

“THE CHARACTER OF GOD AND THE GOSPEL”

How does the gospel relate to God’s character?

From the end of chapter eight through the end of chapter 11 Paul is explaining to the Roman Church why they are experiencing suffering and why they do not see more people from Israel coming to faith in Christ. When we get into the next couple chapters we will see that God is hardening the hearts of some Israelites. God is not giving his Spirit to them. And without His Holy Spirit no one can come to faith in Jesus Christ. Today I want to give some background information that like the Romans Church, we will be able to understand why some people come to Christ and others do not.

The first thing we need to look into has to do with the nature of God and the nature of why he created all things. If we do not understand the nature of God and the nature of why he created us, then we are not going to understand Romans nine through eleven.

The truth is, today many churches have dropped a biblical understanding of God. They have embraced an idea of God based on human emotion, sentimentalism and speculation. Let’s begin our study of God’s word by asking a few questions. These questions will help us to see whether we are basing our understanding of God on scripture or on human sentiment and emotional responses.

TWO QUESTIONS

1. “Is God’s greatest reason for sending His Son to earth to save sinners from hell?”
2. “Can Christ’s plan to save someone be frustrated by human unbelief?”

The bible always teaches salvation is GOD-centered from beginning to end. In other words, each of us who have been saved from our sin has been saved not for our benefit, but for God’s benefit. Sure, we make out very

good in the deal, but the primary reason we are saved is for the benefit of God. Let's look at the scriptures that will deepen our understanding of these things.

WHY DID GOD CREATE US?

Why did God create us? When you ask most people on the street about the meaning of life you will get a response that goes something like this: "I think my life is here to enjoy things and be happy?" But according to God's own words, none of us were put here for our own enjoyment and happiness. Through Isaiah the prophet God tells us why every person was created and given life.

Isaiah 43:6-7 says, "...Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth-- ⁷everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

Every person created from Adam and Even until now has been given the breath of life for God's glory. The cool thing is that every time we do things in our lives that bring God glory we experience the greatest joy. What brings glory to God will always bring us the deepest and most lasting joy. But our joy is not God's ultimate motivation—God's motivation for creating us is His glory.

WHY DOES GOD FORGIVE SIN?

Why does God forgive our sin? Does God save us because he does not want to see us go to hell? Does God save us because he feels sorry for us? God tells us through the prophet Isaiah the primary reason he forgives our sin.

Isaiah 43:25 says, "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."

God forgives sin to show off his mercy and to manifest what kind of heart He has. We certainly are blessed by that forgiving mercy, but make no mistake; His top reason for forgiving us has to do with his glory. God says he forgives us for “his names sake.” Every time we are forgiven for a sin, God the Father gets to show off the work of His son Jesus Christ who provided forgiveness to men and women. So when we ask God to forgive our sin we are working along with God to show off Jesus and bring glory to our savior. Asking for forgiveness is about letting Jesus show off his work that he did on the cross. We feel relieved when we know that God has forgiven us, but God set it up that way so he could show off his capacity and willingness to forgive people. Forgiveness benefits us but glorifies God.

GOD’S PURPOSE IN SALVATION

God’s ultimate purpose in saving sinners through the gospel is NOT delivering people from hell, but showing his glory. To put it another way, salvation is for God’s glory, not the sinner’s deliverance. God’s jealousy for His glory is one of the more common themes in the Bible. God says in *Ephesians 1:4-6* says, “...*In love* ⁵*he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--* ⁶*to the praise of his glorious grace,...*”

Why does God save us from sin and hell? His primary motivation is **to the praise of His grace!** God shows us grace by saving us. And he does this for the purpose of showing off his grace. We are saved and we praise his awesome grace.

Psalms 106:7-8 says, “*When our fathers were in Egypt... they did not remember your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by... the Red Sea.* ⁸*Yet he saved them for his name's sake, to make his mighty power known.*”

The Exodus, God's great act of deliverance was done for the glory of God, not ultimately for the freedom of His people.

WHY DOES GOD PUNISH THOSE WHO DO NOT REPENT OF SIN?

Many people would like to change the bible so that no one experiences the wrath and punishment of God. Therefore we have painted God as one who begs all people to be saved. And if someone rejects Jesus Christ we think it is a shame that neither God nor we were able to convince that person to receive him.

In eternity, will God look down on the people in fires of hell and cry out in anguish, "Why didn't you repent—why did you force me to send you there?" The bible says there is a clear purpose for God to show His wrath.

Romans 9:22-23 says "What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath--prepared for destruction? ²³What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory..."

The first thing in this passage to call attention to is that God bore with great patience the objects of his wrath prepared for destruction. So when some people who are not given the Holy Spirit to repent do all kinds of evil things, God gets to show off his patience.

So when God allows people to join gangs and worship sex and slander and steal from one another and teach their children to act as though God does not exist. He allows those things to happen so that he can show off his patience. And when he steps in, and he will step in, he will do so because he knows it is the right time to show off his justice through his wrath.

And when God shows his wrath and justice against sin, it is not because his feelings are hurt over people rejecting him. It is so that those

who have been shown mercy will appreciate what they have more than the do. Everything God does or allows is first and foremost to show his attributes to the universe and it's inhabitants.

GOD'S WILL CANNOT BE VIOLATED BY SINFUL MAN

The Scripture is clear that, although man has a free will, that free will can never violate God's sovereign choice of who is to be saved. God oversees and superintends the free will of people to accomplish God's will. No one can frustrate God's plans and purposes. This is Paul's point in Romans nine when he explains why the Israelites were rejecting their own Savior.

There are many texts that make this point. Perhaps the best known is found in

John 6:44 where Jesus says, ***“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...”***

Jesus tells us the only way a person can come into relationship with Him is this activity of the Father, which is, translated “draws.” The Father draws people to Jesus. What is the nature of this “drawing” by the Father? Is this drawing like a person who is drawn to buy popcorn in the movie theatre because of the advertisements and the enticing smell? The word in the original language literally means, “to drag.” The Father drags people to Christ.

The same Greek word that is translated here as “draws” is used in Acts 16:19. Paul and Silas just cast a demon out of a slave girl and that will make her useless for earning money as a fortuneteller. In verse 19 we read, ***Acts 16:19 “When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and DRAGGED them into the marketplace to face the authorities.”***

When the slave owners seized Paul and Silas, they did not say, “Um, excuse us. If you would be so kind, please accompany us to the courthouse—but if you don’t want to, we certainly will not compel you to go.” They were dragging Paul and Silas to the courthouse!

This verse should really be translated like this; ***“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me drags him...”***

So often today, the way we present the gospel makes Christ look like a weak sister. J.L. Packer relates how misunderstandings of the character of God results in making so much of our evangelism portray God in an unbiblical manner.

He says, *“we depict the Father and the Son, not as sovereignly active in drawing sinners to themselves, but as waiting in quiet impotence “at the door of our hearts” for us to let Him in...the enthroned Lord is changed into a weak, futile figure tapping at the door of the human heart, which He is powerless to open...Christ [is presented] as the baffled Savior, shut down in what He hoped to do by human unbelief.*

People don’t realize it, but when they believe that the gospel is dependent upon the free will of the lost person, rather than on God’s sovereign, irresistible grace, they are presenting a version of a Savior who is more to be pitied for his lack of persuasive power than worshipped for His sovereign power to save sinners.

If you wonder how rampant this warped thinking is today, all you have to do is open a hymnal. Listen to the words of a popular song.

“The Savior is waiting to enter your heart, Why don’t you let Him come in? There’s nothing in this world to keep you apart, what is your answer to Him? Time after time He has waited

before, And now He is waiting again to see if you're willing to open the door, O, how He wants to come in."

These lyrics makes the sinner 100% in control of their salvation. And to picture the Lord God as a pleading beggar trying to get someone to respond to His love is an insult of the highest order.

Jesus Christ does not need our help to save us! It is ultimately all of Him and all of grace. You may ask, "But we must believe—have faith and we must repent in order to be saved. That's our part of the transaction." That is true, but did you know that belief, faith and repentance are a gift from God? Let's look at the word of God.

Phil 1:29 Paul says, "***For it has been granted*** [that word means "freely given"] ***to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.***"

The faith a sinner exercises to believe does not originate with him. God has freely given it to him. The faith to believe is a gift from God and it is part of the gift of salvation.

Acts 13:48 says of a group of Gentile converts, "***and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.***"

Those who believed were those who had been previously designated, set, established by God to be saved. If we have faith to believe, it is because God gave us that faith. We cannot drum up that kind of faith out of the fallen sin nature. And that is all we have before we come to Christ.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT

The biggest reason we need to understand God's role in the universe is that we do not want to miss the meaning of our life. If this life is primarily about us and about our choices then we are setting ourselves up to steal

glory from God and take credit for things that God has done. More than anything God is jealous for his glory. He has destroyed nations and peoples who refused to give him glory. He cast the highest angel out of heaven over who would get the glory. And in our culture we are taught more and more to treat ourselves as the center of the universe. We are taught to think this life is all about me. I am in control. Do what is best for me. I get to decide what is right for me. As a preacher of the word of God I fear greatly teaching anything that puts us in the drivers seat and pulls God off of his throne.

If we understand that all people and all circumstances are in this world to show off some attribute of God, then we will not get so freaked out by circumstances.

If we understand that all people and circumstances are in this world to show off some attribute of God, then we will not think that the salvation of our friends and neighbors rests on our ability to persuade them. Instead, if God is calling our friends or neighbors to salvation, we can walk in his power to draw and yes even drag people to the cross. And in the end, God will receive the glory and honor.

In this message I have highlighted the sovereignty of God. After Resurrection Sunday I will do my best to talk about the human will and how it is that God predestines things and yet he also tells us to make choices. For now, the best way to digest this material is to decide in your heart right now that you are going to live your entire life and make all your decisions with the goal of doing God's will and bringing Him glory. After all, that is why we have been created. Even though God is Sovereign our choices matter to God. If we are created for His glory, then go and do everything that you know will bring glory to his great and awesome name.