

He Calls Me Beloved Romans 9:24-29

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The Bible has many stories of incredible change of fortune. Joseph is brought from a horrific ancient Egyptian prison to stand before Pharaoh himself. Joseph accurately interprets Pharaoh's dream and is made the second highest authority in the kingdom. Mordecai is under a death sentence, yet through Esther is given authority over all the land. David goes from shepherd boy to giant slayer. Simon of Cyrene happens to walk into Jerusalem at precisely the moment the soldiers conscript him, and he will spend eternity with the distinction of carrying Jesus' cross. These stories of going from obscurity and poverty to honor and distinction are played out over and over again in stories of our culture too. There's something about a girl made queen or a slave made king. Rags to riches. From the lowest to the highest.

Our series in Romans today urges us to realize that by God's grace we are living our own amazing story of spiritual rags to riches. Let's quickly review. Paul transitions in Romans 9 from the wonderful assurances of God's sovereign love in Romans 8 to God's sovereign grace in Romans 9. What about ethnic Israel and the Old Covenant? They have incredible privileges which he lists in 9:1-5. So why aren't they all saved? Paul's answer is that from the beginning God has distinguished in the application of his grace. Isaac/Ishmael. Jacob/Esau. Moses/Pharaoh. From the Patriarchs to the Exodus there were those whom God saved and those whom he did not, even among Abraham's descendants. Why? *"So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy."* (Romans 9:16 ESV)

Since God is sovereign over salvation, what difficult questions might humans have? *That's not fair! And, why are we to blame?* Paul brings those up and answers them by saying salvation is not an issue of justice but an issue of mercy. We should be glad because if we want to make it a justice issue then we're all going to hell because that's what we all deserve. God sovereignly chooses to display his mercy and grace by choosing to save some, which, like the potter with clay, is his divine right. Why?

"...in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—" (Romans 9:23)

Behind both God's display of his justice and holiness in judgment, and grace and mercy in salvation is God's ultimate purpose, which is the full display of all his glory. We want to reduce God to the attributes we prefer, like love and kindness. God has so ordained salvation that it unveils the full spectrum of his divine perfections including the ones sinners don't prefer like wrath, holiness, and judgment. Here's our summary, **Salvation is all about him and salvation is about all of him.**

You will notice that 9:24 doesn't end with a period. The sentence goes on into 9:24 and our text is through verse 29:

"...even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea, 'Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.' "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: 'Though the number of the sons of

Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.’ And as Isaiah predicted, ‘If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.’” (Romans 9:24–29)

Here Paul answers the third question to God exercising his sovereignty in salvation. The first was, *that’s not fair!* The second question was, *then why are we to blame?* His third question is, *where is that in the Bible?* Who was most likely to ask about an Old Testament basis for divine election? The Jews. From here through the end of chapter 11, Paul speaks to the Jewish confusion regarding the scope of God’s mercy. He’s already shown in chapter 4 that God didn’t save Abraham because he was better than everyone else on earth. Even Abraham had to be justified by faith. But what about all his descendants? Do they get a free pass to heaven because of their DNA? And if God can lavish a Jewish believer with mercy, can he do the same for a non-Jew—a Gentile? Is ethnicity a barrier to God’s sovereign grace? Is salvation about race or about grace?

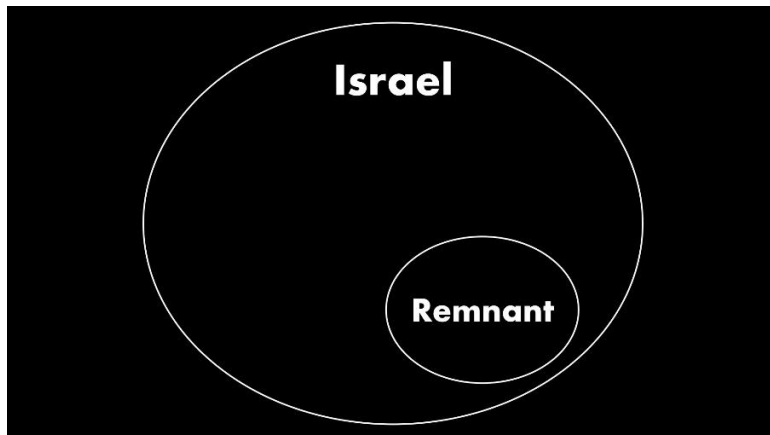
To get there, Paul quotes 4 Old Testament passages. Two say God’s plan includes the Gentiles and two that say Jewish DNA alone doesn’t save. Here is the delicate balance: he wants them and us to realize that salvation was never an ethnic thing even for descendants of Abraham. To the spiritually privileged, he gives a warning. To the spiritually disenfranchised, he gives hope.

Two Old Testament passages are from Hosea and two from Isaiah. I want to do Isaiah first and then focus on Hosea.

Warning the Spiritually Privileged (Romans 9:27-29)

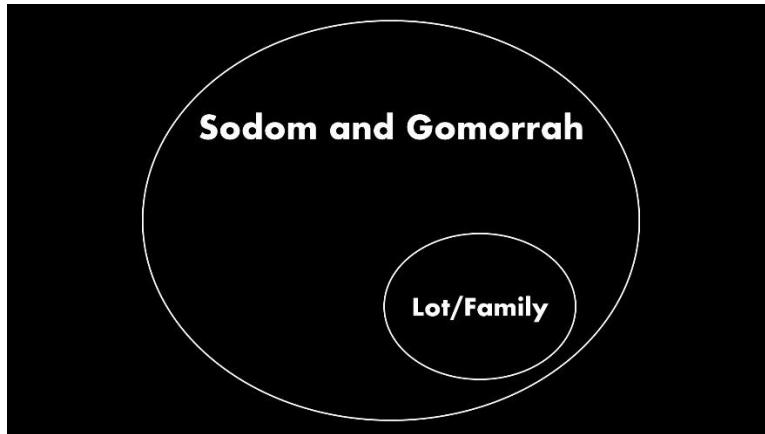
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Both quotes from Isaiah have the theme of remnant. What is a remnant? Go to a carpet or a fabric store and ask for a remnant. What will you get? A little portion of the original roll of carpet. A smaller section of the entire bolt of fabric. A remnant. We saw this earlier in Romans 9, *“not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.”* (Romans 9:6)



The first quote from Isaiah 10 says that though there are descendants of Abraham like the sand of the sea, only a remnant will be saved. That connects because in Genesis 12, God promised his descendants would be like the sand of the sea. It's a huge number of ethnic descendants. Are they all under God's grace? No. "*Only a remnant of them will be saved.*" (Romans 9:27) The revered prophet Isaiah himself said so.

The second quote refers to Sodom and Gomorrah. Why is this compelling? It continues the basic theme of some saved against the backdrop of God's expansive judgment and wrath.¹ Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by God for their wickedness, yet in his mercy, God rescued Lot and his family just before it happened.



What's the point? The Jews were spiritually privileged. They were descendants of Abraham and the patriarchs. They had the Mosaic covenant and the land and the legacy. You grow up thinking you are special in God's eyes because of your DNA, and then you read the Bible stories like you're the hero. You're on the winning team. You're with Lot, not with Sodom. Yet, even Isaiah agrees with Paul. DNA doesn't save you even if its Abrahamic DNA. No. God has no privileged children.

The application is an easy one for us here. Are you special? Were you raised in spiritual privilege? Do you still have your perfect Sunday school attendance certificate? Or worse, have you held on to your award for memorizing Bible verses for 40 years, like me (see below)?



¹ See Thomas Schreiner, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Romans*, p. 530.

If there's any question about my getting into heaven, I can just hold this up, right? I memorized 500 verses when I was in third grade, therefore, I *must* be going to heaven.

American evangelicalism drips with privilege as 3rd, 4th, and 5th generation Christian kids grow up in a Christian subculture where everything affirms them as special in God's eyes. Yet, what is also true? I think about my own youth group friends. I went a couple years to a Christian school. When I think about who was singing the songs and going to camp back then and who is following Jesus today, what word comes to mind? Remnant.

Northwest Indiana is loaded with residents with Christian legacy who have no current affection for Jesus or the church. I've often thought if we could evangelize just a small percentage of the thousands who once claimed allegiance to Jesus, that number alone would be massive.

Paul is issuing a warning to anyone who thinks spiritual family legacy alone saves. Tragically, hell will have many who will quote Bible verses to themselves and remember truth that could have saved them. But they trusted their legacy or their DNA instead of trusting Jesus. Might that be you?

He Calls Me _____ . (Romans 9:24-26)

"...even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea, 'Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" (Romans 9:24-26)

Here Paul addresses the opposite of spiritual privilege. *If the privileged think they are in with God because of who they are, the disenfranchised think they are out with God because of who they are.* Specifically, the Gentiles. NOT descendants of Abraham, NOT recipients of the Old Testament Scriptures, NOT Levitical temple worshippers. Can non-Jews who have lived immoral, prideful, violent, profane, worldly, and godless lives be saved? To use the Isaiah quote, can Sodom be saved? Can Gomorrah come under the grace of God? Why did Jonah flee from preaching to Nineveh? Was it not because he feared God's grace would come to the Assyrians?

Isn't that the fear of the spiritually privileged—that God would allow the racially different and spiritually impure into the club? Worse yet, allow them into heaven? Paul would have a hard time convincing them that the gospel was for Gentile sinners too. But Paul knew the Bible like few have and he reaches into the Jewish sacred text and story and brings up, of all people, *Hosea*.

Let's talk about the prophet Hosea. He has a book of the Bible named after him. He may be the most interesting story in the Bible you don't know about. Hosea was a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel. Centuries earlier under King Rehoboam, the whole kingdom of Israel was divided into the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom called Israel. The two tribes of the south were named Judah. Hosea was a prophet in the northern kingdom shortly before God's judgment fell on them with the coming of the Assyrians in 722 BC.

God decided to make Hosea's own personal story a picture of God's mercy to a rebellious Israel. How? Hosea had a wife named Gomer. Gomer was a piece of work. She was chronically unfaithful and even turned to prostitution. Their marriage ended. God told Hosea

to remarry Gomer. We are not told that Gomer repented or went forward at a Billy Graham crusade or anything. Nothing. Simple obedience meant Hosea had to buy Gomer back out of prostitution. Hosea's living parable included even the names of his children. They have three children together and God tells Hosea what to name them. Jezreel is the girl and they had two sons; the first is named "Not Loved" and the second is "Not My People."

Imagine that. A child named Not Loved. *"Hey Not Loved! Even your Daddy doesn't love you. He named you Not Loved!"*

"He did it 'cuz God told him to."

"Yeah, right!"

"Hey Not My People! Is that your name? Really? Your Momma and Daddy weren't very proud of you! They named you Disowned. That's hilarious!"

Not Loved. Not My People.

Why would God do this? Hosea's life was a living parable of God's relationship with Israel. Unfaithful Gomer was a picture of Unfaithful Israel. His children were a picture of God's rejection of Israel. Not mine anymore. Not loved.

It reminds me of the lyrics to Michael Jackson's song, *Billie Jean*. *"Billie Jean is not my lover./ She's just a girl who/ claims that I am the one./ But the kid is not my son.../She says I am the one,/ but the kid is not my son."*² Hosea's story is as messy as any urban legend.

It is these names that Paul keys in on, and shows us a dramatic change of name and status.

"As indeed he says in Hosea, 'Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" (Romans 9:25) This is a prophecy in which God speaks through Hosea of a future time when God will once again pursue Israel as Hosea pursued and remarried the unfaithful Gomer. He will say to those who are Not My People, you are now *my people* and to those who are Not Loved, you are *my beloved*.

Paul applies the Hosea prophecy to the Gentiles and identifies us as NOT loved and NOT my people. Yet, like with Israel, since God is sovereignly free to save whomever he wills, even Gentiles can go from Not His People to being *his people* and Not Loved to being called by God *Beloved*.

He concludes in verse 26 with a third designation, *"sons of the living God."* There are three complete and shocking changes of status and identity for Gentiles before Almighty God. Not Loved, now *loved*. Not My People, now *my people*. Not My People, now *my family*. Loved. Welcomed. Adopted.

The redemptive point is that there is a wideness to God's love and mercy. Far wider than any suspected. Even Jesus' disciples were slow to realize the scope of God's mercy. I think many still are. Because God is sovereign in salvation and infinite in his mercy, this means his love is free to extend into the hearts of the worst of sinners. Like Hosea loving the prostitute Gomer and marrying her, God's scandalous grace saves the least expected and the most unworthy.

Scandalous in that by faith in Jesus we don't move from Not Loved to tolerated but to the complete other end of the spectrum. From Not Loved to *Beloved*. Not Welcomed to *fully*

² Michael Jackson, "Billie Jean," © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC

accepted. From Orphans to *sons and daughters of God*. How? In the words of one theologian, because it's "*grace, not race*." (N.T. Wright).³

In our world, how do people go from being Not Loved to *Beloved*? It doesn't happen often if ever. In our world it always flows the opposite way. People very easily go from Loved to Not Loved. People we once liked, trusted, and loved, betray us or stab us in the back. Their status quickly changes in our hearts. They go from loved to hated. We easily and naturally flow from love to hate. What we hardly can do is go from hate to love. That feels to us like swimming up a waterfall. At best, we can go from hate to tolerate.

Perhaps that's a new word. *Tolerhate*. I tolerhate her. Are there any people at your family reunions that are tolerhated? Lots of family relationships end up there. Lots of friendships do too. That's human nature. But to go from Not Loved to *Beloved*, that's superhuman. Indeed, it is divine.

He calls me *Beloved*. I was Not Loved but when I receive his offer of forgiveness by faith in Jesus' full and complete work on the cross, then forever I am *be-loved*. The verb is in the passive tense. It is something that is done to us. *Beloved*. God could have said, *Not Loved is Now Loved*. No. Not Loved is *be-loved*. In Christ, we are *be-loved*, *be-mercied*, *be-justified*, *be-graced*, *bewildered* that we are *Beloved*. Think of it, Christian, the Most High God of heaven calls you *Beloved*.

The Love of God. The scale. The scope. The wideness. The grace of God's sovereign saving love. As the hymnwriter says it,

*"The Love of God is greater far/ than tongue or pen can ever tell./ It goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell./ The guilty pair, bowed down with care/ God gave His Son to win./ His erring child He reconciled/ and pardoned from his sin."*⁴

Whether you are spiritually privileged or spiritually under-privileged, disadvantaged, broken and out on the margins, hear God's Word today: God will call Not My People, *my people*. Not Loved, *Beloved*. How? The gospel "*is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the [Gentile]*." (Romans 1:16) Put your faith and trust in Jesus, God's Son and Savior of all who believe in him. A few verses later it says, "*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*" (Romans 10:9)

And if you are already a Christian, revel and wonder that the wideness of God's sovereign mercy reached you and changed you from *Not Loved* to *Beloved* forever and ever. Amen.

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³ N.T. Wright, Source Unknown.

⁴ Frederick Martin Lehman, "The Love of God is Greater Far," © 1923, Ren. 1951 by Hope Publishing.