

The Answer of God - Election

This question often comes up, “Why did God create men whom He determined before not to save?” In other words, “If God eternally and unalterably determined whom He would save and whom He would not save, then why did He create those He knew He would send to hell?”

Though I often try to answer this question the best I can, not only to myself but to others, I often leave with the sense that I did not give a satisfactory answer. Therefore, I want to give “the answer of God” from scripture (Rom. 11:4). The Spirit of God Himself speaks through the apostle Paul to both ask and answer this question in Romans 9. In v11, God says that before Jacob and Esau were born, while they were still in their mother’s womb, before either of them had done any good or evil, God said, “the elder shall serve the younger.” Now, He did not mean simply that Esau would serve Jacob in his life, but spiritually, that God would use Esau (and all like him) to further the purpose of God in the salvation and blessing of His people (Isa. 43:3; 1 Cor. 3:21-23; Rom. 8:28,35-39). It meant that Esau would forever remain the servant of sin; He would never have the promises in Christ God gave to Abraham: salvation and eternal glory in Christ alone. Rom.

9:11 says that God spoke this in advance that His “*purpose according to election might stand.*” “*The purpose according to election*” is that salvation is “*not of works, but of Him that calleth.*” This is why scripture declared, before Jacob and Esau were born, that God loved Jacob and hated Esau: that salvation, from first to last, might be of God and not of man (Rom. 9:11; 1 Cor. 1:30-31).

God’s will never changes. Those He loves, He loves eternally (Jer. 31:3; Isa. 14:24; Ps. 33:11; Mal. 3:6). Those God loved in heaven are those loved before the foundation of the world. All those loved before time are eternally loved in glory. “*Beloved of the Lord...*” (2 Thess. 2:13). Those the Lord saves, He determined to save from eternity. Therefore, here in Romans 9:11, Paul quotes scripture from Malachi 1:2-3 to affirm God’s eternal will towards Jacob and Esau: “*Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated*” (Rom. 9:11). Malachi’s prophecy was not a decision God made in time, but one He made before time. Rom. 9:11 teaches that Jacob was not loved for his good works. And it teaches that Esau was not rejected for his evil works. God is less influenced by sinful man than men are influenced by a worm, or a Potter is influenced by the clay on his wheel (Job 35:5-8; Acts 17:25; Rom. 11:34-36; Jer. 18:6; Isa. 29:16). Election is not in any way conditioned on man. God eternally loved and eternally

chose His own. And He eternally rejected the rest. Nothing about men moved God to chose one and pass by the other. *“For the children, being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil...”*

Many deny this plainly declared truth as if God did not really love one unborn child and hate the other. Some have tried to apply these words to nations rather than individuals. But what are nations but groups of individuals? Some have said this means God loved Esau less, as if “hate” did not mean hate. But why would Esau deserve to be less loved? Usually Luke 14:26 is given to show that Jesus used “hate” to mean “love less.” But the word in Luke literally means “hate.” Jesus is teaching that we must disobey all, even our loved ones, in all things they want us to do that oppose the will of our great Lord and Savior. Our disobedience makes it appear that we hate them. Thus “hate” means hate. And God follows His statement here with a question from an objector that only makes sense if the meaning was that God did love Jacob and hate Esau before they had done any good or evil. The objection that is raised and answered is: *“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?”* The question confirms God’s plain meaning. There could be no objection if God rewarded Jacob and Esau for their will or their works, either past or foreseen. But the objection

serves to confirm the truth plainly stated: **election is unconditional**. It depends on God alone. God eternally set His love on Jacob and chose Jacob in Christ to eternal salvation and glory (Deut. 7:7-8; Eph. 1:3-5; 2 Thess. 2:13-14). Jacob is God's exemplar of all the elect of God. God judged Christ and rewards His elect for Christ's works. But God determined not to choose Esau in Christ. He left Esau to bear his own burden, to reward him according to his own works (Jer. 17:9-10; Rom. 2:6-ff).

Doesn't the objection raised in Rom. 9:11 capture our own when we ask, "How can God be just if He created some with the unalterable will that they suffer the just punishment of their sins" (2 Pet. 2:9-13; 1 Pet. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:10-12; Jude 1:4)? "Why did God create any who ultimately go to hell? Wouldn't it have been better if He either saved all men or simply did not create those that would ultimately perish?!"

Now, we might put forward many responses to questions such as these. We might respond, "In asking such questions, you place greater concern on the plight of unjust man than the glory of holy God." And that would be a correct assessment. God's glory is certainly more important than the personal suffering of sinners. Or we might say, "God only gives men what is right." That would

also be correct. Yet Paul, by the Spirit of God, does something better in his answer, something we must all learn to do in response to our own questions and the questions of others. We must never forget this principle: the Spirit of God answers all such questions as our Lord Jesus answered satan three times. He said, "*It is written...*" This is always the answer of God, isn't it?! Let it therefore always be ours! God's word must be our final answer to every question. We must stop with all of our reasoning and own that God's word is truth. We must rest in the fact that there is no truth but the word of God. God's written word is the ultimate authority. There is none higher (Ps. 138:2).

If we want to know the truth of anything, we must come to the final and ultimate answer of God's written word. For example, "How did this world come to be?" Scripture alone answers this and all such questions. "*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear*" (Heb. 11:3). How did God create all that is out of nothing? He spoke, and it was done. How do we know? The Bible tells us so (Gen. 1:1-31; Ps. 33:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2; John 1:3; Acts 17:24). God made all that is by His Word (John 1:3; Col. 1:16). Scripture has spoken. That is the final response on the matter. To go beyond scripture is to presume there is truth more

foundational than God's own word. But scripture is truth (John 17:17; Dan. 10:21; Ps. 119:43,142) It is the unprovable axiom. All truth is therefore proved by the word of God. Truth is not proven by experience. It is not proven by science, not by man at all or in any way! It is most certainly not proven by our own sinful reasoning (Prov. 28:26; Jer. 17:9)!! Faith is taking God at His word (John 3:33; 20:31). Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself refuted Satan's temptation from scripture (Matt. 4:4,7,10). Eve failed to do so and was deceived. Believers must believe Christ, according to scripture (Rom. 10:17; 1 John 5:4).

Now, in Rom. 9:14-16 God asks, then answers this objection for us. "*Is there unrighteousness with God*" (Rom. 9:14)? What is His answer? "*God forbid*" (Rom. 9:14)! We immediately know, therefore, that God is not unrighteous! But He continues by bringing in the foundation of all truth: scripture. "*15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy*" (Rom. 9:15-16). Scripture says God is not unrighteous. Scripture says He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. Scripture says He will have compassion on whom He will have compassion. The Spirit of God draws the conclusion from scripture to the

objection He knows lies in the minds of sinful men: “*So then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy*” (Rom. 9:16). Salvation is not of him who wills. It is not of him who runs. It is of Him who has mercy! It is of God, to the exclusion of all that is in man!!

By raising and answering this question from scripture, the matter is now put to rest with regards to Jacob and Esau. God determined to have mercy, and did have mercy on Jacob. He determined not to have mercy, and did not have mercy on Esau. God loved Jacob. He hated Esau: He rejected him. Scripture says this was God’s eternal will towards these two unborn children. Scripture says God shows mercy as it pleases Him. Now, we might try to go further and ask, “But Why?” If we question further, we must know that we are prying into God’s eternal counsels. Oh, the pride of our natural hearts! Only faith in God’s word can put such pride to silence! Have you ever come face to face with a complex system, such as your computer? When a computer expert tells you what you should and should not do, you might be tempted to delve deeper into why the computer does what it does so that you can verify the conclusive advice of the computer expert. And how many times in our lives do we acknowledge that some one else understands a complex

system better than we do? We are content to leave it there, aren't we? Expert advice has been given: "Don't do that! Or, do this to avoid that problem!" We know that if we go against that advice, we may very well incur expensive repairs! So we rest on the expert's advice without prying into every supporting fact and intermediate conclusion that led the expert to give that advice: "Do this; do not do that."

Now, in Romans 9:11-16, God says He has a purpose. His purpose is that salvation will be of His calling and not of our will or works. He says that before these two sons were born or ever did good or evil, He loved Jacob and hated Esau. There! The answer has been given! It is a simple answer. Scripture has spoken. Truth has been revealed. Faith must stand firm on it. God, who is righteous, is absolutely sovereign! He saves because of His own will to show mercy on whom He will show mercy! He does not save because of man's will or work to save himself! That's the way things are! Believe the Lord. Bow to Him. Worship Him. His judgments have been made known (Rom. 11:34-36). "*Be still and know that He is God*" (Ps. 46:10; Ps. 145:17; Deut. 32:4)!

Yet the Lord gives another example. He includes Pharaoh. The Spirit of God again speaks through Paul with the ultimate authority of scripture. He again draws the

conclusion for us. *“17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. 18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth”* (Rom. 9:17-18). Scripture spoke to Pharaoh. Scripture said God raised him up to show His power in him and to make His name known throughout all the earth. Isn't that interesting?! God used Pharaoh to show all men that He is Judge of all and sovereign in salvation! God rules over and defeats His proudest enemies on behalf of His people, to the glory of His power and justice! It pleased God to bring Pharaoh to power over all of Egypt, and then, at the appointed time, God commanded him to let Israel go. But in his pride, Pharaoh refused. God hardened him in his own pride (Rom. 1:24,26). Ten times Pharaoh refused. Finally, God overruled his objections. When Pharaoh was in the height of his pride and anger against the LORD and the LORD's people, God destroyed him in the Red Sea. To the utter humiliation of Pharaoh and his proud armies, God destroyed them in open view of His helpless people without so much as a finger being raised by Israel in their own defense! In the same way Christ, the Lamb of God, will cast satan and his followers into the lake of fire under

eternal torment by the work of Christ alone (Rev. 20:10; 21:8)!

Now, this scripture from Ex. 9:16 is called forth to us in Romans 9 to establish the truth that God has mercy on whom He will and hardens whom He will. Again, the Spirit of God anticipates the objection of men: “*Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will*” (Rom. 9:19)? The objection once again confirms God’s meaning. God does with men what pleases Him. His will is absolute, eternal and unalterable (Isa. 14:24; 46:10). Because this is so, sinful man vigorously objects: “If God’s will determines all outcomes, why does He find fault with men?! None can resist His will!” Haven’t you and I wondered and even asked this question ourselves?

Once again, to this objection God Himself answers. His answer is authoritative, final and perfect. He says, “*Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus*” (Rom. 9:20)? God’s answer does not stop with v20. He goes on to reveal that in His sovereign will, before the world began, He predestined some men to be vessels of honor to His saving mercy (Rom. 9:23). And He determined for others to serve His purpose as vessels of

dishonor in their just condemnation to demonstrate His wrath (Rom. 9:22; Isa. 29:16; Jer. 18:6). He sovereignly shows mercy on those He chooses before to save (2 Thess. 2:13-14). That mercy is by His sovereign will alone. And He hardens those He rejected. As Pharaoh, He leaves them to the just consequences of their pride. Or, as Esau, He leaves them to the just consequences of the lusts of their hearts (Heb. 12:16). Pharaoh was destroyed in the height of his pride. Esau cast away eternal blessings for stew. God therefore cast away Esau. Who can deny that God dealt in justice with these two?

Listen to scripture. Scripture says God does not tempt men to evil (James 1:13-15). Scripture says men commit sin when they are drawn away by their own lusts (James 1:14). Scripture says that God did not create Adam and Eve with a sinful nature, but that everything He made was very good (Gen. 1:31). Scripture says men are inventors of evil things (Rom. 1:30). Scripture says God created man upright, but they sought out many inventions (Eccl. 7:29). Scripture says that God's wrath is revealed -- not against the innocence of man but -- against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Rom. 1:18). Scripture says God has shown every man that He is eternal and almighty and that He alone is worthy of all worship (Rom. 1:19-21). Men are therefore without excuse

(Rom. 1:20). Men suppress the truth God has shown them (Rom. 1:18-19). In consequence, God gives men over to their own hearts' lust (Rom. 1:21-24). Scripture makes it clear that men go to hell justly. And in Rom. 9, scripture makes clear that men receive the just reward of their actions (Rom. 2:6-10; 9:22). But scripture also makes clear that God chose some to salvation and eternal glory in spite of the curse of God they deserved by preserving them in Christ, rescuing them from the curse of His justice by Jesus Christ (Jude 1:1; 2 Thess. 2:10-14; Eph. 1:4-5; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 2:1-6)!

Scripture gives this answer: "*The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works*" (Ps. 145:17). "*There is none that doeth good*" (Rom. 3:12). "*All have sinned*" (Rom. 3:23). "*There is no man that sinneth not*" (1 Kings 8:46). Yet God is good (Matt. 19:17; Mark 10:18). He is righteous (Deut. 32:4). In His goodness, and according to His righteousness, He has mercy on whom He will (Ps. 85:10; Rom. 3:24-25; Rom. 9:15-16). And in His righteousness, He hardens whom He will (Rom. 9:18). "*The soul that sinneth, it shall die*" (Ezek. 18:4,20). Death is payback for sin (Rom. 6:23).

We must not exercise our minds further than what God has revealed. He has not revealed the processes in His

eternal counsels by which He determined and predestinated all things for His glory. But He has given us the concluding decisions of His eternal counsels. Scripture reveals God's decrees and purposes and records His works. Justice is what God thinks. Righteousness is what God does. God chooses to save whom He will as it pleases Him (Matt. 11:25-26). He does this so that the salvation of His elect cannot in any way be the result of their works. Just the opposite. He saves His own people in spite of their sinful opposition to Him and even in opposition to their own salvation (Rom. 8:7; 2 Tim. 2:25; Ps. 106:7-8). Scripture reveals that unless God saved men in this way, none would be saved (Rom. 9:29). Scripture reveals that God pours out His wrath on men for their sins (Rom. 1:18-32; Ezek. 18:4,20). And scripture reveals that He hardens men by giving them over to their own pride and lust that arises and resides in their own hearts (Mark. 7:21-23; Rom. 1:18-3:20; Eph. 4:17-19; Acts 28:24-28; Prov. 1:20-32; Isa. 65:2-9; Rom. 10:18-21; 1 Pet. 2:7-8; 2 Pet. 2:1-22).

Why did God create men whom He determined not to save? Because it seemed good to Him to do so. All that God thinks and does is good because He thinks and does it! We should be more concerned to believe scripture than to pry into the secret things of God (Deut. 29:29). We

should be more concerned for God's glory than for the consequences man suffers for his wilful and stubborn ungodliness and unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). May the Lord be pleased to show us His mercy and cause us to rejoice in His salvation in Christ! May He make us go in the path God-given faith in Christ (Ps. 119:49). Oh Lord! Order my steps in thy word (Ps. 119:133)! Make me to go in the path of thy commandments (Ps. 119:35)! Incline my heart to thy testimonies, and not to covetousness (Ps. 119:36)! Give me grace to understand and know the Lord Jesus Christ (Ps. 119:34; John 17:3)! I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant (Ps. 119:176)! Do this, almighty, gracious Savior, according to your righteousness, to the glory of your great and holy name, find me in Christ alone (Php. 3:3-10)!