

ROMANS

Chapter 9

God's Sovereign Choice

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. 4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. 5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. 6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, 7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. 9 For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” 10 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— 12 she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” 13 As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” 14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! 15 For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” 18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. 19 You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” 20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” 21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? 22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— 24 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? 25 As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” 26 “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” 27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, 28 for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.” 29 And as Isaiah predicted, “If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.”

Chs 9–11 Paul now addresses the question of Jewish rejection of the Gospel. How can it be that the Gospel for “the Jew first” (1:16) has failed in its appeal to Israel? Is it really, therefore, the Gospel “of God” (1:1), and is it consistent with His plan of salvation? See note, 9:6. “Paul first directs people to repentance [Romans 1–2], to knowledge of sins [Romans 3:1–20], to faith in

Christ [Romans 3:21–5:21], to divine obedience [Romans 6–8]. Then he speaks of the mystery of God’s eternal election [Romans 9–11]. This doctrine is useful and consolatory to the person who proceeds in this way” (FC Ep XI 11). (TLSB)

Luth: “In chapters 9, 10, and 11 [Paul] teaches of God’s eternal predestination—out of which originally proceeds who shall believe or not, who can or cannot get rid of sin—in order that our salvation may be taken entirely out of our hands and put in the hand of God alone. And this too is utterly necessary. For we are so weak and uncertain that if it depended on us, not even a single person would be saved; the devil would surely overpower us all. But since God is dependable—his predestination cannot fail, and no one can withstand him—we still have hope in the face of sin. (TLSB)

“Here, now, for once we must put a stop to those wicked and high flying spirits who first apply their own reason to this matter. They begin at the top to search the abyss of divine predestination, and worry in vain about whether they are predestinated. They are bound to plunge to their own destruction, either through despair, or through throwing caution to the winds. (TLSB)

“But you had better follow the order of this epistle. Worry first about Christ and the gospel, that you may recognize your sin and his grace. Then fight your sin, as the first eight chapters here have taught. Then, when you have reached the eighth chapter, and are under the cross and suffering, this will teach you correctly of predestination in chapters 9, 10, and 11, and how comforting it is. For in the absence of suffering and the cross and the perils of death, one cannot deal with predestination without harm and without secret anger against God. The old Adam must first die before he can tolerate this thing and drink the strong wine. Therefore beware that you do not drink wine while you are still a suckling. There is a limit, a time, and an age for every doctrine” (AE 35:378). (TLSB)

9:1 *I am speaking the truth* – Rhetoric, not a defense. He is setting up his new topic. (TLSB)

conscience bears me witness – Paul’s clear conscience provides testimony to his truthfulness; he feels a deep compulsion to speak. (TLSB)

in the Holy Spirit. Conscience is a reliable guide only when enlightened by the Holy Spirit. (CSB)

Paul speaks as God’s child having the indwelling Spirit (8:15-16). (TLSB)

9:2 *great sorrow and unceasing anguish* – Paul continually feels deep personal distress because of his sense of solidarity with his own people. (TLSB)

9:3 *accursed*. The Greek for this word is *anathema*, and it means delivered over to the wrath of God for eternal destruction (see 1Co 12:3; 16:22; Gal 1:8–9). Such was Paul’s great love for his fellow Jews. For a similar expression of love see Ex 32:32. (CSB)

Luther says: “A most excellent and entirely apostolic way of speaking here of love both toward Christ as well as toward the Jews.” (TLSB)

brothers – This is the only place where Paul uses this term for Jews, his kinsmen by race. (TLSB)

9:4 Israelites. The descendants of Jacob (who was renamed Israel by God; see Ge 32:28). The name was used of the entire nation (see Jdg 5:7), then of the northern kingdom after the nation was divided (see 1Ki 12), the southern kingdom being called Judah. During the intertestamental period and later in NT times, Palestinian Jews used the title to indicate that they were the chosen people of God. Its use here is especially relevant because Paul is about to show that, despite Israel's unbelief and disobedience, God's promises to her are still valid. (CSB)

Sacred name that marks the Jews as elect and favored recipients of the revelation, the grace, and the promises of God (cf Eph 2:12). Spanning the OT, Paul gives a compact summary of the magnificent privileges belonging to God's people. (TLSB)

adoption. Israel had been accepted as God's son (see Ex 4:22–23; Jer 31:9; Hos 11:1). (CSB)

glory. The evidence of the presence of God among his people (see Ex 16:7, 10; Lev 9:6, 23; Nu 16:19). (CSB)

covenants. For example, the Abrahamic (Ge 15:17–21; 17:1–8); the Mosaic (Ex 19:5; 24:1–4), renewed on the plains of Moab (Dt 29:1–15), at Mounts Ebal and Gerizim (Jos 8:30–35) and at Shechem (Jos 24); the Levitical (Nu 25:12–13; Jer 33:21; Mal 2:4–5); the Davidic (2Sa 7; 23:5; Ps 89:3–4, 28–29; 132:11–12); and the new (prophesied in Jer 31:31–40). (CSB)

promises. Especially those made to Abraham (Ge 12:7; 13:14–17; 17:4–8; 22:16–18) but also including the many OT Messianic promises (e.g., 2Sa 7:12, 16; Isa 9:6–7; Jer 23:5; 31:31–34; Eze 34:23–24; 37:24–28). (CSB)

Especially messianic (2Sm 7:12, 16, 28–29; Is 9:6–7; 53; Jer 23:5; 31:31–40). (TLSB)

9:5 patriarchs. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons. (CSB)

Lit, “fathers”—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his 12 sons, the recipients of the promises. (TLSB)

Lit, “from whom,” i.e., the patriarchs. (TLSB)

Christ, who is God. One of the clearest statements of the deity of Jesus Christ found in the entire NT, assuming the accuracy of the translation. See also 1:4; Mt 1:23; 28:19; Lk 1:35; 5:20–21; Jn 1:1, 3, 10, 14, 18; 5:18; 2Co 13:14; Php 2:6; Col 1:15–20; 2:9; Tit 2:13; Heb 1:3, 8; 2Pe 1:1; Rev 1:13–18; 22:13. (CSB)

Some scholars place a period after “Christ” (the Gk text was originally not punctuated), ascribing this praise to “God.” However, “God” is a direct reference to Christ, who is “blessed forever.” Calling Jesus God would not be unusual for Paul, given what he says elsewhere (8:32, 34; Php 2:9–11; Col 2:9; see note, Rm 10:13). “Christ Jesus is now in one person at the same time true, eternal God, born of the Father from eternity, and a true man, born of the most blessed Virgin Mary” (FC SD VIII 6). (TLSB)

blessed forever Amen – These words were a common devotional language of Jews, who daily prayed the “Eighteen Benedictions” or blessings. Always doxological for Paul (cf. 1:25; 2 Cor 1:3). (TLSB)

9:6 word of God. † His clearly stated purpose, which has not failed, because “not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.” Paul is stating that within Israel there is a separation, that of

unbelieving Israel and believing Israel. Physical descent is no guarantee of a place in God's family. (CSB)

That Paul grieves for Israel (9:1-5) does not mean God's Word has failed to achieve its purpose. (TLSB)

blessed forever. Amen. Words common in the devotional language of Jews, who daily prayed the "Eighteen Benedictions" or blessings. Always doxological for Paul (cf 1:25; 2Co 1:3). (TLSB)

9:7 *children of Abraham.* Physical descendants (e.g., Ishmael and his offspring). (CSB)

Descendants who believe God's promise (4:16). (TLSB)

offspring – Luther: "He says that those are not children of Abraham who are his descendants merely according to the flesh but that those are his children who share his faith (Gal. 3:7). This Moses, too, implies in a hidden manner when he expressively says: 'Blessed be the Lord God of Shem' (Gen 9:26); for he signifies thereby that the blessing is to be found only where the God of Shem, that is, unless he believes. (TLSB)

9:8 *children of the flesh.* Those merely biologically descended from Abraham. (CSB)

God's children. See v. 4. Not all Israelites were God's children. The reference is to the Israel of faith. (CSB)

In contrast to Jewish belief that the physical descendants of Israel will naturally inherit everlasting life. Paul argues from Gn 21:12 that only descendants born as a result of God's promise are "the seed" (true successors of Abraham). In other words, the offspring receive the promise by faith. (TLSB)

9:9 Words of promise spoken to Abraham that called Isaac into being. (TLSB)

9:10 Someone in Paul's audience might argue that God chose Isaac to be the son of promise because he was born of Sarah, Abraham's wife—and not of Hagar, a slave woman. (TLSB)

of one man – God's elective choice is especially clear in the case of Jacob and Esau, for both were born of the same father and mother. (TLSB)

9:11 *done anything good or bad.*† God's choice of Jacob was not based on the fulfillment of any prior conditions. (CSB)

God's purpose in election. God's purpose embodied in his election. (CSB)

God's elective purpose has not fallen by the wayside, but remains at work in history. (TLSB)

The Formula of Concord: "It is false and wrong when it is taught that not only God's mercy and Christ's most holy merit, but also something in us is a cause of God's election, on account of which God has chosen us to eternal life...Before we were born, yes, even before the foundations of the world were laid, He elected us in Christ." (TLSB)

9:12 *not because of works but because of him who calls.* Before Rebekah's children were even born, God made a choice—a choice obviously not based on works. (CSB)

calls. The Holy Spirit calls through word and sacrament. (CSB)

9:13 *Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.* Equivalent to “Jacob I chose, but Esau I rejected.” In vv. 6–13 Paul is clearly dealing with personal and not national election—he is not portraying the nation Israel (Jacob) over the nation Edom (Esau)—Paul's intention is evident in light of the problem he is addressing: How can God's promise stand when so many who comprise Israel (in the OT collective sense) are unbelieving and therefore cut off? (CSB)

Refers to the nations of Israel and Edom. The “love/hate” language emphasizes preference of one over another, not literal hatred (compare Gn 29:30 to 29:31). (TLSB)

9:14 *Is there injustice on God's part?* Unjust to elect on the basis of his sovereign freedom, as with Jacob and Esau. (CSB)

Paul anticipates an objection to his argument in ch 9 thus far. (TLSB)

By no means! See note, 3:4. Emphatic rejection of any implication that God is unjust for choosing one over another in Israel's history. (TLSB)

9:15† Paul denies injustice in God's dealing with Isaac and Ishmael, and Jacob and Esau, by appealing to God's right to dispense mercy as he chooses. (CSB)

God's reply to Moses' request, “Please show me Your glory,” as Moses intercedes for Israel because of the worship of the golden calf. God's answer reveals that not by justice, but only by mercy can anyone (including Moses) stand before God. (TLSB)

9:16 *It.* God's choice, which is not controlled in any way by man. However, Paul makes it clear that the basis for Israel's rejection was her unbelief (see vv. 30–32). (CSB)

God's mercy. (TLSB)

9:17 *Pharaoh.* Pharaoh of the exodus. (CSB)

Remarkable expression indicating that from Paul's perspective, Scripture is God's Word. God's word of judgment reveals that also in dealing with rebellious Pharaoh, God is free to carry out His purpose in history. (TLSB)

raised you up. Made him ruler of Egypt. (CSB)

my name. The character of God, particularly as revealed in the exodus (see Ex 15:13–18; Jos 2:10–11; 9:9; 1Sa 4:8). (CSB)

9:18 The first part of this verse again echoes Ex 33:19 (see v. 15) and the last part such texts as Ex 7:3; 9:12; 14:4, 17, in which God is said to harden the hearts of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. (CSB)

whomever he wants to have mercy. Cannot mean that God is arbitrary in his mercy, because Paul ultimately bases God's rejection of Israel on her unbelief (see vv. 30–32). (CSB)

whomever He wills. God acts in freedom to accomplish His purpose. His actions are not fickle or arbitrary. (TLSB)

hardens whomever. Cf 1:24, 26, 28. Again, the subject here is not spiritual election or predestination. (TLSB)

9:19 Someone may object: “If God determines whose heart is hardened and whose is not, how can God blame anyone for hardening his heart?” (CSB)

Second anticipated objection (cf v 14): If God’s sovereign will is always done, how can anyone be held responsible for his or her actions? (TLSB)

9:20 *who are you, O man, to answer back to God?* Paul is not silencing all questioning of God by man, but he is speaking to those with an impenitent, God-defying attitude who want to make God answerable to man for what he does and who, by their questions, defame the character of God. (CSB)

God’s created humans are in no position to put God on trial. The contrast between the potter and the clay (cf Is 29:15–16; 45:10; Jer 18:1–6) shows how arrogant it is for us to act as though we can hold God accountable for His actions. The potter using a foot-powered wheel was a common sight in biblical times. (TLSB)

9:21† The analogy between God and the potter and between man and the pot should not be pressed to the extreme. The main point is the freedom of God in dealing with man. (CSB)

God certainly has the right over the clay (people). The Creator is free to exercise His will and right, but that does not mean He does so without mercy. (TLSB)

9:22–24 Paul responds further to any suggestion that God has acted unjustly. On the contrary, His forbearance and all-embracing mercy rule out any injustice on God’s part. (TLSB)

9:22–23 An illustration of the principle stated in v. 21. The emphasis is on God’s mercy, not his wrath. (CSB)

9:22 No one can call God to account for what he does. But he does not exercise his freedom of choice arbitrarily, and he shows great patience even toward the objects of his wrath. In light of 2:4, the purpose of such patience is to bring about repentance. (CSB)

patience. Gk *makrothymia*, “bearing up under provocation.”(TLSB)

vessels of wrath. People under God’s wrath. (TLSB)

prepared. Implies readiness for (as in “ripe for”) destruction, not irreversibly foreordained destruction. (TLSB)

9:23 *vessels of mercy.* People under God’s mercy. (TLSB)

9:24 Objects of mercy come from both Jews and Gentiles. (TLSB)

9:25–26† In the original context these passages from Hosea refer to the spiritual restoration of Israel. But Paul finds in them the principle that God is a saving, forgiving, restoring God, who delights to take those who are “not my people” and make them “my people.” Paul then applies this principle to Gentiles, whom God makes his people by grafting them into covenant relationship (see ch. 11). (CSB)

Two quotes from the prophet Hosea. Paul contends that if God could restore the 10 tribes of Israel (Northern Kingdom; see map, p 558), who had abandoned Him, He can also call Gentiles to be the recipients of His mercy (cf 1Pt 2:10). (TLSB)

9:27–29 The two passages from Isaiah indicate that only a small remnant will survive from the great multitude of Israelites. God’s calling includes both Jews and Gentiles (see v. 24), but the vast majority are Gentiles, as v. 30 suggests. (CSB)

9:27–28 Quotes pertain to the Jews. As the prophet Isaiah said of the exiles, “A remnant shall return ... to the mighty God” (Is 10:21), so only a remnant of the Jews will be saved as God acts with speed and finality. (TLSB)

9:29 Just as only a handful at Sodom and Gomorrah were spared by God’s mercy, so only a small number of Jews will believe in the promise. (TLSB)

9:1–29 The unbelief of his fellow Jews, to whom God had given so much, caused Paul great sorrow. Countering likely objections, Paul insists that God’s Word has not failed and He is not unjust in His choices. Unbelievers sit under God’s judgment, placing themselves in spiritual peril. Yet God is patient, desiring to show mercy on us all. • Lord, give us a penitent heart and confidence in Your grace. Thank You for choosing us and calling us to faith in Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

Israel’s Unbelief

30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 as it is written, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

9:30–32† A new step in Paul’s argument: The reason for Israel’s rejection lay in the nature of her disobedience—she failed to obey her own God-given law, which in reality was pointing to Christ. She pursued the law—yet not by faith but by works. Thus the real cause of Israel’s rejection was that she first rejected the promise of God’s grace or gospel. (CSB)

9:30 *What shall we say, then?* Rhetoric. Paul sums up a previous argument (cf 4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 9:14). (TLSB)

did not pursue righteousness. In fact, Gentiles were aggressively unrighteous and ungodly (1:18–24; cf 2Tm 3:1–5), disqualifying them from attaining righteousness. That Gentiles should obtain what they did not pursue was confusing to the Jews. (TLSB)

9:31 *law of righteousness.* The law that prescribed the way to righteousness. Paul does not reject obedience to the law but righteousness by works, the attempt to use the law to put God in one's debt. (CSB)

The Jews wanted righteousness based on the Torah. (TLSB)

reaching. The Gk term here means "to attain" or "arrive at" a particular state (cf Php 3:16). (TLSB)

9:32 *by faith.* † The failure of Israel was not that she pursued the wrong thing (i.e., righteous standing before God), but that she pursued it by works in a futile effort to merit God's favor rather than pursuing it through faith. (CSB)

Pursuit of the Law itself is not wrong. But a right standing with God cannot be attained by works of the Law, but only by grace through faith. Faith lays hold of Christ, who was put to death for our sins and raised for our justification (4:25). (TLSB)

the "stumbling stone." † Jesus, the Messiah. God's rejection of Israel was not arbitrary but was based on Israel's rejection of God's way of gaining righteousness (by grace, through faith). (CSB)

A comparison drawn directly from Is 28:16 (cf v 33). Christ's death on the cross is offensive and arouses opposition because it undermines self-righteousness and proves that we cannot save ourselves (cf 1Co 1:23; Gal 2:21). (TLSB)

9:33 The two passages from Isaiah, which are here combined, apparently were commonly used by early Christians in defense of Jesus' Messiahship (see 1Pe 2:4, 6–8; see also Ps 118:22; Lk 20:17–18). (CSB)

a stone of ... stumbling. God, in judgment, became an offense to Israel, who trusted in themselves and rejected His deliverance, even though in Is 8 God had predicted the Assyrian invasion of Israel and promised to be the Israelite's place of refuge (Is 8:13–15). (TLSB)

whoever believes ... shame. The Messiah, Jesus Christ, was prophesied as "a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone" in Zion (Is 28:16; cf 1Pt 2:4–6; Lk 20:17–18), laid by God to rescue believers. (TLSB)