

Title: Vessels of Mercy
Series: Living Free
Text: Romans 9

Note to Leaders: The following is an abridged version of Pastor Dan's sermon from this past weekend with the addition of several potential discussion questions for your life group meeting this week. Please feel free to use these questions and/or add your own. Have a great meeting!

Introduction: To understand this chapter, we keep in mind the beginning of the letter of Romans. **Romans. 1:16, 17** says the gospel is God's power for salvation . . . "*to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*"

- *Being justified by faith we have peace with God*
- *The just shall live by faith*

The Jews as a nation had rejected Jesus as the Messiah, and thus God rejected them. The question was "Has God broken his promises?" He had promised that they would be His special people. What about their special status? In essence, Paul addresses how the New Covenant affect the Jew who lives under the Old Covenant?

Text: Romans 9

I. Passion for your people

Romans 9:1-3 *I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,*

A. Hyperbole. Paul is over-speaking. He is trying to clearly communicate the deep, deep concern he as over his fellow Jews – his family. Remember he later boasts of being from the tribe of Benjamin and a perfect keeper of the Law.

II. Blessing of the Chosen

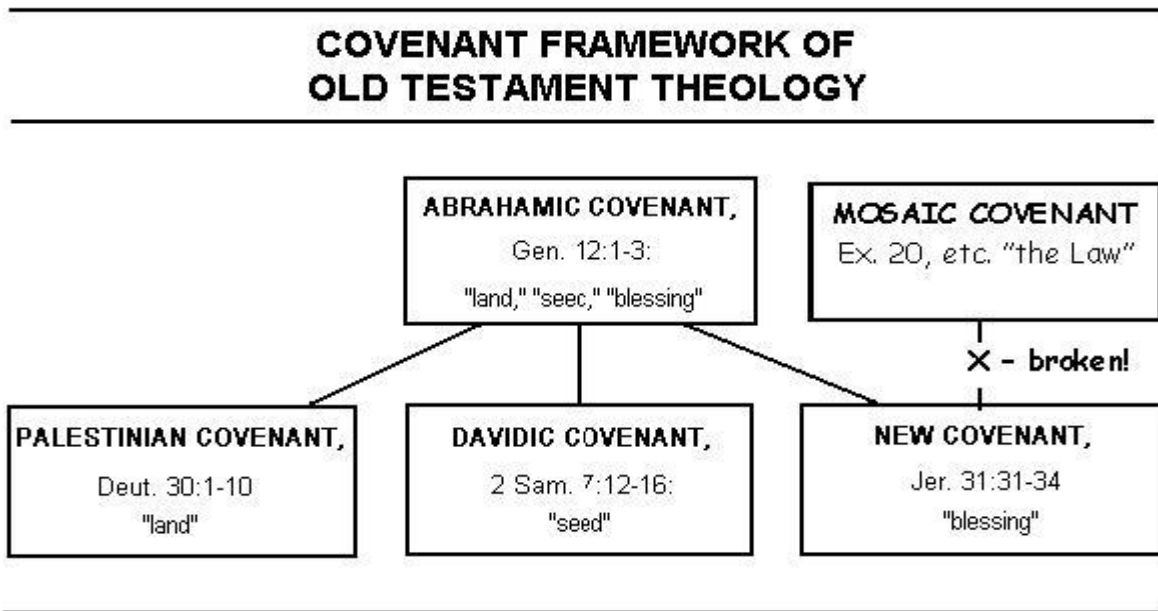
Romans 9:4,5 *who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service[of God, and the promises; of whom[are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen*

When you are chosen by God you are blessed. The Old Covenant gave the elect tremendous blessings yet the Bible says: *he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises* **Hebrews 8:6**

A. The Adoption - In a very real and paternal manner, God made the Israelites his children and looked after them, despite their sins and rebellions, until the purpose of bringing in the Messiah was realized.

B. The Glory – God’s presence among his people such as the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, or the shining face of Moses. It also signifies the prosperity of Israel through the long centuries of their enjoyment of the care and blessing of the Almighty.

C. The Covenants – Covenant(s) is plural and primarily refers to two covenants: the covenant of Moses which is based on the Torah and the covenant of Abraham which is based on promise.



D. The Law - At Sinai the decalogue was given which revealed the will of God

E. The Service of God - refers to the entire liturgical and sacerdotal system of the great religious ceremonies connected with occasions such as the Day of Atonement, the Passover, etc.

F. The Promises – the promises of blessing, deliverance, health and prosperity as in Deut 28.

G. The Savior – this is the Messiah – the anointed one.

Yet with all of these blessings *‘they are not all Israel who are Israel’* **Romans 9:6**

III. God loves Mercy

Romans 9:14,15 *14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."*

A. God is more disposed to mercy than to wrath.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- There are many unbelievers who question God’s love and mercy, especially when they see the presence of pain and suffering in the world. How would you explain the mercy and goodness of God in the midst of our world today?
- Share an example of how you received God’s mercy in a specific circumstance of your life.

READ: Have group members read the following verses.

Micah 7:18 “He delights in mercy.”

You will not find a single verse anywhere in the Bible that says God delights in wrath and judgment and punishment. But you can find many places where it indicates that He delights in mercy. **It’s His joy to show mercy to fallen man.**

B. God’s mercy is abundant.

- **Psalms 86:5** speaks of Him as being *plenteous in mercy*.
- **Ephesians 2:4** speaks of Him as being *rich in mercy*
- **Psalms 51:1** speaks of the *multitude of mercies of God*.

C. God’s mercy is eternal

- **Ps 103:7**, “*But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, upon them that fear him and his righteousness unto children’s children.*”

D. We are Vessels of Mercy

Romans 9:23 *and that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he afore prepared unto glory.*

- By mercy we’re awakened to God.
- Through mercy everything passes to us from the Lord
- For mercy, because we are a conduit of mercy to others. **Matt 5:7** *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Share an example of how has God used you as a “vessel of mercy” to another person?
- What happened in your heart through that experience?
- How did your act of mercy impact that person to whom you showed mercy?
- Think of a specific, practical way you can be a vessel of mercy this week (at home, at school, in the workplace, out in the community, etc.). Have everyone think of something specific and share this with the group.

IV. God Hardens the Heart of the Unbelief

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Many people have found it difficult to understand and reconcile how God has hardened human hearts and still held them accountable for their sin (such as in the case of Pharaoh or the people mentioned in Romans 1, or in the case of the Jews). Discuss this seeming paradox. Is there a contradiction here? What does this really mean?
- How would you explain this to an unbeliever who may question the justice of God in this?

Romans 9:17, 18 *For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.*

This verse is another way of saying "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." **John 3:18**

A. This is a reprisal of earlier in Romans where Paul says the Lord ‘gives them (unrepentant sinners) over’ to their sin.

B. Pharaoh's hardening was at first his own act. Five times Scripture says of him that he hardened himself (**Exod. 7:13; 7:22; 8:15; 8:32; 9:7**), before the time when it is at last said that God hardened him (**Exod. 9:12**), and even after that it is said that he hardened himself (**Exod. 9:34**).

C. The Jews were hardened because of unbelief. The Jews approved of all this in the case of Pharaoh, but held that God would never abandon them on account of *their* sinful course. Paul's argument is, that if they, the favored people, should pursue Pharaoh's course, they would experience Pharaoh's fate.

The ultimate question, "Why did God harden Israel?" It was not arbitrary.

Romans 9:32 *Why? Because they did not seek it (righteousness) by faith but as it were, by the works of the Law.*

V. Finding No Fault in God

If God gives mercy to who he wants and hardens who He wants then how can man still be responsible?

Romans 9: 19,20 *19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" 20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?"*

A. Israel complains that God isn't fair. Remember the background here: Israel is rejected not out of arbitrary sovereignty but because they rejected Christ.

B. We are all tempted to charge God with unrighteousness. We all have "whys" that God does or allows certain things but the creature is in no sense ever a judge of the Creator.

Example of Job: Job 38-41

C. Trusting the goodness of God's sovereignty

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

- How many of us have had something in our lives – an unfulfilled dream or desire, a painful or difficult experience, or something else – in which we have found it difficult to trust the goodness of God's sovereignty?
- Would someone be willing to share about your experience? How has God met you in the midst of your questions? If you are still struggling in this area, how can we pray for you?

The most fundamental of all considerations relative to God's election and sovereignty is that **God is trusted to be altogether righteous, holy, and good**; and that, whatever of his decisions may appear to people as otherwise, the fact of their righteousness and justice remains unimpaired.

- He desires all to be saved; He loves mercy; He judges without prejudice

D. *Beloved, My People and Sons*

Romans 9:25, 26 *I will call them **My people**, who were not My people, and her **beloved**, who was not beloved.*

*And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are My people,' There they shall be call the **sons of the living God***

E. A misunderstanding of God's sovereignty, divine election and predestination has been used as justification for all kinds of errors.

- Example of William Carey. If election is taken to an extreme, we find ourselves parroting those who rebuked William Carey when he cast a vision for world missions: "*Sit down, young man, if God wants to save the heathen in India he will do it without your help or mine.*" Not true. We serve a God who is, "not willing that any should perish"

VI. Closing: An invitation to all people

Romans 9:33 *As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, **And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.**"*

What caused Israel to stumble? They sought a relationship with God by the works of the Law and not by faith (v. 32).

APPLICATION: Have everyone in the group share either an area of their lives where they are finding it difficult to trust God's goodness and mercy OR share the name of someone they know who has yet to receive the reality of God's mercy and love. Break up into smaller groups and pray for these needs.