



# BE TRANSFORMED

THIS HANDOUT

BEING TRANSFORMED BY THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS CHAPTER NINE



FAST FACTS

## ROMANS CHAPTER 9

- St. Paul is pained and grieved by the spiritual state of the Jews.
- Isaac, Esau and Jacob, and Pharaoh are evidence that God has mercy on whom He has mercy, and hardens whom He hardens.
- It is wrong to criticize God's decisions regarding to whom He shows - or does not show - mercy.
- God mercifully calls all people into relationship with Him.
- According to St. Paul, some first century Jews were condemned for maintaining the Law while rejecting Christ, while some Gentiles were saved for faithfully turning to Christ.

### ON THE CD

- GENESIS 15
- AM I JEALOUS OF OTHERS?
- PASCHAL HOMILY
- A POTTER
- INTERACTIVE QUIZ
- MUCH MORE!

## ROMANS 9

The Apostle responds in Romans 9:1-6 to the accusation that he hates the Jews. He vows that he is telling the truth - even calling the Holy Spirit as his witness - when he says that he feels "great pain and continual grief" over the spiritual situation of his ethnic brothers and sisters (9:2). He wishes that any condemnation they may suffer for their attitudes and behavior could instead be leveled against him (9:3). He is proud of his heritage, because God gave to the Israelites tremendous blessings (Romans 9:4). St. Paul concludes with a reminder that Christ, the promised Messiah, is the eternally blessed God Who is over all (Romans 9:5).

Some first century Jews believed that, according to St. Paul, Jews had been separated from the love of God (thereby contradicting Romans 8:39). St. Paul responds, "It is not that the word of God has taken no effect" (Romans 9:6). In other words, God's promise to bless Israel is true and has taken effect. The problem is that people tend to misunderstand *who* is included in this promise: who is a *true* Israelite? St. Paul points out, "For they are not all Israel who are of Israel" (9:6), meaning that not every physical Jew is actually considered part of the Israel to whom God has been faithful in His promise.

If this seems baffling to you, imagine how this point struck first century Jews: "Of course all descendents of Abraham - those who are *of* Israel - are part of Israel! How could some ethnic Jews *not* be considered part of this people?" Verses 7-13 answer this question.

St. Paul begins his answer by returning to the example of our Righteous Forefather Abraham (see Romans chapter four). He states that people who are descended from Abraham - those who are physically or ethnically Jews - are the children of God, but rather those who are de-

## BE THANKFUL FOR LIFE

Fr. James Meena describes some of the things in life for which you can be thankful:

*Why don't we think in smaller terms since we ourselves are so small; the little things for which we ought to be giving thanks. Each morning to be thankful that He brought us to another day, like a ship through the night, and to dedicate to Him the newness of the day. When we look upon the faces of our loved ones, the members of our family, the abundance of our household, our tables literally groaning with food, the plenteousness; when we experience the freedom of our land, that we live in a nation in which we are free to express ourselves, free to worship God as we elect or not to worship Him at all if we choose that; get up in the morning and go to our automobile and just push a button to open the garage door, turn a key and the engine starts and we travel a distance from our home to our place of employment that our forefathers used to have to plan for a whole day to make the same journey; to come home at night to be greeted by warmth and love and security.*

*We have friends in our parish family who love us, who trust us, friends in the neighborhood with whom we have good fellowship. We have the opportunity to work and to support ourselves so that we don't need to be dependent upon anyone for our livelihood. We have the opportunity to educate our children. So much for which to be thankful.*



CONTINUE

scended from Isaac, and thus are the children of the promise (Romans 9:7-8). Abraham had a son, Ishmael, through natural means: he engaged in sexual relations with a slave woman, Hagar, and she conceived Ishmael (Genesis 16). Isaac, however, was conceived because God intervened and miraculously enabled Abraham's wife, Sarah, to conceive and give birth (Genesis 18:10; 21:1-7). This means that Ishmael was the "child of the flesh," whereas Isaac was the "child of the promise" (see Romans 9:9).

It is easy for people to read this point and immediately cry, "God is unfair! He shouldn't give special blessings to one person or group! Everyone should share equally in the blessings!" This objection in essence accuses God of being unrighteous: accusing God of being unrighteous is a terrible error (Romans 9:14). God is not required to equally bless all people - He instead says, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion" (9:15; see Exodus 33:19). His mercy and compassion are not dependent upon people desiring them, or even on people working desperately to earn them; He is free to bestow His mercy on whomever He chooses (9:16). A prime example of God's authority is the Pharaoh who opposed God's demand (through Moses and Aaron) to free the Israelites from slavery. St. Paul is able to conclude from Pharaoh's example that God "has mercy on whom He wills" (the Israelites, whom He mercifully freed from slavery when they had no other hope), and "whom He wills He hardens" (referring to Pharaoh, who is described in Exodus as having his heart hardened by God) (Romans 9:18).

Some readers might misunderstand God's mercy, believing that He should not have "hardened" Esau and Pharaoh so that they suffered their disastrous consequences - is that it leads to the accusation that God is unfair. "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will'" (Romans 9:19)? A first century Jewish reader might have read St. Paul's argument to this point and wondered, "If Esau and Pharaoh's sins were God's will, and were so important that He hardened Pharaoh precisely so that Pharaoh would sin, how can He condemn Jews for sinning? Hasn't God simply hardened Israel? God is acting hypocritically!"

St. Paul criticizes the arrogance (and ignorance) in such a statement. Who are we - mere humans, the creation of God - to criticize our Creator's actions (Romans 9:20)? We have no more right to criticize God's behavior than clay has the right to criticize the potter who molds it (9:21). He further explains that God has been extraordinarily patient with people who rebel against Him - the "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction" - in order to show His great mercy to those who faithfully worship Him (9:22-23). God not only has the right to condemn people who rebel against Him, but also that God has been infinitely patient with them during their rebellion. Now that they have rejected Jesus Christ, however, God is exercising His divine right to render judgment against those who reject Christ.

St. Paul now turns his attention to God's mercy and

those who are saved by it. God has called not only the Jews into a relationship with Him, but also the Gentiles (Romans 9:24). God gave special blessings to the Jews (9:4), and they have experienced the advantage of a special relationship with Him, but the call to relationship has mercifully been given to *all* people. St. Paul begins this section by quoting from Hosea 1:10 and 2:23, proving that God will call people Who were not His - the Gentiles - and make them His people (Romans 9:25-26). He also quotes several passages from the Holy Prophet Isaiah - 1:9; 10:22, 23; 13:19; 28:22 - to prove that God has saved Israel from total destruction for their sins by incorporating non-Jews into the blessed people of God (Romans 9:27-29). Israel's salvation is therefore not simply a reward for *past* faithfulness - Isaiah points out that Israel has been unfaithful - but instead is a merciful gift to those who are *currently* faithful to God.

According to St. Paul, the Jews were not observing the Law as part of a faithful, loving relationship with God; they instead believed that nominally following the rules obligated God to bless them (Romans 9:31-32). The Gentiles, however, attained to righteousness precisely because they knew that they were incapable of earning salvation; they instead humbly accepted the salvation that God mercifully offers them through Jesus Christ (9:30). Jesus Christ is the key to attaining "the righteousness of faith."



## THE MERCY OF GOD

St. Cyprian of Carthage teaches that we must rely on the mercy of God for the forgiveness of our sins:

*Let no man deceive himself, let none be misled. Only the Lord can grant mercy. Sins committed against Him can be cancelled by Him alone Who bore our sins and suffered for us, by Him whom God delivered up for our sins. Man cannot be above God, nor can the servant by any indulgence of his own remit or condone the graver sort of crime committed against his Lord, for that would make the lapsed liable to this further charge, that he knows not the words of the prophet: 'Cursed be the man that putteth his hope in man.'*