

Romans 9:1-3 - The Attributes of God by Wayne Barber

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Romans 9:1-3

The Attributes of God

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

We are going into a very difficult passage of scripture, if you don't know that already. If you have read ahead, you realize that Paul shifts gears. He moves from our salvation, which we have in Christ Jesus, to the Jewish world, to Israel. And immediately there is a change here in his message.

I feel like it would be very important for us at this point to look at the attributes of God. If we don't understand God, the character of God, then it is going to be very difficult to grasp how He is going to do what Paul says in chapters 9, 10 and 11. From 8:35 through 9:5 there is a mood swing. You go from the pinnacle of joy and ecstasy when it comes to your salvation into the very depths of despair of 9:1-5.

Let's go back to 8:35-39. Verse 35 says, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" The love of Christ was demonstrated for us on the cross, the greatest act of love that has ever been seen on this earth. When Jesus died on the cross, He died to sin once for all, and what He did affects believers, not only now, but for eternity. So who shall separate us from the love of Christ? We have already seen that no man can bring a charge against God's elect that would threaten his security in what Jesus has done for him. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. No man can condemn us. There is not a way in the world that my sin and my

failure in this life can condemn me because Jesus is the one who justifies. He is the one who died for you and for me.

Then he goes on, "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Then he quotes out of the Old Testament as if to say, "Christians have been persecuted for a long time, but there is nothing people can do to you that can threaten your eternal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Nothing, nothing can separate you." He says in verse 36, "Just as it is written, 'For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'" This was said in the Old Testament. There is nothing new when it goes on now.

Verse 37 continues, "But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us." How can you overwhelmingly conquer? How can it be when you die of cancer? How can it be when people are martyred for the faith? How can they overwhelmingly conquer? Oh, he has already told you. First of all, whatever happens to me, no matter what it is, works together for my good, not the good that I can see but the good that God can see. He conforms me into the image of Christ Jesus. We overwhelmingly conquer. Life does not work against us. Life works for us. That is what he has been saying. But not only that, we overwhelmingly conquer when we get to Jesus one day and we look and see what He has done now, the finished product. When we have been glorified and given a resurrection body we look back and say, "We have overwhelmingly conquered."

He says in verses 38-39, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created things, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Now I want to tell you, it just doesn't get any better than that. When you come down through chapter 8, you ought to be just shouting, thanking God for all that He has done for you.

But you move from that pinnacle of joy and ecstasy of what God has done for us into the midst of despair in 9:1-5. It is incredible the mood swing that Paul goes through. Now why? Because you see, Paul is a Jew, a converted Jew. But as a converted Jew, he now understands what the Old Testament was teaching all along. He understands that the only way his Jewish brethren, the people whom he loves with all of his heart, can ever be justified is by faith in Jesus Christ and Him alone. And he is beginning to deal now with his people. And when he thinks of Israel, knowing that Israel has rejected Jesus as their Messiah, knowing the fact that they were His special people in the Old Testament, knowing all of these things, his heart turns from joy to sorrow as he realizes they are blinded. They cannot realize that Jesus is the Messiah, the one they have been looking for.

In 9:1 Paul says, "I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ, for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." Now he doesn't say, "I wish I was accursed." He is saying, "If it were proper, if it were even possible (and it is not), if somehow I could be the one separated from Christ and all of my brethren come to know Him, if I could do that, I would do that." He is expressing a grief that is in his heart for his people. He had his people so much on his mind that when he moved from that last verse of chapter 8, he realizes they have rejected the very Christ who offers us the salvation that is so wonderful.

But he is going to give hope for Israel in chapters 9, 10 and 11. You have to understand that God is not through with Israel yet. But before we get into this, we have to realize the integrity and the character of the God that we are dealing with. Before you can get into chapters 9, 10 and 11, you need to realize that, yes, Jesus is the only way. Paul says back in chapter 4 that Abraham had to be justified. How was he justified? He believed. In whom did he believe? The very same Christ we believe in Abraham believed in. The same method of salvation was in the Old Testament that is in the New Testament. They looked forward to a coming redeemer. We look back to a redeemer who has already come. It is the same Christ.

Paul understands that many of his brethren will perish and never, ever have everlasting life. But he also knows the promises that God has made to Israel in the Old Testament, and he wants to make sure that we understand the character of the God that is dealing with both Gentiles and Jews on this earth.

That is why I think it is very important that we start talking about the attributes of God. Who is this that we are talking about? What is God like? If you understand this, I think it will help you as we move carefully through chapters 9 through 11. There are three things I want you to see about the attributes of God. First of all, I want you to look at the fact that God is omnipotent. Now what does it mean to be omnipotent? It means to be all-powerful, that God can do anything. As much as we would like to be like God, we are not. This is why we have to be overwhelmed a little bit with the characteristic of who God really is.

If you look very carefully at 8:18-39, Paul has already introduced us to the fact that God is omnipotent. Look back in 8:18. Paul begins to describe an event, an event that God planned before the foundation of this world and has predetermined to carry through. It takes an omnipotent God to do this: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Now what is this glory that is to be revealed to us? Verse 19 explains. "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God." Now that term "sons" means fully grown sons, mature sons. You see, we are in a process. God is going to glorify us one day. We are being glorified right now, but it is not over yet. As a matter of

fact, He already sees us in the process.

In verses 28-30 say, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined [predetermined] to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

Now listen, we have not been glorified yet. We are being glorified, changed from glory to glory as Paul says, but it hasn't happened yet. That moment when Christ comes for His church and we are given a brand new resurrection body, that is the event he has been talking about up until this point. It takes an omnipotent God to pull this off, a God who can do all things, a God who is not limited in any way, shape or form.

Some people might question by saying, "But Israel has rejected Jesus as their Messiah. How can they as a nation ever come back to Him?" Listen, God can do anything. He is omnipotent. While we sit and try to figure out how God is going to do it, we don't know how God is going to do it. God is just going to do it. He is all powerful and He will what He says He will do.

Let's go back and ask Abraham about God's omnipotence. Turn to Genesis 18:14. Now this came up in Romans 4, and Paul dealt with this specific part of Abraham's life. Now we know what Abraham can do. Abraham can have a child by a handmaid who was named Ishmael. God came to Abraham when he was 99 years old. He says, "You are going to have a son." Abraham says, "I've already got a son named Ishmael." "No, you are going to have another son." "I can't have a son. I am past the years of child-bearing. My wife, she is 89 years old. Come on, God, you don't want me to be 100 years old when a child is born." God says, "Yes, and you are going to name him Isaac." They laughed. But they forgot that the word "Isaac" means laughter and God got the last laugh. One year later they have a son. Can God do anything?

Look in Genesis 18:14 where God spoke to Abraham and He said this, "Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." And history says that Isaac was born. If he hadn't been born, then there wouldn't have been a Jacob and Esau. Jacob had his name changed to Israel and had 12 sons, and there is your nation of Israel. A promise to Abraham, and God says it is going to happen. "Abraham, do you believe God can do anything?" He would be the first one on line to testify, "Do I believe it!" Hebrews 11 says that it was by faith that Sarah, past the years of childbearing was given ability to conceive and bear a child. God can do anything, friend. He can do anything.

Turn over to Jeremiah 32:27. There was no house of Israel at this time. Israel had been dissipated by the Assyrians, and the nation had split with ten nations to the north and two nations to the south, Judah and Benjamin. The tribe of Judah was still hanging in there, but they began to go by the way of Israel. Well, Jeremiah prophesied that they would go into captivity. Zedekiah didn't like that and so he just threw him in prison. He also prophesied they would be out in 70 years.

God had already spoken to Jeremiah and said, "Now listen, a guy is going come to you. He is going to come to you and sell you a farm. Now you better watch him." Now, remember, Jerusalem is under siege by the Babylonians. You don't sell land when you are under siege, because when you are under siege, you don't have any land to sell. But here is a man who says, "I have heard my crazy cousin and he is telling us that we are going into captivity and coming out in 70 years. I am going to sell him some property. If he really believes that, he will buy the land." God spoke to Jeremiah beforehand and said, "Buy the land. Buy it, whatever it costs." Sure enough, Hanamel, his cousin, comes to him in jail and says, "Hey, have I got a deal for you!" Jeremiah already knew he was coming. So he sells him a piece of land. Here is a country and a city under siege and he is selling him land because Jeremiah said they were going to be back in 70 years. So he figures if he buys the land, he will get it back and so, therefore, it is a good deal.

Then Jeremiah is talking to the Lord and in Jeremiah 32:27 God speaks to him to reassure him. Look at what God says to him. He says, "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; *is anything too difficult for Me?*" Oh, I love that! "Come on, Jeremiah! What is too difficult for Me, son? Is anything too difficult for Me? I am the God of all flesh." Ask Abraham! Ask Jeremiah!

Let's go to Job 42:2 and ask Job. Job was going through some very difficult days. In the midst of losing everything, Job makes a statement. Job 42:2 says, "I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted."

In other words, nothing can stop what God puts into motion. He is omnipotent, folks. We are dealing with an omnipotent God, an all-powerful God. What God plans, what God purposes, no man is going to get in the way of. "Well," you say, "I don't understand how Israel can come back into His focus." Friend, you don't have to understand it. We have a God who is all-powerful, and no one stands in His way.

Now in the midst of this there is another characteristic that just flows right out of the fact that He is omnipotent and that is He is faithful to do what He said. God has given us His word and God, because of His integrity, says, "I will do what I said I will do. I am omnipotent. I can do all things, but I am faithful to do what I have said I will do." Deuteronomy 7:9 says, "Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those

who love Him and keep His commandments."

Think about Israel and all the covenants that God made with them. Think of the everlasting covenant that He made with them. When you realize all this you may still wonder, "Well, they have rejected Christ, how can that ever change?" Forget it. God is faithful to what He said that He will do. Second Timothy 2:13 is a wonderful verse that sort of surrounds this. It says, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself." Now this is the God that we serve. He can do anything. Whatever He wants to do, He can do. But He is a God of integrity. He is faithful to do what He said He will do. He keeps His word. And in that faithfulness of keeping His word, we also find out that He is righteous in what He does.

God is not impersonal and impassionate towards His creatures. You see, whatever He does is always right. Why? Because He is a righteous God. Psalm 89:14 says, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Thy throne; Lovingkindness and truth go before Thee."

You say, "Well, there is no justice on this earth." Hang on. We have a just God and there will be justice on this earth. There will be righteousness. His kingdom will be known as a kingdom of righteousness when it is set up on this earth. So we know that God will do exactly what He says He will do. It says in Number 14:18: "The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations." In other words, He does what is right. There is no way that men are going to get away with sin. As a matter of fact, Jesus is coming one day to set up His kingdom to make sure that sin is gotten rid of and that His kingdom of righteousness prevails.

So, when it comes to chapter 9 and we are dealing with Israel and with a God who understands everything that is going on, Paul knows exactly what He has told them. He knows exactly what He has promised them. It looks in our mind that there is no way He could bring them around. There is no way that He could bring them to understand that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. When we come to that, we have to remember that He is an omnipotent God. He can do anything. He is faithful. And will He change? You know, when we read some of the covenants He has made with Israel, you are going to realize that what He says is pretty profound. And what He says is something that nothing can break. Is God going to just forget the covenants He made with Israel? Is He just going to forget this whole thing? Or He is going to go the other route? Listen, God is a God of integrity. He is immutable. Do you know what that means? It means His character is unchangeable. Who He is can never change. What He is like can never change. So if God ever tells you something, take it to the bank because God is faithful to do what He says He is going to do. He always does what is right. When men do not understand it, God does understand it.

Listen to His character in Psalm 102:27: "But Thou art the same, and Thy years will not come to an end." Malachi 3:6 says, "For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed." Hebrews 13:8 reads, "Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday and today, yes and forever." He never changes. So what we have here is an omnipotent God. He is all-powerful. A God who is not only omnipotent, all-powerful, but He is faithful. He has told us what He is going to do and He is faithful to do what He says He is going to do. But He is also a God who is righteous. He always does what is right. You never have to worry about that. It may appear to be injustice to us, but we have to remember the character of the one who is carrying it out. Then we have one who is immutable, which means that His character never changes. This is the God we deal with as we go from chapters 9 to 11 of Romans. We know that He has not changed.

The second thing Paul has introduced us to is the omniscience of God. What does it mean to be omniscient? To be omniscient means that God knows everything. Now that is not real good for some people to know. God is not in retirement, sitting on the back porch of a big mansion in heaven, missing half of what is going on down here. God knows everything. He is not just all-powerful, but He is omniscient. Not only can He do everything, He knows everything.

You ask, "Well, where were we introduced to that in Romans?" Well, in Romans 8:29 where it says, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined." Listen, you have to understand this. You say, "Well, I don't understand it." Well, that is true, we can't understand it fully. If we did, God would be no bigger than our brain. But before the foundation of the world, God had planned salvation for the ones He would create and already knew which ones would receive His salvation.

Later in Romans Paul says, "When the fulness of the Gentiles has come in." Well, who knows when the fulness has come in? He does. He knows everything. Now you have to understand who you are dealing with in Romans 9, 10 and 11. Not only does He have the power to bring about what He has promised to Israel, but secondly, He knows. He knows everything that He needs to know. Nobody needs to remind Him of anything. He is omniscient.

Look over in Romans 11. His foreknowledge not only had to do with believers such as you and me, but it had to do with the nation of Israel, His people, the nation of Israel of the Old Testament. Romans 11:2 says, "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew." Now what is the context? Who is he talking about? He goes on, "Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?" The context is clear. God foreknew Israel. God foreknew you and

me. You say, "That is hard." Yes, it is, because we are not God. He omniscient. He knows everything.

As a matter of fact, for those of you who are uncomfortable with that, let me make you a little more uncomfortable. Let me let you see what He really knows about you. Look in Psalm 139:1-6: "O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up; Thou dost understand my thought from afar. Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down, And art intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O Lord, Thou dost know it all. Thou hast enclosed me behind and before, and laid Thy hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it." No wonder He and He alone knew beforehand who it would be that would receive salvation. He knows everything.

He knows who will be in that one-third of Israel, as Zechariah talks about, in the last days in the last part of that seven-year period of time known as the 70th week of Daniel, who will finally repent and realize that Christ is their Messiah. He already knows that. He knows the remnant that will come in even before that. He knows the Apostle Paul. He knew him. He knows the others that will come in. God knows everything.

In the midst of all that knowledge, He is also long-suffering. God is willing to wait as long as it takes and put up with whatever He has to put up with to bring about the things that He is determined to bring about. Look over in 2 Peter 3:9 where Peter is talking about the fact that God is long-suffering. In the midst of all of it, He is long-suffering. The word long-suffering is *makrothumia*. It means He is willing to wait it out. Whatever it takes, He is willing to wait it out. "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." God wants nobody to miss it. Although He already knows who it will be who will receive it, He wishes that none will ever miss it. He is continuously long-suffering even in what He knows.

He is also merciful. Think about the character of God. He is an omnipotent God who could squash us with a look, but He is a God who is faithful. He is a God with integrity who does what He says He will do and who does right. He is a God who is immutable and knows everything, but He is a God with long-suffering. And in the midst of being long-suffering, He is also merciful. Look in Psalm 62:12: "And lovingkindness is Thine, O Lord, for Thou dost recompense a man according to his work." And Psalm 89:14 reads, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Thy throne; lovingkindness and truth go before Thee." Psalm 116:5 adds, "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yes, our God is compassionate."

Have you ever experienced the mercy and the longsuffering of God, even though you knew He knew some things about your life that weren't good? Yes, that is the kind of God we serve. Some people say, "Look at Israel. They could care less about Jesus being the Christ." Hey, God is long-suffering and merciful, and God will bring about His promises that He has made to Israel. You have to know this about Him.

Thirdly and finally, God is also omnipresent. He is everywhere. We saw a little bit of this in Psalms. If I turn this way, He is there. If I turn that way, He is there. He is everywhere I go. Now, this is interesting. Do you mean that God can be working with Gentiles at the same time that He is working with the Jew? Why certainly! God is everywhere. God is not like us.

God is omnipresent. That means that right now in all the different time zones in the world, something is going on. God is working wherever it is. He is everywhere at all times. You say, "I don't understand that." I know. Neither do I. But this is what we need to start beginning to realize, God is bigger than our minds. He is omnipotent. He is omniscient. But He is also omnipresent. Proverbs 15:3 says, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good." Jeremiah 23:24 reads, "'Can a man hide himself in hiding places, so I do not see him?' declares the Lord? 'Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?' declares the Lord?"

Well, the Apostle John had an opportunity to see the fact that God is omnipotent, He is omniscient and He is omnipresent. Turn to Revelation 4. If you have never seen this in light of what is going on, you need to go back and reread it. For three chapters, Jesus comes down and reveals Himself to the Apostle John. It had been 65 years since John had heard or seen Him because he is an old man by now. He sees Him and is overwhelmed by Him. He faints when he sees Him because He is so glorious. God gives him a message for the seven churches of Asia Minor. Then look in 4:1: "After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard [Jesus], like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.'" In other words, "John, I can't explain it to you down there. There is no way in the world I can explain it to you down there. You are going to have to come up here and see what I see before you can understand what I am about to tell you. You come on up here. Let me give you some understanding about who it is you are dealing with here."

Well, he goes up. Verse 2 reads, "Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne." Now I want to tell you something, friend, that throne signifies where all the business that is taken care of, the orders are given. This is the control tower. Here is one sitting on the throne. Now watch what he sees.

"And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. And around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting,

clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. And from the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps for fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; and before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.' And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 'Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.'"

We are in the throne room, and there is worship going on. Listen, He is calling the shots, and they are bowing down before Him, praising the One who sits on the throne! What are you going through that you need to get a glimpse of the omnipotent, the omniscient, the omnipresent God? Nothing escapes Him. He knows what is going on. He is bringing events to pass.

Well, in chapter 5 and verse 1 it says, "And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals." Now remember, in Romans 8 Paul has been talking about an event called the glorification of the sons of God, the revelation of the sons of God. Talking about that event automatically made him think about his people. Immediately he comes back to his people in chapter 9. That event, when Jesus comes for His church, starts a series of events. That book, that is seven-sealed, is a book like no book that has ever been written. A seal has to be broken and when it is broken, an event takes place. In the middle of chapter 12 while still in the middle of that book, when it is talking about the seven seals and those seven events, it talks about Israel. It calls her a woman and talks about how the woman runs and flees to the mountains for three and a half years. At the end of that three and a half years Israel finally turns and realizes that Christ is her Messiah. John is trying to say something here. All of Israel will not be saved. No. There will be many who reject Christ, but God has not forgotten what He promised to them and He is causing the events to come together.

When you can't see it happen down here, don't ever think for a second that it won't happen. If God said it will happen, God will cause it to happen. He is omnipotent. He is omniscient. And He is omnipresent. He is absolutely in control of what is going on. It might help you before we get into chapters 9, 10 and 11 of Romans just to read two passages of scripture. Look over with me in the book of Jeremiah. I want you to see what God promised to Israel. Paul is remembering this. Paul knows that many of his brethren right now will reject Christ and die in their sins. But he also knows that there is still hope for Israel, that there is a remnant of people who are coming to know Christ. He knows that. But I want you to see this. In Jeremiah 34:14 He promises them something. "Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will fulfill the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. In those days Judah shall be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she shall be called: the Lord is our righteousness." For thus says the Lord, "David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to prepare sacrifices continually." And the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, "Thus says the Lord, "If you can break My covenant for the day, and My covenant for the night, so that day and night will not be at their appointed time, then My covenant may also be broken with David my servant that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levitical priests, My ministers."

In other words, what I say will hold and it will last. So as you enter into chapter 9, remember something, God has made some pretty specific statements to Israel. Can God keep them? Can He keep them? He is omnipotent. Now wait a minute, aren't there things about Israel He needs to know? Needs to know? He knows everything. Well, can He be working with them and at the same time be working with us? He is omnipresent. He is everywhere at all times. Remember the character of who we are dealing with here. He is faithful, long-suffering, merciful. All those beautiful things, but He is going to do what He said He is going to do.