

## 9,30,21 Romans 9 The Movements of God in History

In this section of Romans Paul moves in a different direction. He's addressing those in Rome who have questions, and probably concerns, about what happens to the nation of Israel now that the Church has become God's focus.

Rom. 8:28-30 tells us that "we (the Church) are called according to His purpose". Here's the passage;

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."

Those who "love God" are those who are not living for themselves, but for Christ; we are "the called ones according to *His* purpose" which centers in the Person of God's Son.

All things work together for good *in Him* as we determine within ourselves to pursue the purpose of God in Christ.

Sparks describes Rom. 8:28 like this;

"There is one all-comprehending, all-embracing, all-governing purpose to which God has committed Himself by creation, by redemption, and by union. That purpose is the conformity of a race to the image of His Son."

On the temporal side of this, there is a two-fold aspect of what this would look like in our daily lives;

1) God is calling out from among all humanity a people for His Name. We are co-laborers with Him in this outreach.

2) The Lord is bringing that elect company into the moral and spiritual perfections of Jesus Christ. Each of us is gifted spiritually in a way that allows us to play our part in the 'building up' of the body of Christ.

For both of these, passivity on our part is not God's intent for us. We saw a detective series this year and the main detective had a sign next to his desk that said, "Get off your butt and knock on doors!"

Apparently, you can't be a good cop just sitting at a desk and researching crimes.

Many of you have probably read Watchman Nee's book, "Sit, Walk, Stand". He points out that the first part of our Christian life should be doing exactly that – *sitting* at our desk learning all we can about the life we came into.

It's similar to the Mary/Martha incident in Luke 10. Martha was frantic; Mary was listening.

But eventually, we need to move into the walk phase of our Christian lives. Once we've learned how to be led by the Spirit (which is difficult to learn in a chair), we can "rise and walk".

Maybe this clarification by Sparks can help with this;

"The only thing that can satisfy the Father, that can serve Him is His Son, and if you are going to come into God's service, He has to be the energy of everything, the Life of everything, the Wisdom of everything!" He has to be the governing, ruling reality in everything. It is not to be a matter of your impulses, but of His urgings and leadings by the Holy Spirit; not your sitting down to reason out what it would be good to do for the Lord, what ought to be done, what needs to be done, but what He shows you, and nothing more."

When that's firmly established in our understanding, we need to move.

Ok, let's spend some more time gaining an eternal perspective in all this.

We can see God's purpose amplified in these passages in Ephesians;

(1:9-12) "He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with

the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.”

(3:9-11) “And to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

(4:16) “. . . the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causing growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

If we’re going to line up with God's purpose, our desires, our vision and our commitment must be according to God’s ultimate intention.

Listen to what this author says regarding this purpose of God:

“The Lord Jesus derived much strength from this knowledge of purpose with which His life was bound up. There is no doubt that we too shall get strength from that sense of purpose, that consciousness of a divine vocation which is ours. That is why the enemy always tries to discourage us. He seeks to raise questions and doubts in our hearts as to our reaching the goal, telling us that our labor is in vain. If he succeeds to rob us of that sense of purpose in our life, to make us doubt with regard to our testimony, our work, or the value of the suffering we have to go through, we shall lose our strength and the enemy will get the upper hand.

“Jesus Christ was maintained in God’s strength all the way through, because He was dominated by the sense of His mission, because He kept firm His purpose. If we hold fast the purpose of our life, if we keep in view our calling, we too shall be maintained in strength. But if we try to fulfill some ambition of our own, if we carry out our own plans, there will be no divine resources available for us. In order to be maintained in strength it is essential that we know that we are in the purpose of God. Our service must always be the result of a divine purpose. It is of the greatest importance for us to realize that we have a place in God’s plan. We have to deny ourselves

because in God's purpose there is no room for personal interests. We have got to know that we are in God's purpose."

Paul was an excellent example of one whose life was wholly given over to God's interests; listen to what he says in Col. 1:28-29

"Whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. For this I also labor, striving according to His working, which works in me powerfully."

Paul came to fully understand what God intended for His people, so whether by life or death, Paul's one goal was to pursue that same purpose - to see the *increase of Christ* in the world *and* in the Church.

Paul's heart beat with the same vision and passion as the Father's - to honor and glorify God's Son.

Everything we do in our daily lives has to be connected to both God's eternal purpose in Christ and His unique purpose for the generation we live in.

So, what I hope to do tonight is explore how Paul explains what has happened to Israel and how he ties that explanation into God's purpose both in history and in us.

The first thing we need to realize is that, like any personality, God has desires and a goal in everything He does. He moves in history, and in our lives, with a sovereign, pre-determined plan.

(Eph. 1:11) "In Christ also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will."

Our part is to discover that 'counsel' and then align ourselves with it.

Paul is going to address issues ranging from the difference between Israel and the Church, to election and predestination.

None of these concepts are difficult to understand as long as we keep them in the context of God's overriding purpose of the ages; which is exactly what Paul does in these chapters.

So, before we look at some of the specifics of *how* the Lord is working out His plan, we need to make sure we know what the governing context is.

To help with this, the following is from a book entitled, “The Will of God in Relation to His People” by Sparks.

In the first part of his book, he gives three assumptions that we all need to consider when we look at the implications of discipleship and being in sync with the Lord.

- “1. That you have a very real concern to know the will of God.
2. That you are prepared to consider anything that may be a help to you in that direction.
3. That you are of a mind to obey any light that the Lord may give as to His will.”

Then he adds this,

“Given that foundation, I think the Lord will find a clear way with us. The business of any servant of the Lord is, perhaps in many ways, to bring His people to know what is His will concerning them.

“In other words, the Bible is a revelation of God moving according to purpose. That is only another way of speaking about the will of God.”

Spark’s book traces the history and outworking of that purpose throughout the Old and New Testaments – from the Patriarchs to Israel and the prophets, to the Church and on into eternity.

All of human history from eternity past to eternity future, and everything in between, is simply the labor of God to form both the kingdom and the co-regent (the bride) of His King.

From the beginning, God’s purpose has always centered, and *will always* center, in Christ; He is the horizon of creation.

In John 14:6 Jesus told us that *He* is “the way, the truth and the life”.

There’s no way to *discover or enter* God’s purpose except through Christ; we can’t understand the truth, *the meaning*, of God’s purpose if we don’t see Christ as the

object of all God has desired and willed; and there's no way we can enter into *the experience* of life in what God has provided, if we don't enter in by the only door there is.

I want to briefly share something that Sparks included, that shows his own heart for all this;

"I am trying to be faithful with you young Christians, because I am deeply concerned for you that you do not miss God's best, God's fullest, and so I say that that depends upon your having the Word of God in, so that the Holy Spirit can touch something and say: 'Now, what about this?' I want to be serious on this matter, because it is a pressing issue in Christianity today. The Christianity that is being produced now is a terrible caricature of Christ. Young Christians, having God's fullest and best depends upon your being serious about (understanding and obeying) the Word of God. We must, at some point, find ourselves caught up in the goings of God."

"There is the other side, of course, and what a blessed thing it is to feel that there is no impediment, no restraint with the Lord, that there is a clear way, and that the presence of the Lord is with us! Heaven is opened! I know of nothing more blessed in all of life than those times when I realize that there is no cloud between the Lord and myself. I wish it were always like that!"

One thing that really caught my attention was the phrase, "We must, at some point, find ourselves caught up in the goings of God."

I don't think it's possible for anyone to really be sustained in this life spiritually if their vision of why they are here, and what we are meant to be and do, doesn't rise above self-interest.

I can only speak for myself, but I get so wrapped up in what I'm going through and what I'm experiencing or not experiencing, that my whole life is pulled down into me – instead of losing my life and finding it in Christ; living *only* in the purpose of God.

Again, another example of Sparks sharing his personal concern about this;

"Let us be caught up in something that makes us shed every impeding, arresting and hindering thing. What is it that carries us on? We have seen

the Lord Jesus! We have had a vision, not objectively, perhaps, but something has happened in our hearts and Jesus Christ has become the all-mastering, all-controlling and all-absorbing object of our existence.

“We have *seen* Jesus, and that vision carries us on. What we have seen about Him, what God's purpose is in Him, what we have seen has become a dynamic in our life, and such a dynamic that nothing else matters.”

There is an incredible freedom in losing ourselves in Him, just as there is only death in holding on to our own lives. If the grain of wheat does not fall into the ground and die, it abides alone, but if that grain *does* die, it brings forth much fruit.

As one author put it, “vision is emancipating!”

Without it, we’re just stumbling in the dark, hoping we accidentally do something right.

In the first part of Romans 9 we actually see in Paul’s words what sharing the heart of God looks like;

(Rom. 9:1-3) “I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”

This is common throughout the Bible in the men and women who have been willing to step outside themselves and embrace God’s purpose. In Jeremiah 9:1, the prophet shares the burden of Jehovah for His people,

"Oh, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"

Then in Matthew 23:37 we see the Lord Himself experiencing this same burden,

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets . . . how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not!"

So, obviously, genuine vision brings a burden to us – a strong desire to see God’s purpose realized.

In Acts 13:36 we see David's role in this:

"When David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep."

In our generation (which is obviously different than David's), our 'service' to the Lord doesn't involve killing Philistines – our mission is, as I said earlier, to be co-laborers with the Holy Spirit in bringing in the fullness of the gentiles into the Body of Christ and to use our spiritual gifts to help bring the Church to maturity.

The single greatest spiritual gain we can make in this life is to experientially enter into God's own burden for His people.

An evangelist in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Praying Hyde) felt God's pain so deeply that when he died and an autopsy was performed, they discovered that his heart had actually shifted out of its place from the intensity of his prayers.

Think of your love and the pain you feel when your own children are hurting; then amplify that to an infinite degree and you have an idea of what God feels for *His* children.

The greater the love, the greater the pain.

William R. Newell once wrote,

"It is not easy to estimate the measure of love in a Moses and a Paul. For our limited reason does not grasp it, as the child cannot comprehend the courage of warriors."

Something to keep in mind in all of this is that God's love does not change simply because the object of that love fails. If anything, the intensity of love increases in the presence of sin or defeat in the one loved.



In Romans 9 we are focused on Israel as the object of that love, and no matter what anyone has told you in the past, there is absolutely no way Israel will be ultimately 'cast off' because of her failure.

(Jer. 31:35-37) "Thus says the Lord, Who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; the Lord of hosts is His name: 'If this fixed order departs from before Me,' declares the Lord, 'Then the offspring of Israel also will cease from being a nation before Me forever.' Thus says the Lord, 'If the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth searched out below, then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done,' declares the Lord."

One of the other issues Paul addresses in Romans 9 is to clarify exactly who is a Jew and who isn't. Because, even though the nation of Israel was destroyed and scattered by Rome in 70 A.D., there were, and are still, a large number of Jews who remain in the center of God's will and purpose.

(Rom. 9:6-9) "But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: 'through Isaac your descendants will be named.' 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. For this is the word of promise: 'At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son.'"

This section shows us that only one question or issue matters - who among *physical* Israel is the *spiritual* Israel?

The key in determining who the spiritual Jew is, is to look at Isaac. Isaac was an impossibility. He was the result of grace responding to faith; and only those within physical Israel who approach God on the basis of 'the faith of Abraham' are, in God's mind, true Israelites.

Those who believe, genuinely, as Abraham did, become children of promise. The Lord deals with this in John 8:37-45;

"I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak the things which I have seen

with My Father; therefore, you also do the things which you heard from your father.”

“They answered and said to Him, ‘Abraham is our father’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. You are doing the deeds of your father.’ They said to Him, ‘We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father.’”

Not everyone who claims to be "of Israel" really *is* of Israel from God's viewpoint; just as not everyone who claims to be a Christian, is really a Christian.

Christians don't become Christians by being born into a Christian family or becoming religious, anymore that Jews become real Jews by being born Jewish, attending a synagogue, or studying the Torah.

With God, this isn't determined by the outward appearance or even by the lineage, but by the heart. It's always a spiritual issue, not a lineage or religious issue.

Now, Paul is going to address an issue that has been one of the most controversial doctrines in the Bible – predestination.

This reality within God's counsel and character can only be understood if we realize that it's based on God's omniscience from an *eternal* perspective, not a temporal perspective.

Here's what I mean by that.

Omniscience, by definition, means that God knows (and has known from all eternity), literally everything about everything. That's my feeble attempt to define "omniscience".

If you knew the end from the beginning, and everything in between, do you think you could make an intelligent and fair decision about the fate of nations?

Paul uses three illustrations to teach the principle of God's election in regard to the nation of Israel.

1. The sovereign choice of Jacob over Esau (11-13)
2. The hardening of Pharaoh (14-18)
3. The right of the Potter over the clay (20-23)

So, first - Jacob was chosen.

There are times throughout history when God sovereignly 'chooses'; and there are times when He 'hardens'. The question we all seem to want answered is,

"Isn't it unfair for God to choose one and reject another; especially before either one is born?"

If God didn't know all about each of them billions of years before they sprang into existence, it would be *totally* unfair. But He *did* know – He knew who Jacob would be and He knew who Esau would be. He knew about every thought and every *choice* they would make. And He knew what stand they would take in relation to Him.

Based on that omniscient knowledge, He chose Jacob and rejected Esau.

He didn't force them into any choice they didn't want to make; He simply honored the freedom He gave all of us to make the choices we do – and live with the consequences.

The primary issue of God's sovereign choice in Romans 9 centers in a group of people who will or will not receive a position of privilege in the world; it is not an issue of individual salvation or condemnation.

Jacob and Esau are presented to us as *representatives* of entire civilizations or races of people. It was God's sovereign decision that Esau and his descendants would be in a lesser position among the nations than Jacob and his descendants.

The descendants of Esau included the Canaanites; the descendants of Jacob, of course, made up the nation of Israel.

The fact that Israel would be raised above the Canaanites was a decision God made in His own sovereignty and has to do with national status, not with salvation.

This is obvious when you realize that many Canaanites, including Rahab the harlot, were accepted into the family of God by faith in Jehovah.

“Saved or not saved” is not what Romans 9 is about.

God chooses as He wills - with the same absolute freedom that a potter has the right to make any kind of vessel he wants without accepting any flak from the vessel.

(Rom. 9:21) "Does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?"

That's not heaven or hell – that's honor or dishonor.

This whole section is simply dealing with God's work as related to Israel and their relationship to the nations of the world; it has nothing to do with who's going to heaven or hell.

So, what about the "hardening of Pharaoh" in Romans 9:17-18?

“For the Scripture says to the 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.’ Therefore, He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.”

Doesn't that prove that God hardens individuals?

There is no question that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but did God harden Pharaoh's heart *before* or *after* Pharaoh hardened his own heart?

When did Pharaoh's heart initially get hardened?

(Ex. 9:12) “But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said to Moses.”

But is that the first "hardening"?

(Ex. 3:19 & 5:1-2) “I *know* that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness.’ Pharaoh said, ‘Who is

the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.”

Pharaoh's heart is shown to us in Ex. 3 & 5, *before* God hardens it in Ex. 9.

This is the first mention by the Lord of what Pharaoh will do when Moses confronts him. There's no mention in this passage of God 'forcing' Pharaoh to do it - only that it will happen.

God knows Pharaoh and He knows exactly what Pharaoh will do. So, the next time God talks to Moses about Pharaoh, God shows how He intends to *use* Pharaoh to accomplish God's goals for Israel (Ex. 7:2-3, 22).

(Ex. 7:2-3,22) “You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart . . . the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said.”

The principle is this: God took Pharaoh's self-hardened heart and reinforced that hardness in order to accomplish His purpose for Israel's deliverance.

Now, back to Romans 9:22;

“What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction?”

". . . prepared for destruction". This "prepared" in the original is in the middle voice meaning that those referred to "prepared" themselves.

They made their own decision to rebel against a holy God, so God used them, just as He used Pharaoh, to accomplish His purpose.

What Paul is addressing in Romans 9 through 11 is this incredible working of God in sovereignty over all nations using Jacob and Esau as the representative heads of Israel and of the Gentiles.

Romans 9 is not a chapter on how God has cancelled man's free will; or that He has sovereignly chosen some to go to heaven and some to go to hell.

It isn't a passage that is intended to make a mockery of the offer of the gospel to *all* men, as if that offer had no real meaning since God has already pre-determined who will and who will not respond.

There is a vast difference between God's foreknowledge and the Calvinist's fatalistic view of man's predestination under the hand of a God Who only *appears* to offer salvation to all.

Rather than affirming the heresy of Calvinism and Reformed Theology, Romans 9 actually destroys it.

Paul is seeking to explain the mind and working of a sovereign God who can perfectly balance the freedom of man with his own purpose, so that nothing, not even man's freedom, can sabotage God's ability to complete His plan exactly as He intended.

Paul came to understand both the wonder of God's wisdom and the reality of man's freedom and accountability. It's these two facts brought together that dropped Paul to his knees in Romans 11:33,

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"

I'm going to go off the rails as we close and share something that is only remotely related to what we've been talking about.

First, some verses to set the stage;

(Lk. 9:29) "As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening."

(Phil. 3:21) "(He) will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body."

(Dan. 12:2-3) "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever."

(Matt. 13:43) "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

(1 Cor. 15:40-41) “There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.”

Now, with these verses in mind, I’m going to share some experiences of Christians who died on hospital beds, usually surgery rooms, and then revived and told others about their experience of heaven.

We can believe them or not, but either way, the experiences they shared were remarkably like what we see in the Biblical descriptions of heaven. So, here’s the first one;

“Dr. Mary Neal spoke of the brilliant glory of the people she called her welcoming committee. ‘They were radiating a brilliance that was indescribable . . . it was as though they were like the Northern Lights in that they were of a physical form, but their edges were a little indistinct. It’s sort of translucent and shimmery. A brilliance of light, just exploding in it, and the light was not just something you would see. If you look at the sun, you see light and it’s blinding. This was a light from within, born from love. I don’t know quite how else to explain it.”

“Dean Braxton’s heart stopped for an hour and forty-five minutes during surgery. He revived, claiming he’d see Jesus. ‘He is pure light! His brightness was before me, around me, part of me, and in me. He is brighter than the noonday sun, but we can still look at Him in heaven. I was in Jesus, and Jesus was shining out of me. I would see the brightness. It was around me. I was part of the brightness and brightness was shining out of me. All of it was Life.”

“In another interview, Vicki, who had been blind from birth, was asked about ‘brightness’ (which she had never seen). She said, ‘Jesus was much brighter than anyone there. He was the brightest, the most glorious of all I saw, but it was incredibly beautiful, loving and warm. It was very intense. I know I couldn’t have stood it if I were myself ordinarily.”

“Crystal said this, ‘What I experienced in heaven was so real and lucid, and so utterly intense, it made my experiences on Earth seem hazy and out of focus – as if Heaven is the reality and life as we know it, is just a dream.’ Crystal describes being immersed in a feeling of complete and utter purity, perfection, unbrokenness, and a kind of assurance she’s never experienced on Earth. ‘It was like being bathed in love . . . It was a brightness I didn’t just see, but felt. And it felt familiar, like something I remembered, or even recognized in some way. The best way to put it is this: I was home.’”

I won’t take time to share the experiences of those who did *not* experience heaven, who screamed and pleaded to come back – to escape the pain and soul crushing fear.

But those who were believers consistently described a place where love and light were the atmosphere everyone breathed in with every breath.

The experience of those who suffered here, not just physically but also the emotional suffering of sexual abuse (like Crystal), found healing to the core of their being beyond anything they had ever dreamed possible in their life of shame and self-hatred they had experienced in *this* life.

Just something to help us remember that *this* destiny is part of God’s sovereign, immutable plan for His children, which He will consummate in each of us *one second* after we leave this world.