

**Milwaukee Faithwalkers**

**February 4, 2012**

**Series on the book of Romans - "How to live in a world turned upside down."**

**Romans 9**

**Henry van Oudenaren**

I have two themes that I would like to touch on this morning that come from Romans 9:

1. Paul's anguish over his kinsmen who are "cursed"
2. God's sovereignty

Let me start with a favourite verse from last week's chapter which Chris shared with you...

Romans 8:28

And we know that in **all things** God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

It is no coincidence that I come before you today. It will be two years next Saturday that we left Milwaukee after I lost my job there. How time flies.

I will be honest in telling you that in retrospect, the experience has wounded me deeply.

Time heals most scars, but this one has damaged my self confidence and caused me to be more anxious than ever before in my 30 year working career.

I have no doubt that God caused or allowed this to happen in order to show me the depth of my trust in him vs. my trust in the things of this world.

It has humbled me.

It has molded me.

It has caused me to reexamine my walk with him and re-question my purpose for being.

These are all good things from Gods perspective for he's not interested in coasters and those that are luke warm.

He wants active seekers.

He wants a childlike faith not one that has grown cold and stale with experience, luxury, stability and comfort.

He knows us better than we know ourselves, and He knows that familiarity breeds contempt, and success breeds complacency.

He has called us into conflict, not away from it. As the favourite hymn says...."Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war...."

He has called us to wrestle with Him, to knock and have the door opened, to seek and to find Him, not to sit back and wait for Him to find us.

So when we come to a passage like Rom 9, He wants us to jump in and open our minds to new possibilities.

When Greg asked if I would speak on this chapter, I gave it quick glance over before responding and came away with the impression that it might be a challenge.

Nothing really jumped out at me as being of immediate application. And if you know me at all, you'll know that I am a practical kind of guy. I always ask the "so what" question. Don't give me a lot of theory or theology, give me something that I can apply.

So that's how I went into the study and preparation. Not to over analyze it or Him, but certainly to consider new possibilities of His character that I might not have thought of before.

The chapter starts out with Paul, anxious over the state of his lost Jewish kinsmen. In fact, he wishes he were "cursed" instead if them....

<sup>2</sup> I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, <sup>4</sup> the people of Israel.

Do you ever think about the fact that you and I were once "cursed"?

Do you ever think of Jesus as having taken your "curse" away. That He became cursed on your behalf and that was why He had to die.

For He became sin for us. And the penalty for sin was death. Even death upon the cross.

Do you ever think about your relatives, friends, neighbours or work colleagues who still live under that same curse. Does it burden you the way it did Paul. Do you wish that you were still under that curse in order that they might not be?

Paul then goes on to suggest that God elects some and not others. A historically divisive topic but one that we need to grapple with none the less.

<sup>11</sup> Yet, before the twins (Jacob and Esau) were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: <sup>12</sup> not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” <sup>13</sup> Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

On one side of this argument are those who believe that our salvation is based solely on God’s election or God’s choosing those whom He will save before we were even born, with no basis on our merits or choice.

On the other side of the argument, some would suggest that it is only by faith that we are saved and that this must be our free will choice.

You can see why there are such convincing and scriptural arguments to support both ends of this spectrum.

One of my favourite teachers from our “great cloud of witnesses” is Charles Spurgeon, whom I have gone to on many occasions for insights...

On this topic, he writes:

“The great controversy which for many ages has divided the Christian Church has hinged on the difficult question of “the will.” Without a doubt that conflict has done much harm to the Christian Church, but I will also say, that it has been loaded with immeasurable usefulness; for it has thrust forward before the minds of Christians, precious truths, which without it, might have been kept in the shade. I believe that the two great doctrines of human responsibility and divine sovereignty have both been brought out more prominently in the Christian Church by the fact that there is a class of strong-minded, hard-headed men who magnify sovereignty at the expense of responsibility; and another earnest and useful class who uphold and maintain human responsibility oftentimes at the expense of divine sovereignty. I believe there is a need for this in the finite character of the human mind, for the natural lethargy of the Church requires a kind of healthy irritation to arouse her powers and to stimulate her actions. The pebbles in the living stream of truth are worn smooth and round by friction. Who among us would wish to suspend a law of nature whose effects on the whole are good?”

Another favourite teacher and more contemporary witness of ours, John Piper, who has been ministering just north west of you in Minnesota for many years, and who my son Paul, who is lives and works in Houston suggested I listen to on the topic, learned the following, when he took a sabbatical in 1979 from Bethel College where he had been teaching in order to study just this one chapter in Romans.

He says....

“As I studied Romans 9 day after day, I began to see a God so majestic and so free and so absolutely sovereign that my analysis merged into worship and the Lord said, in effect, **“I will not simply be analyzed, I will be adored. I will not simply be pondered, I will be proclaimed. My sovereignty is not simply to be scrutinized, it is to be heralded. It is not grist for the mill of controversy, it is gospel (good news) for sinners who know that their only hope is the sovereign triumph of God’s grace over their rebellious will.”**”

And I believe God says the same to each of us.

The middle ground I believe in this argument might be that God must call us, because without His creating in us the desire to know Him, then where would this honourable desire come from in a people like us in which Scripture says "there is no good thing."

Spurgeon goes on to say....

"If there are difficulties about the doctrine of pure election, there are ten times more about the opposite. We think that the difficulties which surround our belief that salvation depends on the will of God, arise from our ignorance in not understanding enough of God to be able to judge them properly; but that the difficulties in the other case do not arise from that cause, but from certain great truths, clearly revealed, which stand in clear opposition to the fantasy which our opponents have espoused. According to their theory—that salvation depends on our own will—you have first of all this difficulty to meet, that you have made the purpose of God in the great plan of salvation entirely contingent. You have put an "if" on everything. Christ may die, but it is not certain according to their theory that he will redeem a great multitude; no, not certain that he will redeem any, since the effectiveness of the redemption according to their plan, does not rest in its own intrinsic power, but in the will of man accepting that redemption. Therefore if man is, as we know he always is, if he is a slave to the will of his own wicked heart, and will not yield to the invitation of God's grace, then in such a case the atonement of Christ would be valueless, useless, and altogether in vain, for not a soul would be saved by it; and even when souls are saved by it, according to that theory, the value, I say, lies not in the blood itself, but in the will of man which gives it value. Redemption is therefore made contingent; the cross shakes, the blood falls powerless on the ground, and atonement is a matter of perhaps. There is a heaven provided, but it may be that no souls will ever come there if their coming is to be of themselves."

Let's move on....starting in Verse 22 Paul writes....

<sup>22</sup> What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? <sup>23</sup> What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—<sup>24</sup> even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

Vessels of mercy....have you ever considered yourself to be a "Vessel of mercy"?

What if we are elected?

What if He did choose us?

What would your response be?

Mine would be "Wow"!

The God who created the heavens and the earth chose me?

From among the millions and billions that He has created He chose me from before the foundations of the earth?

He thought about me?

He knew the number of hairs on my head?

He called me for a purpose?

He called me with a plan?

He called me with a reason?

And if that is totally or partially the truth, what was it, what was that purpose, plan and reason?

And even more importantly, am I living according to it?

Aren't those healthy questions to ask?

Isn't this kind of thinking honouring to God?

I think it is.

I think we can agree that He is sovereign.

He is the potter.

And if we do then we can agree that if I am a creation, I have a Creator.

If I am clay, then I should be moldable, and I probably know nothing compared to the potter.

If I am a vessel, then I was made, and I was made to contain something.

And if I am a sheep, then I need a shepherd.

Do you find anywhere in scripture that says I should be self sufficient or self determining?

John Piper writes "When I entered seminary I believed in the freedom of my will, in the sense that it was ultimately self-determining. I had not learned this from the Bible; I absorbed it from the independent, self-sufficient, self-esteeming, self-exalting air that you and I breathe every day of our lives in America. The sovereignty of God meant that he can do anything with me that I give him permission to do."

"Romans 9 is like a tiger going about devouring free-willers like me." That was the end of my love affair with human autonomy and the ultimate self-determination of my will. My worldview simply could not stand against the scriptures, especially Romans 9. And it was the beginning of a lifelong passion to see and

savor the supremacy of God in absolutely everything.

The Apostle Paul laments that his kinsmen have stumbled over the stone that God put in the way of their law abiding pursuit.

A stumbling block that was put there to show them the foolishness of their self saving ways. Ways that suggested that if they would only obey the laws and commandments, that they would be saved.

The result of my study of Romans 9 has led me to focus on the truth that God is sovereign.

It has led me to explore the concept that if I have been elected, if He chose me, then I am totally humbled that He would do so.

It takes away any morsel of pride I might have that I had anything to do with my salvation.

It removes any doubt as to who needs to be in the driver's seat.

It fits completely with my prior learnings that I need to be absolutely surrendered to His will and that my will must be completely abandoned since in me, "there is no good thing".

With Paul I can say that "I have died and Christ Jesus is alive and living in me and through me".

Is it something that I will debate and argue over?

Not for one second because it is not my job to convince anyone but to simply give an answer for the hope that I have.

I am saved because He saved me.

I am sanctified because He chose to.

And I wish the same for each person I come in contact with.

Do I know who else He has "called"?

Of course not...but as we read in a favourite verse that came alive for me several years ago and is found in Philippians 2:13 " <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose."

I have no knowledge of who God has called or who He is working in to will and to act according to His good purpose.

But I do know Henry, and I do know God is working in me to will and to act.

And so the question is, will I be surrendered up to that working?

Will I be fully yielded to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit so that His fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, faithfulness, and self control become so evident that they overflow into the lives of others that God brings me into contact with according to His rich and merciful plan to bring those that He has either elected, foreknown, predestined, predetermined or simply offered His salvation to and who have in turn,

accepted His free gift?

How they get there, I'm not concerned with. That they get there, I am.

And the unmistakable role you and I have to play, is to be the vessels He has called or desires us to be and on that I think we can all agree.

So come Potter, with Your hands dripping with love, gently mold these Your pots, for some, for honourable uses and for others, less honourable use, but for all, make us fit for Your kingdom, there to abide with You forever.

And Lord, as I heard in the words of a song on Christian radio this morning...

"May I never get over the cross. May I never get over the cross."

May I never forget what You did for me there.

May I never forget the price that You paid.

May my gratitude be turned to desire for those that are still under the curse, that they might have it lifted by You.

Thank you Jesus. Thank you Lord.

Amen.

### **Table Questions**

1. How do we know God?

Is it from our own opinions or experiences, or the opinions or experiences of others, or do we know Him solely from what He has told us of Himself in His Word?

2. How would you describe God's "Sovereignty"?

3. In Romans 9:17 it says, "For Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (a reference to Exodus 9:8-17). How was God's power displayed and His name proclaimed in all the earth by hardening Pharaoh's heart?