

BUT THAT ISN'T FAIR!, ROMANS 9:16-29

Pax Romana 23

Intro: We have a lot more freedom than in the time period that Paul wrote his letter to the Christians in Rome around AD57. In those days Christians numbered only about 2500, were considered a problematic sect of the Jews, were sold as slaves, and fed as bait to tigers for entertainment in the Roman coliseum. Very few of us have been sold as a slave by someone stronger just because we believed that Jesus is alive! I'd like to remind us today that it was the faith of those early followers of Jesus Christ that gave us the privileges we blew up fireworks over this past week. Noah Webster, a revolutionary soldier later known as the "Schoolmaster to America," wrote a ***History of the United States*** in 1832. In it, he boldly stated: "The religion which has introduced civil liberty, is the religion of Christ and his apostles, which enjoins humility, piety and benevolence; which acknowledges in every person a brother, or a sister, and a citizen with equal rights. This is genuine Christianity, and to this we owe our free constitutions of government."

We celebrated the 242 anniversary of that freedom this week. The Fourth of July. Independence. Freedom. The New World. The land of opportunity. The place where you can stake a claim. We can do what we want. We can be who we want. No king of England can tell us what's what anymore. Burst all chains that hold you back. Take someone, anyone, to court. Be supplied a lawyer if we cannot afford one. Play the free market, make some demands and get whatever we can for our supply. Don't get me

BUT THAT ISN'T FAIR!, ROMANS 9:16-29

Pax Romana 23

wrong. Beauty and possibility are birthed in such freedoms as we enjoy. But just as the corn can grow in good soil, so can the thistle. The irony is that unbridled freedom can yield the healthy thistles, as well as healthy corn. Today is a word of caution as to how we assess the lives we have and the freedoms we've been given. Paul's perspective in Romans 9 addresses this indirectly.

1. No one owes me a good life. My parents don't owe me it. The city doesn't owe me it. The State doesn't owe me prosperity. And neither does God owe me a good life. I am in no position to demand life, liberty or happiness from God or anyone else. Again, don't misunderstand. I am highly in favor of all these things, as I expect you are. I believe they are good and right, but...

A. We must be careful when we speak of our rights. Tread humbly on the path of liberty. Why? Because these concepts are easily distorted. Because of our proud surety that we deserve a break, or that the world owes us a chance, we have mutated the gift of liberty into the freedom to redefine the sexes, reimagine marriage, decide who may live to birth or beyond. We herald the school boy wiser than his parents, and our feelings as more important than our vows. We are free! We have rights! Our pride keeps us from a holy perspective.

B. It was Israel's assumption that God owed them, as if God were required to save them all. If you were and Israelite, you were the chosen. But we saw last week that our heritage doesn't

BUT THAT ISN'T FAIR!, ROMANS 9:16-29

Pax Romana 23

get us salvation. Heritage gives blessings, but the respectable concept of blessings (life, liberty, freedom) can easily mutate into the disrespectful concept of entitlement. It happens all the time.

For example, lots of children assume they are entitled.

1) A High School child sees all his peers driving their "own" cars and demands of dad that he be provided equal luxury. It seems his *right* when assuming that he *should* have what all other people have. (This is not what the founding fathers meant by "pursuit of happiness"). When the parents provide said vehicle he goes places they do not approve of at hours of the night they think unhealthy, the child claims it is his rights, because it's "his time", and "his car", sometimes even purchased with "his money". This is a ridiculous notion, or course, but many a parent is intimidated by these claims and retreats from their rightful authority. You see, these are not rights. They are gifts. Most teenagers in Nigeria do not have cars! So commonality does not make them a *right*. The son or daughter has not reimbursed the father or mother for long hours of babysitting, diaper changes, and feedings from years gone by. I can assure you these are quite expensive in your average nursing home. So in all fairness, the child is not owed anything. The child owes an unplayable debt! Further, the concept of the child having sovereign authority over "his money" is shaky at best. How was he enabled to live while collecting this money? Did he pay room and board? Supply his own food, clothes, housing, gas, utilities?

BUT THAT ISN'T FAIR!, ROMANS 9:16-29

Pax Romana 23

These provisions might be good, or normal, or even right in some ways. Is it *right* to feed and clothe, even moreso love, your children? Of course it is, but not based on deserving, or fairness; based on the belief that there is a God says it is right. Other countries and religions who do not believe in such a God and children suffer for it. Rome certainly did not. Something is right if there is a God that declares it so. But because something is declared right, or called a right, does not mean it is deserved. And this I think is the twist we have given it in our day, and our country. Our Declaration of Independence references, does it not? ("endowed by their creator with certain inalienable...rights). But these endowments are just that, gifts, not payments or debts.

2) Now as a second illustration let's take some other children; Israel. They were birthed through Abraham, and protected in the wilderness, and housed, fed, and blessed in the Promised Land, given freedom from their enemies all around. And those privileges we looked at earlier in chapter nine (v4-5) led them to expect automatic entitlement from God. Yet Paul says (v6) not all descended from Israel are Israel! Didn't God promise salvation to Israel, his chosen? Isn't God being unfair in choosing *some* of them? (That's the question in v6 & 14). And that's the proud entitlement question we ask when we decide we don't like the idea that God is sovereign over this world and may do what he wants. But God does not owe any of us anything. Rather he owns all of us and everything. God's sovereign ownership is the first reason

BUT THAT ISN'T FAIR!, ROMANS 9:16-29

Pax Romana 23

he is not unjust. (v15). His is the potter. We are clay. Not even pots. Clay. The potter may choose to form the clay into something "noble", say a porcelain cake plate, or he may choose to form the clay into something less noble, say a toilet tank lid. Either way the clay is clay. It has no say. It's not decider, or potter, or God, or anything but creation!

There's another error in our entitlement we have wrung out of our Declaration of Independence.

2. Do not demand what you deserve from God. Rather plead for mercy. The whole question of whether or not it's fair for God to elect or predetermine stems from the errant belief that we are all innocent and deserving. In reality no human person is innocent or deserving. Popular culture maintains that people are basically good and deserving. God's word reveals the opposite. The shock is really that God saves anyone at all for all of us actually *deserve* death. Notice Paul's careful language of mercy.

v15 Mercy presupposes that punishment is what we deserve!

Mercy by definition cannot be an obligation! Mercy is where you do not get the punishment you deserve. To say that it's unfair for God not to save everyone is to say that God's owes us all salvation. In reality he owes us damnation. No sin lives on into eternal life! That puts everyone under wrath already. Ever since our first parents, Adam & Eve (the only ones with a will free from sin), we have all been deserving of death, not life at all! Paul said this earlier.

BUT THAT ISN'T FAIR!, ROMANS 9:16-29

Pax Romana 23

"sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned-...the many died by the trespass of the one man, ...The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation,... by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, ... the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men,...through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners," Romans 5:12-19, NIV.

v16 Again Paul contrasts man's merit and desire not with God's obligation, but with mercy.

v17-18 The illustration of Pharaoh again highlights what word? "Mercy". [Lets pause on Pharaoh for a moment because he raises a crucial truth when it comes to God's sovereign choice to save. That truth is this: All blame for damnation is our own. All credit for salvation is God's.

In at least half a dozen places in the Exodus record it says that Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go (8:15, 19, 32, 9:7, 17, 34). In at least half a dozen places it also says God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he would not let the people go (4:21, 7:3, 9:12, 10:1, 20, 27). So which is it, or are they kind of the same thing? Who is responsible for Pharaoh being evil and fighting God. God does not author sin, but he does allow it. God's hardening was God's giving him over to the sin he would naturally chose without God's intervention (*Rom.1:24 "God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts"*). When we by our own nature want sin and chose it and God leaves us to our

BUT THAT ISN'T FAIR!, ROMANS 9:16-29

Pax Romana 23

own way, that is his hardening, and ours, passive on his part, active on ours.

In election God softens our hearts and gives us the faith to believe, and does not let us have what we choose. In hardening God simply passes over some and lets them have what they themselves chose.

James Kennedy illustrated it this way: "Here are five people who are planning to hold up a bank. They are friends of mine. I find out about it and I plead with them. I beg them not to do it. Finally they push me out of the way and they start out. I tackle one of the men and wrestle him to the ground. The others go ahead and rob the bank. A guard is killed, they are captured, convicted, sentenced to death...The one man who was not involved in the robbery goes free. Now I ask you this question: Whose fault was it that the other men died. ...Now this other man who is walking around free –can he say, "Because my heart is so good, I am a free man"? The only reason that he is free is because of me; because I restrained him. So those who go to hell have no one to blame but themselves. Those who go to heaven have no one to praise but Jesus Christ. Thus we see that salvation is all of grace from beginning to its end."

The whole concept of election, predestination, and God's ultimate and sovereign freedom is repulsive to many, I dare say. It just seems unAmerican. Perhaps part of it is the fact that most of us have become convinced God owes us life, liberty and happiness. Now then, how do we neglect God's

BUT THAT ISN'T FAIR!, ROMANS 9:16-29

Pax Romana 23

sovereign grace? Do we make demands on God? Most certainly. We set ourselves up as God whenever we as pots act as though we are the potter.

1) For example, whenever we disagree with God's commands we are sitting in judgement on God. When we sin we are in essence saying "Well, I disagree with you God. I think ___ is a good thing and that I should pursue it. You must be wrong."

2) We sit in judgement of God when we determine what we think of him based on our own convictions vs his own revelation. We say thing like, "I can't conceive of a God who would let anyone go to hell." -therefore, the God of the Bible must not be true because he's not as loving as I am. Or "I can't stomach the idea of a God who won't let me be me because my idea of love is permission and acceptance. Therefore the God of the Bible must not be true." People make all kinds of judgements over God like "God is going to save everyone no matter what they believe." or "There is no such thing as sin." Since when must God be defined by pots? Paul's quote about the potter comes from Isaiah 45:9 where two verses earlier God makes this claim:

"... from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things." Isaiah 45:6, 7, NIV.

Isaiah is showing that we *are not our own sovereign*. We are under authority of another! We are the ones who are accountable!

BUT THAT ISN'T FAIR!, ROMANS 9:16-29

Pax Romana 23

Don't ask for justice for if that's all you get you're in trouble. Ask for mercy. Don't demand God is accountable to you, for you are accountable to him. If we accept that there is truly a God, then we must also accept the things he says are truer than the things we say; the things he wants are better than the things we want; the choices he makes are wiser than the choices we would make.

Conclusion: No one deserves life. You didn't do anything to get it. You were created. No one deserves liberty. It comes as a blessing just as no one deserves nutrition. Its a wonderful thing but we have not earned it. And many people do not have it at any point in their lives. We don't deserve to have been born in America. We had nothing to do with it. You don't deserve to have a spouse who is loyal to you alone until you die. Nobody could ever deserve such an act of self-giving. You don't deserve the next iPhone upgrade, and I don't deserve a car instead of a horse. You don't deserve to have your nails done while others farm with their bare hands.

Once again it means that all that is good is of grace, and grace is of God. Grace is Jesus deserving life for us! From first to last, hope and salvation are gift. Prosperity, liberty, good life, freedom –these are undeserved gifts of grace. Let us humble ourselves and be grateful, and thank God for mercy through his Son.