

**NOTES ON  
THE INTERPRETATION OF  
ROMANS CHAPTER NINE**

**Romans 9 has been called  
"The Sugar Stick"  
of Extreme, Calvinist Predestination**

*PREPARATION FROM ROMANS EIGHT*

In Romans Chapter Eight, verses 28-30, we have a beautiful revelation concerning God's "foreknowledge," "predestination," "calling," "justification" and "glorification" of the believer in Jesus Christ the Lord. We will read this before we go to Romans 9.

*"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also Predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestinated, these He also called; Whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."*

I say again, these are beautiful verses. They lay out to us what we can call "God's Five Step Execution" of the plan in man's redemption—from God's perspective. There is nothing in this passage that tells man what he needs to do in order to be saved. That is clearly a different subject. More than a 100 times in the Gospel of John alone, man is required to place his faith, trust and belief in Jesus Christ for soul salvation. Consequently, what God requires of man is not the subject of this passage. This passage sets forth God's work in the redemption of mankind from His perspective:

First, there is God's "*foreknowledge*." God knows "the end from the beginning." God knew long before the foundations of the earth all about man.

Second, there is God's "*predestination*." Based on His "foreknowledge" God pre-determined to do a certain thing. It is very important at the outset that we get exactly what God pre-determined to do! The text does NOT say that God pre-determined man "to believe the gospel." What the text does say is that God pre-determined the *results* of "believing in Christ." God pre-determined that the believer would be "*conformed to the image of His Son*." That means "the New Birth" or "New Creation in Christ" (John 1:12 & II Cor. 5:17) is what God "predestined!"

Third, there is God's "*calling*." Those whom God predestined He "called." In the process of man's earthly sojourn he received a "call" from God. It could be in the form of the words, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest..." (Matt. 11:28). Or,

“I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger” (John 6:35). Etc., etc., etc.. Those who respond positively to this call are said to be “*the called of Jesus Christ*” (Rom. 1:6).

Fourth, there is God’s “*justification*.” Those who responded positively to God’s call are said to be “justified” or “declared right.” Not only was the believer declared right, but he was MADE RIGHTOUS in Christ Jesus. This is man’s spiritual redemption.

Fifthly, there is the work of “*glorification*.” This has to do with man’s physical redemption—the glorification of his body. Paul speaks of this as if it was as good as done. It is guaranteed.

With this preparation clearly in mind we will have less trouble understanding the perspective of Romans Nine on this subject.

### *THE PASSAGE IN QUESTION*

The propagators of the false doctrine of “extreme predestination” teaches that God “predestinates” the individual to “believe the gospel,” so that in reality, when a person believes in or trusts in Christ, it was actually God making him do it. And conversely, the unbeliever couldn’t believe even if he wanted to, even though God offers to him the same gospel. These teachers will glibly quote the following passages from Romans Chapter Nine as if these verses substantiate their claims.

*"The purpose of God according to election..." (verse 11).*

*"Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (v. 13).*

*"Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid" (v. 14).*

*"I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (v. 15).*

*"It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (v. 16).*

*"Even for this same purpose have I raised thee (Pharaoh) up, that I might shew My power in thee..." (v. 17).*

*"...and whom He will He hardeneth" (v. 18).*

*"Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why have You made me thus?" (v. 20).*

*"Hath not the potter power over the clay,... to make one vessel to honor, and another to dishonor?" (v. 21).*

These verses jerked out of context seem to give support to the Calvinist doctrine. So they love to quote them! In the same way, those who teach that good works are necessary in order to obtain salvation, will invariably run to the book of James and glibly quote from chapter two—“Faith without works is dead”—in order to support their error. Of course James is telling how one demonstrates his faith by good works and not how good works is coupled with faith in order to get saved. Likewise, we shall find that these verses will not support the false doctrine of extreme predestination but rather, the teaching of salvation by Grace through Faith “and that not of YOURSELVES” (Eph. 2:8-10).

What are the facts concerning the proper interpretation of this passage in Romans Nine? Does the passage really prove the position of the extreme predestinationalist? What is its true interpretation? Let us observe the passage carefully in order to understand the truth that the Apostle Paul is inspired to convey.

### ***OBSERVING THE CHAPTER***

First we should take note of the fact that the whole of chapter NINE of Romans is carefully "framed in" on both sides by two remarkable passages. These two passages will stand in total contradiction to the claims of the Calvinist who believes that God only ordained a few of His choice to believe the gospel and be saved. In other words Calvinism teaches that Christ only died for a small group called "the elect" and no one else. It was never God's will, they teach, that the gospel is actually open to all.

These two passages are (1) Rom. 9:1-3 and (2) Rom. 10:1-3. These two passages are like two Divine "**Plumb Lines**" that stand guarding the subject matter in between, to keep our understanding straight and in proper context, so as not to be wrongfully swayed one way or the other. Let us read the first:

*"I say the truth in Christ, 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 I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh..." (Rom. 9:1-3)*

The statement Paul makes is so difficult to believe that Paul must draw witnesses to attest to its truthfulness. This is "*the truth in Christ.*" Furthermore his conscience guided by the Holy Spirit is witness as well. What Paul could wish for cannot happen because Paul is not Divine. Nevertheless, if it could happen, Paul would be willing to go *to hell* in place of his unsaved, Jewish brethren. The thought of an individual being willing to do such a thing is indeed staggering to the mind.

The fact that both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit stand as witnesses to Paul's heart is proof that this is indeed the reflection of the heart and will of God. This is consistent with other passages that reflect the heart of God, that "*God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,*" (II Pet.3:9). In fact, "*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*" (John 3:16). Christ did die for all the sins of mankind, and went *to hell* in condemnation in their place. Now all men need only call upon Him for salvation. If the unsaved do not repent they are in the company of those perishing at their own choosing.

Paul's "wish" is a reflection of God's "wish" and stands as a perfect "plumb line" at the beginning of this passage. If you don't line up with this as you read on, then you are not properly interpreting the passage.

The second "**Plumb Line**" stands on the other side of Romans 9:

*"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's*

*righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God"*  
(Rom. 10:1-3).

This passage is similar to and in keeping with the truth of the first "plumb line" passage of Romans 9:1-3. Paul prays for the salvation of his unsaved Jewish brethren. But if, as the Calvinists say, it is not God's will for these Jews to be saved, and if God has not provided salvation for them, then how could Paul possibly be in the will of God in praying for them?? He could not!! Obviously the Apostle Paul is not a Calvinist!!

To stand vertical on the revelation we must be sure to observe and abide by the "Plumb lines."

### ***NOTE THE "SUMMARY" OF THE PASSAGE!!***

If we read carefully Paul's summary of this chapter then we will not get lost in the context of what he is saying by the Holy Spirit. In other words the summary of this whole chapter is very clearly given in verses 30 through 33, and this summary will act as a Divine "**Level**" to our understanding of the arguments of this passage. Herein we can discover the truth of the passage—it is not talking about Calvin's position on predestination; rather, it is talking about *salvation by Faith and not of Works!* This is the whole subject matter throughout. Let us read these important summary verses:

*"What shall we say then? (Paul is herein giving the conclusion of this chapter.) That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness (the works of the Law), have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel which followed after the Law of righteousness (the works' system), has not attained to the Law of righteousness (they could not perform it). Wherefore? Because they sought it not by **FAITH**, but as it were by the **WORKS** of the Law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; as it is written, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stumblingstone and rock of offense: and **whosoever** believeth on Him shall not be ashamed,"*

This summary tells us that the whole argument of the apostle is concerning salvation being obtained by **FAITH** in opposition to those who argue that salvation can be obtained by the **WORKS** of the Law system. Now if we keep, as the carpenters say, "the bubble in the middle," we can stay on the horizontal level in our understanding of this passage. On our "**Level**" the middle represents **FAITH** and any deviation will represent the error of obtaining salvation by good **WORKS**.

The doctrine of salvation by faith was a "stumblingstone" to the self-righteous Jewish nation. It remains a "stumblingstone" to the vast majority in so-called "Christendom" to this very day. In addition this simple truth is a "stumblingstone" to the Calvinists who fail to recognize that this is the subject matter of the chapter instead of their ungodly doctrine of salvation by "extreme predestination."

Now, with our two **Plumb Lines** and **Level** in place let us read the passage and we shall see that it is perfectly consistent and square to the inspired instruments of safety, harmony and balance. Every argument Paul puts forth will be to prove that God's salvation is to be obtained by simple **FAITH** and not by human merit or good **WORKS**.

### Verses 4-9—"FLESH vs FAITH"

The people of Israel were specially chosen by God to be a channel of blessing to the whole world. They had many privileges from God, not the least of which was to be a channel for the Messiah and Savior of mankind. However, most of Israel apostasized from God and were not themselves believers in their own Messiah when He came. Therefore, most Israelites were not inwardly "*princes with God*," which is the meaning of the word "Israel." On the other hand, Isaac was a "son of promise" and stands as an example of those who are children of God by "faith" in God's promises. However, just being a fleshly descendent of Abraham was no guarantee of salvation. Abraham had other sons—one by Hagar and many by Keturah. Yet all of these were separated from Isaac and his heritage. Isaac as a child by faith was singled out for exclusive heritages. So it is that the apostle Paul argues that those who are children of God by faith are exclusively acceptable to God for salvation.

### Verses 10-13—"FLESH vs (Faith in) GOD'S CALLING"

Esau was the firstborn heir of Isaac. His strong, manly nature and hunting ability clearly made him the favored choice of his father. Yet God did not choose on that basis. God chose Jacob over Esau because Jacob respected God's birthright promises whereas Esau ignored them. God also foreknew this and before they were even born said that "the elder would serve the younger." In addition, after a long history of the two nations, one nation descending from each son, God said that He had loved Jacob and hated Esau (Mal. 1:2,3). All of this illustrates, as Paul says, the fact that salvation is "Not of Works (as represented in Esau), but of God who calls (as represented in Jacob who respected God's promises by faith)."

### Verses 14-18—"SELF-WILL vs GOD'S MERCY"

The religiously self-righteous person does not appreciate God's method of choosing. He would accuse God of being unrighteous. This is "certainly not!" the case, Paul says. God will "*have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He wills He hardens.*"

Now the first question that should be asked is, "On whom does God have mercy?" And the Scriptures give the answer in many places like the following—"*To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word*" (Isaiah 66:2).

The second question naturally follows, "whom does God harden?" Again the Scriptures answer by many references that God only hardens those who reject His loving invitation—"*Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God*" (Rom. 2:4,5).

"*So then, it is not of him who wills, nor of him that runs, but of God who shows mercy,*" Paul says. This must be understood, from the whole context of Romans, as referring to the

"self-will" of those religious self-righteous who "run" in the exercise and discipline of their ritualistic and ethical systems, while at the same time they don't humbly repent and trust in God's grace. A good example is Christ's story of the "publican in the Temple" vs. the proud Pharisee (see Luke 18:9-14). The Pharisee boasted of many things, but this was not acceptable to God.

### **Verses 19-24—"DESTRUCTION vs GLORY"**

Of-course, the self-righteous religionists are totally repulsed by God rejecting them. Just like Cain, who became angry when God rejected his offering, so these religionists feel trapped and locked into their destiny. They retort with a frustrated, "*How can God find fault?*" and "*Who has resisted His will?*" They refuse to realize that their own self-righteous resistance to God's grace set themselves in an irreversible course toward further hardening of heart and destruction. In his hardness and confusion he says, "*why did you make me this way?*" The answer is simply, "*The potter has power over the clay.*" Since God "*endured with much longsuffering*" these vessels of wrath, it is in His prerogative to form them for destruction and wrath. This first of all means that God did not want them to be destroyed. God appealed to them with grace. They hardened their hearts. In turn, God hardened their hearts even further. One can see this principle taught in the very first chapter of Romans. There was the sequence of Man's rebellion against God, and in response God "*gives them up*" to foolishness. This gets progressively worse until man is hopelessly lost. (See Romans 1:19-23; 1:24-25; 1:26-27 and 1:28-32.)

In contrast to this very sad scenario are those who do repent and believe the gospel and become vessels of mercy. God gives them what He has foreordained for the righteous which is all the glories of the future.

### **Verses 25-29—"The RELIGIOUS vs The REMNANT"**

Though at one time both apostate Israel and the pagan Gentiles were objects of God's discipline and forsakenness, yet when they repent and accept God's terms for salvation by the good news of His grace, they will become objects of God's special favor, and shall be called "*the children of the living God.*" Out of the nation of Israel, who were gifted with the revelation of the ideal and perfect religious system, only a very few—"a remnant"—believed the gospel of grace and were saved.

### **Verses 30-33—"WORKS vs FAITH"**

In conclusion, the religious self-righteous who sought God by the works' system of the Law and morality are lost and on their way to condemnation. They stumbled at the simplicity of the gospel of God's grace—through FAITH. (Many of the extreme predestinationalists stumble at the interpretation of this passage because of the hardness of their own hearts. Invariably, the teachers I have met who strongly espoused this false doctrine were characterized by their pridefulness.)

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