

Dear Friends and Family,

One day, not too long ago, I found myself in a grilling conversation with a Muslim. The conversation began abruptly and took me by surprise. Before I understood where he was directing the conversation, he began quizzing me about very specific verses of scripture. He knew I was a Pastor and was intentionally digging to see how much I knew about obscure Old Testament references to lineages. It wasn't until I got home and did some research that I understood better what had just happened.

The Islamic religion is a false religion that has supplanted itself within the true history of Israel and Christianity. It claims to be an Abrahamic religion but it changes the entire history of Abraham and God's promises to him. However, like all false religions, they attempt to tear apart the truth of scripture and use it out of context to serve their own purposes. Satan's greatest trick is infiltrating true religion and hiding in plain sight.

Paul helps us address this issue in Romans 9. Romans 9 represents a transition in the Epistle to the Romans. Chapters 1-8 describe the character and deeds of God, the source of our salvation. Chapters 9-11 describe the character and deeds of God, who elected the Jews first and now calls the Gentiles. Romans 9 is vital in understanding the truth of salvation - that it is through faith in Jesus Christ, not a misguided inherited 'religion'.

“That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.”

Romans 9:8

Day 1: READ Romans 9:1-13

How does Paul begin this new section of the letter? What argument is he making here?

Look specifically at verse 3, what is Paul saying about his heart toward his own people?

What belongs, rightfully, to the Israelites?

How important is Paul's declaration in verse 6?

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy says in part:

“The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.”

Why is it important for Paul to remind us of the inerrancy of scripture before moving forward to the purpose of God according to His choice, in verse 11?

Have you ever thought, “How could God love Jacob but hate Esau?”

Day 2: READ Romans 9:14-18

Many today wish to label God as lacking justice. “How could a loving God do _____?”

How does Paul address this issue here?

Many might state that Paul doesn't truly meet the question head on. However, according to CK Barrett's commentary, Paul addresses the question expertly.

First, in verse 15, he quotes scripture, Exodus 33:19. This introduces the idea of God's mercy and compassion. Not a wrathful, indignant God, but a merciful compassionate savior.

Second, Paul acknowledges our free will in verse 16. We are not puppets on God's cosmic strings, but we are free moral agents, willfully sinning and going against God's design.

Third, Paul appeals to another familiar Old Testament passage, God's raising up of Pharaoh. Pharaoh, who thought himself god and in charge of his empire, God raised up to manifest His power and proclaim His name. Even this however, did not come without Pharaoh's free choice to deny God (Exodus 5:2).

Finally, Paul's masterful reasoning is clearly seen in the fact that we are by our freedom, sinful, but God is by His grace, merciful.

Day 3: READ Romans 9:19-24

Paul immediately asks the logical question we are all thinking, “How then, can God find fault in any of us, if this is the case?”

Paul then provides the logical, yet hard to hear, defense. Remember God's own words to Job? (Job 38-41) And Job's response to Him? (Job 42:1-6)

Paul's analogy of two vessels made from the same lump is poignant. However, we must all remember that we were all once “vessels made for common use”. By God's grace and mercy, He redeemed us and made us into “vessels for honorable use”.

All of this proves God's incomprehensible mercy toward us.

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

Day 4: READ Romans 9:25-33

What does Paul tell us about ‘inherited faith’?

What about the calling of the Gentiles?

Look at Paul’s instructions to Timothy:

“As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, ⁴ nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than *furthering* the administration of God which is by faith.” 1 Timothy 1:3-4

This passage echoes the direction of my conversation with the Muslim man. He was trying to get caught up in strange doctrines, myths, and endless genealogies. He was attempting to use that to declare that he is a genealogical heir to Abraham. Instead, we are to be founded on faith in Jesus Christ. The reformers called this doctrine *Sola Fide* – Faith Alone.

We can see this clearly in Paul’s testimony in verses 30-33. Read this passage and consider its implications.

I challenge you to know Scripture. Understand what it means and how it applies to your life. You will encounter difficult situations and conversations. May you be grounded in truth! Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone, the one rejected by His own people, to which He became a stumbling stone. But to those who believe, He is the foundation of faith, and the mercy of God delivered to us, that we may put on His righteousness!

All praise, glory and honor to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

In Faith,

Pastor Matt

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message. "May the LORD bless you and keep, may He make His face shine upon you." Numbers 6:24-25

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*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us **RUN** with endurance the race that is set before us -- Hebrews 12:1*