

CHAPTER XI

ROMANS 9:1-33 - THE GOSPEL AND ISRAEL'S ELECTION

A MORE superficial assessment of Romans 9-11 might lead one to believe that this section is a distinct unit, especially since there appears to be little continuity with the exultant conclusion of chapter 8. Furthermore, it has been noted that some degree of continuity can be discerned, after the manner of Paul's other writings where doctrine is followed by duty, if chapters 8 and 12 are read consecutively.¹ Nevertheless there do seem to be substantial reasons why Paul makes this seemingly abrupt injection of the whole matter, concerning the righteousness of God in relation to Israel and the gospel, that in fact has deep connectedness.

First there needs to be recollection of 1:16 where the gospel is to be offered "to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek," which principle the Lord Jesus revealed to Ananias, namely that Paul was to bear My [Christ's] name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel" (Acts 9:15). As a result Paul consistently witnessed to the Jews at every opportunity, even from the beginning at Damascus following his conversion (Acts 9:22). His first missionary journey saw initial synagogue witness at Salamis, Pisidian Antioch, and Iconium (Acts 13: 5, 14; 14:1). Note that Acts 13:46 reveals: "It was necessary that the Word of God be spoken to you [Jews at Psidian Antioch] first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles." Nevertheless, at the next stop at Iconium, Paul first visits the synagogue. His second missionary journey finds him seeking the Jews first at Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus (Acts 16:13; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 19). Note that Acts 18:6 records, "Your blood [that of the Jews at Athens] be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." Nevertheless, at the next stop at Ephesus, Paul first visits the synagogue. His third missionary journey finds him returning to Ephesus, but first to the synagogue (Acts 19:8). Paul's final journey, in which he is led captive to Rome for trial, commences in Jerusalem where he witnesses in the Temple (Acts 21:26), declares to the Jews that, "I am a Jew" (Acts 22:3), and three days following his arrival at Rome, he "called together those who were the leading men of the Jews," and declared that, "I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel" (Acts 28:17, 20). It should be born in mind that Romans was received in Rome from Corinth approximately three years before this arrival in Rome just described. Thus the Apostle, although repeatedly scorned and assailed by the Jews, yet manifested an indefatigable and gracious persistence with those to whom he nevertheless felt so indebted (9:4-5). Paul was decidedly pro-semitic, even when faced with the most stubborn unbelief and spiritual adultery (9:1-3; 10:1; 11:1, 11; cf. Hosea 11:8-9). Indeed he manifests a degree of ongoing Jewishness that, while used pragmatically (Acts 16:1-3; 21:26), yet is reflective of deep love for "my kinsmen according to the flesh" (9:3). Hence, no Christian should be of any lesser attitude, though sad to say, some Christians have been anti-Semitic both racially and theologically.²

Second, other references in Romans indicate an underlying interest in the destiny of God's covenant people (2:9-10, 17-29; 3:3:1-2, 9, 29), and particularly the character of true Jewishness (2:28-29, cf. 9:6-8). It may well be that this emphasis, but especially as now considered in

¹ John Murray, *Romans*, II, p. xi.

² Martin Luther is one case in point. Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, pp. 296-8.

Romans 9-11, incorporates much of the repeated thrust of Paul's frequent synagogue ministry. Thus this former Pharisee and student of Gamaliel was constantly sensitive to the ramifications of Christian gospel truth as either an apprehensive unbelieving Jew or a recently converted Jewish Christian might assess it (7:1). Consider how often Paul, on being rejected by the Jews in his journeyings, would have reflected upon the certain covenant promises given to national Israel and the overwhelming unbelief he encountered. Here his frequent ruminating on this matter finds detailed expression.

Third, the theme of God's saving righteousness (1:16-17; 3:21-26; 5:17-21; 8:4) has highlighted the integrity of God in saving sinners, whether Jew or Gentile. Paul is dominated by this fundamental truth, so that in 3:3 God's righteousness is not to be questioned even "if some [Jews] did not believe." Hence it ought not surprise us if, in the light of Paul's confessed Jewishness, this upholding of God's character should arise again, in view of the covenant status of Israel, following such a complete vindication of the fullness and universality of the gospel. Therefore at this juncture there is good reason for maintaining that 9:6a is of crucial importance when it declares: "But it is not as though the word of God has failed." Thus John Piper rightly argues that 9:6a declares, "the main point which Romans 9-11 was written to prove, in view of Israel's unbelief and rejection. What is at stake *ultimately* in these chapters is not the fate of Israel; that is penultimate. Ultimately God's own trustworthiness is at stake. And if God's word of promise cannot be trusted to stand forever, then all our faith is in vain."³ Hence, the Word of God has not failed, and neither has its promised dealings with Israel.

Fourth, we should consider if Romans 9-11 contains any terminology that is reminiscent of Romans 1-8. Most significant is the use of "righteousness," especially in 9:30 where the Gentiles "attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith," and 10:4 where "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." Again in 10:6, 9-10a, "the righteousness based on faith" is "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness." Surely this is recapitulation of the gospel earlier described in Romans. The reference to "grace" in 11:5-6 is similarly drawing upon previous gospel doctrine where "grace" by its very nature is exclusive of "works," as in 4:4-6, 13-16.

So this excursus of Paul is very much integral to Romans as a whole. Moo wells states the issue here:

Those who relegate chaps. 9-11 to the periphery of Romans have misunderstood the purpose of Romans 9-11, or of the letter, or of both. . . . Once we recognize the importance of this Jewish motif in Romans, we can give Romans 9-11 its appropriate place in the letter. In these chapters Paul is not simply using Israel to illustrate a theological point, such as predestination (according to Augustine, [and Luther]⁴) or the righteousness of God. He is talking about Israel herself, as he wrestles with the implications of the gospel for God's 'chosen people' of the Old Testament.⁵ . . . If Jewish rejection of the gospel creates the problem Paul grapples with in Romans 9-11, Gentile acceptance of that same gospel exacerbates it. It seems that Israel has not only been disinherited but replaced. Paul earlier categorically but briefly rejected the conclusion that his teaching implied the cancellation of all the Jews' advantages (3:1-4). Now he elaborates. Of course, Paul could have cut the Gordian knot by

³ John Piper, *The Justification of God*, p. 19.

⁴ In Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 25-6, he subtitles chapters 9-11 "Predestination or Election," and fails to even mention Israel in this section.

⁵ In summary of this most vital point, refer to Murray, *Romans*, II, pp. xii-xv. However, more substantial support will be found in, Johannes Munck, *Christ & Israel*; Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*; Joseph Shulam with Hilary Le Cornu, *A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Romans*.

simply claiming that the church had taken over Israel's position and leaving it at that. But what, then, would become of the continuity between the Old Testament and the gospel? For the Jewish claim to privileged status arises not from a self-generated nationalistic fervor; it is rooted in the Old Testament (Deut. 7:6b).⁶

A. THE APOSTOLIC APPRECIATION OF ISRAEL, VS. 1-5.

There is tremendous passion in this opening declaration of Paul's heartfelt concern for national Israel. Doubtless he is reflective of his own past, the sheer bigotry of it all (Acts 26:5, 24; Gal. 1:14; Phil. 3:5-6), and there is nothing like sensitivity to our own sin making us compassionate toward others who sin in a similar fashion (I Pet. 4:8). Notice that while Paul may have expressed anger with the Jews in past encounters (Acts 13:46; 18:6; 23:2-5), yet recall that following their attempt to kill him in Jerusalem (Acts 21:30-32, 36) he nevertheless begged for permission to preach free grace that extended to the Gentiles before these violent accusers (Acts 21:39-40; 22:21-22).

1. Appreciation born of kinship, vs. 1-3.

This is a carnal kinship, yet Paul does not deny its existence or validity, as with 3:1-4. So the Christian today should have similar esteem, even if the Jews he witnesses to are scornful of the gospel. We ought to remember that we are saved by a Jewish Savior, have the gospel from the Jewish Scriptures, as well as mostly Jewish writers in the New Testament. Further, the first mother church at Jerusalem was Jewish, as were all of the twelve apostles, while Paul continued to call himself a Jew. A Christian, like Paul, ought to dearly love the Jews, in spite of their hardness of heart.

a. Through the Spirit of Christ, v. 1.

There is tremendous force of conviction in this oath-like declaration, cf. 1:9. If the composition of the church at Rome is comprised of more Gentiles than Jews, as the greetings offered in 16:1-23 could indicate, then Paul may be attempting to cover the charge that his more recent teaching, with its universal distinctions, has inferred that national Israel no longer has any place in the new church age (3:9, 22; cf. Gal. 3:28). So he immediately responds by indicating just how intensely his heart aches for national Israel. The reality of his yearning is akin to that of Christ (Matt. 23:37-39), for it is "in Christ," that is in union with Christ, to which conviction of conscience the Holy Spirit bears witness. It is not unreasonable to propose that Paul, in his earlier instruction by Christ (I Cor. 7:6, 12, 40; 11:23; Gal. 1:12), learned much of what he now relates concerning the gospel and Jewish unbelief. Here is burning concern that has divine attestation.

b. Through heartfelt concern, v. 2.

In the light of Paul's missionary travels, it is not difficult to contemplate the incessant anxiety of soul that has resulted from the incessant opposition he has faced from the Jews, at virtually every port of call and especially Jerusalem; his

⁶ Douglas Moo, *Romans*, pp. 548-50.

agonizing is suitably described here in the present tense. He certainly knew of a converted remnant; but the vast majority of Israel has continued in its militant opposition to his gospel. Yet in the light of what is about to be revealed in 9:3-11:36, this soul unrest is more akin to birth-pangs, for the Apostle is well aware of the ultimate glorious destiny of Israel. In this regard, as Moo indicates, Paul laments after the manner of the Old Testament prophets;⁷ they likewise were grieved at Israel's unbelief and prospective dispersion, yet at the same time anticipated Israel's metamorphosis at the "last days" (Deut. 4:25-31; Hos. 3:4-5; Zech. 12:10-14; 14:8-11).

c. Through racial alliance, v. 3.

We expand in translation here: "For I was seriously contemplating [imperfect tense] the possibility of my submission to damnation [ἀνάθεμα, anathema], that is consignment to hell from Christ, if by any means my fellow Jewish brethren, according to the flesh, might be united to Christ." The Puritans were known to pose the question as to whether a Christian should be willing to be consigned to hell for the glory of God, most likely on account of this statement of Paul.⁸ Both situations are hypothetical since they propose an attitude that could only be generated in the heart of a child of God, and God does not send *His own children* to hell for His own glory; such an idea would be monstrous.⁹ This is not to deny that apart from what God would never do, yet the child of God may selflessly so love another that he postulates the impossible, by way of hyperbole, as Paul elsewhere suggests (II Cor. 12:15), after the manner of Moses (Ex. 32:31-32). Of course it could also be argued that Christ was certainly willing to enter the realm of the damned for the sake of the Father's elect (I Pet. 3:18-20). However, the large truth here is the Apostle's profound love for God's prodigal people, the nation of Israel, which frustration can only be blissfully relieved at the saving of this same nation.

2. Appreciation born of the covenants, vs. 4-5.

Here Paul passionately identifies with his Jewish heritage by exalting in biblical Judaism that reaches its apex in Jesus Christ who is "God over all." In the luster of this catalogue of blessings is the reason why Paul would, if it would help, offer up his soul for the saving of Israel. But as Moo well states, there is also a hint here, "why that sacrifice will not be necessary: God 'has not rejected his people whom he foreknew' (11:2)."¹⁰ Thus Paul's brethren are "Israelites," Ἰσραηλῖται, Israēlitai, the descendants of Jacob,¹¹ and the following characteristics must be carefully born in mind in the light of greater clarification being made in vs. 6-13.

⁷ Moo, *Romans*, p. 557. He cites the examples of Jeremiah 4:19; 14:17; Lamentations 1-5; Dan. 9:3.

⁸ Thomas Manton, *Works*, XXII, p. 137.

⁹ Robert Haldane comments: "That anyone should desire to be eternally separated from Christ, and consequently punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, is impossible." *Romans*, p. 450.

¹⁰ Moo, *Romans*, p. 560.

¹¹ This first of eleven references to "Israel/Israelite" in Romans 9-11 clearly has a national connotation.

a. Old Testament covenant blessings, vs. 4-5a.

All of the following seven categories, each identified with the definite article, pertain to Old Testament benefits which, in 3:1-2, were but alluded to by the singular mention of “the oracles of God.” Here Paul accepts the legitimacy of such “boasting,” except that in 2:17-24 it was void of holy consistency.

- (1) *The adoption.* In the light of Paul’s teaching in 8:15, 23; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5, the application of “the adoption,” “the son-placement” to unbelieving Israel as a present reality is significant, though consistent with the Old Testament (Ex. 4:22; Deut. 14:1-2; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 31:9-20; Hos. 11:1; Mal. 2:10). While Hodge and Murray reject any connection here, Piper is of the opposite and more convincing opinion.¹²
- (2) *The glory.* The immediate thought must be the coming of God’s glory to Israel in visible presence, theophany (Ex. 3:2-6), tabernacle worship (Ex. 40:34), especially during the Exodus and wilderness wanderings (Ex. 16:10). This visitation was unique among the nations of the world (Deut. 14:2), the subject of boasting in spite of God declaring the reason for their election (Deut. 7:7). However the context in Romans also causes us to look forward to coming glory as the major thrust here (2:10; 9:23; 11:12, 15, 26-27). So Piper concludes: “It is precisely this destiny of Israel that makes the problem of Israel’s unbelief so intense!”¹³
- (3) *The covenants.* The plural usage here, akin to “the covenants of promise” (Eph. 2:12), would include the Mosaic Covenant, but especially the Abrahamic Covenant as well as those ratifications given to Isaac (Gen. 26:1-5), Jacob (Gen. 28:10-16), and David (II Sam. 7:8-17; 23:5) that reach toward fulfillment in the New Covenant (11:27).¹⁴ Implicit here is the understanding of the irrevocable nature and certain fulfillment that is at the heart of these “big promises” (Gen. 15:1-21; Deut. 7:7-9; Rom. 11:27-29¹⁵).
- (4) *The law.* Literally we have ἡ νομοθεσία, *hē nomothesia*, or “the legislation,” that is the whole Mosaic legal system, moral, civil, and ceremonial, which in total was a divine revelation exclusively given by God to newly redeemed Israel. No other nation on earth was given this

¹² “Lexical considerations are all in favor of construing the sonship of Rom. 9:4b with the fullest saving significance of Rom. 8:15, 23. What Murray seems to overlook is that the olive tree analogy in Rom. 11:17 implies that whatever blessings the Church enjoys, it does so because it has been engrafted into the cultivated tree to share in its rich root (11:17). It is the Jews who are the ‘natural branches’ (11:21) which, though now broken off (by a temporary hardening 11:7, 25), will be grafted in again (11:24): ‘all Israel will be saved’ (11:26). If the Church enjoys divine sonship, it must remember that it does so by participating in the people of God which is historical Israel ‘by nature’ (i.e. by a special act of sovereign election).” *Justification of God*, p. 32.

¹³ Piper, *Justification of God*, p. 34. Moo has preference for this view of eschatological glory, *Romans*, p. 563.

¹⁴ Here, as in all of Paul’s writings, there is not the slightest indication that he embraces an overarching, systematic “covenant of grace” under which the “covenants of promise” are administered.

¹⁵ Concerning Romans 11:29, Moo, Morris, and Murray agree that “the gifts and the calling of God [that] are irrevocable” refer to the listing here in vs. 4-5 of Israel’s national blessings.

legal package (Ps. 147:19-20). Hence, in spite of its condemning characteristic, the law was a gift of the engraven, inscripturated, righteous will of God that none else had received except the race of Abraham. Thus “the law” was an exclusive and precious legacy.

- (5) *The [temple] service.* This ἡ λατρεία, *hē latreia*, or “the service,” used in 12:1 to describe “spiritual service of worship,” is the whole sacrificial system, again a revelation from God that was unique to Judaism in a world full of paganism. While the law revealed the righteous will of God to redeemed Israel, and thus the sin of God’s people, the offerings maintained fellowship. Cranfield suggests that synagogue worship, piety in the home, prayer, recitation of the Shema (Deut. 6:4), etc., are likely to be included here.¹⁶
- (6) *The promises.* Primarily they are the promises given to the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (4:13-22; 15:8; Gal. 3:16-29; cf. Gen. 17:4-8; 26:3-5; 28:10-17), yet more broadly incorporate the promised blessings of right fellowship (II Cor. 6:16-7:1). They subsume under the larger covenantal promises, but particularly find their consummation in Messiah (Rom. 15:8; II Cor. 1:19-20; Gal. 3:16, 29). Yet again, these promises were only given to one, seemingly insignificant, chosen nation.
- (7) *The fathers.* The expression, “*whose* are the father’s” has “Israelites” in v. 4 as its referent, not “the promises.”¹⁷ Thus it is the *fathers* who are the progenitors of the “Israelites;” it is the *fathers* who are the “rich root” of the olive tree (11:17-18) that has given rise to the “natural branches” (11:21, 24). But further, in spite of Israel’s unbelief and severance (11:17, 19-21), yet “God is able to graft them in again” (11:23). Why is this so? Because, “from the standpoint of the gospel they [unbelieving Israel] are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved *for the sake of the fathers* [emphasis added]”(11:28), that is the certain covenantal promises.

b. New Testament covenant blessings, v. 5b.

Here we transfer from the covenants and promises to their supreme fulfillment, and the smooth though radical transition leads us to the primary reason why neither Israel has been finally abandoned nor the Word of God has failed. Again, “from *whom* is the Christ” has the “Israelites” in v. 4 as its referent. Here is the supreme glory of the Jew, namely that he is the progenitor of the Savior of the World; further, the Savior of the World is a Jew.¹⁸ But Piper adds: “Paul is saying far more than that the Messiah is a Jew. He is stressing that, with the coming of

¹⁶ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans*, II, p. 463.

¹⁷ Piper makes it clear, with support from H. A. W. Meyer, that “whom” v. 4, “whose” v. 5a, and “whom” v. 5b, all refer to “Israelites” in v. 4. *Justification of God*, p. 21.

¹⁸ Calvin adds: “For if he [Christ] honored all mankind, when he coupleth himself to us by communicating our nature, much more did he honor them [the Israelites] with whom he would have a nearer bond of conjunction.” *Romans*, p. 248.

Christ, the privileges of Israel have reached their decisive climax.”¹⁹ However a danger arises in suggesting too comprehensively that Messiah has come from Israel. So Paul immediately qualifies his prior statement. He refers us to truth previously taught in 1:3-4, concerning Christ as the theanthropic person, except that now he makes his point even more forcefully.

- (1) Christ *according to the flesh*. We expand in translation, that from the “Israelites” of v. 4, the blessed people of God, comes “the Christ, the one who is according to the [Israelite] flesh.” Or as 1:3 declares, this Christ, “was born of a descendant of David according to [the] flesh.”
- (2) Christ *the blessed God*. A great debate has centered on the question of punctuating the following statement. If a period concludes, “who [Christ] is over all.” then what follows is simply a doxology: “God [the Father is] blessed forever. Amen.” which the NIV has as a marginal alternative. Thus here Christ is not explicitly declared to be God. But a comma after “all” leads to the translation, “who [Christ] is over all, [who is] God blessed forever. Amen.” which the KJV, NKJV, and NASB have without any marginal alternative. In this case Christ is explicitly declared to be God, and there are very good reasons for defending this translation.²⁰ However, given this to be wondrously true, the point is that in the midst of a catalog of distinctive benefits that have graced the nation of Israel, the crowning blessing is that of it being the earthly incubator of the Son of God, Emmanuel (Isa. 7:14). Hence, the Apostle cherishes this whole incubation process; it is not to be denigrated, even though the rank unbelief of the Jews is a present grief. The Word of God has recorded all of this birthing process; but it has not failed because of where we are presently observing this Abrahamic saga. We need wide-angle lenses when we attempt to comprehend God’s dealings with Israel, and Paul in Romans 9-11 helps us to have this comprehensive focus.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

²⁰ The main objection to the punctuation that declares Christ to be God is the argument that nowhere else does Paul make such a claim in his writings, and that in spite of Philippians 2:6; Colossians 2:9; II Thessalonians 1:12; Titus 2:13. However, the evidence upholding the expression here of Christ’s deity is substantial. 1. Most of the early church fathers were of this opinion. 2. The grammar is decidedly in favor of Christ being described as “God blessed forever.” The word order here does not follow the common expression of a doxology that would have been second nature to Paul, the highly trained Jew. Barrett comments. “[I]f Paul wished to say ‘Blessed be God’, he should have placed the word ‘blessed’ (εὐλογητός) first in the sentence, as he does not.” *Romans*, p. 179. Cranfield writes that, “the superiority of the case for taking v. 5b to refer to Christ is so overwhelming as to warrant the assertion that it is very nearly certain that it ought to be accepted.” *Romans*, II, p. 468. Nigel Turner supports the NEB marginal translation, that is “from them [the patriarchs] sprang the Messiah, supreme above all, God blessed for ever.” *Grammatical Insights*, p. 15. 3. The thrust of Paul’s reasoning strongly supports the reference to Christ’s humanity and deity in parallel with 1:3-4; the Israelites have given birth to Christ from their flesh, yet he is also divine. But simply to declare Christ’s human/Jewish roots and then proclaim the Father blessed, is to suddenly change course while leaving the doctrine of Christ in mid air, that is in terms of 1:3-4 and Paul’s doctrine of Christ described elsewhere.

B. THE MERCIFUL ELECTION OF ISRAEL, VS. 6-33.

Having given us a panoramic view of the blessings that accrue to Israelites, and the intimation that God is by no means finished with the tribe of Abraham, yet Paul well knows just how easy it is for Jewish Christians in particular, as well as Gentile Christians, to be confused in this matter, and especially with regard to, first, the essential characteristics of a Jew in the sight of God, second, the basis upon which the Jews came into being, and third, of course their ultimate destiny.

1. Distinguished as children through promise, vs. 6-13.

So Paul goes to four portions of the Jewish Scriptures, to deal with the first two of these problems at this stage, that most likely the congregation at Rome has already pondered. This sacred corpus especially embodies the much vaunted blessings just enumerated. At the same time the gospel he has so passionately and carefully expounded in chapters 1-8, as well as fruitfully proclaimed to the Gentiles, is closely related to this concern. Does national Israel in its present unbelief indicate that the gospel, while clearly being effective amongst the Gentiles, is yet a failure amongst the Jews, inscripturated blessings notwithstanding? Therefore, has this comprehensive “word of God,” this grand plan of redemption failed?²¹

a. Israel's distinctive children of promise, v. 6.

Because of the glory of the aforementioned blessings that attach to an Israelite, a conflict has arisen. On the one hand, Paul has expressed profound sorrow at the present state of Israel with regard to Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, who has been spurned by the nation that gave him birth. On the other hand, he has just listed the glorious benefits of being an Israelite. So is the integrity of God's Word brought into question at this point? If the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are so wonderful, how come they do not find present fulfillment in national Israel as a whole with regard to its Messiah? Is the Word of God, the revelation of God's sure covenant promises, at fault here so that there is in fact no certain destiny for national Israel in the light of the expansion of the Christian gospel amongst Gentiles? In no way, although clarification is now needed.

Basic to the problem is a misunderstanding as to the definition of an “Israelite.” Hence, “they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel,” or, “they who are of the totality of [present national] Israel are not [all true] descendants of Israel [Jacob].”²² From the outset, let us clear away a common misunderstanding. Paul is *not here*, by implication, indicating that a real Jew at heart now has no national connection with the previously listed blessings; further, he is *not here* teaching that there are, along with believing Gentiles, only “spiritual” Jews in that they are descendants of Abraham by faith alone. Paul is *not here* saying there is a more broad, encompassing understanding of what it is to be a Jew. The Gentiles are not

²¹ Piper, *Justification of God*, pp. 48-50.

²² Here the second and third instances of “Israel” in Romans 9-11 both refer to national Israel, though with a distinction. “[T]hey are not all Israel” refers to the present inclusive nation; those “who are descended from Israel” comprise the remnant about to be described, 9:27; 11:5, as part of the eventual “fulfillment” or “all Israel” of 11:12, 26.

in mind here; they are not mentioned until v. 24 where Paul writes of, “us [the Roman congregation as a whole], whom He [God] also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.”²³ Quite the opposite, the Apostle is saying there is a more narrow, restrictive focus that finds, as John Murray puts it, “an ‘Israel’ within ethnic Israel.”²⁴ Carefully consider the context of the following vs. 7-13. The Jews boasted that they were of the descendants of Abraham (Matt. 3:9; John 8:39) while Paul makes it disturbingly clear that you may be born of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob and not be an Israelite! Indeed the forthcoming Moslem claims to be a descendant of Abraham as well! A real Jew must be defined in sharper terms with regard to “the fathers,” cf. v. 5! Moo explains: “Paul is not saying ‘it is not *only* those who are Israel that are Israel,’ but ‘it is not *all* those who are of Israel that are Israel.’”²⁵

b. Isaac as a distinctive child of Abraham, vs. 7-9.

Keeping in mind Paul’s loving anxiety for unbelieving Israel, he upholds the Word’s integrity by expounding the unfailing hope that it offers even to a nation presently hardened. His argument in this vein will continue till the exultant doxology at 11:33-36. Thus he resorts to “the father” of the “fathers,” that is Abraham, and, in parallel with v. 6b, points out that not all of his physical descendants or “seed” are in fact his “children.”

(1) Isaac received the promise, not Ishmael, v. 7.

It is explicitly stated that, “through Isaac your descendants will be named” (Gen. 21:12) while it is implicitly indicated that Ishmael has not been chosen to be a vehicle of the covenant promise (Gen. 17:18-21), even though the firstborn was circumcised (Gen. 17:23-26), blessed (Gen. 17:20), and promised national prominence (Gen. 36:1-43). Rather Isaac is to be the means by which the promise made to Abraham would be passed on to its climactic fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16). Yet not even all of the seed of Isaac are to be regarded as true children of Abraham. So what is

²³ Phillip Mauro is mistaken in writing: “This Scripture [Romans 9:6-8] gives us, in addition to the important truth that not all Israelites are included in the ‘Israel’ of God’s prophetic purposes, the closely allied truth that ‘the children of God,’ that is, those who are saved by the gospel, are “the children of the promise” (definite article in the original); and that they are ‘counted for the seed’ (of Abraham).” *The Hope of Israel: What Is It?* p. 204. Grover Gunn is likewise incorrect when he makes the same inclusive generalization: “The spiritual seed of Abraham are all those who truly share Abraham’s faith (Rom. 4:11-12), and these alone are the seed of Abraham in the most fundamental sense of the term (John 8:39; Rom. 9:6-7; 2:28. Only these will inherit the promises of the covenant in terms of real spiritual rest and an eternal inheritance.” *Dispensationalism, Today, Yesterday, And Tomorrow*, p. 234.

²⁴ Murray, *Romans*, II, p. 9. Walter Gutbrod similarly states: “[W]e are not told here that Gentile Christians are the true Israel. The distinction at Romans 9:6 does not go beyond what is presupposed at John 1:47 [concerning pious Nathanael].” “Ἰσραὴλ” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, III, p. 387.

²⁵ Moo, *Romans*, p. 574. Also Fred Zaspel notes that the previously listed Jewish blessings are not expounded here by Paul as being “now realized in the church; . . . they belong to Israel; . . . they have not become ineffectual for them; they offer no less a real hope today than ever.” *Jews, Gentiles and the Goal of Redemptive History*, pp. 12-13.

it that distinguishes the lineage of the godly seed, that passes from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob? The answer is in the fact that Abraham was “called” (Gen. 12:1; 15:7; Acts 7:3; Heb. 11:8), and became a child of “promise” (Gen. 12:2-3; 15:5-6; Gal. 3:16-19; Heb. 6:13-15), even as did Isaac and Jacob. Paul will make further explanation concerning this point. Suffice to say here that for the Apostle, as we have already seen, “calling” (4:17; 8:28, 30 and “promise” (1:1-2; 4:13-21), are wholly of elective, works excluding, sovereign grace.

(1) Isaac hoped in the promise, not the flesh, v. 8.

For all of his earthly blessings, yet Ishmael is designated as belonging to “the children of the flesh” (8:5) even as his life was void of the faith of his father. He was to be, “a wild donkey of a man, his hand will be against everyone, and everyone’s hand will be against him, and he will live to the east of his brothers” (Gen. 16:12). Thus his descendants became known as Arabians as well as the troublesome Edomites. The essential distinguishing feature between the half-brothers was “promise,” which in Pauline terms means that Isaac was chosen, according to pure grace, to be an heir of the promise given to his father, in spite of Abraham’s initial preference for Ishmael (Gen. 17:18-19). Thus those children of Abraham who inherit “the promise” are “regarded [reckoned, λογίζομαι, logizomai, cf. 4:3; 8:18, 36] as [true spiritual] descendants,” as true Israelites. By an act of divine will, not intrinsic human merit, the promise is given with particularity, such as to Isaac but not Ishmael.

Luther comments: “Therefore it inexorably follows that the flesh does not make sons of God and the heirs of promise, but only the gracious election of God. . . . Therefore, why does man take pride in his merits and works, which in no way are pleasing to God? For they are good, or meritorious, works, but only because they have been chosen by God from eternity that they please Him.”²⁶

(2) Isaac was born of Sarah, not Hagar, v. 9.

The fact of Isaac being a child of promise, born in spite of all natural expectations to Sarah, is proved from Genesis 18:10. Here also is implicit contrast with the rejection of Ishmael, the child of Hagar according to human design (Gen. 16:1-4). Isaac is designated by divine sovereign will, not the advice of Abraham (Genesis 17:18-19), to be the true spiritual descendant according to the promise, the Abrahamic Covenant. Sarah was a free woman who gave birth “through the promise” while Hagar was an Egyptian maid who gave birth “according to the flesh” (Gal. 4:23). Thus, in spite of the “Ishmaels” and carnal seed of Abraham throughout Hebrew history, the promise originally given has not been invalidated, “the word of God has not failed,” v. 6a, for the seed of Isaac remains even to this day, and shall remain because “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable”

²⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Lectures on Romans*, 25, p. 385.

(11:29). This concern then for “the justification of God” is the dominant matter that Paul is careful to maintain.²⁷

a. Jacob as a distinctive child of Isaac, vs. 10-13.

The generation succeeding Isaac provides an even greater representation of the sovereign will of God that continues to work within the seed of Abraham in general. Whereas Isaac and Ishmael, as descendants of Abraham, were born separately to different mothers with contrasting status, in the case of Jacob and Esau, as descendants of Abraham, they were born as twins from the same mother. Consequently, the divine purpose, according to sovereign calling and promise, is alone the cause of the constituency of the true spiritual Israel, not the external forms and especially circumcision, cf. vs. 3-5, though for the Jewish Christian they may have significance. This principle applies to the constituency of the Christian church, even though the ordinances have significant legitimacy (Eph. 1:3-6).

(1) Jacob was born with his brother Esau, v. 10.

While Isaac represented the distinction of promise as opposed to flesh within the general seed of Abraham, now we have the same distinction made within the general seed of Isaac. This distinction within the ongoing lineage of the children of God only reinforces the mystery of God’s elective purposes that defy human contribution and allow God to populate heaven as He sees fit. Even the traditional seniority, which would normally accrue to Esau in his coming first from Rebekah’s womb, is turned on its head (Gen. 25:21-34; 27:1-38; 28:10-17; 32:24-32).

(2) Jacob was chosen as distinct from Esau, v. 11.

However, the distinction that God makes between Jacob and Esau must be appreciated in the most absolute sense of excluding human cooperation, and that preceding their earthly struggles and conflicts that commenced as Jacob clung to Esau’s heel at their birth (Gen. 25:26). Prior to their birth they had not “practiced [πράσσω, *prassō*, aorist, as active habit, cf. 2:3] anything good or bad.”²⁸ Hence, God had a particular “elective purpose [cf. 8:28]” that distinguished between the two, before “they,” obviously “the twins,” had done, through personal action, “anything good or bad [foul].” The divine intent here was that God’s individual election of Jacob be upheld, human works be excluded, and His “[effectual] calling” be acknowledged in all of its humbling, pristine sovereignty!

²⁷ It is fitting that Piper’s study of Romans 9 is titled, *The Justification of God*.

²⁸ Shedd comments: “St. Paul does not exclude sin altogether, so as to imply innocence, because one of these individuals was elected to salvation, and salvation presupposes sin and condemnation.” *Commentary on Romans*, p. 284. Of course the Pelagian would claim innocence at birth with sin originating from personal choice. However 5:12, 19 declares that sin is inherited, and inheritance certainly precedes birth.

(3) Jacob was favored over Esau, vs. 12-13.

Paul's argument is humbling to the proud human condition, that boastful spirit of autonomy and self-determination, and especially the Jew who trusts in physical lineage with Abraham. Challenge can be expected. Hence proof must be forthcoming from Scripture. Two quotations follow.

(a) In the area of employment, v. 12.

Genesis 25:23. To Rebekah the Lord declared that, "the older [Esau] shall serve the younger [Jacob]," though this subjection is not evident during their lifetimes. However, as Paul writes he and others in Rome would be aware of the conflict and subjugation of Esau's seed, the Edomites, by David, Amaziah, Uzziah, and finally the Maccabees.²⁹ Such a reversal of the custom of privileged inheritance for the firstborn is solely according to divine prerogative. Thus promise overrides not only a patriarchal norm, but preeminently works, also faith, and even foreseen merit since "doing good [following birth]" is excluded, v. 11. Therefore this calling and covenantal promise, rooted in Abraham, is according to pure grace and mercy.

(b) In the area of esteem, v. 13.

Malachi 1:2-5. The prophet writes, "Jacob I loved [aorist], but Esau I hated [aorist]," suggesting prior determination. The Hebrew word here is נִשְׂאָה, sane, which usually means "intense detestation" and "loathing," especially with regard to evil (Ps. 97:10; Prov. 6:16-19; Amos 5:15), idolatry (Jer. 44:3-4), divorce (Mal. 2:16), even hatred of those who hate God (Ps. 139:21-22); yet there is a weaker sense of "alienation" which the synonymous parallelism of Ezekiel 23:28 indicates.³⁰ So here as well there are distinct reasons for the idea of "rejection" or "spurning" rather than "hatred" as emotional despise.³¹ Of course this interpretation in no way detracts from the absolute and particular choice of God. In the same vein Calvin declares of God at this point, "I have chosen him [Jacob] and refused this [Esau]. . . . I have rejected the Edomites, the progeny of Esau."³²

It should be remembered that while Esau and his descendants led profane and sinful lives (Gen. 26:34-35; 27:41; Obad. 10-14), and Jacob lacked integrity, the elective/reprobate distinction made before

²⁹ Ibid., p. 286.

³⁰ Vine, Unger, White, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, p. 105.

³¹ So Cranfield and Moo. Haldane similarly remarks: "It is evident that the quotation from the Old Testament of these words, 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated,' is here made by the Apostle with the design of illustrating the great truth which he is laboring through the whole of this chapter to substantiate; namely, that in the rejection of the great body of the Jewish nation, as being 'vessels of wrath,' while He reserved for Himself a remnant among them as 'vessels of mercy,' verses 22-23, neither the purpose nor the promises of God had failed." *Romans*, p. 469.

³² Calvin, *Romans*, p. 257. Likewise Edwards, *Works*, II, p. 852.

their birth was *not* based upon intrinsic or prospective “good or bad.” Hence the “hatred” or “rejection” here, not being based upon moral focus, means that the choice was within the inscrutable, sovereign counsel of God. Of course this thought of “rejection” appears here to be more than “preterition,” or the mere passing by of Esau. There was both a choice of Jacob in grace, and the abandonment of Esau to reprobation.³³ However, the main point is that it was wholly God’s decision and as such exclusive of human merit or contribution. Therefore, the covenant, saving plan of God channeled through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is certain to be accomplished; thus “the Word of God has not and will not fail”!

Hence, God’s love for Jacob was grace in election and promise, and it was both corporate and particular. The partial quotation of Genesis 25:23 in v. 12 follows the Lord’s statement to Rebekah that, “two nations are in your womb.” The broader context of Malachi 1:1-5 certainly indicates a corporate meaning with regard to not only Israel, but also God’s rejection of Esau who incorporates his descendants, the nation of Edom. Nevertheless the fact of particular election/reprobation is in no way excluded here, as some would hope to accomplish.³⁴ Surely corporate election is but the outworking of particular election, even as the corporate “remnant” (11:5) is comprised of individual, elect Jewish Christians. Further, the following reference to Pharaoh (v. 17) is most particular. Moo responds with three main arguments for the primacy of individual election at this juncture that are summarized as follows. First, Paul describes Jacob and Esau as individuals with regard to their conception, birth, and “works.” Second, Paul uses familiar, individualistic salvation words such as “election” and “calling” that are difficult to apply to a nation. Third, to assert the choice of Israel over Edom does not fit with his former argument regarding a “physical” and “spiritual” discrimination being made within Israel.³⁵

2. Distinguished as children through mercy, vs. 14-18.

The objection of v. 6a has been answered. However, knowing human nature, especially the jealous claim of autonomy, of self-determination, of human initiative, Paul is quick to anticipate another major objection that challenges the justice of God concerning the aforementioned election/reprobation and finds expression in three questions (vs. 14, 19). First, in v. 14, “Is not election/reprobation in conflict with human moral accountability and thus an indictment of God’s justice?” In other words, how can man

³³ This positive act of reprobation ought not to be pursued, especially by means of logical scrutiny, further than does Scripture, otherwise we may find our finiteness coming to a precipice that leads to being dashed to pieces by wrong conclusions. Probably the intricacies of lapsarianism fall into this category. Refer to L Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 118-125.

³⁴ This is probably the most popular attempt used by many to avoid any thought of particularism at this point, such as with R. Shank, *Elect In The Son*. Refer to Murray’s detailed response to this concept, *Romans*, II, pp. 15-21.

³⁵ Moo, *Romans*, p. 585.

be judged by God for his moral stance before God if it has been predetermined by God's arbitrary decree?

a. The principle of God's justice upheld, v. 14.

Paul's rhetorical question (cf. 3:5; 6:1; 7:7) is surely drawn from past experience, even as the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty has never ceased to stimulate the defensive human reaction of "Yes God is sovereign, but man is not a robot," or "man has free-will." The question, "There is no injustice with God, is there?" expects a negative answer, along with the emphatic, "May it never be!" In the light of v. 6a, the Apostle's emphatic denial here cannot be overstated, especially as the term "injustice," ἀδικία, *adikia*, is literally translated in the KJV as "unrighteousness." To charge God with a crime is a very serious matter indeed; it has an unholy audaciousness, an impudence about it which is hardly fitting for the finite creature to bring as a charge against the infinite God. But man in sin has never lacked insolence before the Almighty!

b. The principle of election through mercy upheld, vs. 15-16.

It is significant that as Paul raises a contentious issue, even as Romans 9 is probably the most contentious chapter in all of Romans, in response he provides more separate Scripture quotations, eleven in all, to uphold his overall case, than in any other comparable section in this Epistle. The Apostle appears to logically deal with the ramifications of God's election of Jacob first with reference to Moses, vs. 15-16, then the reprobation of Esau second with reference to Pharaoh, vs. 17-18.

(1) This sovereign mercy is according to Scripture, v. 15.

Here the quotation of Exodus 33:19 is based upon Moses' ongoing desire for the saving, reassuring presence of the LORD so that, "I and Your people [already backslidden, cf. ch. 32] be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth," v. 16. So the LORD favorably responds declaring that Moses, as Israel's representative, will witness the glory of His name, signifying that, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious [Israel], and will show compassion to whom I will show compassion," in spite of the Golden Calf incident. Here the covenant given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was maintained, in spite of offending sin, solely on account of sovereign "mercy" and "compassion." Both terms are distinguishable as relieving love and pitiable love, yet the parallelism here simply suggests "grace" (11:5-6). Hence, the election of Jacob according to v. 13 was based solely upon the same divine prerogative described here. The parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16) is illustrative of the selective mercy described here, when Christ declares, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?" v. 15. Thus Stephen Charnock declares:

The apostle joins mercy and this sovereignty of his will together (Rom. 9:15), . . . He is so absolute a sovereign that he will give no account of these matters but his own good pleasure. Why he renews man is merely voluntary; why he saves renewed man is just; why he justifies those that believe is justice to Christ

and mercy to them; but why he bestows faith on any is merely the good pleasure of his will. . . . [O]ur Savior himself renders this only as a reason of his distinguishing mercy, wherein himself doth, and therefore we must, acquiesce (Matt. 11:27), ‘Even so, Father, for so it pleased thee.’³⁶

- (2) This sovereign mercy is exclusive of human capacity, v. 16.

From the divine declaration there is derived the divine principle. “Therefore, it surely follows that [it is] not of the one willing or the one who is running, but of the God of Abraham showing mercy.” However, the implied subject “it” must first be identified, and the preceding context suggests God’s “mercy” and “compassion,” directed toward the seed of promise flowing from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In more simple and timeless terms, the contrast is made between man and God. In more broad terms, with man in his unholy predicament on earth and God in his holy glory in heaven, the question arises as to how man may be reconciled with the offended God.

One alternative is for man to attempt “willing” and “running,” the present tenses reflecting persistent effort; here he offers self-determination and self-exertion, and both are excluded, though not absolutely. For as Luther comments:

This is not to be understood in the sense that this is a matter only of God’s showing mercy, as if it were not necessary for a person to will or exert himself, but rather the fact that a man does will or exert himself is not of his own power but of the mercy of God, who has given this power of willing and doing, without which man of himself can neither will or make exertion.³⁷

Thus faith is not excluded here, except it be regarded as a work of autonomous man, as the free-will response of man, even as vs. 30-33 indicate. However, in contemporary evangelicalism there is much evangelism that is a vain display of “willing” and “running,” of decisionism, rationalism, ritualism, abstract believism, etc.

The other alternative is with regard to God “who has mercy.” Here this mercy is not simply on offer, but active in a most particular and effectual sense. In other words, “Salvation is from the Lord” (Jonah 2:9), and the self-renouncing, works-renouncing faith that truly lays hold of this gospel principle is that which wholly trusts in the mercy of God. Indeed such faith may well not be too much aware of the profound distinctions being made by Paul at this point concerning election and reprobation. Luther warns against the unconverted becoming engrossed in such matters,³⁸ as does J. C. Ryle.³⁹

³⁶ Stephen Charnock, *Works*, III, p. 268.

³⁷ Luther, *Works*, 25, p. 388.

³⁸ “I am issuing the warning that no man whose mind has not been purged should rush into these speculations, lest he fall into the abyss of horror and hopelessness; but first let him purge the eyes of his heart in his meditations on the wounds of Jesus Christ. For I myself would not even read these things if the order of the lection and necessity did not compel me to do so. For this is very strong wine and the most complete meal, solid food for those who are perfect, that is, the most excellent theology, of which the apostle says: ‘Among the mature we do impart wisdom’ (I Cor. 2:6). But I am a baby who needs milk, not solid food (cf. I Cor. 3:1-2). Let him who is a child like me do the same. The wounds of Jesus Christ, ‘the clefts of the rock,’ are

But simply mention the rich and free mercy of God to such a newly saved sinner and he will affirm it with the greatest enthusiasm. Then follows enlarged understanding.

I sought the Lord and afterward I knew
 He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
 It was not I that found, O Savior true;
 No, I was found of Thee.

c. The principle of reprobation through hardening, vs. 17-18.

Here the antithesis of sovereign “mercy”, as reflected in God’s love of Jacob, is declared to be sovereign “hardening” as reflected in God’s rejection, even reprobation of Esau. The sober nature of this aspect of God’s dealings with fallen man is reflected in Calvin’s notable comment that, “[t]he decree [of reprobation] is dreadful indeed [decretum horribile], I confess.”⁴⁰

(1) This sovereign hardening is according to Scripture, v. 17.

The specific reference here is to Exodus 9:16, where, following the fifth plague of cattle disease, the sixth plague of boils has struck Pharaoh and all the Egyptians. In vs. 14 God declares that the plagues have been designed so that, “you [Pharaoh] may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth.” He could have rightly judged and crushed Pharaoh in an instant, v. 15; however, “I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth,” v. 16, cf. 10:1. Hence, God’s intention is that by means of his saving and judging power manifest toward Israel and Egypt, Jacob and Esau, His unique glory might be displayed. Thus the God who has decisively spoken and given mercy to Moses, v. 15, is the same God who has decisively spoken and given hardness to Pharaoh, v. 17, all according to His just and inscrutable will. Haldane declares that, “the birth, the life, and the situation of Pharaoh were all of Divine appointment.”⁴¹

Pharaoh was particularly “raised up” in no different sense than were Judas (John 6:70), and “Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your [God’s] hand and Your purpose predestined to occur” (Acts 4:27-28; cf. 2:23). Yet none of these who were reprobate would have claimed to be under divine duress. Herein lies the

sufficiently safe for us. The strong and the perfect may discuss the first book of the *Sentences* [a theology volume by Peter Lombard dealing with predestination, etc.], which properly should not be the first but the last book. Many today rush into this book heedlessly and strangely also become blinded.” Comment on Romans 9:16, *Works*, 25, pp. 389-90.

³⁹ “A man must first go to the little Grammar-school of Repentance and Faith, before he enters the great University of Election and Predestination.” *Old Paths*, p. 473.

⁴⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, III, 23, 7.

⁴¹ Haldane, *Romans*, p. 479.

transcendent truth of antinomy,⁴² the particularity of God's dealings with man, even as the potter forms the clay according to his design, vs. 20-21. God is totally sovereign over man who is at the same time fully responsible for his actions under this sovereignty. As Loraine Boettner has written: "Predestination and free agency [thus accountability] are twin pillars of a great temple, and they meet above the clouds where the human gaze cannot penetrate."⁴³ Hence, humble caution is required here. Haldane warns that while the "truth respecting Pharaoh is what the Scriptures declare; . . . we ought never to pretend to go further into the deep things of God than they go before *us*, but submissively to bow to every Divine declaration."⁴⁴

- (2) This sovereign hardening is exclusive of demerit, v. 18.

Again, from the divine declaration there is derived the divine principle. "Therefore it follows that He, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, shows mercy [present tense] to whoever He desires, and likewise He hardens [present tense] whoever He desires." For Paul this hardening, σκληρύνω, sklērūnō, appears to be an ongoing process, rather than a past appointment, that is associated with "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction," v. 22. Such a process is consistent with the repeated description of this hardening action by God (9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8), so that Pharaoh's heart becomes increasingly unyielding. However, as Edwards well points out, the method of God's hardening activity here is not to be construed as direct so as to make God the indictable author of sin. Rather, God introduces circumstances that will aggravate Pharaoh's recalcitrant heart.⁴⁵ These circumstances are God's irritant that, like the law (7:7-13), aggravate the sinner to the point where, without the grace of the Spirit, the soul is increasingly hardened. However, Boice rightly warns us: "God's raising Pharaoh to this position [of dominion] does not mean that he made him sin. Pharaoh sinned because he chose to sin, and he resisted God and hardened

⁴² By "antinomy" is not meant "contradiction" or "paradox," but the fact of two undoubted truths that, while *appearing* to be in conflict, yet are both acknowledged to be true in spite of man's inability to comprehend reconciliation. Consider the question of whether light is wave and/or particle.

⁴³ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, p. 222.

⁴⁴ Haldane, *Romans*, p. 479.

⁴⁵ "When God is here spoken of as hardening some of the children of men, it is not to be understood that God by any positive efficiency hardens any man's heart. There is no positive act in God, as though he put forth any power to harden the heart. To suppose any such thing would be to make God the immediate author of sin. God is said to harden men in two ways: by withholding the powerful influences of his Spirit, without which their hearts will remain hardened, and grow harder and harder; in this sense he hardens them, as he leaves them to hardness. And again, by ordering those things in his providence which, through the abuse of their corruption, become the occasion of their hardening. Thus God sends his word and ordinances to men which, by their abuse, prove an occasion of their hardening. So the apostle said, that he was unto some 'a savor of death unto death' [II Cor. 2:15-16]. So God is represented as sending Isaiah on this errand, to make the hearts of the people fat, and to make their ears heavy, and to shut their eyes; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed' (Isa. 6:10). Isaiah's preaching was, in itself, of a contrary tendency, to make them better. But their abuse of it rendered it an occasion of their hardening. As God is here said to harden men, so he is said to put a lying spirit in the mouth of the false prophets (II Chron. 18:22). That is, he suffered a lying spirit to enter into them." Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, II, p. 849. Similarly Shedd, *Romans*, pp. 291-3.

his heart because it is the nature of sin to harden hearts.”⁴⁶ Even so, it is the supremacy of the divine will dominant in this verse that, like v. 16, is the humbling principle with regard to the constituency of the true and spiritual seed of Abraham.

Some have suggested that God hardens the heart of Pharaoh, to begin with in 9:12, only after Pharaoh himself first hardened his own heart in 8:15, 32.⁴⁷ However, this overlooks the prophecy of 4:21; 7:3 and, as Moo points out, the lack of such an explanation in response to the objection of v. 19.⁴⁸ According to the process Edwards announces, God may justly harden, any sinner that He chooses.

3. Distinguished as children through sovereignty, vs. 19-29.

Surely Paul responds here just as he has on countless occasions in witnessing to Jews who have wrestled with the question of the sovereignty of God and human responsibility. Conservative “Pharisees held that all was not predestined and that though divine providence governed all things, man still had freedom of choice. . . . [Liberal] Saducees denied predestination and any [specific] divine influence on men’s doings, good or bad.”⁴⁹ Hence the preceding instruction would be regarded as “predestinarian,” to use Jewish terminology, and definitely unorthodox.

a. Man’s objection to sovereign mercy/reprobation, v. 19.

The essential complaint is that God appears to be unfair if He determines individual human destiny while at the same time holding the individual to be accountable for his belief or unbelief. How can God judge or “find fault” with faithless Esau and Pharaoh if He also determined the bent of their choosing? Surely they were unable to “resist His will”! While a polarized situation is envisaged here with regard to the relationship between man and God, it is obvious that the objector, representative of the natural man, is far more concerned with the cause of man than of God.

b. God’s vindication of sovereign mercy/reprobation, v. 20-29.

Paul’s response commences with a more jealous regard for God rather than for man, even as this priority is always an indication of true Christian conversion (Gal. 4:9). Yet he weaves his fervent response in such a way that we are soon returned to the sovereignty of God’s calling of not only the righteous remnant at the present within national Israel, but also the Gentiles.

⁴⁶ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans*, III, pp. 1094-5.

⁴⁷ So Lenski, Morris, Stott. C. H. Dodd, representative of liberal opinion which tends to impose a human perspective, comments that here Paul’s “thought declines from its highest level. . . . He pushes what we must describe as an unethical determinism.” *Romans*, p. 158.

⁴⁸ Moo, *Romans*, pp. 598-9.

⁴⁹ Abraham Weinfeld, *Basic Jewish Ethics and Freedom of Will*, p. 7. Josephus makes the same assessment, though he adds that the Essenes were strict predestinarians. *Antiquities*, XIII, V, 9.

- (1) He has full rights over the creature, vs. 20-21.

Does man have the “right”, assumed to be allowed by God, to question the purposes of God? Does the creature have the “right” to question the ways of the Creator? Of course the answer here can only be determined when the origin of these “rights” is discovered. Surely God alone establishes the “right,” not man. Sinful, rebellious man may claim “rights,” while they may not have connection with the “righteousness of God.” So here, Paul responds to an objection that suggests necessary “rights,” especially autonomy, that are in fact “wrongs” that emanate from the aspirations of fallen man.

C. H. Dodd makes pompous and consistently liberal comments at this point, not unlike the objector that Paul responds to:

Has the potter no right over the clay? It is a well-worn illustration. But the trouble is that a man is not a pot; he *will* ask, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ and he will not be bludgeoned into silence. It is the weakest point in the whole epistle. . . . [Paul] has just represented [God] as a non-moral despot. . . . [W]hen Paul, normally a clear thinker, becomes obscure, it usually means that he is embarrassed by the position he has taken up⁵⁰

We will respond to this as the argument further unfolds.

- (a) Who is man that he questions God’s design?, v. 20a.

Paul does not give a direct reply to v. 19 since the question is born of proud impertinence. God is not answerable to man, though man is answerable to God even as Job discovered (Job 38:1-40:2); yet without an explanation for his troubles he was humbled to the point where he confessed: “I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth” (Job 40:4-5). Again, without an explanation concerning Job’s troubles, yet submission to, rather than understanding of, the sovereignty of God resulted in rest and greater blessing. So Jonathan Edwards writes:

Let us, therefore, labor to submit to the sovereignty of God. God insists, that his sovereignty be acknowledged by us, and that even in this great matter which so nearly and infinitely concerns us, as our own eternal salvation. This is the stumbling-block on which thousands fall and perish; and if we go on contending with God about his sovereignty [as Paul’s objector and Dodd do], it will be our eternal ruin. It is absolutely necessary that we should submit to God, as our absolute sovereign, and the sovereign over our souls; as one who may have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and harden whom he will.⁵¹

Certainly vs. 22-23 further expand upon the *purpose* of God rejecting Esau/Pharaoh and loving Jacob/Moses; but Paul regards it as unnecessary that he reply to the charge of divine injustice.⁵² As Morris

⁵⁰ Dodd, *Romans*, p. 159.

⁵¹ Edwards, *Works*, II, p. 854.

⁵² Moo comments: “Paul never offers here—or anywhere else—a ‘logical’ solution to the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility that he creates. . . . Paul is content to hold the truths of God’s absolute

adds: "Paul is not saying there is no answer to the question; he is saying that the question is illegitimate."⁵³ Again, the infinite God does not have to explain everything to finite man; on the other hand, finite man ought to acknowledge his finiteness and submit (Deut. 29:29).

(b) Does the molder have to answer to the thing molded? v. 20b.

The illustration concerning clay manufacture might be freely translated here: "Shall the plastic and formable substance [πλάσμα, plasma] say to the plastic fabricator and substance former [πλάσσω, plassō, cf. LXX Gen. 2:7; I Tim. 2:13], 'Why did you make or fabricate me according to this particular design?'" Paul draws upon Isaiah 29:16; 45:9, which indicate that the divine Potter in question does not act capriciously, but always righteously. However, this does not deny Him the right to fashion both premium items for "honorable use" and standard items for "common use, v. 21.

(c) Does the potter have to answer to the clay? v. 21.

The same basic illustration draws upon familiar Old Testament imagery (Isa. 29:15-16; 45:9; 64:8-9; Jer. 18:1-10), and probably from the Apocrypha (Wisdom of Solomon 15:7).⁵⁴ Further, from v. 20 where πλάσσω, plassō, means to form or manufacture with existing substance or clay, not to create, so here the potter takes a common lump of preexisting clay, such as from the womb of Rebecca by "one man, our father Isaac" v. 10, and makes "one vessel for honorable use and another for common [dishonorable] use" (cf. II Tim. 2:20). Paul is not saying that God *creates* men as sinners, but rather that he takes the common lump of sinners and deals with them individually, not merely as a sinful nation as the context of Isaiah 29:15-16; 45:9; 64:8-9; Jer. 18:1-10, suggests, according to His purposes of election and reprobation. So Hodge comments: "It is not the right of God to create sinful beings in order to punish them, but his right to deal with sinful beings according to his good pleasure. . . . He pardons or punishes as he sees fit."⁵⁵

sovereignty—in both election and in hardening—and of full responsibility without reconciling them We would do well to emulate his approach." *Romans*, p. 601.

⁵³ Morris, *Romans*, p. 364.

⁵⁴ "For when a potter kneads the soft earth and laboriously molds each vessel for our service, he fashions out of the same clay both the vessels that serve clean uses and those for contrary uses, making all in like manner; but which shall be the use of each of these the worker in clay decides." Wisdom of Solomon, 15:7. Refer to Piper's study of this passage, *Justification of God*, pp. 195-6.

⁵⁵ Charles Hodge, *Romans*, p. 319. So Boice, Haldane, Murray, Piper, Shedd. Luther quotes Augustine: "For grace alone distinguishes the redeemed from the condemned, all having been mingled in one mass of perdition by the common cause of their common origin." *Works*, 25, pp. 388-9. Logic *may* lead to a conclusion that God has predestined and created sinners. However, such a logical conclusion also leads to the indictment of God as being complicit in sinful origination. Such an inference has a very obnoxious and unholy ring about it. Further, Scripture nowhere explicitly declares God to be the creator of sinners; the wicked angels and man are solely represented as being responsible for their sin.

With regard to Dodd at this point, his protest that in relation to the Potter, “man is nor a pot,” has the inference that “man is more than a pot, man is something, man was made in the image of God.” But Paul here is not dealing with relative status, rather origination. So that whether we consider a pot, a petunia, a pussycat, or a person, all are creatures and all equally have their existence at God’s sole discretion. Dodd’s protest is tinged with the arrogance of vaunted autonomy. This is further indicated when he writes that man, “*will* ask, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” On the contrary, man in innocence would not have so complained. Sinful man certainly would have done so. On the other hand authentic Christians are to “entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right” (I Pet. 4:19).

- (2) He has full rights in showing mercy/reprobation, vs. 22-29.

Paul’s rhetorical method often includes the rejoinder of a series of questions concerning which he does not give direct explanation since, by their very nature the answers are all too obvious. This was God’s way of dealing with Job (Job 38-39), even as Paul uses the same method in 2:21-23; 3:5-8; 11:33-35; Gal. 3:1-5, and here. While God is not obliged to answer the implied charge of injustice in v. 19, Paul is anxious to reveal a divine purpose in God’s dealings with men that the objector has not considered, but ought to understand. The Potter’s ways are not capricious, but glorious in their outworking, even as they incorporate both Jew and Gentile; it is the perspective of the Potter that Paul is anxious to uphold.

- (a) Enduring vessels prepared for ruin, v. 22.

“Suppose,” says Paul indicating reality rather theory, “that God, while being immediately desirous to bring his wrath and power upon vessels prepared for destruction,⁵⁶ after the manner of Pharaoh’s heart being hardened, yet had good reason to be exceedingly patient for a time [cf. 2:4] so as to delay his judgment? Have you thought of such a possibility? because it is in fact the case!” So Hodge expounds:

The preparation intended is that illustrated in the case of Pharaoh. God did not make him wicked and obdurate; but as a punishment for his sin, he so dealt with him that the evil of his nature revealed itself in a form, and under circumstances, which made him a fit object of the punitive [hardening?] justice of God. The dealings of God as a sovereign are often, by the Jewish writers, spoken of in the same terms as those here used.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Haldane comments that, “they are vessels of wrath, and by their sins they are fitted for destruction.” Romans, p. 493; likewise Stott. However, while the agent of this “preparation for destruction” is not explicitly stated, the most likely identification is God, after the manner of the potter who makes some vessels for “common [dishonorable]” use, v. 21. Literally, these vessels, “having been prepared [perfect passive participle of *καταρτίζω*, *katartizō*, not aorist] for destruction,” are involved in a hardening process, cf. vs. 18-19, as 1:24, 26, 28 reflect, that comes to a climax of judgment (Phil. 1:28; 3:18-19). Refer to Cranfield, *Romans*, II, pp. 495-6.

⁵⁷ Hodge, *Romans*, pp. 321-2.

(b) Honoring vessels prepared for glory, v. 23.

The supposition of v. 22 is now asserted as truth, except that the focus now turns to the reason for the divine forbearance. God purposely delayed judgment so that the “vessels of mercy . . . prepared beforehand⁵⁸ for glory,” might display the “riches of His glory.” This delay was when God “overlooked the times of ignorance” (Acts 17:30), when “in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed” (Rom. 3:25). This temporary tolerance was exemplified in God’s dealing with Pharaoh. The major divine intent is the proclamation of the radiant glory of God’s sovereign grace by means of redemptive glory being given to particular, chosen vessels, in “the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4). This was the result of God’s patience with Pharaoh that ended with the display of God’s glory through the glorious redemption of Israel from Egypt. This contrast in God’s dealing with both the reprobate and elect only heightens the glory of God’s ways. As Piper comments: “It behooves every great artist to demonstrate in the variety of his work the full range of his skill and power.”⁵⁹ Thus these “honorable vessels” reflect or refund glory back to its source. Such recipients were “chosen in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world” (Eph1:4; cf. Rom. 8:29-30). So, “He [God the Father] predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:5-6). Thus Isaac Watts sums up this whole truth:

What if, to make his terrors known,
 He lets his patience long endure,
 Suff’ring vile rebels to go on,
 And seal their own destruction sure?
 What if He means to show his grace,
 And his electing love employs
 To mark out some of mortal race,
 And form them fit for heav’nly joys?
 But, O my soul! If truths so bright
 Should dazzle and confound thy sight,
 Yet still his written will obey,
 And wait the great decisive day.

(c) Calling vessels as a holy remnant, v. 24-29.

However the expression “vessels of mercy” in v. 23 requires qualification. Bearing in mind that the church at Rome is probably

⁵⁸ In contrast with the perfect tense used to describe the vessels of wrath “having been prepared” for destruction in v. 22, here the aorist is used to describe the vessels of mercy “prepared beforehand” for glory. Here we also have the use of προετοιμάζω, proetoimazō that has more the idea of preordination, rather than καταρτίζω, katartizō, in v. 22. Cranfield emphasizes this distinction, *Romans*, II, p. 497.

⁵⁹ Piper, *Justification of God*, p. 187.

comprised of more Gentiles than Jews, an explanation is warranted here since the preceding focus could easily be misunderstood, as if the elect was solely comprised of the Jewish remnant enumerated in 9:6-13. While such a conclusion ought to be easily dismissed in the light of Paul's ministry, yet a biblical explanation is called for, and is now forthcoming. His earlier canvas becomes refined and inclusive of greater detail, specifically the additional incorporation, equally effectual, of the Gentiles within God's "vessels of mercy," and thus to prove that, "in you [Abraham] all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:6-9). The "us" then of v. 24 is inclusive of all the saints at Rome, yet as they are distinguished as "called Gentiles" and "called Jews."

1) A Gentile remnant according to Hosea, vs. 24-26.

Hosea was a prophet to the ten apostate northern tribes distinguished, from the southern kingdom of Judah, as the kingdom of Israel. His ministry was during the last 25 years of that decaying nation, prior to Assyrian exile in 722 BC.

a) God's distinguishing mercy, v. 24.

Notice that not all Jews *or* Gentiles are "called." Paul reverts to a favorite grace term, that is sovereign "calling," cf. 8:28, 30; 9:11, so that we are reminded once again of God's selective dealings in pure mercy, though now with broader focus on the nations of the world.

b) God's distinguishing calling of Gentiles (Hos. 2:23b), v. 25.

This free quotation from the LXX, similar to the usage of Peter (I Pet. 2:10), refers to Israel as "not being God's people" on account of spiritual and material adultery. Yet through the sheer mercy of God, He "will call them My people." Further, "I will have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion" (Hos. 2:23a). But could not Paul have chosen more explicit proof of the inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God? (Ps. 22:27; 86:9; Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 56:6-7; Jer. 3:17; Mic. 4:1-2; Zech. 2:11). Probably the language of contrast is helpful to Paul's argument. However Keil explains that this is not mere application: "Through its apostasy from God, Israel had become like the Gentiles, and had fallen from the covenant of grace with the Lord. Consequently, the re-adoption of the Israelites as children of God was a practical proof that God had also adopted the Gentile world as His children."⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Keil, *The Minor Prophets*, pp. 49-50. Also Hodge, Shedd: "[A]s they [the tribes of Israel] had been excluded from the theocracy, and so were virtually heathen, the apostle regards them as the type of the Gentiles

c) God's distinguishing calling of Gentiles (Hos. 1:10), v. 26.

In full from Hosea this quotation reads: "Yet the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured and numbered; and in the place [of exile?] where it is said to them, 'You are not My people,' it will be said to them, "You are the sons of the living God." Paul renders the last statement, "There they shall be *called* sons of the living God." This is the main point, namely that the Gentiles shall be engrafted into the people of God according to purest sovereign mercy (11:17).

2) A Jewish remnant according to Isaiah, vs. 27-29.

Isaiah was a prophet, contemporary with Hosea, who ministered during c. 740-690 B.C. to the two southern tribes known as the kingdom of Judah. Both quotations concern apostasy that preceded the Babylonian captivity which was followed by the return of a remnant to Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah. Paul's immediate concern is with regard to the present state of the nation of Israel, that is its pervasive unbelief that is yet not total.

a) God's distinguishing call of Jews (Isa. 10:22-3), vs. 27-28.

Isaiah's impassioned "cry" is onomatopoeic, κράζω, krazō, being an intense shout, "Though the number of the sons of Israel be like the sands of the sea, it is a remnant that will be saved," that is only about 55,000 in the first three contingents. "For the LORD will execute His word on the earth thoroughly and swiftly," that is, His judgment of exile as well as the preservation of a remnant. However for Paul, the big point is the maintenance of this remnant until the present time, and thus the fulfillment of God's covenant, not its negation. Thus God's calling to the Jews remains, Q.E.D, v. 6.

b) God's distinguishing call of Jews (Isa. 1:9), v. 29.

This is prophetic confirmation of the preceding truth, namely that only God's covenant mercy in His calling and preservation of the remnant, but here designated as a "seed" and likewise in v. 8 as "the children of promise," distinguishes Israel from such dregs as the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. Again, the distinctive characteristic of this remnant is not even faith or intrinsic righteousness, but "God who has mercy," v. 16 (cf. Mal. 3:6; Rom. 11:28-29).

Thus Haldane comments: “Had it not been for this election, through which God had before prepared vessels of mercy unto glory, neither Jew nor Gentile would have escaped, but all would have remained vessels of wrath fitted for destruction.”⁶¹

4. Distinguished as children through the righteousness of faith, vs. 30-33.

It is significant that the role of faith has not been referred to in this chapter up to this point, though it will now be mentioned three times, and especially the key expression, “the righteousness which is by faith. This leads us to conclude that Paul, while having emphasized the significance of faith, especially in chs. 3-4, now reverts to its non-meritorious characteristic, its pivotal importance following the establishment of God’s absolute sovereignty in the saving of sinners.

In a similar vein, it is also significant that the terms “faith” and “righteousness,” so dominant in Romans 3-8, not having been mentioned in 9:1-29, are now once again given familiar prominence. It would seem that while divine sovereignty and particular election are of fundamental importance, especially as they relate to the saving of the remnant Jew up to the present, yet the particulars of the gospel are not to be disregarded now that we have just been reminded of the incorporation of the Gentile in vs. 24-26. This reclaimed thrust will continue into 10:1-21 where “faith” and “righteousness” remain as prominent terms, though still with particular application to Israel as a nation.

a. Faith righteousness that the Gentiles attained, v. 30.

“What shall we say then?” is a rallying call that redirects focus from God’s sovereign dealing with the Jew and Gentile to a paradox that relates to the present status of the Jew and Gentile in terms of the gospel of justification by faith. Presently, we have the condition of “Gentiles who did not pursue [were not running as an athlete, hunting, pressing for as a passionate pursuit, present tense of διώκω, diōkō] righteousness.” There they were in the “streets and lanes” of this world minding their own defiling business and pagan religion, without a thought for Moses and his distinct righteous claims, when suddenly they found themselves invited to a divine banquet. Without any pretension, while aware of their poverty and unworthiness, as with the centurion who confessed, “Lord, . . . I am not worthy for You to come under my roof” (Luke 7:6), they accepted, they “attained” or “seized” at the point of faith [aorist καταλαμβάνω, katalambanō] the free grace that confronted them. They believed the offer of grace and were accepted! They were “the poor and crippled and blind and lame” who were invited to God’s “big dinner” (Luke 14:16-24).⁶²

⁶¹ Haldane, *Romans*, p. 501.

⁶² Refer to the helpful exposition of R. C. Trench, *Notes on the Parables of our Lord*, pp. 127-31 in which he not only distinguishes this parable from that of the Marriage of the King’s Son in Matt. 22:1-14, but points out that the slave represents those initial “preachers, evangelists, [and] apostles” who were spurned by Israel in general and subsequent “ambassadors of Christ” who urge the Gentiles to partake of this feast of grace.

The result is that Gentiles obtained “righteousness,” but more specifically “the righteousness of [solely obtained through] faith,” as distinct from righteousness derived from “the law of works” (3:27). As the following context indicates, this righteousness is wholly disassociated from the law of Moses, and obviously is that righteousness which is perfectly embodied in Jesus Christ’s atonement and imputed through faith alone. Such *sola fide* is that of Abraham, “who believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (6:3). Hence, this is a righteousness of legal standing; the idea of a progressive righteousness, which in fact they were not pursuing, is untenable in the light of the ungodly status of Gentiles here described. This is the righteousness that justifies through faith alone (1:16; 3:21-22, 28, 30; 4:3-5, 9-12), the gift of righteousness (5:17).

b. Faith righteousness that Israel squandered, vs. 31-33.

But what of Israel, that is the nation as a whole? To begin with, by way of contrast, it had a “law of righteousness” set before it; but what was that “law”? Contrast with the lack of Gentile pursuit would suggest the distinctive law of Moses, the law that elicits the “practice of righteousness” (10:5), rather than law as a general principle⁶³

(1) Striving, they did not achieve, v. 31.

It was “hunting, pressing for, as a passionate pursuit [present tense of διώκω, diōkō], righteousness,” which legal standard of required perfection it did not arrive at or attain (Gal. 3:10; 5:3). This was “a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge” (10:2), as embodied in Saul before he became Paul (Acts 22:3; Gal. 1:14). However, Israel did not achieve that which it sought, and implicit here is human inability in this regard (8:3-4),⁶⁴ as well as a misunderstanding concerning the true purpose of the law (Gal. 3:19, 21).

(2) Working, they did not believe, v. 32a.

But why did not Israel achieve God-pleasing conformity to that “Mosaic law of righteousness” which it so zealously pursued? To begin with, Paul does not answer that Israel’s failure here was due to the fact that the “Potter” created an insufficient number of “vessels of mercy” (cf. vs. 21-23)! Here he is simply concerned with accountability. In a sense the nation became seemingly so near and yet in reality so far from a saving knowledge of God. While having privileged status, yet the Jews were void of the true characteristics of that status. So how could Israel be such a contradiction?

(a) *Israel did not pursue God by faith.* As a people already redeemed, it misused the law by attributing to it saving rather than sanctifying power. As the children of God through the grace of redemption from Egypt, their redeemed status was perverted. The Jews did not deny

⁶³ “Law of Moses” is supported by Cranfield, Hodge, Lenski, Moo, Morris, Stott; “law as principle” is supported by Murray.

⁶⁴ Moo, *Romans*, p. 627.

faith, but rather believed in synergistic, bilateral religion, whereby faith and works unite to consummate salvation. Redemption out of Egypt was certainly all of grace; the only response required was faith in the passover lamb (Ex. 12:13) and God's saving power (Ex. 14:13). However, following this deliverance of God, the place of the law for an already redeemed people was misapplied. In other words, Israel bought into Galatianism (Gal. 3:1-3).

- (b) *Israel did pursue God by works.* Again, the Jews did *not* seek salvation by works alone. Their attitude is best reflected by the Pharisee who prayed, "God, *I thank You* that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this [contemptible] tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get" (Luke 18:11-12). Of course the gratitude for grace was merely patronage, while the declaration of works was proud publicity. Faith here was for infused grace, not faith in the sole saving power of God! The result was failure in several realms. First the Jews did not achieve the standard they aspired to. Second they did not gain justification with God, but rather condemnation. Third, they degenerated into proud hypocrisy. Fourth, they ended up crucifying their Messiah who had become "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense," v. 33.

- (3) Pursuing, they stumbled, v. 32b-33.

It may well be that here Paul further alludes to a favorite athletic representation of spiritual pilgrimage. "Pursuing" in vs. 30-31, present tense of διώκω, diōkō, and by inference in v. 32a, is qualified by the tragedy of a "fall" with regard to the Jews. They "stumbled over [aorist of προσκόπτω, proskoptō] the stumbling stone [πρόσκομμα proskomma]," that is in their strenuous pursuit of works righteousness, a "stone" of pure redeeming grace appeared in their way that caused them to be confounded and fall.

- (a) The "stone" is Christ, cf. v. 33b; 10:11, a "living stone," ordained to be "the very corner stone" of "a spiritual house" (I Pet. 2:4-7), "a holy temple in the Lord, . . . a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:19-22), who gets in the way of attempted salvation through works righteousness; he is a sore irritant to all legalism. Thus he becomes a disturbing interruption, an "offense" or "stumbling block," σκάνδαλον, skandalon (I Cor. 1:23; cf. Gal. 5:11). One option is to attempt to run over and crush that which gets in the way of human works religion (John 11:47-50), v. 32b.
- (b) The "stone" of Christ's righteousness conflicts with legal works. The quotation of Isaiah 28:16; 8:14 declares that God set such a disturbing stone in the center of Judaism or "Zion," again, so as to build "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 12:22). Contrary to militant efforts to eliminate such humiliating intrusion, this same "stone" of Christ's atonement, his righteous person and redemptive work, elicits solitary faith that repudiates self-righteousness and wholly

believes in this propitiatory, substitutionary righteousness. Further, concerning the opponents of this “stone” (God the Son) which God the Father has firmly set in Jerusalem, “the stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; . . . and he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust” (Matt. 21:42, 44), v. 33.

- (c) Just as the Gentiles attained “the righteousness which is *“by faith,”* v. 30, and Israel did not pursue this same acceptable righteousness *“by faith,”* v. 32, so *sola fide* is the vital principle of v. 33. In context, the point here is that, “he [the Jew] who exclusively believes [is believing, present participle] in Him [Jesus Christ as the lamb of God] will not be disappointed [put to shame at the day of reckoning, cf. ‘be disturbed,’ Is. 28:16].” Why is this so? The hymn writer pens the divine response :

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
 I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
 That soul, tho' all hell should endeavour to shake,
 I'll never, no never, no never forsake.