

## **“Be Careful What You Ask For”**

### **Romans 9:13-18**

June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Here's a big question with innumerable answers: *What do you think of when you think about God?*

*Perhaps you view God through the lenses of sentiment; you remember what He meant to you at memorable times in your earlier years?*

*Maybe you see God as Someone who doesn't want to offend people, by restricting their choices in any way?*

*Maybe you understand God is love, but He has nothing whatsoever to do with “tough love?”*

Here is a truth we absolutely must keep in mind as students of the Bible - Our view of God reveals our understanding of His Word, the Holy Bible. Our understanding of God must be informed by what sacred Scripture says about Him.

Our weekly sermon series through the New Testament book of Romans has shown us a side of God we don't regularly see. This is especially true of **Chapters 9-11 of Romans**. Many Christian people – those who profess saving faith in Jesus Christ – have not wrestled with the God pictured in these three chapters of Romans. With today's text of Scripture before us, we are presented a side of God that can be difficult to accept. And, so, we don't spend much time studying these chapters, or the other passages of Scripture they quote. As such, we settle for a god we have fashioned and can control and manipulate, a 'divine' Being who exists to serve our desires and wants. And, that, my friends, is not the true and living God.

We come today to a passage of sacred Scripture that may rankle us, but studying it should also cause us to expand our concept of Who God is – **Romans 9:13-18**. You'll remember I briefly touched on verse 13 with last week's sermon on **Romans 9:6-13**. The topic today is still election because Paul continues to write about it. And by election, I don't mean election in the voting or polling sense, but rather God's election of those for whom He would secure eternity in heaven.

Adding to the discussion on election, today's text reveals election's opposite condition, reprobation. Let's get into the text.

#### **Romans 9:13-18:**

*“As it is written, ‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! <sup>15</sup>For 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.” <sup>16</sup>So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. <sup>17</sup>For 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.” <sup>18</sup>Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.”*

In verse 13, Paul quotes an Old Testament passage – **Malachi 1:2 & 3**. Jacob and Esau were the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac was the child God promised Abraham and Sarah in their old age. Isaac was not Abraham's oldest son. That position was filled by Ishmael, the child Abraham fathered with Hagar, Sarah's handmaiden. Abraham's seed continued through Isaac, and Isaac's son, Jacob, would carry on that line as well. And, we remember that Jacob was not the first-born of the twin sons – Esau was. So, this was all taking place because God ordained it all to happen at His choice.

God chose the second-born son Jacob because it pleased God to choose Jacob. It was clearly within God's purview to make such a choice – after all, He is God. Verse 13 teaches us, God *loved* Jacob. And, Jacob didn't have much to commend himself to God. His name means "supplanter" or "deceiver." And, he was surely that in stealing Esau's birthright.

Verse 13 teaches us that God didn't choose Esau because He (God)...*hated* him. Oof! There it is – so hard to accept. *God hates someone? But, doesn't the Bible teach that God is love?* Yes, it does. In many places, notably **I John Chapter 4**, we know God is the embodiment of love.

God's choices for Jacob and Esau are examples of election and reprobation. **Election** is the biblical doctrine that God chooses some to be the recipients of His special grace in eternal salvation. (Berkhoff, 114) **Reprobation** is God's eternal decree that He has determined to pass some men by and to punish them for their sins. (Berkhoff, 116).

Last Sunday during worship, we recited question and answer #7 of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, which we understand to be a proper summary of what the Bible teaches. That question asks, "What are the decrees of God?" The answer, "The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for His own glory, He has fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass." That would mean Jacob received God's favor because God decreed (fore-ordained) it to be so, and Esau did not receive God's favor because God decreed it to be so. *Does God have the right to make such choices?* Yes, He does. *Is God's choice fair?* Be careful. Our sense of fairness is stained by the sin with which we were conceived and born. Yes, it is fair (just) because Esau got what was coming to him in being rejected by God; Jacob got what he didn't deserve.

God accepted Jacob (He loved him) while He rejected Esau (He hated him). Jacob received grace; Esau received justice. God withheld His mercy from Esau – mercy to which Esau had no claim – but the withholding was not an act of injustice on God's part. The elect get grace; the reprobate (non-elect) get justice. Nobody gets injustice. That's what verse 14 of today's passage teaches – "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness ('injustice' in some versions) with God? Certainly not!"

As if the COVID-19 viral pandemic and the rocky financial markets weren't difficult enough, they were followed up by another crisis threatening the very fabric of America. This crisis, like the first two mentioned, is having an international impact.

I refer to the riots and demonstrations in many cities and towns (even our own!). *Who among us hasn't seen the video of the policeman with his knee across the throat of a man on a street in Minneapolis, Minnesota?* Shocking to watch, and predictably incendiary in its' effect.

For the first several days after that video went viral, the outrage played out in foolish, destructive, even criminal ways all across our country. Watching rage-filled people trashing buildings and cars, and stealing goods from stores was extremely frustrating. I pondered how such behaviors made the situation any better for any one.

And, at most, if not all of these gatherings, people motivated to erase injustice shouted over loudspeakers and social media asking for justice. I thought – be careful what you ask for, you just might get it!

One of Aesop's fables concerns an old man gathering branches in the forest. He grew weary of the task and said, "I cannot do this any longer. I wish death would come and take me."

At that moment death appeared to him and said, "What do you want, mortal? I heard you call for me." Terrified, the old man said, "Please sir, help me load this bundle of branches on my shoulder?" Aesop's moral: ***Be careful what you ask for – you just might get it!***

What we really need, all throughout our country, is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whether demonstrating, legislating, or serving the public by keeping the peace, if we are not believers in Jesus Christ acting out of selflessness, then we are part of the problem in terms of race relations.

Theologically, we don't want to receive justice from God. As our study of Romans has taught us, we were conceived in sin, born in sin, and we remain in sin unless and until God intervenes and gives us new hearts with which to worship and serve Him. No, we want – we desperately need - ***mercy*** from God! Having said that, if we are not ***in*** Christ, we are ***in*** trouble – and that's trouble with a capital 'T.' Those who are clipping along through this life with no thought of God in Christ, will receive their just desserts when they stand before God in judgment. They will get eternal justice, which is the punishments of hell, for sinful men and women (which we ***all*** were before Christ saved us!)

So, we must first experience hearts changed by God's grace before we can, in turn, attempt to change the world, country, state, county, city, or even our little domiciles. But, our behaviors must glorify God if we are to have any lasting, positive effect.

Verses 15 and 16 of today's passage teach God's sovereignty. "For He (God) says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.' So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy." This harkens back to **Exodus Chapter 33** and a conversation between God and Moses. In verse 18, Moses asks of God, "Please, show me Your glory," which is to say, "Show me Who You are." Then with verse 19, God said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the

name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” There’s no mention of God giving everyone an equal chance at whether they will choose him or not for salvation. None would choose salvation because all are sinful. Only those whom God gives spiritual life (those to whom He will be gracious) will be equipped to choose Him.

Tim Keller shares this example in his commentary.

Consider a rich person who decides to choose 20 inner-city kids and guarantee their full college tuition. There are literally thousands of equally worthy recipients. And this rich woman could help a lot more than 20 children. But can anyone say that since she helped some, she is being unfair to everyone else? No. She has no particular obligation to help any of the children. Since all she has given is sheer mercy, there can be no talk about being “unfair.” (Keller, 65)

In verse 17, Paul refers to another passage from Exodus. In particular, he is influenced by **Exodus 9:13-16**. Again, God and Moses are having a discussion. The context is just before the seventh of ten plagues God was bringing against Pharaoh and Egypt in defense of His people (hail).

“<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: “Let My people go, that they may serve Me, <sup>14</sup> for at this time I will send all My plagues to your very heart, and on your servants and on your people, that you may know that *there is* none like Me in all the earth. <sup>15</sup> Now if I had stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, then you would have been cut off from the earth. <sup>16</sup> But indeed for this *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.”

We see in **Exodus 9:16** that God had a purpose in exalting Pharaoh – it was God’s will that Pharaoh filled the position he held. That purpose was so that God’s power would be declared throughout the world. That brings us to **Romans 9:18** – “(God) has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.”

It’s of note to point out that Scripture nowhere shows God hardening a person who hadn’t already hardened him/herself against Him. God is pictured in Exodus as “hardening” Pharaoh, but that didn’t precede the hardening Pharaoh experienced for himself. What this illustrates is the first chapter of Romans. God was giving Pharaoh over to his sin.

In exercising mercy to those He wills, God actively works to save those elect persons from an eternal punishment in hell. He must actively cause there to be spiritual life where there is spiritual deadness. He must change stony hearts into fleshy ones, and He must breathe His Spirit into dead carcasses in order to effect spiritual life in those whom He has chosen.

But, for the non-elect, those God doesn’t give grace, all He has to do is pass over them. “He leaves them to their own desires, but He does not intrude in their lives to create additional or fresh evil.” (Sproul, 328)

So, the God we've seen pictured in these verses from **Romans Chapter 9**, may indeed be a different god than you perceived in answering my question at the beginning of this message, *What do you think about when you think about God?* Your understanding of God must include His electing some in Christ Jesus, and the rest Him passing over. Only those God foreknows, predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies are chosen to eternal salvation. The rest receive justice, for God never acts unjustly.

Finally, our understanding of God must include absolute loyalty and radical love, not subordinating any love for Him to anyone He created. We close hearing Jesus' words in the Gospel According to Luke, **Luke 14:26** – "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."

"Jesus was making a comparison. Those who want to love Him must love Him before all others. Jesus requires that the love we have for our friends, spouse, mother, father, or children be so much less than the love we have for Him that it could be seen as hatred." (Sproul, 317)