

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

LESSON 34 – THE FAIRNESS OF GOD – Romans 9:19-33

I’m sure you’ve all heard small children complain, “That’s not fair!” At times it seems like that’s the first thing out of their mouths when things don’t go their way. Unfortunately, age doesn’t really do away with this attitude in us entirely.

So far in this chapter of Romans, Paul has talked about God’s faithfulness and His justice. Now in closing out this section, Paul moves on to talking about God’s fairness. He gives us four reasons why God’s actions are fair and consistent with who He is.

God’s Actions Are Consistent With His Rights

Paul again anticipates questions that his readers might have...specifically the Jewish readers...and gives questions of his own to emphasize the distance that separates the Creator from His creation...

“But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, Why did you make me like this? Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?” vs. 20-21

Now...Paul is not saying that we can’t ask questions of God and His will but he is saying that we need to ask reverently and respectfully. Paul uses two passages from Isaiah to make his point.

Isaiah 29:16, “You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, You did not make me? Can the pot say to the potter, You know nothing?”

Isaiah 45:9, “Does the clay say to the potter, What are you making? Does your work say, The potter has no hands?”

One writer put it this way, “When we have a question for God, we should first act like Moses who removed his shoes because he was on holy ground. Next we should cover our mouth like Job and confess that we tend to speak things that we don’t understand; then we should come with an attitude of repentance. Worship is always the proper response when we are perplexed about God.”

God’s Actions Are Consistent With His Reputation

In verses 22 and 23, Paul makes the point that God always acts in ways that line up with His nature. A key part of God’s character is shown in verse 22 where Paul says God acts with great patience toward the objects of His wrath. Remember Pharaoh? God gave him many chances to repent but he never did. So Pharaoh became an object of God’s wrath.

Keep in mind that this section of Romans...chapters 9-11...focuses on God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. God is in control, but mankind is responsible for how they respond to Him.

Deuteronomy 29:29, “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.”

Those secret things are God's sovereign purposes. Our problem is wanting to know all of God's secrets. Our responsibility is to take what God has revealed and work to understand it and implement it in our lives. The difficult part is learning to leave those secret things for God to handle.

God's Actions Are Consistent With His Revelation

Paul goes on to share that what God does is entirely fair since it is consistent with His prior revelations about His actions. This fairness issue is brought up by Paul because of the Jews who thought that God was being unfair because the Gospel...and its blessings...were now opened to the Gentiles.

In verses 25 and 26, Paul quotes from the book of Hosea to show that God had always included the Gentiles in His plan. Then in verses 27 through 29, he quotes from Isaiah to show the day was coming when only a remnant of Israel would believe. In Paul's day both those things were happening and they are certainly true today. The church around the world is mostly Gentile with only a small number of Jews embracing their Messiah.

The Gospel began with the Jews but when Jesus came, His own people rejected Him. The door was then opened to allow Gentiles to receive the Gospel directly from the apostles...specifically through Paul. This was not a surprise development at all. It was exactly what God said would happen hundreds of years earlier.

The book of Hosea pictures the unfaithfulness of Israel during the Old Testament time. Hosea was instructed by God to marry a prostitute who was a picture of the spiritually adulterous Jewish people.

Hosea and his wife had three children who became pictures of God's dealings with Israel. The first child's name was Jezreel...which meant scattered. The second child's name was Lo-ruhamah which meant not pitied. The third child was named Lo-Ammi which meant not my people.

Scattered, Not-Pitied and Not-My-People were perfect names for how God's relationship with Israel would change. Later on in Hosea the children were given three more names by God. These names moved from pictures of destruction and abandonment to grace and love. The first child's name changed from Scattered to Planted. The second child's name changed from Not-Pitied to Pitied...and the third child's name from Not-My-People to My-People.

We discussed this as we were going through the book of Revelation but I'll remind you again that Israel is still God's chosen people. Scripture tells us that they will return to Him and God will use them in a great way to share the Gospel with the world.

God's Actions Are Consistent With His Redemptive Plan

The Gentiles Paul visited on his missionary journeys were not looking for righteousness at all. In fact, they were filled with superstition, immorality, corruption and all kinds of unrighteousness. Still, when the Gospel was preached, there were thousands of Gentiles saved. So even though they weren't looking for righteousness, they found it because God sent it their way through Paul's message.

Reading Paul's preaching in Acts, we find that in the same cities where many Gentiles responded to the Gospel, most of the Jews didn't. So the same Gospel was preached to each group but the responses were totally different. What we see is exactly what the prophets predicted and Paul confirmed taking place.

The “stumbling stone” that Paul refers to in verse 32 is Jesus. The two quotes He uses from Isaiah predicted the fact that one day the Jews would stumble over their own Messiah...they rejected Him for who He really was. The Jews refused to confess the truth of what Jesus taught. Jesus became the stumbling stone of offense to the Jews because they were offended by His message of repentance and they would not repent.

People today are still offended by the cross, the blood and the message of repentance. Today...just as in Jesus’ day, are quick to hold on to their heritage and their good works as proof of their righteousness. The reality is that neither of those things can save. Only a personal relationship with Jesus can save us and make us righteous before a holy God.