

“THE CHARACTER OF GOD AND THE GOSPEL—II”

INTRODUCTION

We are continuing our study in the book of Romans. Next week we will begin working our way through the rest of chapter 9. Before we do that we need to do some more background work. In chapters 9 through 11 Paul addresses the issue of why many Israelites were rejecting their own Messiah. His answer is that God has chosen to harden the hearts of most Israelites. He had not given them the faith to believe. Instead he has chosen to give saving faith to many gentile people.

This brings up the issue of predestination. It brings up the issue of whether we are saved by God’s will or our own human will. Is saving faith something we come up or is it something God chooses to give to people? We will deal with this a little bit more today before jumping into a line-by-line study of Romans 9. I encourage you to form no opinion until you hear the word of God preached and you carefully read Romans chapters 9-11.

In chapters 9-11 Paul also assures the Roman Church that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. Some Christians might have been afraid that because Israel rejected her own messiah no one could be saved. Paul assured the Roman Church that God would never turn away those who earnestly seek him.

Finally he tells the church that they should not be conceited. He tells them not to think that they are better than the Israelites who have rejected the Messiah. He tells them in light of God’s holiness and awesome power that they should fear God. Pay attention to how you are doing with the Lord. Let God worry about other people.

A GOD CENTERED WORLD VIEW

One of the major themes of Romans 9-11 is that our life is more for God than for us. If God allows sin to go unpunished for a season, it is because God wants to show off his patience. When God does step in with judgment, it is because he wants to show off his perfect justice. When God saves a sinner, it is because God wants to show off his attributes of love and mercy. Our salvation is more about God than about us.

As Christians we must become more God centered in our beliefs and Christian practice. God is in control of his creation and his purpose in the universe is to increase the number of times that he is given credit and applause for who he is and what he does.

Today many churches have taken a human centered approach to theology and ministry. We are saturated by our culture with the notion that each person is the master of his or her own fate. We are taught by this culture to do what is right and convenient for me. As a result some Christians, influenced by our culture, say in their heart; "I am not here for the Lord, the Lord is here for me." This is not God's thinking.

Bible teachers influenced by our human centered culture have developed theologies that place the human as the potter and God as the clay. Speaking of things being out of order.

THE MEANACING ALPHA-MALE WEENER DOG

My mother-in-law has a tiny little wiener dog. And she loves that wiener dog. My mother in law is a sweet tenderhearted person. She gives that little dog a lot of love and pampering. Every time that dog barked she ran to see what the dog wanted. When the dog begged she would give him a treat every time. Pretty soon the dog was in charge and my mother in law was no longer in control. One day when she went to take something away from the dog, that little dog turned on her and viciously attacked her.

The little wiener dog thought that he was the alpha male of the house. He thought that my mother in law was supposed to obey him and do what he wanted.

Our culture tells us that we are the alpha male and God is supposed to give us anything we want. We make the plans and God is supposed to follow our lead and do what we want. Humanity has become like the little wiener dog that thinks he is in charge of his owner.

God is the alpha and omega. We are here for him. Our comfort zone is not an excuse to disobey or neglect what the alpha and omega is calling us to do. His preference in everything must become our preference. We must reject theologies and practices that present humans as the alpha male of the universe.

THE POTTER AND CLAY

Romans 9:21 “Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use.”

Humans exist for God’s pleasure; God does not exist for our pleasure. God is the Potter and humanity is the clay and the Potter has an absolute right to do with each piece of clay whatever most pleases Him.

God is the absolute authority of the universe and of our lives. And that can make people, even Christians uncomfortable.

PIPER QUOTE

John Piper has said, *“Few things are more humbling...than to think of His absolute authority over our lives as His creatures. He is the Supreme Court, ... the legislature... the Chief Executive. After God, no appeal!”*

In our humanity we do not enjoy thinking of ourselves as God’s pieces of clay to do with what He pleases. That makes us feel helpless and vulnerable. It is very hard for our prideful hearts to accept that.

One reason we want to have control is because it is hard for us to trust God alone with the ultimate destination of our soul and the souls of our unsaved friends and loved ones. One-way people try to ease those feelings of helplessness and vulnerability is to assert that we humans have the ultimate say as to our final destination. Because we have a hard time trusting in God alone for a person's soul, we want people with their free wills to have the ultimate say over whether or not they go to heaven.

NO ONE SEEKS AFTER GOD

The fatal flaw with that thinking is this: If a fallen human being was given the ultimate say in whether he or she would choose Christ not one person would ever choose to turn to God.

Romans 3:11 says, ***“There is no one who understands, no one seeks after God.”***

Romans 3:18 says; ***“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”***

The power of sin within humanity has so tainted people that not one single person would choose Christ and the entire human race would go to hell.

But even knowing that, we still have trouble trusting God with the soul of a loved one. Let's face it; the biggest challenge is to fully trust God and His good plan for our lives. It can be frightening to place someone we love in God's hands, even though we know that God's will is ***“good, perfect and acceptable.”***

NOT OBLIGATED TO SAVE US

Why doesn't God just save everyone? The truth is God is under no obligation to save anyone. God would be no less God and no less good if He didn't save one soul.

GRACE - God's grace is ***“giving someone what they DON'T deserve”***

MERCY - Mercy is “*sparing a person from what they DO deserve.*”

If God chooses to give some people what they do deserve, is that wrong?

Romans 3:23 “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”.

If all have sinned and fall short, then how many of us deserve eternal life? No one deserves mercy. If you deserved it, it wouldn't be mercy.

GOD'S MERCY – TAKEN FROM GRANTED

So let's get a hold of this. No one deserves to be saved from his or her sin. In fact God's creation has largely ignored him. And yet day after day God shows his patience. If he were totally fair he would send all people to hell. But day after day God chooses to withhold his judgment. Day after day he forgives sin and gives us many blessings.

GOD'S MERCY IS EASY TO SEE

In fact God's mercy is so common and is so much the norm in our lives, we tend to assume that His mercy is something He owes us, rather than something He may choose to show us if it is for His glory.

As one theologian has said, “The question is not, why would God allow a sinner to be killed.” The question is, “why does he allow so many sinners to remain alive?” We almost never ask that question because we are so drenched with the daily mercies of God; we assume God is somehow obligated to show His mercy.

Psalms 103 says, “If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?”

If we were to consider what we, as those who have rebelled against a holy, just God deserve, and lived our lives in the light of that, we would be overwhelmed with the number of times he has showed his grace and mercy to us.

When we get to heaven and look into the face of a holy God, we will be amazed at the grace of God to allow any sin-soaked creature to be there! We will fall prostrate at His feet because, in His amazing grace and mercy through the blood of His Son, He has allowed an undeserving sinner like me to live in His presence. God is so good.

The bottom line is this: there is no guarantee that God will always answer affirmatively when you cry out for your child, your sibling, your parent, or your loved one to be saved, but we must understand two truths.

First, He has the sovereign right to do with us what He wants. He's the Creator and we are the creatures. He's the Potter and we are the clay.

Second, isn't it better to trust a merciful God with our loved ones rather than to trust a person's fallen, twisted will, which would never choose God? As God said to Abraham, ***"Will not the God of this earth do right?"***

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS

We have a lot of information, but now what do we do with it? How do we take this into our every day lives? Let's begin with a bible verse.

Deuteronomy 29. verse 29, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law."

In other words, there are secret things like God's timing, why He does certain things in the way He does them, the timing of his return, and the identity of those He has predestined to save and those He has not. Those are the secret things of God. It is not our job to deal with the secret things that belong to the Lord.

It is however our job to do what we know with that which has been revealed to us. We know we have a holy God who is to be feared and respected. We know that billions of times God has shown his great mercy

and love by saving the souls of humans. We know that God was merciful to us. He has given us the faith to believe. He has given us eternal life. He hears our prayers. He accepts our worship. He makes sense out of our lives. He gives us hope that cannot be stolen.

So a great response to our study is to stand in wonder that God has not given us what we deserve. He has shown off his mercy and love by saving us and forgiving our sin. We have become friends of God. If you are happy about the mercy God has shown you then do his will and sing his praises.

He wants to show his attributes of love and mercy through us. He has asked us to love him with all our hearts. And he has asked us to love one another. He has asked us to use the spiritual gifts he has given us. He has asked us to seek his will for our lives, our church and our community.

As we go through Roman 9-11 we will explore the truth that we do have a human will. In light of God's holiness and his mercy God wants us to use our human will to ask this question; "how will my actions and my attitude bring glory to God?" Does this relationship bring glory to God? Does my attitude bring glory to God? Do our decisions come from God's will and thus bring glory to him? God, how do you want me to serve you?

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.