

Study 10 - The epistle of Paul to the Romans by Neville Clark, 2017

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Romans Ch 9

“The righteousness of God with Israel.”

The climax of the Apostle's argument

This is the beginning of the section which is the climax of the Apostle's argument in the book of Romans, the righteousness of God with Israel. It is at once a most fascinating and controversial section of the book, fascinating, of course, because it deals with the subject of election, the method by which God would choose one person and reject another person from salvation. Romans, of course, and this chapter in particular raises some of the most difficult questions in scripture and answers them. If I had to choose a chapter of Scripture which would be my favourite, there is no question, it would be Rom Ch 9. You wait until you see the argument unfold. So it is fascinating. It is controversial because to many modern commentators Chs 9, 10, and 11 are a closed book, they can't make sense of them. In fact once commentator said it like this, “The book of Romans is 8 chapters of gospel at the beginning, 5 chapters of application at the end, and 3 chapters of puzzle in the middle,” referring to these three chapters of 9, 10 and 11. That's the section we are going to commence. In fact, even in the truth, you may regard Romans Chs 9, 10 and 11 as something like a stand-alone section in the middle of Romans, all about God's dealing with the nation of Israel. Now the reason people might think Romans breaks up a little like that is because, the fact is, you could read directly from Ch 8:39, the last verse in Ch 8 straight into Ch 12:1 without any disruption in the flow of argument. You could conclude the story of the argument of Romans in Romans Ch 8, in fact I've got a set of notes in my shelf at home, which is, just Romans 1 to 8. I have heard series of studies which brethren have done, Rom 1 to 8. There is no question, Rom 8 is the end of a sub-section in Romans, so Ch 8:39 is a pause, if you like, in the argument. But let me put it like this, if you were to think of Romans as an argument just revolving around Chs 1-8 it would be a bit like eating the cake without the icing.

There is no question this is the climax of the argument that rolls through Chs 1-8. Let me just draw your attention to some of the links. In Ch 8:33, you have the subject of election, “Who will lay anything to the charge of God's elect?” Well you meet exactly the same word in Ch 9:11. “The purpose of God according to election.” Rom 8:15, you have the subject of Adoption. “We have received the spirit of adoption.” Well, Ch 9:4, amongst the eight blessings bestowed upon Israel, first, “The adoption.” Ch 8:16 speaks about the fact that we are “children of God.” Ch 9:8 speaks of “children of God.” You see, he is actually continuing the argument of Chs 1-8 not starting a completely new and unrelated argument about the nation of Israel. But before the Apostle begins to expound this section, there is a problem. You see, up until this point of time, Paul has been arguing the case for the righteousness of God using the doctrine of the atonement and the person of the Lord Jesus Christ in relation to that. And in almost every turn in the road, he has run up against this or that Jewish notion which was contrary to scripture; the purpose of the Law, the place of Abraham, the significance of Christ, the rite of baptism, the Jews had very strong thoughts on all those sorts of things which were most often wrong. So you see that by the end of Ch 8 we have got to, as far as the apostle is concerned, is that there is a good portion of the ecclesia, or ecclesias, who at this point, would have a very dim view of the Apostle, the Jewish portion of the ecclesia, a very dim view. At best they might have said that he was nullifying Old Testament Scripture, and at worst, they might have said, that he had become completely anti-Semitic. You think about the argument so far as it is in Romans.

God is no respecter of Persons

Ch 1, the Gentiles have failed to find God. They are completely unrighteous. Well of course the Jew would have applauded that conclusion at the end of Ch 1. But then look what happens, Ch2, “God is no respecter of persons,” he says, even though the Jews thought he was. Circumcision is no guarantee of God's favour, even though the Jew thought it was. Men are account Jew, based on their character, not based on their physical descent. Based on that, you see, the Jews in the ecclesia could well argue that Paul was saying that really, there is no such thing as a Jew, couldn't they. Ch 3, Oh well, says the Jew, I've got the Law, I will be fine, I've got the Law of Moses. Not good enough says Paul, the Law was never ever intended to save you, righteousness comes by faith, it does not come by the Law. Ch 4, look at Abraham, he was pronounced righteous ever before the Law was given. And then look at David, in Ch 14, he couldn't have saved himself by works even if he had wanted to. There was no law that could absolve him of the sins he had committed, adultery, murder, and therefore he concludes at the end of Ch 4 that Abraham was not just the father of the Jews, but also of the non-Jew. And then Ch 5, what does that say? Well it's that all man are born under

condemnation from Adam. The Jew didn't agree with that, he thought he was above condemnation, the problem is, Paul says, in Rom 5:12, that "sin came by one man," and the Jews are also descendants of Adam, they are also descendants of that one man, just like Gentiles are. Baptism Ch 6 applies to everyone. The Jew thought that baptism was a rite that applied to Gentiles who had to wash themselves before they could become Jews. What's more, Ch 7 says, that law, the Law, as mere law, did nothing for you, it was only a tool to lead you to Christ. And because of all of that, you see, by the time you get to Ch 8, the world is not divided between Jew and Gentile, it is divided between carnal and spiritual. He has completely re-defined the two groups of people that make up the entire population of humanity, to what the Jew thought. The Jew divided the world between Jew and Gentile, the Apostle divided it between carnally and spiritual, he has completely obscured the identity of the Jew in his argument. And you can imagine the Jewish mind running down those chapters, you see, by the time he gets to the end of Ch 8 he has been completely demolished, hasn't he. Everything he stood for has been wiped out, completely wiped out.

God never ever intended to save every Jew

So the question arises now in Ch 9, if that's the case, is Israel finished? Is Israel finished? You see that, so entirely has the Apostle dismantled the Jewish notions of legalistic righteousness that when you get to Ch 9, he is reeling in despair, wondering whether God still has a purpose with the nation of Israel. Well, this is what Ch 9, 10 and 11 look like. I am just going to restrict my comments on this slide at least, to Ch 9. The simple answer is this, Yes, God does still have a purpose with the nation of Israel. Ch 9:1-5 open the chapter with words of genuine distress that the Apostle has over the nation. Now he says these words, he begins like this to allay any concerns that he was anti-Jewish. The fact is, that the real argument of Ch 9 begins in V 6, but he prefixes it, you see, by these heartfelt sentiments feeling for the nation, given the blessings they had and the atrocious mess they have made of them. Vv 6-13, Well, the argument begins, just because some Jews never believed, he says, does not mean that God's purpose with the nation has finished. Jewish disobedience could never undermine God's purpose, why not? And this is earth shattering, because God never ever intended to save the whole nation anyway, he never intended to save every Jew. Only the true seed of Abraham. That is the process of election. But Vv 14-18, does that mean God's unjust? If he picks one person and he discards another person, does that mean he is unjust? No, says, the apostle, it is not a matter of God's justice, it is a matter of God's mercy. No-one deserves salvation, no-one has the right to be picked by God. And so Vv 19-21, he explains that, by reference to God's dealing with people like a potter does with the clay. And a simple summary of that section is, and a bit of a complicated and a controversial section, God does not reject any item, or if you like, any person until that person becomes unworkable. And since salvation is subject to God's mercy, rather than man's nationality. Gentiles can be saved equally well as Jews. And then between Vv 22-29 he quotes 4 Old Testament chapters to prove his point. He quotes the prophecy of Hosea twice, to show that not all Gentiles will be lost. And he quotes the prophecy of Isa twice to show that not all Jews would be saved. And then he concludes the Ch Vv 30-33, with an explanation of where the Jews went wrong. So that is the story of Ch 9, but as you can see, we are entering a highly sensitive section of the book of Romans. This is the story of God's treatment of the nation of Israel and the Jews are not going to agree with this exposition, unless the Apostle can prove it unequivocally. When I say unequivocally, I don't mean prove it by logic, I mean prove it by Scripture. These are Jews, If you are going to say anything, particularly about their nation, you are going to have to prove it by Scripture. Everything he says is going to have to be beyond question, underlined twice. How does he do that? This is how he does it. 33 times in three chapters, Rom 9,10 and 11, the Old Testament is quoted, in fact, in Rom 9 alone, there are 13 quotations from the Old Testament, which I've got to tell you, is more than in any other chapter of the Bible. 13 times he is going to quote the Old Testament in this chapter, to make his point. Nothing else in Scripture compares with this, you see, but you'll appreciate, for half the ecclesia who were the initial audience of this letter, there is no subject in the world more controversial. This is Rom 9, unbelievable.

Paul's reputation

Well, he begins the chapter. Ch 9:1-5 Paul's distress at Israel's unbelief. V 1, "I say the truth in Christ," he says, "I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart, for I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh," why does he need to say that, why does he need to begin the chapter like that? Well, because, as I have already explained a moment ago, he has a certain reputation. There are many who regarded him a traitor to the nation. I mean, they have just read eight chapters and by Ch 9:1, they regard him as a traitor to the Jewish cause. Let me just show you something about the Apostle's reputation. You know, in Acts 21, after the conclusion of the third missionary journey, the Apostle comes back to the Jerusalem ecclesia and the Arranging Brethren of that ecclesia took him aside in Acts 21:18, they took him aside and they spoke privately to him and this is what they said. V18 of Acts 21, "The day following, Paul went in with us," that is with Luke, and those who had gathered, "unto James," the recording

brother of the Jewish ecclesia, the largest ecclesia in the world, Jewish ecclesia. "And all the elders were present, and when he had saluted them he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministering. And they said to him, Paul, thou seest brother how many thousands of Jews there are that believe, and they are all zealous of the Law, and they are informed of thee, that thou teaches all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses." That's the reputation he had got, you see. Not just in Rome, this is back in Jerusalem. He's got this reputation amongst the Jewish world within Christadelphia in the first century. That's why he begins Ch 9, in the way he does. The result of this, by the way, in Acts 21, the result of this discussion was that the Apostle goes to the temple. He goes to the temple on the seventh day, the record tells us, and the Jews in the temple, non-Christadelphians, they start a riot. He's arrested, he appeals to Caesar, and he ends up in prison in Rome. It is this discussion that led to his ultimate imprisonment in Rome the first time. That's how sensitive things were you see, and that's why, as I say, he opens the chapter in the way he does. He is very keenly aware of it.

And so you read, three times in V 1 of Rom 9 statements of his integrity. "I'm telling the truth," "I'm not lying," he says. "The Holy Spirit confirms my honesty," which by the way, is simply a means of saying that I am telling you the truth before God. Back in Acts Ch 5:3 you might recall that Ananias and Saphira lied to the Holy Spirit which a couple of verses later is said to mean that they lied to God. So he says, "My conscience," as it were, if I could paraphrase, "my conscience bearing me witness, before God." Three times in V1 he's determined about the genuineness of his spirit. Such is the agony of mind, in fact, on this issue, he wishes that he could swap places with the nation. Look at V 3, "I could wish that myself were cursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." You might instantly recognise in that verse the sentiments of Moses in Ex 32:32, after the incident of the golden calf on the 6th occasion of ascending the mountain, uninvited, and he gets to the top and he says to God "If thou wilt forgive their sin, and if not, blot me out of the book thou hast written." What is he saying? If you are going to destroy them, then destroy me with them." Isn't he? If Israel must die, I will die with them. You will see in V 3, the Apostle is going one step further, "If I could die," he says, "I wouldn't die with them, I would die for them," isn't he? I'd die for them. And you know, read carefully V 3, he knows what he is saying is an impossibility, he doesn't say "I wish," he says, "I could wish." The offer he is making in V 3 is not a realistic offer, but it is a measure of his sincerity. He says, "I could wish that I myself was accursed," the word 'accursed' there is the Greek word 'anathema.' It means 'devoted to destruction as an accursed thing.' You read it many times in the Old Testament. Achan took the accursed thing, those Babylonish garments, the wedge of gold and such, the things from Jericho, he took them. He becomes as a consequence an accursed thing himself, devoted to destruction. What he is saying here in V 3 is, 'If it were possible, I would forfeit the kingdom of God to save my nation, if I could,' he says. And the unbelief, you see, the unbelief of the nation of Israel was all the more tragic by virtue of the privileges they had.

Israel's privileges

Look at Vv 4 and 5, there are eight privileges enumerated here, which the nation of Israel was subject to. "Who are Israelites, this nation," he says, "who are Israelites, to whom pertaineth, number 1, the adoption, 2, the glory, 3, the covenants, 4, the giving of the Law, the service of God, the promises, whose are the fathers and of whom as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who over all, God blessed forever. It is not saying, by the way that Christ is God, in my margin I have made a little change, 'God-blessed,' Christ is blessed by God forever. But what are these blessings, eight blessings, you see came upon the nation of Israel. What were they? The adoption, well as the slide says, that's son-ship. As a nation they became God's children. The glory, they got the glory, that is the Shekina glory that dwelt in the Most Holy Place and proved that God dwelt amongst them. They got the covenants, now there is debate, in fact in translation that says it is 'covenant' singular or 'covenants' plural here. If it is 'covenant' singular, it would evidently be the Mosaic covenant. If it is covenants plural, then you could add to that the Abrahamic and the Davidic. They got the Law, given at Sinai, the basis of the nation, and the envy of all surrounding nations. The people who looked at them were meant to look upon them and their conduct and their wisdom, and say "what nation is there so mighty as this as that has your God." "They had the service of God," it says, toward the end of V 4, what's that? It's actually the service of the Tabernacle, with the priests and the priesthood. Who could atone for the sins of the nation. Whatever nation had that? They had the promises. These are not the covenant promises, these are now the multitude of promises that the prophets delivered throughout the Old Testament. The guarantee, if you like, of God's providence working in their lives. So for example, Deut 18:18, the promise of a coming Messiah, modelled after Moses himself, who would be a king, Jer 23:5, after the nation was restored and elevated. Countless promises you could enumerate. Whose were the fathers, they had the fathers, and you might say, well what's so special about that, we've all got fathers. No, no, no, no, it was because Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were the fathers of this nation that all the blessings came upon them. God didn't choose them in Deut Ch 7 because they were the greatest or the most numerous of all nations,

he chose them because of the relationship he had with Abraham. The fathers were worth an awful lot to that nation, and then if you like, the greatest blessing of all, the Messiah, came from Israel and as a consequence of him being a Jew, he went first to the house of Israel. Enormous number of blessings, but despite those blessings, perhaps in spite of those blessings, the nation, at least as a nation, completely failed to respond.

Has God's purpose with Israel failed?

And so now the Apostle drops a bombshell, in verse 6. The nation's unbelief does not disrupt God's purpose. V 6 through V 13, does the fact that the nation didn't believe, or didn't respond, to God's work with them, does that mean that God's purpose with the nation has failed? Does that mean that the prophecies about the nation has failed? And the answer, of course, is 'no.' Why no? And the answer is that God's purpose with the nation of Israel never required the salvation of every Jew, and as you will see, he never ever intended, right from the days of Abraham, to save every mortal descendant of Abraham. Now I say that that's a bombshell. The Jews never ever thought that, that never ever entered their mind, they thought they were automatically saved as a consequence of having Abraham's blood. God's intention from the outset was never to save every single Jew. Look at the argument V 6, "Not as though the word of God has taken none effect for they are not all Israel which are of Israel." So, what is the verse saying? "Does Israel's unbelief make God's purpose with them of none effect? No they are not all of Israel which are of Israel." What does that mean? It means that the hope of salvation was only ever to a special class within the nation. It was never intended to include every Jew. So think about what that means to a Jew reading this epistle. Never intended to include everyone. They are not all Israel after the spirit, he says, which are of Israel after the flesh, that's the point.

In Isaac shall thy seed be called

V 7 "Neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children, but in Isaac shall thy seed be called." Now there wouldn't be a Jew alive who didn't agree with that. They thought, you see, they were saved simply because they were Abraham's seed, by natural descent. The problem was Abraham had two children. Was Ishmael saved? Were both of Abraham's children saved. No they weren't were they? They weren't. Ah but the Jew had an answer to that, he says, 'Well of course not, because they had different mothers, so of course only Isaac would be saved. Descent had to be through Isaac.' Sure. Well then, were all Isaac's children saved? V 10, "Not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even our father Isaac, for the children being not yet born, having done neither any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth, it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. So Isaac had two children, but Esau wasn't selected. So it is not good enough simply to be a son of Isaac, yet Esau was a son of Isaac, by the same mother as Jacob. Not only that, he was a twin of Jacob, and not just a twin, but the firstborn twin. And if that is not enough, brothers and sisters, the decision that God made on Esau's eternal welfare, was made before the kid was even born, is the point that is made clearly in V 11, he hadn't even done good or evil and God has already decided against him. Unbelievable. At least, you might say, at least Ishmael's character was made manifest when he was rejected from the household of Abraham, Esau hadn't even seen the light of day, and God selected against him, in the foreknowledge of God, his character was evident. God knew what the boy would be like, V 13, "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated, and he knew that when the boys were in the womb, fighting.

The purpose of God according to election

Now V 11 calls that "The purpose of God according to election." The word 'election' means, 'selection.' It just means selection, that is the decision God makes with people in order to fulfil his purpose, and that purpose required the selection of Jacob, and the rejection of Esau, even before the boy had shown his true colours. Now how would you be, if in this hall we had a mother right now who we knew was going to give birth to twins, well there wouldn't be one of us who would say one's in the kingdom, and the other one's not, by name, but that's what happens here. So what is this section saying? Here's the summary. A man does not commend himself to God simply being born of Abraham because Ishmael was not commended. A nation does not commend itself to God simply by being born of Isaac because Esau was not commended. And I say 'nation,' because in verse 13, when Malachi says "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated," he is speaking about two nations, he is speaking about Jews and Edomites because two nations are in thy womb, Rebecca was told in Genesis 25. So a nation doesn't commend itself to God simply by being born of Isaac, because Esau wasn't commended. You see, the Jews thought that God was obliged to accept them just because they were children of Abraham, but Paul has just shown on two occasions that that did not occur. And why? Why not? Well because simply having Abraham's blood is not how God defines being a child of Abraham. The question is, do you live like Abraham? Do you obey God's word, that was what the real question was here, that's the rub. Abraham's natural blood is of about as much use for your salvation as

Christ's literal blood. The question is, what are you like? But can you see where this is heading? The very principle that the Apostle has just established which would allow God to choose Isaac over Ishmael, or Jacob over Esau, will also allow him to choose Gentiles over Jews. Because what if the Gentiles had more the character of Abraham than the Jew? I mean, what was the reason God chose Isaac over Ishmael, or Jacob over Esau, it was about their characters. Well where would the Jews stand then, based on the fact that his is how God acts, where would the Jew stand if the Gentile had a character that he didn't? You see, he's setting himself up, and well, I will tell you now, in V 24, that is exactly the conclusion he gets to. But he is setting himself up for this argument, but before you get to V 24, you've now begun a lot of other side questions, because when it came to Ishmael or Esau, the Jews didn't care. They were perfectly happy to write those boys off and the nations that came from them, they didn't care at all, they didn't give a rush about those two descendants of Abraham, but the moment you turn around and say that God might save a Gentile and reject the Jew, that's not fair. Not fair.

Is there unrighteousness with God?

V 14, "What shall we say then, is there unrighteousness with God? By no means," he says. Now how can the Apostle simply say, 'Is God unrighteous, definitely not, how can he say that? Well, the quote in your margin would be something like Psa 92:15, "There is no unrighteousness with God." Like it is an explicit statement in Psa 92:15, "There is no unrighteousness with God," so 'God forbid,' or 'let it not be,' or 'by no means,' is true. That is to say, God always makes the correct choice. He is going to get it right. However, in order to answer the question in V 14 more fully, 'Is God arbitrary about who he selects,' does he play fair, does he give everyone a fair crack? Paul is going to bring into view two characters. Moses, and Pharaoh, he's going to introduce us to these two men, Moses and Pharaoh. And I will tell you why. Moses pleads with God to save Israel. He pleads with God to save every single Jew, and God says, 'no.' Pharaoh on the other hand conspires against God to destroy Israel, by which I mean, every single Jew, and God says 'no.' Now why is that important? And it is simple, the answer is because God never intended to save every single Jew, therefore Moses is wrong, but God did say that he would save the nation, which required the salvation of at least some Jews and therefore Pharaoh was wrong, you see? And here's the argument, V 15, "But God said to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Now that is a quotation from Ex 33:19 after the incident of the golden calf.

Now what happened? Just cast your mind back. Well, God told Moses when Moses comes down the mount and he smashes the tables of stone and God tells Moses to stand aside while he destroyed the nation and began again with Moses. And Moses intercedes, as we mentioned a little earlier, to God for the nation, 'If they are going to die,' he says, 'then let me die with them, blot my name out.' God says, 'No, not acceptable, not acceptable.' Moses says then, 'Well, all right then, will you save them for me?' And based upon the fact that we've got a first name relationship, will you do it for me? If you won't do it in an outright sense for them, will you do it for me?' God says, 'You know what, Moses, I will do it for you I will save them for you.' And then Moses says, 'All right, I've got one more request, "show me thy glory. Show me thy glory." 'Let me see the character of the God that would destroy a nation. Let me see the character of the God I am dealing with' and the answer comes back, 'All right, I will do that for you Moses.' "I will make all my goodness pass before thee. I will be gracious to whom I am gracious, and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy." You see, what Moses didn't appreciate was that in order that God might save the nation, it did not obligate him to save every single Jew in the wilderness. Within a year, let me tell you, the whole wilderness generation had been consigned to death. By Num 14 "your carcasses shall perish in the wilderness." You see, God was right, God was right in his initial judgment against the nation, but his purpose was going to continue through the next generation. The nation would still survive, though not every individual would be involved.

And so V 16, "So then," he says, "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy," well, what does that mean? Well, "the him that wills" and the "him that runs" is Moses, you see? In simple terms, what he is saying is that the fulfilment of God's plan is not up to Moses. In Ex 31:12, Moses "willed," when he asked God to forgive Israel, that was Moses will. In Ex 34:8, Moses it says had "Made haste and prayed for God's angel to go with them." So Moses "willed" and Moses, "ran" to try to save every single Jew, what he didn't understand was that God didn't need to save every single Jew to fulfil his purpose with Israel. But in the same way that God would 'Show mercy to whom he would show mercy,' he would also show judgment to whom he would show judgment. V 17, "For the Scripture said unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up that I might show my power in thee, that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore he will have mercy upon whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

Did Pharaoh have a choice?

Now what's going on there? Well, it is very simple. God shows mercy to some and deliberately doesn't show it to others. As we know in the case of Pharaoh, God specifically hardened him and then destroyed him, which only raises the next question. V 19, "Well," he says, "thou would say then unto me" says the Apostle, so he is speaking to the ecclesia, and he says, 'And since I have said this, and I have told you how God acts, you are going to say to me, "Well then why does God find fault with Pharaoh, because Pharaoh did not resist his will." How can God take a man and harden him, which means he is going to sin and then punish him for sinning? How can God do that in V 19? How can God punish Pharaoh for resisting his will when God hardened his heart in the first place and no one can resist God? Did Pharaoh have a choice? Now this, of course, in V 19, is one of those passages which has generated an enormous amount of discussion. You will be aware that many times in the Exodus record, throughout the ten plagues it says, that "God hardened Pharaoh's heart." Perhaps we will be equally aware that on many other occasions it says, that "Pharaoh hardened his own heart." We might explain that by saying that these two statements complement rather than contradict each other, well that's true, but how is it true? And does that really answer V 19? Well, No it doesn't. The answer to this riddle is to be found in how the Potter works with the clay. Now I am going to come back to Pharaoh and show you what I mean in a moment, but let's just keep reading for a bit, Vv 20 and 21. Look what he says, "Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" Now that's Paul's answer to the question of V 19, do you think that answers the question? Why does God find fault with people he hardens who resist his will and then God punishes, well, V 20 "Who art thou that repliest against God?" V 21."Shaul the thing that God formed question why it has been formed in such a way?" Now commentators have looked at what Paul says in V 19 and looked at the answer he gives in Vv 20 and 21, and concluded often that Paul side-steps the issue, that his answer is simply, 'Who are you O man, to answer God back?' And, I must admit, that when I first read this, when I was much younger, I thought, oh what kind of an answer is that? One commentator I read said, "This is the weakest point of the entire epistle." Well, if you had a superficial understanding of these verses, sure, it is the weakest point of the epistle. Let me show you what is actually happening here. He is speaking about the Potter's work with the clay. And in order to do that he quotes a combination, as your margin says, Isa 29, Isa 64, Isa 45, but there is another very powerful, and I am going to suggest, most important quotation in your margin and you need to highlight it, and it is Jer 18:6, you will see it there on that little 'f' in V 21. This is the critical quote to understand the solution to this dilemma. What does it say in Jer 18, here is Jer 18:6-10 on the screen. "Oh house of Israel," he says, "can not I do with you as this Potter says Yahweh? Behold as the clay is in the Potter's hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel." So there's your context, there is no question we are talking about how the Potter works with the clay. "At what instant," the Potter says, "at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to pluck up, to pull down and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, then I will repent of the evil that I thought to do to them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to build and to plant it, if it then go and do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will also repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them."

God will work with a pot until it becomes unworkable

There are two points from this verse in Jer 18. Here is the first one. It is God's prerogative as the Potter to make whatever he wants, and the second point is, that the exercise of God's will is conditioned by the response of the clay. You see the significance of that? It is God's prerogative as the potter to make whatever he wants, but the exercise of God's will toward that clay is conditioned by the response of the clay. What does that mean in plain English, it means this, God will work with the pot until such time as the pot becomes unworkable. At that point, God will use that pot for his purposes without any consideration for the eternal well-being of the pot, because he has given up with the pot. But if that pot continues to be workable, the potter will take it off the wheel, squish it together and try and re-form it into the pot he wants. If it is marred, he will pull out that little stone, and keep working with the pot. The minute the pot says "Get your hands off me," ...throw the pot in, or else, he will leave the pot and make it an object example for other pots not to copy, but the critical thing is, he never stops working with the pot until the pot becomes unworkable.

Pharaoh hardens his own heart

Now let's talk about Pharaoh. God hardened Pharaoh's heart, Pharaoh hardens his own heart. Let me show you how it happens. God only, as it turns out, hardens Pharaoh's heart after Pharaoh has proven himself unworkable. Look at the ten plagues. We've got a prophecy in Ex Ch 4:21, and Ex Ch 7:3 before the plagues begin, that God will harden Pharaoh's heart, and then we have the plague of blood. Pharaoh hardens his heart. Frogs, he hardens his heart. Lice, he hardens his heart, Flies, he hardens his heart, Murrain, he hardens his heart, only when it comes to the boils, does God say, 'I'm going to harden his heart.' Hail comes,

he hardens his heart, and then from that point on, God hardens, God hardens, God hardens. You see the point? God did not harden Pharaoh's heart until Pharaoh became unworkable. I would draw your attention to Ex 7:13-14, it would appear to say in the Authorised Version, that God hardened Pharaoh's heart right at the beginning in Ex 7. All modern translations disagree, so I am quoting you here the RSV but the NIV's the same. Pharaoh harden his own heart in Ex 7:13-14. So what you find, you see, is by the time God hardens Pharaoh's heart, Pharaoh has already hardened it himself seven times. God does not stop working with the pot, even if it is an Egyptian pot, until the pot becomes unworkable. That's the fundamental policy of the potter and the clay. In fact, in Ex 9:16 it says that Pharaoh was specifically told by Moses, "For this cause," he says, "I have raised thee up to show my power in thee," speaking on behalf of God. The result was that at the end of Ex Ch 9 "Pharaoh sinned yet more." Can you see the point? The clay always determines its own destiny. God doesn't give up on a person until there is no chance left. But there is one thing God does do, when a person has proven themselves unworkable, God doesn't necessarily discard them straight away, he may well use them to save others, even if they won't be saved themselves.

Vessels of wrath fitted for destruction

So, V 22, "Well, what if God willing to show his wrath and to make his power known, endures with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." So here are people who will not be in the kingdom of God, "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." And the word 'fitted' is in the middle voice, which simply means, they have fitted themselves to destruction. It is their choice to be destroyed. They might not think of it quite in those terms, but by their own conduct they bring the sentence against themselves. V 23, And that God might in contrast "make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory." But you notice the difference between Vv 22 and 23? Obviously V 22 is talking about people fitted to destruction, and V 23 is about people fitted to glory, or prepared for glory, but the difference is this, the vessels of wrath in V 22 fit themselves to destruction. The vessels of mercy in V 23 are prepared by God. They are prepared by God. And you see, this is where it becomes meaningful for us, brothers and sisters, God is equally as long-suffering with us as he was with Pharaoh, because we are being shaped for his purpose - we are not being shaped for Our purpose. So God's the potter, not us. We can never stop responding to the hand of the potter. At your own peril, you stop responding to the hand of the potter. We might look at trials that come upon us, Why is this happening to me? Why is that happening to me? In fact I often think that the trials that come upon me are so because I am fighting the hand of the Potter. Or I want to be a different kind of pot than what the Potter has decided. The exhortation therefore is simple, we've got to remain pliable, the water's got to keep going on the clay, if you stop reading your Bible, the clay dries out. We are earthen vessels, the water leaks out, and all of a sudden, well dry clay is not as pliable as wet clay, is it? Think about why we have been called to the Truth and why our next-door neighbour wasn't called to the Truth. What is so special about us? Nothing is so special about us. God simply showed mercy. He simply showed mercy, so then think about how we will reward him for his mercy, and how much of our time, our energy, our motivation our aspirations revolve around what God wants instead of what we want.

Not of the Jews only but also of the Gentiles

And so when you come to V 24, he now drops the next bombshell. "Even us," he says, "whom God hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. Understanding all of that he says, it is very clear not all Jews will be saved. But understanding all of that, he says, it is equally clear, not all Gentiles will be lost. God's purpose doesn't require a firm cleaving to only one nation, he is looking for a certain character, you see? And what he does now, between Vv 25 and 29, is he gives four Old Testament quotations to prove his point. Two from Hosea, and two from Isaiah, and look at them. Remarkable! V 25, "As God also says in Hosea, I will call them my people which were not my people and her beloved which was not beloved." So that's a quotation from Hos 2:23.

"Not my people" will become "my people"

What's it all about? Well there were ten tribes that had just been sent into Assyrian captivity. They were God's people but Hosea says they had become wicked and they are "not my people," being that they are now in captivity, but in the kingdom of God, God will have them back, he will regather all of national Israel and they will become "my people" again, you see? And that is what he is saying, "I will call them my people" in the kingdom age, which were "not my people," and "her beloved" which was not beloved. He is talking about the restoration of the nation of Israel. And then again in V 26. "It shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them Ye are not my people there shall they be called the children of the Living God," now that's a quotation from Hos 1:10, making the same point as V25 but with a difference, Israel doesn't just become God's people in V 26, they become children of the living God. That's not the same as just being natural Israel, that's spiritual Israel. Turn just one page back to Ch 8:14, Israel in the kingdom are going to

become children of the living God. Ch 8:14 says, "As many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God." So you see what Hosea is saying in V 26 of Rom 9, Israel is not just regathered, they are converted to the Truth, that's how they become "my people" again, that's how they become "children of the living God," not simply by being relocated from the four corners of the world back to the land of Israel, but by being changed in their character. But here's the question, Hosea is speaking of the Jews, and he is applying these Scriptures to Gentiles, because what he is basically saying in these verses here is, that the Gentiles can come to the Truth, I mean, that is what he has just said in V 24 and this is how he is proving it. Well here is a question for you, How can Paul take Jewish Scriptures which are about the regathering of the nation and say that those scriptures now are...I am appropriating them and I am applying them to the Gentiles to prove to you that the Gentiles can come to the Truth. The answer is this. This whole notion of "my people," or "not my people," where does that first occur in the Bible? And by happy coincidence, in Ch 10:19, you have a quotation from Deut 32:21. And this is what it says. Rom 10:19 quoting Deut 32, "But I say," he says, "did not Israel know. First Moses said, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are not my people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you." So what he is simply saying here is that God tried to provoke Israel back to the Truth by choosing the Gentiles. He tried to make Israel jealous of the hope of salvation by calling non-Jews to the Truth. Now it didn't work, but that's what he tried to do, but my point is, the Gentiles are called "no people," that's who it is in V 19, they are called "no people" or "not my people." So think about what you have just read then back in Ch 9:25-26, the Jews were "my people," they disobeyed and they became "not my people," but in the kingdom age you are going to bring them back, convert them and call them "my people." Ah! So what that means is if God can take a people who are "not my people," and bring them back into the fold and call them "my people," if he can do that with the Jews, he can do it with the Gentiles, who are "not my people," and call them "my people," see that? He's just established by quoting Jewish Scriptures, the method by which God can justify calling the Gentiles to the truth, because he simply says, God can take a people who are "not my people" and call them "my people," if they convert. Well he is going to do that with Israel in the future, so clearly he can do it with the Gentiles now. Let me tell you, that is a brilliant use of two quotations in Hosea.

God only ever needed a remnant

And now two quotations from Isaiah, V 27. Isaiah also cried concerning Israel. Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea a remnant shall be saved," it is quoting Isa 10:22 and it is simply saying God only ever expected to save a remnant in Israel. He also knew that most of the Jews would be unresponsive. V 28, "For he will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness. Because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth." Now the "short work" here, this is Isa 10:23. Isa 10:23 says that "God will make a consumption" or a "destruction," in the midst of the land. Now initially of course, it has reference to the Assyrian invasion in the days of Hezekiah, but Paul is using it in V 28 here, of the imminent destruction of AD 70, and he calls it a "short work," because Matt 24 and verse 22 says, "Except those days should be shortened no flesh would be saved." And then V 29, and as Isaiah said before, so here's the second quotation, "Except Yahweh of Sabaoth, or the Lord of Sabaoth, had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom and made like unto Gomorrah," quoting Isa 1:9. Once again, the emphasis is on a remnant. If God hadn't left a remnant here, he would have wiped us out in the same way he wiped out Sodom and Gomorrah. A complete and utter annihilation of the Jewish race. Unless God preserved a remnant. But you see in those four quotations, he has just established to principles, two key principles, Number 1, God can take a group who are "not his people," and he can make them "his people." That's what Hosea teaches, and it is not restricted just to Jews. And secondly, from all those who are called, God only expects to save a remnant. That's what Isaiah teaches. And if I could be so bold as to suggest, that also is not restricted just to Jews. So V 25, 26, two quotes from Hosea to show that not all Gentiles will be lost, Vv 27 through 29, two quotes from Isaiah to show that not all Jews would be saved. So summarise that. Some Gentiles will be called, despite the fact that the Jews thought none would be. Some Jews would be called, despite the fact that the Jews thought that all would be. And in both cases, if I had time I could show you, it is the children of these prophets that tell the story. This is "my people" is in fact the Heb word Ammi which is Hosea's son, and "the beloved" in V 25 is the Heb word Ruama, which was Hosea's daughter. And the remnant of Vv 27-29, well that's Isaiah's sons Sheer Jashub, a remnant would return. So in fact the children, the names of the children, tell the story of these two prophets. And that brings us to the final section Vv 30 through 33. V 30 says, "Well what shall we say then," V 30 says, "that the Gentiles which followed not after righteousness have attained to righteousness even the righteousness which is of faith, but Israel which followed after the law of righteousness have not attained to the law of righteousness." How is it, he says, that the Gentiles who had none of Israel's privileges, succeeded where Israel failed? Well it is easy he says, V 32, how, "Wherefore, because the Jews sought it not by faith, but as it were by works. For they stumbled at the stumbling stone." Israel was never ever looking for righteousness in the right place. They sought righteousness by law whereas the Gentiles responded to the offer of righteousness by faith, that was the difference. And of all the

privileges that Israel had, now recall back to Vv 4 and 5 to those eight astonishing privileges the nation had. Of All those privileges the greatest of the lot was that Christ came from their nation. And of all the stumbling stones, that also proved to be the greatest. They stumbled at that stumbling stone, as it is written in V 33, "Behold I lay in Zion a stumbling stone, a rock of offence, and whosoever believeth on him, Christ shall not be ashamed." They didn't accept him. And they didn't just reject him, they actually killed him. And you know, brothers and sisters and young people, you marvel, at what the nation has done here, they had such enormous privileges, yet they failed so dramatically, and you've got to wonder, perhaps, whether they failed in proportion to the blessings they received. I mean, it is a fact isn't it, that sometimes the advantages we have in life can be the very source of our downfall, because so often our advantages cost us nothing, and so we never really value them, so think about us, we've got the truth, we live in a comfortable society, no one stops us doing what we are doing, we want for nothing, really. We want for nothing. But what has it really cost us to be Christadelphian? For many of us in this room, we have known nothing else, we were born onto Christadelphia. Oh yes, we made a personal decision for baptism, but the fact is that most young people that are brought up in the Truth get baptised but for the Gentiles in this ecclesia, they had to leave something behind, they had no privileges, they were not "my people," and they saw the Truth like a beacon in a very dark world, didn't they, so if we are going to learn anything from Israel, it must surely be this, don't take the Truth for granted. Count your blessings. Don't expect that just because we are Christadelphian God will automatically save us, that would be the fatal mistake of the nation of Israel, as if our blood meant something to God, because every which way I read Rom 9, brothers and sisters, it is very clear to me that the abiding lesson from Israel's history is that to fulfil his purpose God only ever needed a remnant.

Transcription by Fay Berry 2017