

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001
www.fcfonline.org

GOD'S GREAT MERCY IN SALVATION

Romans 9:24-29

By

Steven J. Cole

December 4, 2011

© Steven J. Cole, 2011

For access to previous sermons or to subscribe to weekly sermons via email go to: www.fcfonline.org/sermons

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture
Quotations are from the New American
Standard Bible, Updated Edition
© The Lockman Foundation

December 4, 2011
Romans, Lesson 61

God's Great Mercy in Salvation Romans 9:24-29

Does the gospel, the good news that God saved you from sin and judgment by His great love and mercy, cause your heart to rejoice and your soul to be flooded with gratitude? Does the fact that you could have been a vessel of wrath prepared for destruction, but instead you're a vessel of mercy, which God prepared beforehand for glory, cause you to marvel and ask, "Why me?" If you grew up in a Christian home or you've been saved for a long time, you face the danger of the gospel becoming commonplace. You become accustomed to God's grace, so that you take it for granted.

One sign that you're drifting into such complacency is that you grumble about life's trials, forgetting that God has done the greatest thing imaginable in sending His Son to die in your place (Rom. 8:32). Surely, you can trust Him to provide for lesser needs.

Another sign that the gospel has become "ho-hum" is that you've become focused on accumulating the world's stuff, thinking that having the latest and newest gadgets will make you happy. You're laying up treasures on earth, rather than in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21). You think that you'll find contentment in the things of this world rather than in the joy of salvation (1 John 2:15-17).

Another sign that the gospel has become commonplace is that you begin to envy the wicked, thinking that sin will satisfy your needs (Prov. 23:17; 24:1, 19). You forget the horrible, corrupting effects of sin. You begin to justify your sins and blame others, or even God, for your own disobedience (Prov. 19:3).

There are many more signs of forgetting the blessings of the gospel, but a final one that I'll mention is that you become indifferent to sharing the gospel with the lost, whether through your personal witness or by supporting the cause of world missions (Rom. 9:3; 10:1). You forget that those without Christ are lost and headed for judgment (Eph. 2:12). And so we all constantly need to preach the gospel to ourselves and to remind ourselves of the wonderful blessings of God's mercy to us in Christ.

In our text, Paul continues his response to the problem that he raised earlier in the chapter: If God's promises to save His chosen people are good, then why are most of the Jews rejecting Christ? He has shown that God's word of promise has not failed, because He never promised to save all Israel. Rather, God has always accomplished His purpose through a remnant that He has chosen according to His grace. There was a "true" Israel within Israel who were children of the promise (9:6).

Paul knew that his teaching about God's choosing some but not all would raise questions. So in 9:14-23, he deals with these anticipated objections. Isn't God unfair to choose Jacob and reject Esau while they were still in the womb (9:14)? Paul replies, "May it never be!" Because all deserve God's judgment, He is free to show mercy to whomever He wishes (9:15-16). God is free to raise up a man like Pharaoh to demonstrate His power and proclaim His name more widely, but then to leave Pharaoh as an object of His wrath (9:17). Since we all have sinned, none of us has the right to blame God for judging us (9:19). As the divine potter, God has the right to use the sinful clay for His glory, whether as "vessels of wrath" or as "vessels of mercy" (9:20-23).

Who are these "vessels of mercy"? In answering that question, Paul brings us back to the wonder of the gospel, reminding us of God's great mercy towards us (9:24): "even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles." That is Paul's theme statement for 9:25-29. It also ties back to the question of whether God's word has failed. "No," says Paul,

In fulfillment of His word, God in mercy is calling to Himself a people from the Jews and the Gentiles.

In 9:25-26, Paul supports this theme from the prophet Hosea as it applies to the Gentiles. God told Hosea that He would call the unbelieving ten northern tribes, whom Assyria would take into captivity, "not My people," and "not beloved." But then, in mercy, He would restore them, so that He would call them, "My people," and "beloved." If those terms could be applied to sinful Israel, then they also can be applied to the Gentiles. This would have been a surprise to the Gentiles, who thought that they were excluded from God's promises by virtue of not being Jews.

Then (9:27-29), Paul supports the theme from the prophet Isaiah as applied to the Jews. He shows that even though there were many physical descendants of Israel, God only promised to save a remnant, while bringing judgment on the rest (9:27-28). As Isaiah also foretold, if God had not been gracious to leave Israel with a spiritual seed, they would have become like Sodom and Gomorrah, totally wiped out by His judgment (9:29). This would have come as a surprise to many Jews, who thought that they were the beneficiaries of God's promises simply because of their physical birth as Jews. But Paul is establishing that God's promise to save His chosen people has not failed, because He has prepared vessels of mercy not only from among the Jews, but also from among the Gentiles. So we can trust God to keep His word.

Rather than working through the text in the order that I've just outlined, I want to point out five truths about salvation embedded in these verses:

1. Salvation is from God's great mercy and His sovereign, effectual call, not from anything in us.

Paul says (9:23) that God is making "known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory." Then he adds (9:24), "even us, whom He also called." *Called* takes us back to 8:28, "to those who are called according to His purpose." Paul mentioned both *called* and the theme of *glory* in 8:30, "and these whom he predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified." And we again encounter *call* in 9:11, "so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls."

The entire book of Romans to this point (but especially chapters 8 & 9) emphasizes that God, not man, is the primary force behind salvation. Both pagan Gentiles and religious Jews were all under God's righteous wrath and condemnation (Rom. 1 & 2). None were seeking God (Rom. 3). He would not be unjust to leave us all under condemnation. But in His great love and mercy, He sent His own Son to bear the penalty that we deserved.

But God doesn't leave His sovereign purpose up to the choices of sinful people who have turned their backs on Him.

Rather (9:18), "He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires." He initiates His mercy toward some by His effectual call through the gospel. As we saw when we studied 8:30, the word *call* is used in two ways in Scripture. The *general call* of the gospel goes out to all. Jesus mentioned this when He said (Matt. 22:14), "Many are called, but few are chosen." He issued a general call when He said (Matt. 11:28), "Come unto Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." But the general call is not effectual because of the spiritual deadness of sinners' hearts.

But in the New Testament epistles, *call* (or, *calling*) is always used of God's *effectual* call. It *always* accomplishes God's purpose of giving life to the spiritually dead so that they respond willingly to the call. We see an illustration of this when Jesus called Lazarus from the tomb. The call imparted life so that Lazarus actually came to life and responded to the call. Lazarus didn't lie in the tomb and think, "I don't want to be raised from the dead right now. You can't force me against my free will!" Rather, when Jesus imparted life to Lazarus, he willingly and gladly came forth from the tomb.

In the same way, God's effectual call to salvation does not violate our will. Rather, His life-giving power makes us willing to respond. And, the fact that we were not left in our sin as vessels of wrath, but rather were called as vessels of mercy, shows us that we owe everything to God's great mercy. It should humble us and fill us with gratitude every day!

2. Salvation brings us into a personal relationship with the living God.

Formerly, we were not His people. Now we are His people. Formerly, we were not beloved. Now, we are beloved. Now we are called "sons of the living God" (9:25-26). These are all terms of a warm, personal, loving relationship with God.

Behind this text from Hosea is a moving story of heartache and grief, which eventually turned into tears of joy. God told Hosea to marry and have children by a prostitute by the name of Gomer as an object lesson to the unfaithful nation that had committed flagrant harlotry against the Lord (Hos. 1:2). Hosea, though, was not to divorce her for her unfaithfulness, but to love her in

order to draw her back, to illustrate God's faithful love to the unfaithful nation. It was a very difficult sermon illustration!

Hosea obeyed and had three children by Gomer. God told him to name the first son, "Jezreel" (Hos. 1:4). That was the name of a well-known valley where Jehu had slaughtered off the house of Ahab, including his 70 sons (2 Kings 9 & 10). God commended Jehu for carrying out His judgment on Ahab and promised that his sons to the fourth generation would sit on the throne of Israel. But Jehu was not faithful to the Lord, and so judgment eventually came on his descendants (2 Kings 10:28-31). Through Hosea's son, God was announcing that in judgment He would end the northern kingdom of Israel (Hos. 1:4-5).

Hosea and Gomer's second child was a daughter, whom God said to name "Lo-ruhamah" ("no compassion"). God explained (Hos. 1:6), "For I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel." The third child was a son whom the Lord said to name "Lo-ammi" ("not my people"), explaining (Hos. 1:9), "For you are not My people and I am not your God."

After this, true to her character, Gomer left Hosea and was unfaithful with a number of lovers. She ended up shamefully disgraced on the slave market. God told Hosea to go and buy her back, not as a slave, but as his beloved wife. It was an illustration of God's faithful love for His adulterous people.

At that point, God changed the names of the children as a lesson to Israel of His great love. Jezreel means in Hebrew, "God will sow," or "May God sow" (*The Message of Hosea*, Derek Kidner [IVP], p. 39). God now turns this into a promise to sow the land again with people (Hos. 2:23). God also drops the Hebrew negative (*lo*) off the names of the second and third children, so that "No compassion" becomes "Compassion," and "Not My people" becomes "My people" (Hos. 1:10; 2:1, 23). It's a moving, beautiful picture of the power of God's grace to restore unfaithful people and bring them into a relationship with Him.

The point is, Christianity is not a religion of going through rituals and trying to keep a bunch of rules to gain standing with God. Rather, it's all about a gracious, compassionate, merciful God who calls sinners back to Himself. He paid the price to buy us out

of the slave market of sin so that we could be His bride, the object of His undeserved love and grace. Formerly, we were not beloved, but now we are beloved. Formerly, we were not His people, but now we are His chosen people. We are “sons of the living God!”

Relationships take time. Are you taking time to maintain and deepen your most important relationship—with God?

3. Salvation extends to people from every type of background.

Paul’s theme is (9:24), “not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.” This shows us that salvation is not a matter of natural birth or of religious heritage or upbringing. Rather, it is available to all, no matter what their background. In 9:25-29, Paul refers to the Old Testament to show that he wasn’t making up what he had just written about God’s wrath and His mercy, especially about His mercy extending not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles, whom the Jews despised.

A. A pagan background does not exclude you from God’s mercy (9:25-26).

This is great news for all of us who are not Jewish by birth. As I said, Hosea’s words in their original context referred to the ten northern tribes of Israel, but Paul here applies it to the Gentiles (so does Peter, 1 Pet. 2:10). Paul saw that Israel in apostasy had been cast off as God’s people. For all purposes, they became “Gentiles,” just like the pagan nations around them. But in His great mercy, God brought them back so that again it could be said of them that they were His people. Here Paul applies this to the church, which included Gentiles (see also, Eph. 2:11-22).

Perhaps you were raised in a non-Christian home, where you received no understanding of how to live in a manner pleasing to God. Perhaps your background led you into all sorts of horrible sins. The good news is that no matter how pagan your background, you can experience God’s mercy and forgiveness if you will repent of your sins and trust in Christ.

B. A religious background does not automatically include you in God’s mercy (9:27-29).

Many Jews in Paul's day thought, "I'm good with God because I was born a Jew." But as Paul has already said more than once, being a Jew outwardly doesn't make you right with God. You must experience the new birth and have God change your heart (Rom. 2:17-29). Being a child of the flesh counts for nothing; you must become a child of the promise (Rom. 9:6-8).

Verse 27 should begin with "But." Paul is contrasting Israel with the Gentiles. He cites Isaiah 10:22, "Though the number of the sons of Israel be like the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved." The point is that the Jews should not rely on being part of Abraham's many descendants. Rather, they needed to be a part of the remnant.

Skipping verse 28 for a moment, verse 29 cites Isaiah 1:9, "Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left to us a posterity [lit., "seed"], we would have become like Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah." *Sabaoth* means "hosts," referring to the angelic hosts. It emphasizes God's sovereign authority over His creation. The point is, if the sovereign God had not intervened to preserve a remnant, the entire nation would have been destroyed like the corrupt Sodom and Gomorrah. It is essentially the same point as verse 27: being a Jew by birth was not enough. Even though the Jews were God's chosen nation, their hearts were just as corrupt as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. But God granted His grace and salvation to a "seed," a remnant. He was calling out vessels of mercy from among the Jews.

The point for us is that it is not enough to be born and raised in the church. Your heart is just as corrupt as the hearts of those in the pagan Sodom and Gomorrah around us. You must become a part of God's seed, His remnant, through the new birth.

Thus salvation is from God's great mercy and His sovereign, effectual call, not from anything in us. Salvation brings us into a personal relationship with the loving God. Salvation extends to people from every type of background, whether pagan or religious.

4. Salvation delivers us from God's inescapable, thorough judgment.

Verse 28 cites Isaiah 10:23, "For the Lord will execute His word on the earth, thoroughly and quickly." It is not easy to under-

stand how Paul is using this verse here, but it probably emphasizes that God will bring judgment on those who claim to be His people by birth, but are not following Him. When it comes, His judgment will be inescapable, thorough, and sudden. None except the remnant, the vessels of His mercy, will escape.

The point for us is that we should not emphasize God's love and grace to the neglect of His righteousness and judgment. I've met Christians who say, "I don't worship a God of wrath and judgment, but a God of love and mercy." Well, then you do not worship the God of the Bible! And if you're excusing your sins and claiming that you're the object of His love because you belong to the church, you may be in for a rude, irreversible shock. You must respond to God's call of mercy by repenting of your sins or you may be a part of the professing people of God who are not a part of His remnant.

5. Salvation brings us into the racially diverse spiritual family of God's people.

God is calling to Himself a people, "not from among the Jews only, but also from among the Gentiles" (9:24). As Paul put it in Ephesians 2:13, "But now in Christ Jesus you [the Gentiles] who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." He adds (Eph. 2:19), "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household." In heaven, there will be a great multitude "from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues," crying out, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9, 10).

There will be no racism in heaven. It will be multi-racial and multi-cultural. And so there is absolutely no place for racism in the Lord's church today. The church should reflect the racial diversity of the community where it exists. The numbers vary depending on the survey, but Flagstaff is about 70% white, 16% Hispanic, 10% Native, 2% black, and 1% Asian. To reflect those proportions, if we have 400 attending FCF, we should have approximately 280 whites, 64 Hispanics, 40 Native people, 7 blacks, and 5 Asians. I think that God is delighted when the church is multi-racial. So should we be.

Unless there are language barriers, I think that it's wrong for the church to segregate according to race. We should love each other and learn from each other as a testimony of God's grace. We are a racially blended family because we were adopted by the God who is calling His people from among the Jews and Gentiles without distinction.

Conclusion

To come back to my opening question, "Does the gospel, the good news that God saved you from sin and judgment by His great love and mercy, cause your heart to rejoice and your soul to be flooded with gratitude?" If perhaps your appreciation for the gospel has grown a bit dull, consider these words that the Puritan preacher Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) wrote to his son (in *A Frank Boreham Treasury*, compiled by Peter Gunther [Moody Press], p. 72),

When I was threatening to become cold in my ministry, and when I felt Sabbath morning coming and my heart not filled with amazement at the grace of God, or when I was making ready to dispense the Lord's Supper, do you know what I used to do? I used to take a turn up and down among the sins of my past life, and I always came down again with a broken and a contrite heart, ready to preach, as it was preached in the beginning, the forgiveness of sins. I do not think I ever went up the pulpit stair that I did not stop for a moment at the foot of it and take a turn up and down among the sins of my past years. I do not think that I ever planned a sermon that I did not take a turn around my study table and look back at the sins of my youth and of all my life down to the present; and many a Sabbath morning, when my soul had been cold and dry, for the lack of prayer during the week, a turn up and down in my past life before I went into the pulpit always broke my hard heart and made me close with the gospel for my own soul before I began to preach.

Don't ever get over the wonder of God's mercy to you in the gospel!

Application Questions

1. I mentioned several signs that the gospel has become commonplace in your life. What are some others?
2. Some have pointed out an inverse relationship between a personal walk with the living God and religious ritual. Is this true? Is religious ritualism dangerous? Why/why not?
3. Are churches today in danger of becoming an “insider club” for the religious that excludes pagans who need the gospel? How can we fight against this?
4. Is our church in danger of racism? How can we correct this?

Copyright, Steven J. Cole, 2011, All Rights Reserved.