



The Unavoidable Christ

“As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (Romans 9:33).

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“For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. 18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. 19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? 20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? 21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? 22 What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: 23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, 24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? 25 As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. 26 And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God. 27 Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: 28 For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth. 29 And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha. 30 What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. 31 But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. 32 Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; 33 As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (Romans 9:17-33).

Introduction

In this scripture, the Apostle Paul addresses a profound and solemn truths on the sovereignty of God, the hardness of man, the mercy of the Lord, and the tragedy of rejecting Christ. Romans 9:17–33 confronts us with truths that humble human pride and magnify divine grace. We live in a generation that exalts human choice, human wisdom, and human merit. Yet Paul reminds us that salvation is not rooted in man’s effort, lineage, or righteousness, but in the mercy and purpose of Almighty God. Romans 9:16 declares: “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.” This passage teaches us three great truths:

1. God is sovereign in His dealings with men.
2. Man is responsible for his response to God.
3. Christ is either the Rock of salvation or the Stone of stumbling.

This study is broken into five parts:

- 1) GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY DISPLAYED IN PHARAOH
- 2) GOD’S RIGHT AS THE POTTER
- 3) GOD’S MERCY EXTENDED TO THE GENTILES
- 4) THE TRAGEDY OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS
- 5) CHRIST: THE STONE OF STUMBLING OR THE ROCK OF SALVATION



I. GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY DISPLAYED IN PHARAOH (Romans 9:17–18)

Paul begins by referring to Pharaoh: “For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth” — Romans 9:17. This quotation comes from Exodus 9:16: “And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.”

Pharaoh was the most powerful ruler on earth, yet he became an instrument through which God displayed His glory, illustrating that God's power overrules human pride. Paul continues: “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” (Romans 9:18). Pharaoh believed he was untouchable. Egypt was the superpower of the ancient world. Yet **one man standing with God was greater than the armies of Egypt.**

Psalms 75:7 says: “But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.” History repeatedly demonstrates this truth. Empires rise and fall, dictators boast and perish, but God remains sovereign over all. Consider Nebuchadnezzar. He stood in Babylon and declared: “... Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30). Yet immediately God humbled him, and after his restoration Nebuchadnezzar confessed: “And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth” (Daniel 4:35). Human pride always collapses before divine sovereignty.

When the Titanic was launched, many boasted that even God could not sink it. Yet on its maiden voyage, it struck an iceberg and sank into the Atlantic Ocean. Human arrogance has always underestimated the sovereignty of God. Proverbs 16:18 warns: “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”

II. GOD'S RIGHT AS THE POTTER (Romans 9:19–24)

Paul anticipates an objection: “Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?” (Romans 9:19). Paul's answer is direct and humbling: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” (Romans 9:20). It should be noted that (a) The Creator has authority over the creation, and (b) God endures sinners with great longsuffering.

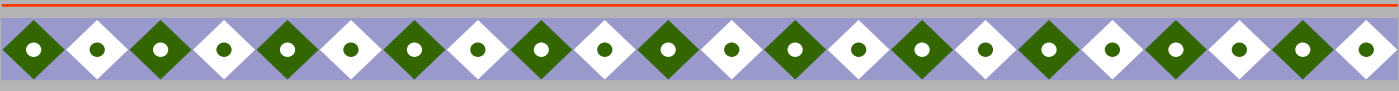
1. The Creator has authority over the creation

Paul uses the illustration of the potter and the clay: “Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?” (Romans 9:20). Isaiah declared similarly: “Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!” (Isaiah 45:9). The clay does not instruct the potter. The creature does not govern the Creator. Jeremiah was sent to the potter's house and observed: “And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it” (Jeremiah 18:4). God shapes nations, circumstances, and lives according to His wisdom.

2. God endures sinners with great longsuffering

Romans 9:22 says: “What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.” God is holy and just, yet remarkably patient. 2 Peter 3:9 says: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Consider how long God endured:

- a. Pharaoh before judgment fell.
- b. Israel in the wilderness.
- c. Sinful humanity today.



Before the flood, God gave Noah over a century to preach righteousness while the ark was being prepared. 1 Peter 3:20 speaks of: “The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah.” Yet eventually the flood came. God’s patience is immense, but it is not endless. Hebrews 9:27 reminds us: “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”

III. GOD’S MERCY EXTENDED TO THE GENTILES (Romans 9:24–26)

Paul now reveals a glorious truth: “Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?” (Romans 9:24). The Gospel is not confined to one ethnic group or nation. God calls people from every tribe and tongue. Paul quotes Hosea: “I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved” (Romans 9:25). This gives the key message that Grace reaches the undeserving.

The Gentiles had been strangers to the covenants of promise. Ephesians 2:12 says: “That at that time ye were without Christ... having no hope, and without God in the world. “Yet through Christ they were brought near”. Ephesians 2:13 declares: “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” This is the wonder of grace: **God saves those who had no claim upon Him.**

Consider Mephibosheth, the crippled son of Jonathan, who lived in obscurity and shame. Yet King David summoned him to the palace and declared: “Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him... But Mephibosheth thy master’s son shall eat bread alway at my table” (2 Samuel 9:10). Mephibosheth did not earn favour; he received mercy because of the king’s covenant love. Likewise, sinners are welcomed through Christ.

IV. THE TRAGEDY OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS (Romans 9:30–32)

Paul now contrasts the Gentiles and Israel. “What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith” (Romans 9:30). But Israel failed: Romans 9:31 indicates that “... Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness”. Why? “Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law” — Romans 9:32

It must be noted that religion cannot save. Israel possessed the law, the temple, the sacrifices, and the covenants. Yet many rejected Christ because they trusted in religious performance rather than faith. Isaiah 64:6 points out that: “... we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags”. Salvation is not achieved through morality, ritual, or religious heritage. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares that: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast”.

Jesus told of two men praying in the temple. The Pharisee boasted: “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are” (Luke 18:11). But the publican cried: “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13). Jesus concluded that: “This man went down to his house justified rather than the other” (Luke 18:14). God responds to humble faith, not proud religion.

V. CHRIST: THE STONE OF STUMBLING OR THE ROCK OF SALVATION (Romans 9:32–33)

Paul concludes with a solemn warning: “For they stumbled at that stumblingstone” (Romans 9:32). And then quoting from Isaiah stated: “Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (Romans 9:33); from which it can be concluded that **Christ is unavoidable. Every person must respond to Him**, in one way



of the other, such as taking offence or believing as described in these two points:

1. Christ offends human pride

The Jews wanted a conquering Messiah, not a crucified Saviour; but Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 1:23 says: “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness”. The cross destroys human boasting because it declares that man cannot save himself.

2. Christ saves all who believe

Though Christ is a stumblingstone to some, He is the foundation of salvation to others. 1 Peter 2:6 declares: “Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.” Acts 4:12 declares: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

As an illustration, note that the same sun that melts wax hardens clay. The difference is not in the sun, but in the material exposed to it. Likewise, the same Christ who softens one heart hardens another. Some repent and believe; others stumble in unbelief. John 3:19 says: “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.”

Conclusion

Romans 9:17–33 confronts us with eternal realities that:

- God is sovereign.
- Man is accountable.
- Mercy is available.
- Pride destroys.
- Christ alone saves.

The great question is not whether Christ is the cornerstone. **The great question is whether we will build upon Him or stumble over Him.** Jesus said: “And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder” (Matthew 21:44).

Today the invitation still stands. Isaiah 55:6 says: “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near”. And Romans 10:13 promises: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”.

May we humble ourselves before the Potter, trust wholly in Christ, and rejoice in the mercy of God. Amen.