

Romans

Romans Chapter Nine

Romans 9:14-24

March 13, 2011

This is lesson number **81** in our exposition of the Book of Romans.

The Theme of the Letter

Romans 1:16-17

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God** is **revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ” Romans 1:16-17

Title: I Will Have Mercy on Whomever I Will Have Mercy

Romans 9:14-24

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." 16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" 20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

This message demands **humility** on the part of the **preacher** and the **hearer**.

Humility especially on the part of the preacher because he dare not bring in his own prejudices and try to “correct” what the Apostle has written simply because he does not agree with the doctrine of God’s sovereignty. That is not to even hint that I do not agree with the doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty. But in my study of this passage I have come across scholars who say things like, “Well it says so and so, but it means thus and so.”

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Well, it means exactly what it says and that goes to the humility of the hearer. Humility on the part of the hearer because this is God's word and if you reject it because you simply do not believe that God does what Paul writes about in this passage you may find in the end that you are fighting against God in order to give man glory that only God deserves.

What we have before us is the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God.

What we have before us is the watershed of man's so-called "free will." I am well aware that "free-will" is what most people have been taught and if what I teach offends you, ask yourself, "Why?"

The issue before us is that if a man is saved, who or what deserves the glory?

The issue before us is this: Is final salvation, all of grace, by God's free choice and by God keeping His children; or is salvation finally and ultimately determined by the exercise of man's 'free will'?

Who or what deserves the glory if any man is saved?

Let me say in all humility, and by humility I mean that the only reason that I believe the truth of God's sovereignty is because that is what God's word teaches, and the only reason that I believe **it is** God's word is because of free and sovereign grace. If that sounds like 'circular reasoning' then so be it.

Also, I am not smarter than men who disagree with the doctrine of God's sovereignty but I am convinced that they have not submitted to the whole counsel of Scripture and what it teaches about the sovereignty of God.

Furthermore, I challenge anyone on the side of the sovereignty of God, such as this preacher, that if they are not as concerned for the souls of men as Paul was for his 'brethren according to the flesh' you may find yourself to believe only a caricature or false notion of the sovereignty of God. You may be a fatalist, a Freudian determinist, or a hyper-Calvinist.

E.g., I know men who claim to believe in election but do not believe we should preach the Gospel to the lost. Those men are hyper-Calvinist. That is called 'Hardshellism.' If you will pay attention to what I preach you cannot fairly accuse me of that gross and fatal error that is nothing but fatalism.

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A woman I know told me that her husband said I was a hyper-Calvinist. My reply was that either he didn't know what a hyper-Calvinist was or he didn't know what I preach. This man I know very well and he is of the school that EVERY Calvinist is a hyper-Calvinist. He is willfully ignorant.

We ended the last lesson at verse 13:

As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

Paul was explaining verse 6, how God's word had not failed concerning the salvation of the Jews and God's covenant promises because:

"They are not all Israel who are of Israel."

True Israel is made up of those called by God to be His children and not those who are born of Jewish parents, although many ethnic Jews belong to the "remnant."

The Apostle calls on the OT Scripture to show that God chose Isaac instead of Ishmael, even though Ishmael was the firstborn son of Abraham.

Even more compelling is the fact that God chose Jacob and not Esau who was his twin brother and that choice was made before either of them had done good or evil that the purpose of God according to election might stand.

"Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

There it is, now how shall we understand what Paul says?

Some men are offended by the teaching that God is dealing here with **individuals**. They say rather that God here means the **nations** that derived from Jacob and Esau, viz. Israel and Edom.

It is true that two nations derived from Jacob and Esau but the **context** does not allow you to say that verse 13 means nations and does not primarily refer to individuals because verses 15 and 16 must be about individuals.

In vs. 15 "whomever" and in vs. 16 "him who wills" must mean individuals and not simply nations of men.

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Another way that men try to soften verse 13 is to say that “hate” only means to “love less.” **"Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have loved less."**

But Robert Haldane correctly points out that you might as well make it say that God ‘hated Jacob less than He hated Esau.’ “If God’s love to Jacob was real literal love, God’s hatred of Esau must be real literal hatred.”

What it says is: **"Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."**

Perhaps the most important point of my last lesson was what I learned from Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones about election. God did not have these two boys, Jacob and Esau, standing before Him and then He chose one and rejected the other. **No, God called Jacob into being because of election.**

God did not view all of humanity and choose to elect from among that mass of humanity and pass by the rest.

God calls His elect children into being.
It is the purpose of God according to election.

And so Paul anticipates an objection in verse 14.

If God has chosen some people in Christ before the foundation of the world and **calls them into being** and arranges His providence so that they hear and believe the Gospel and God leaves the rest of mankind to die in their sin, is God unrighteous? That is the objection that Paul anticipates in verse 14.

What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!

The KJV and the NKJV have “*Is there*” in italics, which means that these words are not in the Greek but were added by the English translators.

A better translation might be:

What shall we say then? Not unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!

In another place {6:2} I pointed out that ‘God forbid’ in KJV gives the idea of the response, but the word for God is not in the Greek text.

The idea is: **What shall we say then? Not unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!** or ‘Don’t think that way!’

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I have read and heard sermons that preach against election and predestination and have heard preachers actually declare that God would be 'unfair' if what Paul writes here is what God actually does.

A person should be very careful when they accuse God of being unfair.

The notion that if God calls some into being and passes over others is somehow 'unjust' is to entirely miss the state and condition of every person born of Adam. All men are born under condemnation!

One preacher said that every person has the right to hear the Gospel at least once. You see his theology of salvation is that if you give a person a 'chance' that they just might exercise their 'free-will' to allow God to save them. But salvation is not by 'chance' and no one has the 'right' to hear the Gospel even once.

Let's see how Paul answers the objection that God is unfair.

Paul again reaches back into OT history to make his point about God's sovereign choice. Paul brings in the account of Moses who asked God three important questions that are recorded in Exodus 33.

It will help you to read this in your own Bible, so turn to Exodus 33.

Moses had come down from Mount Sinai with the tablets of stone, God's Ten Words {Commandments} written by the finger of God {Ex 31:18}.

Because Moses had been gone for what seemed a long time the people complained and Aaron made them an image of a calf out of gold and told them, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt." {Ex 32:4}

God told Moses what the people had done and threatened to destroy them but Moses interceded for them and God spared them.

All of this record in Exodus is very important and you should read all of it to get the context, but for the purpose of Romans 9 we need to go to Ex 33:8 and look at the three questions that Moses asked God.

1. Show me Your way { Ex 33:13.

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2. For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? { Ex 33:16}
3. And he said, **“Please show me Your glory.”** { Ex 33:18}

19 Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Right here is where those who champion the ‘free-will’ of man miss the point. God’s glory and His mercy is that **anyone at all** is shown mercy.

When you understand that no one **deserves** mercy you can begin to grasp what grace and mercy mean.

So don’t talk about there being injustice or unrighteousness with God:

15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."

Take the man in John 5. There were many lame and infirm and Jesus healed only one man. That was one more than deserved to be healed.

Here is what God says about man’s ‘free-will’ in Romans 9:16.

**16 So then it is not of him who wills {intention},
nor of him who runs {active exertion},
but of God who shows mercy.**

With the singular exception of Jesus of Nazareth, the only man that ever had ‘free-will’ was Adam and you can read what he did with it in Genesis 3.

Adam’s sin was that he wanted to be autonomous; free from God.

Get rid of this notion of man’s ‘free-will’ if by ‘free-will’ you mean that God is trying to save everyone and that man has the power by his ‘free-will’ to let God save them.

We make free choices and we are responsible for the choices that we make. But the notion of a ‘free-will’ is simply wrong-headed. Your will is not free and isolated from your intellect and emotions.

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Your will is influenced by what you know and what you think.

If you are saved, did you just wake up one day and say, "I believe in Jesus."

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the **only** Savior and sufficient Sacrifice for sin? How did that faith come about? Did you hear something about the holy law of God, and were you convinced that your sin had condemned you, but that Jesus saves His people from their sins? Do you really believe that happened by "chance?"

If you believe and another person who hears the same Gospel does not believe what causes you to believe and the other person to not believe?

**16 So then it is not of him who wills {intention},
nor of him who runs {active exertion},
but of God who shows mercy.**

That takes us to the next 'hard saying.'

17 For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

Notice that Paul does not say that Moses says to Pharaoh, but that the Scripture says to Pharaoh. Moses spoke exactly and only what God told him to say to Pharaoh and what Moses said became Scripture.

What the Scripture says is that God "**raised up**" Pharaoh for a purpose.

Be very careful here. God did not create Pharaoh and force him to sin. What God did was to allow Pharaoh, a sinner, to follow his sinful desires.

We have seen this in Romans Chapter One. Men can see the fact of the divine being in creation and yet reject that truth. God does not cause them to fashion images of birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.

God simply does not show them mercy; He leaves them in their sin! God does not force men and women to give themselves up to uncleanness and dishonor their bodies in sexual debauchery.

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God simply does not show them mercy!

God does not cause men and women to dishonor God and to deny their own nature in homosexual activity.

God simply does not show them mercy!

What God does is leave them to themselves and He gives them up to uncleanness, and to vile passions, and to a reprobate mind.

**18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills,
and whom He wills He hardens.**

God did not create an evil Pharaoh.

God took an evil Pharaoh and raised him up for His purpose.

If you will study the Hebrew words in Exodus you will find that there are 20 times where the hardening of Pharaoh's heart is mentioned. Ten of those times it indicates that Pharaoh hardened his own heart and ten times it says that God hardened his heart. But **before** Moses was sent to Pharaoh and **before** the plagues had begun we read what God told Moses.

Exodus 4:21

And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go, 22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: "Israel is My son, My firstborn. 23 So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn." ' ' "

Ultimately it was God that hardened Pharaoh's sinful heart but God did not create Pharaoh's sinful heart.

This is an example of how the hearts of men are hardened. In Matthew 12 the Pharisees confronted Jesus about a supposed violation of the law of the Sabbath

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because His disciples had plucked some heads of grain and rubbed them together in their hands and ate them.

The Pharisees accused Jesus of breaking the law of the Sabbath. But Jesus told them the meaning of the Sabbath and that mercy always took priority over sacrifice, that the spirit of the law always took priority over the letter of the law. Then Jesus healed the man with a withered hand on the Sabbath!

The Pharisees were in a rage and plotted to kill Jesus. They were hardened in their hatred of Jesus and in their rejection of Him as Messiah. God did not create wicked Pharisees but He used their wickedness for His purpose.

Men do wicked things in the providence of God and God uses the wickedness of men for His purpose.

But again the stubborn and insolent man will ask yet another question.

19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault?

For who has resisted His will?"

Notice the **attitude** behind this objection. It is not wrong to ask why? It is very wrong and very dangerous to accuse God of unrighteousness

When confronted with the sovereignty of God we have two options.

The first option is that we can stiffen our necks and harden our hearts and say, "If I can't be in control of my life then I will quit God." And you will be hardened in your rebellion and find out too late that while God is merciful, only God determines to whom He will show mercy.

The preferred option of the two is for us to realize that God is, in fact, God, and learn to say with Nebuchadnezzar after God restored his sanity:

Daniel 4:34-35

And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever:

For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,

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**And His kingdom is from generation to generation.
35 All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;
He does according to His will in the army of heaven
And among the inhabitants of the earth.
No one can restrain His hand
Or say to Him, "What have You done?"**

You and I are not in the position to challenge the purpose of God.
We are creatures and are accountable to God.
God is not obligated to explain Himself to any man.

What we can do is receive His word in the Scriptures and praise Him for His mercy and be very careful not to charge God with being unrighteous or unfair. That is what Paul tells in next place.

20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

Paul is once again referring to Isaiah.

There is a similar parable in Jeremiah 18, but here Paul calls on Isaiah, his favorite OT prophet.

Isaiah 29:15-16

**15 Woe to those who seek deep to hide their counsel far from the LORD,
And their works are in the dark;
They say, "Who sees us?" and, "Who knows us?"
16 Surely you have things turned around!
Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay;
For shall the thing made say of him who made it,
"He did not make me"?
Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it,
"He has no understanding"?**

Notice two things about vs. 20 and 21 in our text.

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First, man is not in the position to 'reply against' God. This is not saying that we cannot ask questions. Ask questions and go to the Word of God for the answers. The problem comes in when we dare to presume that we know more than God.

**Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it,
"He has no understanding"?**

Second, and very important, God did not create man for evil purposes. He takes man who is evil and uses him for His purpose.

God does not create just to condemn. Nowhere does the Bible teach such a thing. God created man in His own image. God saw everything that He created as very good. But Adam sinned and all men sinned in Adam.

The potter does not create the clay. The potter takes what is already created and forms the lump into whatever he chooses. That is the teaching.

God raised up Pharaoh just the way the potter raised up a lump of clay.

God takes sinful men and uses their wickedness for His purpose.

And then the question:

22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,

But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?

The longsuffering of God is a mystery. Why does God allow wicked men to continue in their rebellion against God? What if God permits evil men to go on for thousands of years? You might as well ask why God did not send Adam and Eve to hell the instant Adam disobeyed God.

Adam was shown mercy because God is longsuffering.

Abel was shown mercy and Cain was sent to hell even though Abel was as great a sinner as Cain. But Abel sought a Substitute in a blood sacrifice and Cain wanted God to accept the work of his hands.

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If the believer is told that the sufferings of this present age are not to be compared to the glory that is to come, then it seems to me that God need not be in a hurry to punish the sinner who does not come to Christ.

The longsuffering and goodness of God may lead to repentance but it also may result in a hardened heart.

God **does not** prepare the vessels of wrath for destruction; they come into the world already prepared for destruction.

But notice that in the next verse God **does** prepare beforehand those who are the vessels of mercy. He prepared them beforehand by His sovereign free choice in election and in time He **calls them into being** through the Gospel of the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.

23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,

What an amazing thing to see! Instead of struggling against the sovereignty of God why don't you praise Him because He has mercy on whom He will have mercy?

24 even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

We will continue with what Paul says about the Gentiles from the OT Scriptures in our next lesson. But I close with this question:

Even us! Are you one of the 'us' whom He called?

Can you bow in awe and worship before the sovereign God and be quiet about your so-called 'free-will'? Don't be guilty of replying against God and accusing God of being unfair.

If you are saved you will know that God saved you and that He did not have to do it. He could have passed by you and me and He would still be God and He would still be holy and He would still be just.

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Who or what is your god? Is your God the sovereign of the universe that does what He pleases or do you worship your 'free-will'?

Election is positive and there is nothing in the free invitation of the Gospel to cause a sinner to reject the offer of Christ.

Come to Jesus Christ in faith and godly repentance and find rest for your soul.