

God's Sovereignty Versus Man's Responsibility - A Study of Romans 9

Job 42:2 (ESV)

²"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

- "no purpose of yours can be thwarted" - *There are many Scriptures that clearly indicate the Sovereignty of God*
- *The Book of Revelation beautifully expounds on the sovereignty of God as it outlines the future events of mankind and ends with the finale of "We win!"*

1 Timothy 2:4 (NKJV)

⁴who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

- *Scripture clearly indicates that God desires to save all men, but not everyone will be saved.*
- *Man's choice is obviously involved in his or her personal salvation.*
- *Even in Apostle Paul's writings we can see this dichotomy of thought.*

Galatians 1:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace,

- "who separated me from my mother's womb" - *In this verse Paul clearly verifies the sovereignty of God in his life.*

1 Corinthians 9:27 (NKJV)

²⁷But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

- *In this verse Paul also clearly states that if he fails to submit to God then his service and life would be "disqualified," which means in the Greek "of no value, worth nothing."*
- *Paul's two statements show us that Paul's calling was a sovereign call from God, but his response to that calling would determine how fruitful his calling would be.*
- *The topic of God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility has in the minds of some been a source of contradiction and confusion, but in reality they provide a divine tension that brings balance into our lives.*

- *There are two extremes we can fall into when looking at the topic of God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility.*
- *If we only focus on God's Sovereignty we can develop an attitude of irresponsibility and think we don't have to worry about our choices, because God's will will be done anyway.*
- *If we only focus on Man's Responsibility we can begin to feel overwhelmed thinking that all the burdens of this life are upon our shoulders and we will never be able to live up to God's expectations.*
- *Understanding God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility gives us both motivation to press on in God's purposes for our lives, and at the same time gives us security as we learn to lean upon God's sovereign plan for our lives.*
- *Romans, Chapter 9, probably addresses the relationship between God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility most thoroughly.*
- *In Romans, Chapter 9, Paul uses Israel as an example to illustrate the relationship between God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility.*
- **1. GOD'S HEART TOWARDS MANKIND IS ALWAYS REDEMPTIVE**

Romans 9:1–5 (NKJV)

¹I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,

²that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.

³For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,

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- **“For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren”**
– *Paul expresses the heart of God for Israel by saying he would willingly choose to be accursed and separated from Christ if it would bring his fellow Jews to salvation.*
- *What Paul expressed is really the heart of God, because Christ literally became a curse for us, and became separated from His Father so we could be saved.*

⁴who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises;

⁵of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

- “who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises” – *God created Israel so they could experience His glory and blessings. Similarly God created mankind to experience His blessings and glory. All who receive Christ will experience this.*
- *Personal Application: God is for you and not against you and the desire of His heart is to save, sanctify, and bless you.*
- **2. MAN’S UNFAITHFULNESS CANNOT NULLIFY GOD’S FAITHFULNESS.**

Romans 9:6 (NKJV)

⁶But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,

Romans 3:3 (NKJV)

³For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?

- *The unbelief of some does not nullify or make ineffective the promises of God.*
- *“For not all Israel who are of Israel” – Not all of Israel is in unbelief and not all natural Israel is spiritually Israel.*
- *Personal Application: No matter how many times we fail, God is still faithful and will respond to us when we call out to Him with a humble and repentant heart.*
- **3. ONLY WHEN WE CHOOSE TO WALK BY FAITH WILL WE SEE GOD’S PROMISES FULFILLED IN OUR LIVES.**

Romans 9:7–9 (NKJV)

⁷nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.”

⁸That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

⁹For this is the word of promise: “At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.”

- *Abraham had two sons, one was the result of self-effort and the other the result of faith in God’s promises.*
- *“those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed” – Ishmael was a product of Abraham’s self-effort (the flesh), but Isaac’s birth resulted from*

Abraham trusting God's promises.

- *Abraham's first son, Ishmael, resulted in strife that has continued to the present day.*
- *Abraham's second son, Isaac, resulted in the promises and faithfulness of God being manifest to this present day.*
- *The very existence of modern day Israel testifies to God's faithfulness to Abraham, because Abraham chose to believe God.*
- *Personal Application: Only when we choose to put our faith in God do His promises come into effect in our lives.*
- **4. OUR PERSONAL CALLING IS A RESULT OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN WILL.**

Romans 9:10–11 (NKJV)

¹⁰And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac

¹¹(for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls),

- *“for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil” – The calling of God upon our lives has nothing to do with how good or nice we are, but is solely based on God's choice.*
- *“the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls” – The calling of God upon each of our lives is not meant to exalt us, but the One who called us.*
- *1 Corinthians 12:14-27 clearly points out that each of our callings is equally important to God and no calling is more or less important.*

1 Corinthians 12:25–26 (NKJV)

²⁵that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

²⁶And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

- *There is no hierarchy of importance. Each calling is directly from God.*
- *What exalts a Christian in God's Kingdom is not the type of calling, but if he or she responds faithfully to that calling.*

- *Personal Application: We need to recognize that God's calling upon our lives is solely based on His sovereign will and is not based on anything we have done to earn it.*
- **5. GOD HAS A SPECIFIC PATTERN THAT WE MUST FOLLOW**

Romans 9:12 (NKJV)

¹²it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger."

- *What does the pattern "the older shall serve the younger" represent?*

Galatians 4:22–24 (NKJV)

²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman.

²³But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise,

²⁴which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—

- *"Which things are symbolic" - Ishmael and Isaac were two real men who symbolically represented two covenants, Ishmael representing those under the Law and Isaac representing those under grace through faith.*
- *Even as Ishmael and Isaac are used in Galatians to illustrate a spiritual principle, so also are Esau and Jacob used in Romans to symbolically illustrate a spiritual principle.*

1 Corinthians 15:44–47 (NKJV)

⁴⁴It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

⁴⁵And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

⁴⁶However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.

⁴⁷The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven.

- *We see the principle that the natural comes before the spiritual.*
- *The first Adam was a living soul but the last Adam (Jesus) is a life-giving spirit.*
- *We are first born naturally as a living soul and when we receive Christ we are born again as a life-giving spirit.*
- *Therefore our natural life is "older" while our spirit that has been born again is "younger."*

Romans 8:4 (NKJV)

⁴that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- *The spirit (our reborn spirit) is to rule over the flesh (our natural life).*
- *The elder shall serve the younger – the flesh shall submit to the spirit.*

Colossians 3:9–10 (NKJV)

⁹Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,
¹⁰and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

- *We experience this principle, of the elder serving the younger, as our soul no longer allows itself to be controlled by the flesh, but by the spirit.*
- *We will never enter God's predestined works for our lives until we learn to be spirit led, which mean the older (the old man) must submit to the younger (the new man in Christ).*
- *Personal Application: If we want to walk in God's plan for our lives we must learn to yield to the spirit so the flesh comes under subjection.*
- **6. GOD LOVES RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATES INIQUITY**

Romans 9:13 (NKJV)

¹³As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

- *Just as the previous verse dealt not with two men but a spiritual principle, this verse is also a prophetic message, not about two men but two nations and the spirit behind those nations.*
- *Romans 9:13 is not quoting from Genesis where it speaks about the lives of the two men, but from Malachi, where it speaks about the spirit behind two nations.*

Malachi 1:2–3 (NKJV)

²"I have loved you," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Says the LORD. "Yet Jacob I have loved;
³But Esau I have hated, And laid waste his mountains and his heritage For the jackals of the wilderness."

Hebrews 12:16–17 (NKJV)

¹⁶lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.

¹⁷For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

- *When God said, “but Esau have I hated”, He is not referring to the individual but the spirit that operated in him and then later in the nation Edom that came from him.*
- *Iniquity is when people despise the calling God has given them and they choose the fleeting passions of sin over the eternal purposes that God has for their lives.*
- *God had a wonderful purpose not only for Jacob but also for Esau, but Esau despised his birthright and sold it for a single meal.*
- *There is no calling that is more or less important.*
- *God did not choose Esau to fail. Esau made that choice himself.*
- *As long as we have breath we have the opportunity to say, “yes” to God and His purposes for our lives.*
- *Personal Application: We must not despise God’s calling on our lives and give up God’s purposes to satisfy fleeting lustful desires.*
- **7. GOD’S PRIMARY MOTIVATION IS TO SHOW MERCY AND COMPASSION**

Romans 9:14–16 (NKJV)

¹⁴What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!

¹⁵For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.”

¹⁶So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

- *After giving the previous examples, Paul concludes with “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!”*
- *“So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” - God is a God of mercy and compassion not based on our inherit goodness, but based on His inherit goodness!*
- *The heart of God toward the wicked is beautifully summarized in Ezekiel 33:11, “As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.’”*

- *Personal Application: We are never to look down on an unsaved person with apathy or hostility, no matter how wicked they are, but with a prayerful desire for them to repent and receive Christ.*
- **8. ALL CREATION WILL GLORIFY GOD, BUT OUR RESPONSE TO GOD WILL DETERMINE HOW HE WILL USE US TO GLORIFY HIS NAME**

Romans 9:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.”

- *“For this very purpose I have raised you up” – Pharaoh did not just happen to become ruler over Egypt. This was purposed by God to bring glory to His name.*
- *When many read that God raised up Pharaoh for the very purpose of showing His power and declaring His name in all the earth, they wrongly assumed that Pharaoh had no choice, but was predestined to be an object of God’s wrath and judgment.*
- *However, Pharaoh had a choice on how God’s name and power was going to be glorified through him.*
- *Pharaoh, the king of the great empire of Egypt, could have humbled himself before the God of Israel, confessed the greatness of God, and released the children of Israel. All the earth would have heard about this and glorified the God of Israel.*
- *The entire world would have thought, “How great is the God of Israel that even Pharaoh himself bowed to Him.”*

Sadly, Pharaoh chose to rebel against God and the entire earth heard about God’s judgment against Pharaoh and Egypt, and trembled and glorified the God of Israel.

- *Nebuchadnezzar is an example of a great ruler who was initially arrogant, but later he humbled himself before God and even wrote a decree to the great empire of Babylon declaring the greatness of the God of Israel.*
- *Personal Application: We as Believers have a choice if our lives will be lived to glorify His name in this world, or an example of what happens when believers choose to resist God’s grace.*
- **9. EVEN THOUGH GOD IS MERCIFUL AND PATIENT HE IS ALSO THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE THAT WILL JUDGE UNRIGHTEOUSNESS AND BRING LAWLESSNESS TO AN END.**

Romans 9:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

- *It says in Exodus that God hardened Pharaoh's heart six times, but that was only after he first hardened his own heart seven times. If someone chooses not to receive God's mercy, he surely will not escape His judgment.*
- *How did God harden Pharaoh's heart?*
- *Every time God showed mercy to Pharaoh, he responded by hardening his own heart.*

Exodus 9:34 (NKJV)

³⁴And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet more; and he hardened his heart, he and his servants.

- *The pattern we see repeated again and again is that every time God brought a plague on Egypt Pharaoh asked for Moses to intercede for him, but once the plague was removed he hardened his heart.*

Romans 2:4 (NKJV)

⁴Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

- *It is God's goodness and mercy that leads us to repentance.*
- *Just as the same sun that softens the wax hardens the clay, the same mercy that causes some hearts to soften causes others hearts to harden.*
- *When Pharaoh experienced God's mercy he consistently responded by hardening his heart.*
- *Some respond to God's mercy by repenting while others take it as an excuse to continue in rebellion.*

Proverbs 29:1 (NKJV)

¹He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, Will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

- *This is a perfect description of what happened to Pharaoh. As he continued to harden his heart to God, ultimately the Lord brought upon him His full judgment and without remedy.*
- *Personal Application: Since it is God's goodness and mercy that bring us to repentance, we must not misinterpret this as His approval of our sinful actions,*

but an opportunity to know that His mercy and love is extended to us so that we can repent and be set free.

- **10. GOD WILL NEVER OVERRIDE OUR FREEDOM TO CHOOSE**

Romans 9:19–21 (NKJV)

¹⁹You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?”

²⁰But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?”

²¹Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

- *Freedom of choice is a better term than free will, because free will can imply the power to not only choose, but the power to carry out those choices.*
- *Freedom of choice puts the responsibility for our choices squarely upon us.*
- *Some may choose to serve God, but struggle to fulfill that choice. However, God is there step by step to give that person the grace to see his or her choices become a reality.*
- *Others may choose not to serve God and blame God because they are experiencing trials or temptations.*
- *“Why have you made me like this?” – The person is really blaming God for the choices they have made and the sins that have entrapped them.*
- *They are really saying, “You could force me to do right and be obedient, so it’s Your fault,” but God’s ways are, “Choose this day whom you will serve (Joshua 24:15.)”*

2 Timothy 2:20–21 (NKJV)

²⁰But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor.

²¹Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

- *Our choice will determine if we will be a vessel of honour or dishonour (lack of honour).*
- *Personal Application: The closeness of our walk with God and how much of God’s glory and presence we will experience is directly proportioned, not by our abilities, calling, or gifting, but by our choices to yield to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.*

- **11. GOD IS PATIENTLY AND METICULOUSLY UNFOLDING HIS PLAN**

Romans 9:22 (NKJV)

²²What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,

- *God is patiently enduring all the evil that is taking place in the world so that His ultimate purpose, to save all those who turn to Him and condemn those who refuse. The result will be that for all eternity there will be bliss in Heaven and not even the smallest remnant or speck of sin, evil, pain, sorrow, or tears.*

2 Peter 3:9 (NKJV)

⁹The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

- *God is patient, not because He is looking forward to condemning the wicked, but because He desires to give all men an opportunity to repent and receive Christ.*
- *Personal Application: Let us patiently endure the difficulties and trials of this life knowing that God will ultimately purge His creation of evil and in the process He is purifying our hearts in preparation for eternity.*
- **12. THE ULTIMATE OUTCOME OF GOD’S PLAN WILL BE A HEAVEN WHERE GOD WILL CONTINUALLY BE POURING OUT HIS MERCY, LOVE, AND GLORY UPON US FOR ALL ETERNITY.**

Romans 9:23–26 (NKJV)

²³and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,

²⁴even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

²⁵As He says also in Hosea: “I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved.”

²⁶“And it shall come to pass 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 Heaven we will fully understand what it means to be called the sons and daughters of the living God.*
- *Personal Application: Let us allow our hearts to dwell upon the wonders of His love and what He has prepared for us in Heaven.*

Points of prayer:

- *There may be some here who have never received Christ, but today God is inviting you to choose to repent and receive Christ as your Lord and Saviour.*
- *There may be some believers here who have lived a double-minded life and never made consistent choices to serve Christ, but today we can ask the Lord to give us grace to make that choice and begin to learn to live a surrendered life.*
- *There may be some believers here who have chosen to walk with the Lord, but are struggling and today we can seek God to help us in our walk.*
- *There may be some believers here who have experienced victory and we can be thankful and ask Him to strengthen us even more so that we can walk in a greater degree of victory and freedom.*