

Salvation by Faith Alone: The Book of Romans Children of the Promise

Lesson #10 for December 9, 2017

Scriptures: Romans 9.

1. In Romans 1-8, Paul set out his understanding of the plan of salvation. It is free to all people, Jew and Gentile alike. But, Paul recognized that this approach might alienate many of his fellow countrymen, the Jews. So, in Romans 9-11, he addressed their issues.

“As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. . . . For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy . . . , and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (*Rom. 9:13, 15*).

What is Paul talking about here? What about human free will and the freedom to choose, without which very little of what we believe makes sense? Are we not free to choose or reject God? Or are these verses teaching that certain people are elected to be saved and others to be lost, regardless of their own personal choices?

The answer is found, as usual, by looking at the bigger picture of what Paul is saying. Paul is following a line of argument in which he attempts to show God’s right to pick those whom He will use as His “elected” ones. After all, God is the One who carries the ultimate responsibility of evangelizing the world. Therefore, why can He not choose as His agents whomever He wills? So long as God cuts off no one from the opportunity of salvation, such an action on God’s part is not contrary to the principles of free will. Even more important, it’s not contrary to the great truth that Christ died for all humans and His desire that everyone have salvation.

As long as we remember that Romans 9 is not dealing with the personal salvation of those it names; but that it is dealing with their call to do a certain work, the chapter presents no difficulties.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath, December 2, 2017.

2. The Jews had always believed that they were God’s special people. They thought they had an inside track for salvation. Some of them believed that because they were Abraham’s descendants, they had an automatic guarantee of salvation. So, when they heard Paul spelling out how the gospel was equally for Gentiles and Jews, they were upset.
3. Paul began by saying that he would be willing to give up his own eternal salvation if it would save the Jews. (See Romans 9:1-3; 10:1; 11:1-2. Compare Moses in Exodus 32:30-34.) He acknowledged the fact that God chose their ancestors to be His special people. But, he also recognized that they had had a number of problems. Hosea 4:17 even suggested that the time might have come for God to abandon them completely! Hosea 2:8 says that in Hosea’s day, they were referred to not as God’s own people but as idol worshipers. But, as always, God was ready to take them back if they repented and turned to Him. (Hosea 2:14-23) God’s attitude toward the Gentiles, however, is also clearly spelled out. (Hosea 2:23)
4. Seventh-day Adventists have sometimes had a similar attitude. We have often suggested that “we have the truth,” when, in fact, God wishes that the truth had us! Why do many modern Christian churches claim that they are the one true church?
5. Why do you think God chose Abram/Abraham? Was Abraham particularly righteous? Was he the best available? Was Abram the one who responded to God? Or, was Abraham called to

do a special work for God—a special mission? What about us? (Romans 8:29-30)

6. What is God's "election"? Is that referring to God offering us salvation? Or, is it talking about God choosing us to do a special work for Him? Many Christians especially those in the Calvinistic tradition have believed that this passage is talking about salvation. If that is true, then we are subject to "predestination." *Predestination* means that God has already decided who is going to be saved and who is going to be lost, and there is nothing we can do about it. If that is true, is there any role left for human free choice? Is there any freedom of any kind? Does it matter what we believe? And if you say: "Okay, I will do whatever I want since it doesn't matter," they will respond that that is proof that you have been chosen to be lost!
7. But, if this passage is talking about the ones God is calling to do a special work for Him, then, since He is the one responsible for spreading the gospel throughout the universe, He certainly has the right to choose anyone He wants to serve as His agent. Could God have chosen a better method of getting His work done? Wouldn't the angels have done a better job of spreading the gospel than we are doing? Why did God choose to give us this job?
8. What does this "calling" or "election" mean? Read Exodus 19:5-6 and 1 Peter 2:9. Notice that God's words about the people of Israel are almost identical with His New Testament words through Peter about the Christian church. But, we must remember that our freedom affects what God can do with us! Without freedom, there is no possibility for love; and God is all about love. (1 John 4:8,16) God cannot force you to love Him and still have freedom.
9. What was God's original plan for the Israelites? Weren't they placed at the crossroads of the ancient world so that they could witness for God? Weren't they supposed to be shining lights to all around them? **But, they believed that they had been chosen for special privileges and not for special responsibilities.** How soon did Abraham and his descendants fall short of God's ideal for them? Notice this interesting selection.

If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved in the ark by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity of the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, which circumcision was a token or pledge of, they would never have gone into idolatry, and been suffered to go down into Egypt, and there would have been no necessity of God's proclaiming his law from Sinai, and engraving it upon tables of stone, and guarding it by definite directions in the judgments and statutes given to Moses.

Moses wrote these judgments and statutes from the mouth of God while he was with him in the mount. If the people of God had obeyed the principles of the ten commandments, there would have been no need of the specific directions given to Moses, which he wrote in a book, relative to their duty to God and to one another. The definite directions which the Lord gave to Moses in regard to the duty of his people to one another, and to the stranger, are the principles of the ten commandments simplified, and given in a definite manner that they need not err.—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*,* vol. 3, 299.2-300.0 (1864); *1SP** 264.2-265.1; *The Signs of the Times*,* June 17, 1880, par. 2-3. First paragraph: *Patriarchs and Prophets** 364.2; second paragraph: compare *Ibid.** 364.3; compare *Pamphlet 064** p. 19 (1875).

10. Doesn't this passage seem to suggest that even in the earliest generations of Abraham's descendants, they were departing quite some distance from God's original plan? Who did the twelve sons of Jacob marry? Were they being sucked into Canaanite culture and religion? If

God had left them there in Canaan, how long would it have been before they just melted into Canaanite society? If they had remained faithful to God, they would never have been in Egypt! It should not have been necessary for God to give them the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai! But, weren't they the "elected" ones?

The children of Israel were to occupy all the territory which God appointed them. Those nations that rejected the worship and service of the true God were to be dispossessed. But it was God's purpose that by the revelation of His character through Israel men should be drawn unto Him. To all the world the gospel invitation was to be given. Through the teaching of the sacrificial service Christ was to be uplifted before the nations, and all who would look unto Him should live. All who, like Rahab the Canaanite, and Ruth the Moabitess, turned from idolatry to the worship of the true God, were to unite themselves with His chosen people. As the numbers of Israel increased they were to enlarge their borders, until their kingdom should embrace the world.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons** 290.1.

11. Read Romans 9:1-12. **Paul was making it very clear that he had a great burden for his fellow Israelites. But, at the same time, he was pointing out that direct descent from Abraham did not make them automatically God's privileged people.** We are not saved by genetics. And he concluded with that challenging phrase, "I loved Jacob ... but I hated Esau"! It is from this verse and the following verses that Calvin and others came up with the idea of predestination.
12. But, that is a result of not reading the Scriptures correctly. The verse quoted in Romans 9:13 is found in Malachi 1:2-3. That is not a prediction of how God would treat them in the future; it is a summary of their relationship to Him hundreds of years earlier. Now, it is true that Rebekah was given a prophecy about the two children in her womb; (Genesis 25:19-26) but, that prophecy simply stated that God had chosen Jacob rather than Esau to be the ancestor of His Son. It was a prophecy about the work that God had given them to do—not salvation.
13. Did God really hate Esau? What is implied when we say God hates someone? How can a God who is love (1 John 4:8,16) hate anyone? There are many texts in Scripture suggesting that God loves everyone and wants to save everyone. And that would include Esau. So, how are we to read this passage? In scriptural language, *to hate* simply means *to love less*. It is a way of expressing preference for one as opposed to another. (See Genesis 29:31 [KJV].) God "hates" anything that damages His children.
14. God's response to Jacob and Esau was based on their own behavior and choices. Salvation does not come automatically through genealogy. Clearly, God did not choose as His special agents all the descendants of Abraham through his eight sons. (Genesis 25:1)
15. Notice two important facts: 1) Not everyone who was a descendant of Abraham will be saved. And 2) God will not even save all the descendants of Isaac or Jacob. Therefore, salvation is based on a relationship with God—not on heredity. Did the Jews accept this?
16. As you consider these facts, are you comfortable with the idea that God is fair to everyone?
17. Review the history of God's relationship with human beings from the time of Adam to our day. He chose Adam and Eve, and their descendants ended up in the flood. He chose Noah, and his descendants soon became idol worshipers at the tower of Babel. He chose Abraham and worked with his descendants for almost 2000 years, and they finally crucified God's own Son. He started over again with the Christian church, and it became the little horn of Daniel 7 and 8 and the leopard-like beast of Revelation 13. He worked with the Protestant reformers until

their followers became almost as spiritually dead as the church from which they had come. God then chose to work with a small group calling themselves Seventh-day Adventists, and that is where we are. Is it likely that we will accomplish what none of those previous groups have succeeded in doing? This far from the tree of life, shrunken and shriveled as we are, what are the chances that we can be successful against the Devil?

18. Read Romans 9:13-18. What impression do you get from reading these verses? Does God seem at least a little bit arbitrary? Are we all just puppets? Doesn't God's desire to save everyone (1 Timothy 2:3-4; Titus 2:11; 2 Peter 3:9) include people like Esau? Haven't we all been chosen to be saved, not lost? (Ephesians 1:4-5; 2 Peter 1:10) Why have human beings as a group generally failed so miserably to follow God's plan for their lives? God has chosen every one of us to be His eternally-saved, elect children. (See Romans 1-8.) Are we going to allow sin to deny us that wonderful heritage?
19. In many ways we Adventists are in a position similar to that of the Jews. Haven't we been given a message for the whole world? (Revelation 14:6-12) Are we hiding our lights under a basket? Or, are we letting them shine out to all those around us? Why are we still here almost 2000 years after the life and death of Jesus and 173 years after the Great Disappointment? Are we in this generation just going to pass the job of finishing the gospel to the next generation and not make any more progress than those before us?
20. Is there any basis from Scripture or any evidence in God's behavior in more recent times that He regards any race, caste, ethnicity, color, or gender as having any special privilege when it comes to salvation? (Galatians 3:28) What are we doing to reach out to everyone in the world?
21. So far in Romans, we have seen that: 1) Romans 1-3 spells out very clearly that we are all sinners. If we are all sinners—and on that basis equally lost—there is not much basis for arguing amongst ourselves about who is better! 2) In Romans 4-8, Paul explained why he believed that salvation is universally available to everyone. None of us can claim an inside track or special privileges.
22. Read Romans 9:14-15. Do these verses suggest to you that it is impossible for human beings to understand God? Or, is God telling us through Paul that we may not always understand why He does what He does; but, when we see the larger picture, we will understand? Compare Exodus 9:34-10:1 (KJV). How did God actually harden Pharaoh's heart? Did Pharaoh's own choices have anything to do with it? How do we explain the fact that in those three verses it says, "Pharaoh's heart was hardened," "Pharaoh hardened his own heart," and "God hardened his heart"? By rebelling against God's wishes, Pharaoh hardened his own heart, and God brought it about by sending the plagues. Why did God send the plagues on Egypt? Didn't He love the Egyptians also? Was it fair to nearly destroy the entire nation and kill all the firstborn because Pharaoh was so stubborn?
23. The crucial point in all this is that as fallen human beings we have such a narrow view of the world, of reality, and of God and how He works in the world. How can we expect to understand all of God's ways when the natural world, everywhere we turn, holds mysteries we can't understand? After all, it was only in the past 171 years that doctors learned it might be a good idea to wash their hands before performing surgery! That's how steeped in ignorance we have been. And who knows, if time should last, what other things will we discover in the future that will reveal just how steeped in ignorance we are today?

Certainly we don't always understand God's ways, but Jesus came to reveal to us what God is like (*John 14:9*). Why, then, amid all of life's mysteries and

unexpected events is it so crucial for us to dwell on the character of Christ and what He has revealed to us about God and His love for us? How can knowing what God's character is like help us to stay faithful amid trials that seem so unjustified and so unfair?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, December 5.

24. What should be our main mission to the world in our day? Isn't Jesus supposed to be our Example? Didn't Jesus come primarily to teach us about the Father? (John 14:9) How well are we doing at correctly representing God to the world?

The law of Jehovah was burdened with needless exactions and traditions, and God was represented as severe, exacting, revengeful, and arbitrary. He was pictured as one who could take pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures. The very attributes that belonged to the character of Satan, the evil one represented as belonging to the character of God. **Jesus came to teach men of the Father, to correctly represent him before the fallen children of earth. Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. The only way in which he could set and keep men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes.**

Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to him the praise, and giving to him the credit, of the whole purpose of his own mission on earth,—to set men right through the revelation of God. In Christ was arrayed before men the paternal grace and the matchless perfections of the Father. In his prayer just before his crucifixion, he declared, "I have manifested thy name." "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." **When the object of his mission was attained,—the revelation of God to the world,—the Son of God announced that his work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men.**—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*,* January 20, 1890, par. 6,9. Compare *Manuscript Releases*,* vol. 18, 359; *RH** August 14, 1900; *YI** November 21, 1883. [Bold type is added.]

25. One of the largest issues raised by Romans 9 is the question of freedom versus foreknowledge. Do you believe that God has foreknowledge? If God is able to know in advance even our moral choices, does that eliminate the possibility of human freedom?
26. How could God so correctly predict the rise and fall of the great empires of the ancient world and what has happened since then all the way to the second coming of Jesus? Did God manipulate things to make them come out the way He wanted them to? Or, could He, somehow, see the future?
27. Read Job 1:6; 2:1; and 42:7-8. Was God able to predict in advance the outcome of that experiment? Did God manipulate the results? How did God know that Noah would only need a boat of a certain size and not a whole fleet of larger boats for all the people who would want to get aboard? Is there any evidence that God refused anyone admission to the ark? How do you understand Isaiah 40-55?
28. In the New Testament when God performed several miracles to get Peter to go to Cornelius's house and then poured out the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius's family, wasn't that sufficient reason for believing that God was willing to save Gentiles too? Why was that such a difficult thing for

even the Christian leaders in Jerusalem to accept? (See Acts 10 & 11; compare 1 Timothy 2:4.) Why did Peter find it so hard to accept Gentiles?

29. Read Romans 9:25-29. Why did Paul suggest that only a few Jews will be saved?

In Romans 9:25 Paul quotes Hosea 2:23, and in Romans 9:26 he quotes Hosea 1:10. The background is that God instructed Hosea to take “a wife of whoredoms” (*Hos. 1:2*) as an illustration of God’s relationship with Israel, because the nation had gone after strange gods. The children born to this marriage were given names signifying God’s rejection and punishment of idolatrous Israel. The third child was named *Loammi* (*Hos. 1:9*), meaning literally “not my people.”

Yet, amid all this, Hosea predicted that the day would come when, after punishing His people, God would restore their fortunes, take away their false gods, and make a covenant with them. (See *Hos. 2:11-19*.) At this point those who were *Loammi*, “not my people,” would become *Ammi*, “my people.”

In Paul’s day, the *Ammi* were “even us, . . . not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles” (*Rom. 9:24*). What a clear and powerful presentation of the gospel, a gospel that from the start was intended for the whole world. No wonder we as Seventh-day Adventists take part of our calling from Revelation 14:6, “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*NKJV*). Today, as in Paul’s day, and as in the days of ancient Israel, the good news of salvation is to be spread throughout the world.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, December 6.

Are we doing that? As a church? Do we as individuals have any responsibility in doing that?

30. Read Romans 9:30-32. Who or what was the stumbling block? Is this parable related to Jesus’s own statement recorded in Luke 20:18? In what sense was Jesus a stumbling block to the Jews? Was it that He was not the kind of Messiah they were hoping would come? Could we make a similar mistake? (See Acts 2:41; contrast 1 Peter 2:6-8.)

There is an election of individuals and a people, the only election found in the word of God, where man is elected to be saved. Many have looked at the end, thinking they were surely elected to have heavenly bliss; but this is not the election the Bible reveals. **Man is elected to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling.** He is elected to put on the armor, to fight the good fight of faith. He is elected to use the means God has placed within his reach to war against every unholy lust, while Satan is playing the game of life for his soul. He is elected to watch unto prayer, to search the Scriptures, and to avoid entering into temptation. He is elected to have faith continually. He is elected to be obedient to every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, that he may be, not a hearer only, but a doer of the word. This is Bible election.—Ellen G. White, *A Tract: The Sin of Licentiousness; * Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*,* 453.5-454.0. [Bold type is added.]

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