

Romans 9:19-33
Living with the rock of offense.

- Christians have always faced a challenge with respect to the Gospel and culture.
- It is offensive in its message (as it was to the religious establishment of Paul's day). I Pet.2:8 "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"
- Its presenters and presentation can be unnecessarily offensive on any number of accounts. Rom.14: 21; 16:17; I Cor.8:13; 10:32 "Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God." II Cor.6:3 "Giving no offense in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed."
- In trying to avoid the (unnecessary) second type of offense, we can also remove the first (necessary) offense. Gal.5:11 "But I , brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished."
- In this passage we have a number of issues associated with the Gospel that will be offensive to the world.

God is sovereign

(Man is not the center of the universe).

19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" 20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? 21 Or 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?

- Jer.18:1-11 speaks of the prophet's observation of the potter's wheel as an illustration of God's dealing with the nation Israel. Jer.18:6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. The nation is clay in God's hands, and the nation's future is contingent upon their response to God's word, "if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it . . . So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, 'Thus says the Lord, "Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds.'"" (Jer.18:8,11)
- It must be acknowledged however that the question posed in verse 19 assumes that Paul's argument addresses the election of individuals not a nation. How can man be held responsible for something he cannot control? Paul acknowledges the question as legitimate but tells us that we have no right to demand an answer. Our response options to the challenge of Divine sovereignty and human freedom are as follows.

(three views)

**God is absolutely
sovereign**

**We have a paradox
that defies our**

**Human freedom is
authentic**

Free will passages are an enigma.

understanding

We embrace both truths without demanding a rational explanation.

Sovereignty passages are an enigma.

- Some theological truths may be misunderstood and misrepresented but they cannot be understood or rationally explained. We are called to not misrepresent the truth of human freedom and Divine sovereignty.
- The challenge of resolving the paradox of God's sovereignty and human volition may ultimately be beyond our comprehension and resolution.

- **Point: It's not about me.**

As Christians we differ from the secular world in which we live at one fundamental point - We realize that the story of history is not primarily about us. God does not exist to make us happy, prosperous, or significant. We exist to know Him and joyfully cooperate with His purpose in history. This should powerfully effect our expectations in this life.

God is judgmental (He is not permissive).

22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And {He did so} in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, 24 {even} us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

- “prepared for destruction” is a phrase (KATERTISMENA) which can (according to Arndt and Gingrich) be middle or passive voice. If it is middle voice the translation would be “having prepared themselves for destruction.” It is perhaps significant that God is directly linked to the preparation for glory but not to the preparation for destruction.
- **Point: Double predestination (choosing some for destruction) is not clearly established with this text. No one should assume that those who rebel against God are doing so as a result of God's intent or unconditional and sovereign plan.**

While God's wrath is a part of His plan, it is withheld so that His mercy might be received. The notion of a God of judgment being only an OT doctrine is wishful thinking by those who read their wishes into the Biblical story. Jn.3:36 “whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him” Rom.1:18 “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.” (I Thess.1:10; 5:9; II Thess.1:8; Rev.6:16-17; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15)

God blesses through grace

(We are not entitled).

25 As He says also in Hosea, *"I will call those who were not My people, 'My people,' And her who was not beloved, 'beloved.'"* 26 *"And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'you are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God."*

- The inclusion of Gentiles in God's promise is hinted at in the OT Prophet's message.

I Pet. 1 "10 As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that {would come} to you made careful search and inquiry, 11 seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look."

I Pet.2 "9 But you are *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for {God's} own possession*, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were *not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*"

- **Point:** History is a story of God's work in creating and calling a people to and for Himself. The significance of Jesus and the Cross in this story is central to God's purpose in bringing us from darkness to light.

Our blessings, security, and significance before God do not come from being made in His image but rather in being redeemed by His Son and united by faith with Christ. The Gospel Story is the most important story in all history.

God is exclusive

(He does not include everyone).

27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, *"Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved 28 for the Lord will execute His word upon the earth, thoroughly and quickly."* 29 And just as Isaiah foretold, *"Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left to us a posterity, We would have become as Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah."*

- Not all of "national Israel" will be saved but only the believing remnant.
- When asked in 1980 why he did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, an Israeli guide said, "When he came nothing changed for Israel." Although many Jews believed and still believe that Messiah will bring a social political renewal to Israel, the prophets saw but a remnant returning. Isa.10:22 "Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous."
- It is tempting to read the polls when deciding what belief system one will embrace. The OT and NT both indicate that the way of God will be narrow and few will choose it. Matt.7:13 "13 Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. 14 For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it."

- **Point:** Believers are called to thankfulness without pride. While it can be said that God loves the whole world (all people), it must be recognized that being "beloved of God" is reserved for a remnant who "believe." Not everyone is a "son of the living God." This is not a cause for pride or boasting in that the relationship is not conditioned upon human merit.

Perhaps the most offensive part of the Gospel is its exclusivity in that only those who are "in Christ" by faith inherit the blessings of the covenant promises. This offense has led some evangelicals to try to explain the Gospel so as to avoid the problem (see theology notes #703).

**God's message is offensive to some
(We should not be unnecessarily offensive).**

30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at {that} law. 32 Why? Because {they did} not {pursue it} by faith, but as though {it were} by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 just as it is written, "*Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.*"

- It is clear that Paul recognizes that Israel did not attain the righteousness of God because they did not believe. He does not attribute Israel's failure to God's choice but their choice. This will be clear in the chapter that follows.
- This passage makes a clear distinction between two paths to righteousness.

Righteousness via the Law Our righteousness The choice of many Jews Old Covenant	Righteousness via faith Christ's righteousness The choice of Christians New Covenant
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- What constitutes the offense of Christ? I Cor.1:23 “but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,”
 1. **Exclusive access to God.** (Lord) This is an affront to pluralism. We should not neglect or hide the fact that not all are included.
 2. **Universal moral standard.** (Truth) This is an affront to individualism. Any claim to external moral constraints will seem like an unhealthy encroachment on my personal soul. I can only be true to myself if I am free to define my own path.
 3. **Discrediting of human merit.** (Grace) This is an affront to pride of achievement. The Gospel of grace through faith, while offensive should not be displaced by a moral ethical agenda.
- What constitutes an unnecessary offense? I Cor.10:32 “Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.”
 1. **Lack or respect for others.** (Pride of privilege or achievement) This is an affront to God’s image in all people and proper manners. When our actions intentionally or unintentionally hurt others we are an unnecessary offense.
 2. **Moral Hypocrisy.** (poor personal discipline) This is an affront to what is recognized as good by all people. It is not only our selfish and shortsighted ethics but our lack of humility in acknowledging our failures that represent an unnecessary offense.
 3. **Disinterest in truth.** (Superficiality, dishonesty) This is an affront to walking in the light. When we have not recognition of or appetite for common truth, we become an unnecessary offense.
- How can the church “sugar coat” the Gospel? II Tim.4:3 “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires;”
 1. Excluding the offensive parts of the Gospel.
 2. Playing to the selfish interests of the audience.
 3. Letting the world’s culture define the agenda.
 4. Making false or inflated claims and promises.
- **Point: Disciples of Christ should not hide the offense of Christ and the cross nor should they create unnecessary offense.**