

ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH
GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY & MAN’S RESPONSIBILITY – Chapters 9-11

LESSON 33 – GOD’S MERCY AND RIGHTEOUSNESS – Romans 9:14-18

Again...as a reminder to you, I’m using a set of study guides by Dr. David Jeremiah as a basis for our Romans study. As we studied last week, Dr. Jeremiah is a proponent of the Reformed View of the doctrines of election and predestination so this lesson in his study guide is somewhat a continuation of that topic. Since I hold the Non Reformed View on these doctrines, my interpretation...and therefore presentation of this lesson material differs from his.

As a brief review, let’s spend a moment going over these viewpoints once again.

The Reformed View

The Reformed doctrine of election and predestination simply stated is that God elects whom He wants to and predestines them to be saved and people choose God only because He has first predestined them.

The Non-Reformed View

The Non-Reformed doctrine simply states that God elected mankind and predestines people to salvation but people freely choose to accept or reject God’s offer of salvation. That God’s plan for the salvation of mankind was predestined and Jesus was elected to fulfill that plan.

So once again, I disagree with Dr. Jeremiah and his interpretation of these verses here in Romans 9. I’m also going to remind you again that my goal with these lessons is not to convince you to believe like me. My goal is to get you to study and pray and come to your own conclusion as to the correct interpretation of these verses.

In this lesson we continue looking at some of the questions Paul raised to his readers. In the previous section, Paul talked about God’s character and power. God had promised blessing to Israel in the Old Testament but the vast majority of Israel in Paul’s day was not enjoying God’s blessing. So had God’s plan been voided by Israel’s disobedience?

Paul answers that in verse 14 when he says, “Not at all!” God’s opening salvation up to the Gentiles was not out of frustration over the Jews not accepting Jesus as the Messiah. God’s plan was always to extend His plan of salvation to the entire world. This is exactly what God meant when He told Abraham, “All the nations of the world will be blessed because of you.”

This spiritual blessing of God raised more questions. How can some people receive His spiritual blessing and some people not? Isn’t that unfair?

Paul doesn’t even try to answer this question about unfairness here. Instead Paul focuses on the righteousness of God and that we are dependent on His mercy.

Doubting God’s Righteousness

Everyone at some point has doubted God’s justice. Now we may not think of it that way...instead we may wonder, “Why did God allow something to happen that way?” or “Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?”

As usual, Paul anticipates these types of questions and asks one of his own in verse 14, "Is God unjust?" He then answers that question with a resounding, "Not at all!"

If we do not live our lives based on the fact that God IS righteous, we have no basis for righteousness in our own lives.

Defending God's Righteousness

Paul defends the righteousness of God from two different angles by using the examples of Moses and Pharaoh.

God Is Righteous When He Extends His Mercy

The doctrine of mercy is introduced to us here for the first time in Romans. Paul goes back in the Old Testament to a time when God gave the Law to Moses. While Moses was on the mountain with God, the rest of the Israelites built a golden idol to worship. God was about to destroy the people for this when Moses intervened. Moses interceded for forty days and forty nights before the Lord.

As a result of Moses' intercession, God extended mercy to Israel. These people who had sinned, were guilty and deserved judgment...instead received God's mercy. If you think of mankind in much the same way, it is only His mercy that allows any of us to escape judgment and receive salvation.

Paul then explains that God's mercy is not in response to our desire or our effort. It's fine for us to work after we come to Christ, but before becoming Christians, no amount of effort on our part can get us close to God.

God Is Righteous When He Executes His Judgment

Paul's statement in verse 17 comes from Exodus 9:16. "But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

So the real question is this... Does God harden someone's heart so they will not believe and then punish them because of what they couldn't do because He hardened their heart?

Well the answer to that question is this... God doesn't harden the heart of anyone who hasn't first hardened their own heart against Him.

Exodus 7:13-14, "Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had said."

Exodus 9:12, "But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart ..."

After studying these verses, we have to come to the conclusion that Pharaoh hardened his own heart and God hardened his heart...both are true. Remember this...God's hardening of anyone's heart is always a response to the sinfulness of that person. If Pharaoh had not hardened himself toward the will of God, God would not have hardened his heart. God used Pharaoh's evil to show His power to His people and to all the other nations of the world. Yes...God did it, but it was Pharaoh's responsibility.

As a result of Pharaoh's hardened heart, the Israelites were freed from slavery. God's defeat of Pharaoh and rescue of Israel became the central redemptive story throughout the Old Testament.

I want to take just a moment here at the end of this lesson to try and tie up the discussion we had about election and predestination and share with you why I think those who hold to the reformed view of these doctrines have misunderstood and misinterpreted Scripture. I'm going to use a direct quote from Dr. Jeremiah's study guide to illustrate this for you. He says...

"What happened to Pharaoh should serve as a warning to us. Throughout the ten plagues, God gave Pharaoh ten chances, as it were, to repent and obey God. But each time, Pharaoh hardened his heart more. Somewhere in the process God 'gave him over' to the hardness of his own heart because he would not repent. **This should frighten all of us, especially any who are resisting the call of God on his or her life for salvation or service.** To resist God is to run the risk of being delivered up to the effects of our own choices."

To be quite frank and honest with you, this statement by Dr. Jeremiah is a direct contradiction to his stance on election and predestination. According to him, someone who has been elected and predestined for salvation, cannot "resist the call of God on his or her life for salvation or service." In our last lesson I shared with you the example he used about the airplane...

"Think of election and predestination as an airline flight to heaven. Election is God deciding who gets on the plane bound for heaven. Predestination means God, Himself makes sure the elect actually board the plane."

And another quote by Dr. Jeremiah from our last lesson...

"Those whom God has elected to salvation He also moves to accept His free offer. All who are chosen are predestined to end up in heaven. Not only are we predestined for salvation but according to Romans 8:29, we are predestined to conform to the image of Jesus. A person chosen unto salvation will live a holy life."

I would suggest to Dr. Jeremiah or anyone else who takes this viewpoint that you can't have it both ways. People have either been elected and predestined for salvation and have no choice in the matter...or God extends his plan of salvation to us because of His love and mercy but it's up to mankind to make the choice to accept or reject His free gift. It's one or the other...both cannot be true!