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The Divine Prerogative

Romans 9.19-21

Series: The Pure Gospel

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The Village Church

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I. Introduction

- A. Jean and I are from Maryland
 - 1. And to say you are “from Maryland” that means that you know how to eat steamed crabs
 - 2. One of the prominent slogans you can see up in that mid-Atlantic region of the country is “Maryland is for crabs”
 - 3. But even that’s not enough to say you are “from Maryland”
 - a. You have to not only know how to eat steamed crabs
 - b. You actually have to eat them – at least occasionally
 - c. And you have to at least pretend to like them while you eat them
- B. Eating Maryland steamed blue crabs is monumental process in the culinary world – nothing else quite like it
 - 1. First – it’s messy
 - a. The best place to eat steamed crabs is outside
 - b. And most people cover whatever table they use with newspaper because the whole process is messy
 - 2. Second – it requires preparation
 - a. You need to have the right tools – like a paring knife and a wooden mallet
 - b. And you need to dress for the occasion – nothing fancy, that’s for sure
 - c. And wearing a bib is not a bad idea
 - 3. Third – you need to prepare what you will eat with the crabs
 - a. Corn on the cob is a favorite – why not, since it’s also messy
 - b. And dipping sauces like melted butter or apple cider vinegar should be ready to go
- C. Then, you dive in
 - 1. It takes some courage to do so
 - a. It’s a hands-on enterprise; you’ve got to man-handle the beast
 - b. But don’t worry – they don’t fight back; they’re dead since they’ve been steamed

2. You rip off the claws and legs
 - a. You can break off the outside of the claws and legs with your mallet and extract the meat
 - b. Sometimes you get a little meat; sometimes a lot, especially from the claws
 - c. The claws may require special pliers to break apart
 3. Then you break off the top shell, called the apron – might have to use the paring knife to pry it off
 - a. You remove the gills – they are not edible
 - b. And then you remove the gooey yellow stuff called the hepatopancreas
 - c. Some people actually eat the stuff – but, really, it's disgusting; throw it away
 - d. You can still be “from Maryland” if you don't eat that stuff
 4. Then you break apart what's left over from the crab with your hands
 - a. And one half at a time, you break open the segments and pull out the meat
 - b. And each time you pull some meat out of either the body of the crab or from the claws or legs, you eat the meat
- D. The result is really very tasty
1. But it's a lot of work
 2. In fact, the energy you use to open the crab and extract the meat is greater than the calories you can consume from eating the meat
 3. I think that if you ate crabs all the time, it would be a great way to lose weight

a.

- E. Just to prove that we are true Marylanders, here's a picture some years ago of our family eating crabs



- F. Truth be told, even true Marylanders can eat steamed crabs very often
1. Now, if somebody else did all that work to extract the meat and prepare it in the form of crab cakes or crab imperial – that's a whole lot easier
 2. But doing it yourself is required occasionally to be considered a true Marylander
 3. But not often
 - a. It's difficult
 - b. Time consuming
 - c. It's messy
 - d. Requires preparation
 - e. And there's a lot to clean up
 4. But in the final analysis, the result is delicious
- G. Studying Romans 9 reminds me of eating crabs
1. We've been studying Romans 9 since early March
 - a. And we've only had four messages on it
 2. We've been interrupted in our series
 - a. But, you know, that's probably a good thing

- b. Because if you ripped through Romans 9 all at once that would be like eating steamed crabs every week
 - c. And not even true Marylanders don't do that!
 - 3. Romans 9 is difficult
 - It requires preparation
 - b. You have to have the right approach and attitude
 - c. You have to be prepared to get your hands dirty
 - 4. But if you acquire the taste for Romans 9 – just like true Marylanders have to acquire the taste for crabs – you will find Romans 9 a rich mine of delicious truth
- H. So let's see what kind of mess we can get into today!

II. The Gospel – So Far

- A. Since it's been a while since our last Romans 9 message, we do need to take some time to put it in context
 - 1. That's part of the preparation necessary for the feast of Romans 9
- B. Romans 9 comes right after Romans 1-8
 - 1. And Romans 1-8 is about the Gospel of Christ
 - 2. Paul introduces the gospel in the first chapter
 - 3. **Romans 1:16–17** (ESV) —
 - a. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
 - b. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."
- C. Then Paul unfolds the essential element of the gospel
 - 1. The need for the gospel is laid out in the first three chapters
 - 2. The human condition is such that humans by nature suppress the truth about God in unrighteousness and are under the wrath of God
 - a. God is genuinely and righteously angry about His human subjects rejecting His reign and rule
 - b. Humans are sinners by nature and by practice – every single one of us!
 - c. We lack righteousness necessary for fellowship with God and for the enjoyment of God
 - 3. But God Himself has provided the righteousness we need for our salvation
 - a. That righteousness is in Jesus Christ
 - 4. **Romans 3:21–22** (ESV) —
 - a. 21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—

- a.
- b. 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe....
- 5. And then Paul recounts the wonderful blessings that come to all those who genuinely trust Jesus for their salvation
 - a. Peace with God
 - b. Access to God
 - c. Saved from the wrath of God
 - d. Gift of the Holy Spirit to indwell the believer, enabling us to overcome the residues of our sinful nature and enable us to live the righteous life that God requires
- D. These are all glorious benefits that come with the gospel
 - 1. **Romans 8:1** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
 - 2. We are heirs of God, fellow heirs with Christ
 - a. Members of God's family
 - 3. The assurance of salvation
 - 4. **Romans 8:31** (ESV) —
 - a. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?
 - 5. **Romans 8:35** (ESV) —
 - a. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?
 - 6. **Romans 8:37** (ESV) —
 - a. 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
 - 7. **Romans 8:38–39** (ESV) —
 - a. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,
 - b. 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. E. That is the glorious gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!
 - 1. But that is only the gospel – so far
 - a. There is more to the gospel than that
 - b. And that's why the book of Romans doesn't end with Chapter 8!
 - 2. The gospel continues with Chapters 9-11, which details how this gospel relates to the Jewish people
 - 3. And then with Chapters 12-16, which demonstrates how the gospel is to be applied to our lives individually and corporately as a community of believers

III. Gospel Anguish

- A. So, as we recall, as Paul begins to explore how the gospel relates to the Jewish people, he opens Chapter 9 in anguish
 - 1. In fact, “great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart”
- B. And for what could Paul’s heart be so broken?
 - 1. It’s because his own people – his Jewish kindred – by and large have not responded to the gospel
 - 2. He’s so broken up over it that he says...
 - 3. **Romans 9:3** (ESV) —
 - 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.
 - 4. Paul would do anything if it would mean that his kindred, the Jewish people, would respond to the gracious offer of salvation in Messiah Jesus

IV. God’s Word and the Children of the Promise

- A. But that raises some troubling questions that need to be addressed in order for the gospel to have its full impact
- B. Does the fact that most of the Jewish people in Paul’s day have rejected the gospel – does that mean that the word of God has failed?
 - 1. Does that mean that the promises of God for the Jewish people go unfulfilled?
- C. Paul’s answer is, of course, no!
 - 1. And his reasoning is then laid out for us
- D. **Romans 9:6–7** (ESV) —
 - 1. 6 ... For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,
 - 2. 7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”
- E. And then he goes on to explain that the critical issue in understanding who are the true recipients of the promises of God is not the physical descent of the Jewish people
 - 1. But the children of the promise
- F. **Romans 9:8** (ESV) —
 - 1. 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.
- G. He goes on to give two examples
 - 1. The examples of the children of Abraham and Sarah, and the children of Isaac and Rebekah
 - 2. Isaac was the child of the promise
 - a. Abraham’s first born child – Ishmael – was not

- a.
- b. Ishmael was Abraham and Sarah's vain attempt at a human solution to Sarah's barrenness
- c. But Isaac was the one who was favored
- d. He was the child of the promise

V. **Election and Objection**

- A. The second example – the children of Isaac and Rebekah – was also used
 - 1. And Paul uses that example to establish the sovereignty of God in election
 - 2. A doctrine that has created great controversy in the church over the centuries
 - 3. But a doctrine that Paul clearly teaches
- B. **Romans 9:10–13** (ESV) —
 - 1. 10 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac,
 - 2. 11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— 3. 12 she was told, "The older will serve the younger."
 - 4. 13 As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."
- C. These were two children, from the same mother and father
 - 1. Twins, in fact
 - 2. Who were chosen – one for grace and favor, and the other not
 - 3. Based not on anything that they had done
- D. Why?
 - 1. "... in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls"
- E. That, of course, raises an objection
 - 1. We would say, "That's not fair!"
 - a. "God, how could you make a choice of one over the other not based on anything in either one of them?"
 - 2. Paul puts the question this way:
 - 3. **Romans 9:14** (ESV) —
 - a. 14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part?...
 - 4. In other words, "God, that's unjust!"
- F. Paul's answer is one that, if you're a true believer in Jesus, is that little nugget of meat that is so flavorful when you finally extract it from the shell
 - 1. That it will forever change your understanding of the nature and character of God
- G. **Romans 9:15–16** (ESV) —
 - 1. 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

2. 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.
- H. Paul quotes the OT – and every aware Jewish person would have – or should have – known this passage
1. That God shows mercy and compassion on whom He will
 - a. That He alone has the right to be merciful to some and not to others
 2. So that salvation depends on God
 - a. Not on any human will or exertion
- I. We saw that very truth expressed in the gospel of John
1. **John 1:12** (ESV) —
 - a. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,
 2. **John 1:13** (ESV) —
 - a. 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.
 3. Your being a child of God is not dependant on your flesh and blood, nor on your will

Your being a child of God is dependant on God alone
 4. When you think about your own salvation, you don't thank yourself
 - a. You don't thank yourself for the brilliance of your decision to follow Jesus
 - b. No – you fall on your face before God and thank Him alone
 - c. Thank Him for His mercy
 5. And that's what Paul is teaching
 - a. And that's what Moses learned when God told him, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and compassion on whom I have compassion"
- J. Now you might say, "Doesn't that deny free will?" 1. Absolutely not – every human being has a will
 - a. But God's decision to show mercy doesn't depend on your will
2. You have a will
 - a. And you always choose according to your will
- K. But let's back up for a moment and remember something 1. On whom does God show mercy and compassion?
2. God only shows mercy and compassion on sinners
 - a. That's why we just spent some time reviewing the earlier parts of Romans
 - b. Chapters 1-3 are clear
 - c. Human beings are by nature sinners
 - d. No one is good – not one

- a.
- e. No one seeks for God
- L. So when God passes over someone – He lets them do what they want
 - 1. And they choose – freely – to go their own way
 - 2. Hell is filled with people who say “My will be done”
 - 3. And for those on whom God shows mercy – those are also sinners
 - a. But God, as a gift, gives us a desire, a longing, for Jesus that we never even knew we had
 - 4. **Ephesians 2:8–9** (ESV) —
 - a. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith.
 - b. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,
 - c. 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.
 - 5. And believer, with that gift – the gift of faith – you exercised your will also
 - a. And you chose Jesus

VI. **Finger-pointing**

- A. So now we come to our text for this morning (sermon begins here!)
 - 1. And it is where, for some of you, it will get messy
 - a. Even more messy than eating crabs
 - 2. And the reason it gets messy, is that we humans have a great capacity for making a mess of things
 - a. For taking that which is simple, and making it complicated
 - b. And in the process, for making a mess of it
 - 3. And generally, the human impulse when things don’t go the way we want them to go, is to blame somebody else
 - a. To point fingers
 - b. To disclaim all responsibility
 - c. That’s it’s not our fault; that we’re not to blame!
 - d. We see it all the time in the media – how rare it is for any of the famous and influential in our world to take responsibility for anything
 - e. But if we’re honest, we see it in ourselves also
- B. And that’s what happens in this passage when Paul teaches
 - 1. That it’s not about our works, about what we do
 - 2. That it’s not about us but about God
 - 3. That it doesn’t depend on us but on God who has mercy
 - 4. That God has mercy on whom He has mercy
- C. **The Question**
 - 1. **Romans 9:19** (ESV) —
 - a. 19 You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”
 - 2. If God is sovereign – that means I’m not responsible

- a. Why does God find fault with me?
- 3. Do you think that's a good question?
 - a. A lot of people do
 - b. In fact, a lot of theologians do
- 4. Now I was a university professor for 32 years
 - a. And I would always tell my classes, "Ask me anything – there's no such thing as a stupid question"
 - b. But every now and then – someone would ask a really stupid question!
 - c. But, I would restrain myself; I would never say, "That's a really stupid question"
 - d. I would go ahead and answer it
- 5. If God is sovereign, why does He find fault with me?
 - a. Is that a good question?

D. **The Answer**

- 1. Here's what Paul says
- 2. **Romans 9:20** (ESV) —
 - a. 20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? ...
- 3. "Who do you think you are, asking a question like that?"
- 4. You know, the way people ask questions of God reveals their character
- 5. There are ways people talk to God – and even talk back to God
 - a. The Psalms are full of questions that the psalmists ask God
 - b. Challenging questions
 - c. Questions that challenge why God does certain things
- 6. But always in the psalms the questions come from believing hearts
 - Distressed hearts
 - b. Confused hearts
 - c. But believing hearts
- 7. But when you say, since God is sovereign, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?"
 - a. That's the question of a rebel
 - b. That's the question of a person who can't stand that God is supreme
 - c. That's the question of an unbeliever
- 8. Now you may be a believer in Jesus and ask that question
 - a. But when you do, you're asking the question of a rebel – of one who chafes under the sovereign authority of God
- 9. "Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?"
 - a. The contrast is clear

- a.
- b. Who are you – O **man**; O creature; O mere mortal; O mere human whose very existence, whose very breath at this very moment, depends on favor of the Creator?
10. Who are you, O man, to answer back to **God**?
 - a. To the Creator of the universe
 - b. To the One who can name every star in the expansive universe in which you, O man, are a mere speck of dust in the grand scheme of things unless God had invested you with His image
 - c. To answer back to the One on whom you depend this very moment for even the slightest bit of comfort and consolation
11. Who are you, compared to God?
12. Boice: It is ludicrous for creatures as small, ignorant, impotent, and sinful as we are to question the propriety of God's moral acts. We may not understand what God is doing in any particular case. In fact, most of the time we will not, because "'my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD" (**Isaiah 55.8**). We can ask God to explain what he is doing, if he will. But for us to suggest that he is wrong in what he does is patently absurd.

E. **The Illustration**

1. Then Paul goes on to illustrate this contrast between man and God
 - a. And he goes back to the scripture for this illustration
 - b. An illustration that would be very familiar to the Hebrews
2. **Romans 9:20–21** (ESV) —
 - a. 20 ... Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?"
 - b. 21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?
3. Now Paul uses the OT for this illustration – but it's hard to pin down exactly which OT exactly
 - a. That's not because the OT doesn't directly address the issue
 - b. In fact, it's the opposite – there are four passages in the OT which lay out the same truth
4. **Isaiah 29:16** (ESV) —
 - a. 16 You turn things upside down!
 - b. Shall the potter be regarded as the clay,
 - c. that the thing made should say of its maker, "He did not make me";
 - d. or the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"?
5. **Isaiah 45:9** (ESV) —

- a. 9 “Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots!
 - b. Does the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’ or ‘Your work has no handles’?
- 6. **Isaiah 64:8** (ESV) —
 - a. 8 But now, O LORD, you are our Father;
 - b. we are the clay, and you are our potter;
 - c. we are all the work of your hand.
- 7. But Jeremiah does into even greater detail
- 8. **Jeremiah 18:1–11** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD:
 - b. 2 “Arise, and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.”
 - c. 3 So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel.
 - d. 4 And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do.
 - e. 5 Then the word of the LORD came to me:
 - f. 6 “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.
 - g. 7 If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it,
 - h. 8 and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it.
 - i. 9 And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it,
 - j. 10 and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it.
 - k. 11 Now, therefore, say to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: ‘Thus says the LORD, Behold, I am shaping disaster against you and devising a plan against you. Return, every one from his evil way, and amend your ways and your deeds.’
- 9. The application from Jeremiah is striking, isn’t it?
 - “Return, everyone from his evil way, and amend your ways and your deeds.”
- 10. But then, look at the response of the people that Jeremiah records:

a.

11. **Jeremiah 18:12** (ESV) —

a. 12 “But they say, ‘That is in vain! We will follow our own plans, and will every one act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.’

12. So you see, the question one asks betrays the character of the one who asks
it

13. Since God is sovereign, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”

a. The question of the stubbornness of an evil heart

14. “Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?”

15. Instead of objecting to God’s sovereign action, maybe we should fear Him, turn from our wicked, selfish ways, cast ourselves on His mercy, a. And find Him to be the all-sufficient God

b. Who in grace alone has seen fit to draw us into His loving family

VII. **The Divine Prerogative**

A. Ultimately, this is really simple

1. He is God; I am not

2. He is God; we are not

B. This is all about what theologians have called the divine prerogative

1. God is the potter; we are the clay

2. God has the right to make us and mold us as He sees fit

C. And true believers will not find that to be a terror or a threat or something to abhor

1. True believers will find that to be a cherished truth

2. And we will say with the hymn writer... D. Have thine own way, Lord!

1. Have thine own way!

2. Thou art the potter,

3. I am the clay.

4. Mold me and make me

5. after thy will, 6. while I am waiting,

7. yielded and still.

E. 2 Have thine own way, Lord!

1. Have thine own way!

2. Search me and try me,

3. Savior today!

4. Wash me just now, Lord,

5. wash me just now,

6. as in thy presence 7. humbly I bow.

F. 3 Have thine own way, Lord!

1. Have thine own way!
2. Wounded and weary,
3. help me I pray!
4. Power, all power,
5. surely is thine!
6. Touch me and heal me,
7. Savior divine!

G. 4 Have thine own way, Lord!

1. Have thine own way!
2. Hold o'er my being
3. absolute sway.
4. Fill with thy Spirit
5. till all shall see
6. Christ only, always,
7. living in me!