

In step with Jesus 178

November 16, 2025

Key Text: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Introduction

Last week we read about Paul’s passion for the salvation of Israel. He pointed out the privileges that God had given to His people and laments the apparent failure of His people to apprehend the glory that God had prepared for them. Yet, Paul remains confident that God’s plan for Israel did not fail. He points out that even though all Israel were the children of Abraham, God chose specific individuals as heirs. Among the sons of Abraham, He chose Isaac, from Isaac He chose Jacob, from Jacob He chose Judah; and His election continued until He chose David, and Jesus the son of David. But why does God choose specific people over others in certain things? That is a question that He alone can answer. But the good news is that God did not elect His people by works, but by Grace, and grace is universal.

Today we shall read the remaining verses of Romans chapter 9. I do not know about you, but this is a particularly tough chapter. However, understanding this chapter helps us understand the blend of God’s sovereignty and mercy in the face of human choices. Let us read prayerfully and see what God will show us.

Romans 9: 19-33

¹⁹You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” ²⁰But 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?” ²¹Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? ²²What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— ²⁴even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵As 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.’”

²⁷And 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, ²⁸for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.” ²⁹And as Isaiah predicted, “If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.”

³⁰What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³²Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³as 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.”

Reflections

Paul continues to emphasize that God is sovereign and has the authority to choose whomever He will and show mercy upon whomever He will. In fact, Paul reminded us of the potter imagery recorded in the book of Jeremiah chapter 18. God is the potter, we are the clay, and He can decide to make anything He likes with the clay in His hands. Paul adds that we, as mortals, do not have a right to question God’s decision. This is a hard saying and subject to misunderstanding. But before we judge God as an arbitrary dictator who creates people for destruction, let us remember that Paul was referring to how God had dealt with the disobedient and not how He will deal with us. Our limited understanding prevents us from making judgments about God's relationship with others. God knows everyone; the choices they make and how they respond to His laws and instructions, and He gives each person according to the fruits of their choices. Our safeguard is in knowing God for who He is, not by judging His actions with our feeble sense.

To aid our understanding of God, let us read Exodus 34: 6-7 to see how He introduced Himself to Moses. In Exodus 34, God made all His goodness to pass before Moses and proclaimed His name as “The LORD, the LORD, God, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.” In simple terms, these verses explain that God is both merciful and just, and that love and mercy must also include justice to avoid being unfair to those who are obedient. In the end, the defining factor for receiving God’s salvation or wrath is submission. God’s love and mercy is universal, but His choosing and election is specific to specific individuals. We cannot question why He chose some people for specific blessings and assignments, but we can trust His heart and ultimate goal. We can submit to His love and mercy knowing that, regardless of our positioning in this life, God’s ultimate purpose is to save all humanity. Even His punishment is a gift of His grace, with our salvation in view. The good news remains that God saves us by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by our works. Holding onto this truth will protect us from stumbling like the Israelites of old. We who have believed in Jesus Christ will never be put to shame.