him (*The Parable of Wedding Banquet*, Matt. 22:1-14; *The Parable of the Great Banquet*, Luke 14:16-24; *The Parable of the Rejection of the Landowner*, Matt. 21:33-44); but in passages like Romans 9:27-29, Paul, who fully understood the "national" redemption promised to the repentant Jewish remnant at Christ's Second Coming (Zech. 12-13), reminded the Jews that God in His mercy would not fail to fulfill His specific plan and promise to them.

True, we can sit and wonder today, "Lord, what is going on?" The answer is simple: God's sovereignty is what's going on. Any Jew could readily say, "It appears the whole world is arrayed against us and God has forgotten us" (Note: The day this message was delivered, Hamas launched 600 rockets at Israel for no reason whatsoever). No, He hasn't. Even in tragedy He is act work making sure His sovereign plans for eternity are realized to the letter. And when they are realized, all the world will know just how just and merciful He really is. Really, I'd dare say at the moment it will be time to sing the *Hallelujah Chorus* of George Frideric Handel (composed 1741):

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
 For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.
 Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
 For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.
 Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
 The kingdom of this world
 Is become the kingdom of our Lord,
 And of His Christ, and of His Christ;
 And He shall reign for ever and ever,
 For ever and ever, forever and ever,
 King of kings, and Lord of lords,
 King of kings, and Lord of lords,
 And Lord of lords,
 And He shall reign,
 And He shall reign forever and ever,

King of kings, forever and ever,
And Lord of lords,
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
And He shall reign forever and ever,
King of kings! and Lord of lords!
And He shall reign forever and ever,
King of kings! and Lord of lords!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!