

## Romans 9:14-33

“Vessels Of Mercy”

We're sort of steam rolling towards a point whereby Paul the apostle will in a couple chapters proclaim, “*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ‘For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?’” Rom 11:33-34 What does that mean? It means exactly what it says, it means that the wisdom and knowledge of God run so deep that we could never plumb the depths of them; His judgments are unsearchable to us, His ways, His reasons past our finding out. It means that with our limited understanding and our finite ability to comprehend that there are some things about God that we'll just never quite understand, that there are some facets about God that are so complex that can never hope to some how get a grip *on* them, or wrap our understanding *around* them. and Though is certain respects that *frustrates* us because none of us like to be in a position whereby we have to concede to the fact that something is beyond us, be it in ability or understanding.*

In another very *real* respect it comforts us because I'd be awful worried if my God was no larger than my ability to understand. Because if I were able to grasp the very depths *of* Him, or comprehend every aspect *about* Him than He'd be a fairly shallow, weak and anemic God. You see if sinful, limited in understanding, restricted in ability man can comprehend the fullness of God, than we have a problem. and The reason I bring all this up is because we find ourselves today in one of those portions of scripture that are beyond our finding out, when you begin to speak about the sovereignty of God in the affairs of men, it very quickly begins to boggle the brain.

When the topic of predestination and election come up it sort of makes us a little bit nervous or perhaps uneasy because it's difficult, in fact impossible for us to completely get a grip *on* it, and wrap our understanding *around* it. But we never want to soften the scripture simply because we can't understand it, nor will I ever apologize for what the bible says, nor should you. The problem that presents itself to us is that when we follow the line of the sovereignty of God out to its logical conclusion it seems to us as if man never *really* had a choice. We're all just puppets on the stage of this world simply dancing to the tune that God plays for us. and The bible is clear that God chooses, that He has a plan, He has a purpose for this world collectively, and your and my life personally, and nothing will ultimately thwart that plan. But once again the problem with our perspective is that the logic that's used to bring those scriptural concepts to their conclusion is our own, sin tainted, finite, limited in understanding logic. But the bible is clear that God doesn't think like we think, nor is His understanding limited or in any way tainted by sin, so though we hit a mental and intellectual brick wall, it poses no problem whatsoever to God.

You see the bible is also very clear on the fact that we as humanity have a free will and that God in no way shape or form forces our hand in the choice that we make. Joshua exhorted the Israelites, "...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve," Josh 24:15 what's the implication there? That you have a choice, you can choose to serve the Lord, and follow after Him, or you can choose to turn your back *on* Him and walk away *from* Him. So whether you *receive* Him, or *reject* Him that's up to you, and there are miles worth of scriptures both ways. So which is it? Free will, or God's sovereignty? Listen, the bible teaches both emphatically, here's what we need to understand, they don't *contradict* each other, they *correlate* to one another. Someone once asked Charles Spurgeon to reconcile free will with God's sovereignty. He said something to the effect of, "There's never a need to reconcile friends."

In our minds they work against each other, in the heart and mind of God they work in perfect harmony together. We just can't see it, but here's the deal. Since the bible teaches both, we teach both, because we just teach the bible, so when we come across a passage that teaches freewill and the responsibility of man, we hit it hard. and If you were to visit us that day you might think that we were hardcore Armenians. But when we come across a passage the highlights the sovereignty of God, we teach that just as emphatically. So that if you were to come in on a day when we were in *portion* of scripture you might think that we were hyper Calvinistic, but the truth is we're not Calvinists, nor are we Armenians, we're simply bible believing Christians and we take God's Word on faith. Just because *we* can't harmonize the 2 doesn't mean they pose a problem for God even a little bit. God is much bigger than our ability to comprehend.

Paul has been sharing with us the reality that God has a plan, and that that plan isn't at risk in the lives of Israel *nationally* or in our lives *personally*. and That the reason God's chooses one person, or one nation as opposed to the other with respect *to* that plan is bound up not in us, but in Him. It's not in him who works (you or me) but of Him who calls. Now in light of that we sometimes begin to think that that's not fair, why would God choose one, and not the other, notice.

Vs14

So follow the flow, Paul has shared with us how that God chose Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, and that in either case it really had nothing to do with the guys, but rather the sovereign purpose of God. and So the question comes up, "Well then is God unfair? Is He unrighteous?" and Vs 14 is a key, it's another one of those Vs like we spoke of a couple weeks ago that help to under gird the foundation of Christ in our lives, remember we spoke of the fact that God is for us, we mentioned Ps 73, "Truly God is *good*." Here's another one, "Is there unrighteousness with God?" Mark it well, "Certainly not!" It's the most emphatic negative response in the Greek he could make, "NO WAY!!" There is nothing *but* righteousness with God.

The bible is very clear, "*He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He.*" Deut 32:4 The

psalmist declares, “...*the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.*” Ps 92:15 and Again in the book of Revelation we read, “*And I heard another from the altar saying, “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.”*” Rev 16:7 So this Vs helps make the filter through which we strain our biblical perspective, God is good, in Christ He’s for me, and in all that He does, every decision that He makes He’s completely righteous.

We like the fact that this Vs is strategically placed by the Holy Spirit right here sandwiched in between, just right about in the center of this portion that deals with the sovereignty of God. Because having gone over what we’ve gone over, we need to be reminded of that fact. But getting ready to head in to what’s facing us it serves to keep our perspective proper, and what we’re going to discover is that God reserves the right to do whatever He wants. Not just because its *His* world, *His* creation (though that alone is enough), but all of mankind has sinned, fallen short of the glory of God, and we all deserve an eternity in hell. So when we’re allowed to simply proceed down our own personal path of self destruction, that doesn’t make God unrighteous. If anything it testifies to His righteousness, and demonstrates *our* unrighteousness. But if in His sovereignty He should choose to show mercy in a given nation, or person’s life, that’s His prerogative as well, doesn’t make Him unrighteous to show mercy, nor does it make Him unrighteous to execute justice, notice.

#### Vs15

We spoke about this last week (if you weren’t here grab the cd) you recall the whole golden calf incident. After which Moses went back up on the Mt to intercede for the people. Well it was with in the confines of that context that this statement was made, Moses was requesting that the presence of God go with them and that if God didn’t go with them that he didn’t want to go, (which is a healthy prerequisite for *everything* we do). and He asked the Lord that if he’d found grace in His sight that He’d go with them and God said that He would, and Moses said, “Please, show me Your glory” its really a beautiful scene there in Ex 33. and When God told Moses that He’d cause His goodness to pass before Him, it was then that He uttered this Vs.

So the idea here is that we all deserve judgment, that’s the fair thing, no one can ever accuse God of being unjust, or unfair for giving man his rightful reward, the penalty due, eternal separation from Him. But mercy is not giving man what he deserves, so should God choose to be merciful to someone, He reserves that right. What are the factors that go in to God deciding to whom He’ll show mercy, and to whom He allows to reap the whirlwind of their own ways? I don’t know, those reasons aren’t in us, they’re in Him. Now that might frustrate you a bit, but listen guard your eye from being evil just because His heart is good. God will *never* be less than fair, but God *may* be merciful to boot, praise Him for that. Jesus spoke about this concept in Matthew 20, let’s turn there together. (Vs1-15)

Often times that’s exactly the case, we get mad at God because He chooses to be good. But we’re in a dangerous place when we begin to look upon the mercy of God as our *right*, if

God *owed* us mercy, that would be obligation. God doesn't *owe* us anything, but should He choose to extend His mercy, that's *His* right, not ours.

### Vs16

So Paul underscores the last part of Vs 11 (not of works, but of Him who calls), God's mercy extended to me is not because of a desire *in* me, or a work that somehow draws His attention *towards* me, its just *His* desire to show mercy *to* me. Now bear in mind Vs 14, there's no unrighteousness with God, He'll always do the right thing. Isn't interesting often we'll cast ourselves wholly on the judgments of men, or not question a particular judgment of man, but we'll question the judgments of God? Man is corrupt, God is righteous, but I'll so often take man's judgment with out a 2<sup>nd</sup> thought, but God's judgment trips me up, ironic isn't it? But every choice God makes is the right one, its ok if His ways go beyond mine, that's part of what makes Him God. We'd do well to quit questioning Him and simply get on our faces before Him and worship Him for all that He is. But a desire to please God, or doing a *work* that pleases God isn't even possible outside of the grace and mercy of God extended towards my life.

The bible tells us in no uncertain terms, "...*for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*" Phil 2:13 Having a holy notion, or doing a righteous work isn't even possible outside of God's favor being poured out on your life, these things are the *result* of God's mercy and grace, not the *cause* of them. So at times God will sovereignly extend mercy, and at times He'll sovereignly allow a course to run its own way. But he *never* responds to a situation in unrighteousness.

### Vs17-18

Paul uses the Pharaoh for an illustration of the fact that to some God shows mercy (in this case Moses, the children of Israel) and some He hardens (Pharaoh, who had Israel bound in slavery). and Again bear in mind that Paul is portraying for us the sovereign perspective, "For this purpose I have raised you up," Pharaoh wasn't Pharaoh by the luck of the draw, he was there for a divine purpose, because God wanted to use him to show Himself strong. We've been speaking about the providential hand of God in our lives on Wednesday evenings regarding the book of Esther. Here with the Pharaoh he wasn't where he was by chance either, but God didn't choose mercy for Pharaoh, He wanted to use him to demonstrate the reality of who He is as a testimony in all the earth.

But as you consider this scenario there's a couple things you need to understand, 1<sup>st</sup> of all this doesn't in anyway infer or imply the fact that God caused the Pharaoh to have a certain type of personality. God knew his personality that's why God raised him up in that position, he'd have been just as ostentatious, prideful and haughty had he lived in a nowhere village along the shores of the Nile somewhere and we never knew he existed. But because of the stoutness of heart that he would have, God placed him in that position to use that for His glory. God didn't *make* him like he was, but He did *take* him as he was and use him to glorify Himself.

2<sup>ndly</sup> when we read that God “Hardened” his heart you need to bear in mind the full context of that situation, and exactly what was taking place. We read of the Pharaoh at least 4 times that he hardened his own heart against the Lord before there’s every any mention of God’s entering into the equation with respect to the position of his heart before Him. and You also need to know that there are 2 different words in the Hebrew for “Harden.” One means to make *dull*, or *heavy*, or to *desensitize*, and that’s the word that’s used in reference to what Pharaoh was doing. He was dulling his heart, desensitizing his heart to the Word of God towards his life. The other word means to *strengthen* or *make firm*, and that’s the word that’s used with reference to God’s interaction in the Pharaoh’s heart. So what’s taking place exactly?

What we’re seeing there is that over and over and over again, of his own accord the Pharaoh was dulling down his heart, and desensitizing his heart, dulling down his heart to the Word and will of God. So finally the Lord moved in and simply *strengthened* him in his resolve against Him, *made firm* his already predetermined position against the Lord. In other words God simply honored the direction he’d already resolved to take, that’s why our resolve towards the Lord is so critical, because God will honor that. If you make the resolve to want to submit your life *to* Him, walk intimately *with* Him, He’ll honor that too, strengthen you in your resolve, but should you choose to reject the Lord, harden your *against* the Lord there may come a time that He’ll step in and strengthen you against Him as well, and sad and tragic is that day. Now if you’re wondering if you’re there, there answer is “No” or you wouldn’t be *here*. But I encourage you to consider soberly your resolve towards the Lord, don’t vacillate over whether or not you want to surrender your life to Him, just decide that you’re going to serve Him with your whole heart and you’ll be on safe ground.

#### Vs19-21

You see Vs 19 is the danger and the folly of following a line of reason out to its logical conclusion on an issue like this, because the logic you’re using is sin-tainted and limited in understanding at best. It’s an argument to try and alleviate all personal responsibility before God for my own actions. “Well, if God’s purposes are going to be accomplished and I’m just a pawn in His hand set forth to play out His plan, than why should I be held responsible for my actions? I’m just going to fall prey to His will anyway.” You see it’s a fatalistic attitude, “If I’m to be saved, I’ll be saved, If I’m to be an object of wrath, I’ll be an object of wrath, its all in God’s hands.” and That’s the folly of human reasoning, and to be honest Paul doesn’t seek to explain how all that comes together, only the fact that he knows that’s faulty logic because it’s *man* that’s sinful, God is the One who’s *righteous* in *everything* He does. and That’s to cast judgment on God, I mean how dare I take the position, and have the audacity to question my maker, He’s God, I’m not, and I need to remember that, I’m but dust, He’s the righteous and loving Creator who gave His Son to take the penalty of my sin upon Himself because He’s not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But for some reason Vs like that seem to escape our memory when we’re dealing with topics like this. God is love, God is righteous

In Vs 20-21 Paul says that we really have no more right to question what God does with our lives than a lump of clay has to question what the potter does with it. God holds every right to hold sinful man accountable for His actions, God didn't make the clay the way it is, man sinned all on his own, but He'll make *of that clay* whatever He desires. You've got to remember that God doesn't do any evil, He doesn't tempt anyone *else* to do evil, or cause evil to come into anyone's life, Satan is at the root of those things, not to mention the fact that we do a pretty good job of inviting sin into our lives with out any help from anyone. So God reserves the right to extend mercy, or not extend mercy, either way He's righteous.

### Vs22-23

Again keep in mind the character of God, Vs 14 He's righteous, and Vs 22 we note there that God endures with much longsuffering, He's patient. and We shouldn't think that God "prepares" vessels of wrath, remember the bible doesn't teach that God elects *anyone* for hell. We make that choice all on our own, the preparation that takes place in one's life that leads to destruction is brought on all by themselves, (by nature children of wrath Eph 2:3). The word "prepared" there in Vs 22 is in the passive voice with the reference to what God is doing, which means that God takes a passive role in one's preparation for destruction. He doesn't prepare a person, or destine a person for hell, hell was never intended for man, but man fashions himself for hell through willfully choosing to sin against God.

Remember the scene there in Matt 25? Jesus was speaking about the final day of judgment, and He said to the unrighteous and the wicked, "*Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:*" Matt 25:41 He didn't say that it was prepared for man, so how could God prepare man for hell since He never prepared hell for man? But man prepares himself through sin in his life. But earlier in Ch 25 Jesus says to the righteous, "*Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:*" Matt 25:34

You see God prepared His Kingdom for man, not hell, but man messed it all up. Now having said that we understand that God has to do nothing to prepare man for hell, man does just fine on his own that way. But God *does* have to prepare us for glory, and in so doing we become what? Vessels of mercy, (I love that phrase) if you know Jesus, you're a vessel of mercy, I'm a vessel of mercy, God desires to make of any and all who will call upon Him a vessel of mercy, and He prepares us for glory. You see the word "prepared" in Vs 23 is in the active voice, meaning the subject (which is God) performs the action. He prepares us, salvation/sanctification through Christ for eternal glory. God's plan of salvation is indiscriminate, Jew and Gentile alike, the door is open and has been purposed by God to include every tribe, tongue, nation and people.

## Vs24-29

Now remember the context of what's being said here, Ch's 9,10,and 11 deal primarily with Israel, the fact that God has a plan as we spoke last week. and What Paul is doing here is dipping back into the prophets to place that plan in its proper perspective. and The gist of what's being communicated here is that God's plan is right on schedule, it never promised that all of Israel (ethnically speaking) would be saved anymore than it says every Gentile will be saved. As a matter of fact Isaiah stated plainly that ethnically speaking Israel would be radically numerous but that sadly only a remnant would see Christ as the Messiah. and Even that was a sheer act of the grace and mercy of God. Had God not intervened they'd have all slipped self righteously into the pit of hell. and So to with us all (perhaps not from a self righteous Pharisaic angle) but apart from God's mercy and sovereign intervention in our lives, none of us could be saved. Now there's sufficient power in the blood of Christ *for* the salvation of everyone, but not everyone will come to Christ, that's just a fact.

But we also see as we mentioned before that God intended from the beginning for the gospel to go out to the Gentiles and that though they'd never been "God's people" they'd come to be called the sons of the living God. That's you this morning if you know Christ, a child (as by adoption) of the living God.

## Vs30-33

Here's the point of all that we just read (but I don't want to get too deep into it because this same flow of thought carries into Ch 10). What Paul is saying here is that it's always been a "By faith" righteousness that God honors, but Israel tried to attain to a "By Law" righteousness. But the law was only meant to lead us to Christ (we'll hit on that next time) so that whoever *believes on Him* will not be put to shame. You see it's about believing on Christ if I'm to be received as righteous in God's sight. and I want you to note 2 things briefly and we're done. After all the talk of God's Sovereign plan and purpose who's plate does Paul serve up the responsibility for their missing of the Messiah on? Israel's, *why* didn't they attain to righteousness, "Because God purposed it that way alleviating them of all personal responsibility." Is that what your bible says? Vs 32, "Because *they* did not seek it by faith," they chose to reject Christ and walk by law, they stumbled over Christ, couldn't comprehend a crucified Savior. So God didn't make them reject Jesus, they did that on their own, not all of them individually, but as a whole nationally.

2<sup>ndly</sup> Not here in Vs 33 the open door/freewill offer of the gospel, who is it that will not be put to shame? Who'll be ushered into glory? "Those whom God has sovereignly elected?" Is that what it says? No, *whoever believes on Him*, that is, on Christ. *Whoever*, that my friends is a open invitation to your free will, you have a choice. Let me encourage you to make it the right one, choose for yourselves this day whom you'll serve, God wants to make of you a vessel of mercy, don't resist Him, receive Him, and may He strengthen you today in your resolve to whole heartedly follow Him.

Prayer Points: God we thank You and praise You for making of us “Vessels Of Mercy” may we never take Your mercy for granted, or slip into the mindset that says, “Your mercy is my right.” But rather that we’d just follow whole heartedly after You, help us Lord not to question Your judgment, but rather that we’d abandon ourselves to You, Holy and Righteous in everything You do.

If you need Jesus to come into Your life, allow Him that place today, receive Christ into Your life and you’ll find that God has ordained that you should be a vessel of His mercy, let Him prepare you for glory by faith in Christ.