

ROMANS 9:14-23 "What Then Shall We Say? Is God Unjust?"

The section of scripture which we've been looking at recently is one of the most confusing and even disturbing portions of God's word for many Christians. However, I would remind you that this is God's very Word and as Paul told Timothy in 2Ti 3:16-17 "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

God's Word alone, with the Holy Spirit's working, is sufficient for faith and practice as we desire to grow in our faith in Christ. This is why Peter can say in 1Pet.2:2 "like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to your salvation."

The wisdom of the world and philosophies of men can never be combined with the word of God to enhance our growth in Christ. If God's word is not sufficient for thoroughly equipping His people, then God is not sufficient.

To question the validity and reliability of God and His word is to miss the point of His Sovereignty. And God's Sovereignty is what Paul has been discussing in Romans 9. One aspect of His Sovereignty is His will in choosing people to be recipients of His grace and mercy as found in His Jesus Christ's atonement for the penalty of our sin.

It's this choosing which many people have a problem with because they imply that if God chooses some to life He must therefore choose some to damnation. And when you look at the portion of God's word we ended with last week you can begin to see why some would feel this way.

Rom 9:13 Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."
[Mal. 1:2,3]

The fact is that God's very nature will not allow Him to create with the express purpose of destroying. From the beginning His design was to create life, specifically man, with the purpose of having eternal life and fellowship with Himself. And so to accuse God of some sinister plot to create men so that He might send them to hell is to misunderstand what His election, predestination and choosing is all about.

Because there are those who look at God's Sovereignty and in their own minds conclude that if God is more than capable of saving all men through the shed blood of Christ, why aren't all men saved? And what they're really saying is, that if God chooses one like Jacob and does not choose one like Esau, even before they had done anything good or bad, He must be unjust and unfair.

This is the exact question Paul anticipates and in our text this morning we will deal with this issue.

Rom 9:14-16 "What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." [Exodus 33:19] 16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

Since God is perfect and holy and just He cannot be anything less than perfect in all His dealings with man. It is impossible for God to make a mistake. He cannot be unjust. This verse in Romans 9:14 is taken from 2Chronicles.

2Ch 19:5-7 "He appointed judges in the land, in each of the fortified cities of Judah. 6 He told them, "Consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for man but for the LORD, who is with you whenever you give a verdict. 7 Now let the fear of the LORD be upon you. Judge carefully, ***for with the LORD our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery.***"

The point was that if God doesn't judge with injustice, partiality or bribery, neither should the judges of Israel. The standard was God's perfection, though no imperfect man could ever come up to that standard. None the less there could be no excuse for seeking to be less than just with those whom they judged.

And so, if there is no injustice with God it was well within His love and Sovereignty to choose Jacob and not Esau. And then Paul goes on to give an example of how this justice of God actually worked in the lives of Israel; and notice the contrast Paul introduces here. He has been speaking of God's justice but now introduces His mercy and compassion.

Rom 9:15-16 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

What Paul has done here is to make a quantum leap from what all men deserve to what many actually receive from God. And this is the real issue. What all men deserve from God is justice. If God is perfect He is obliged, by His very nature, to deliver His justice on unjust people who have sinned against a Holy God.

He has no choice but to deal justly with sin. But, enter God's Sovereign eternal plan which has taken man's sin into account. To deal justly with man, and still put into effect His desire to have eternal fellowship with man, He chose to send His Son to partake of God's justice and pay our penalty in full.

Mercy and compassion is at the center of God's plan for our deliverance. It's always been God's plan to extend mercy and compassion on unjust people deserving His wrath, which is a just expression of His anger over our sin, which is always directed against Him.

Some might argue that, 'no my sin is against other people.' In part that's true. But ultimately when you and I sin it's an affront against our very Creator. This is why when David repented of his sin against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah, he said in Psa 51:3 "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.⁴ ***Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight***, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge."

But just as David understood the justice of God and that he deserved a just sentence, David also understood the mercy and compassion of God and in that same Psalm he says, "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Psa 51:7-10)

Mercy and compassion is God's response to man's injustice and rebellion. Paul points to Moses and gives this example.

Rom 9:15 "For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

This is taken from Exo 33:18 where Moses had been interceding to God on behalf of Israel, who had made a golden calf to worship because Moses didn't come down from the mountain where God

gave him the commandments. Moses desired to see God and speak to Him personally.

Exo 33:18-19 "Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." 19 And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Moses' request was for God to have compassion on all of this stiff-necked people. God's response was that if I choose to show compassion and mercy it will be because I choose to do so, not because Moses feels it's necessary.

This is an important point about God's Sovereignty. Nothing outside of God, whether it be our prayers or our desires or our situations, ultimately determines what God's will and good pleasure will be. If that were the case then God would be somehow dependent on His creation to give Him direction.

That doesn't mean He doesn't respond to our prayers, which He desires from us, or that He doesn't respond to our desires and situations, it just means that His Sovereign will determines how He chooses to act or not to act.

In fact, Jesus Himself tells us in Mat 6:8-10 "Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

God's Sovereignty: He knows all things and acts according to His good pleasure. Man's responsibility as given by God: 1Jo 5:14-15 "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him."

Though these two aspects may seem at odds with one another, God has united them and expects us to believe both, and act in accordance with both, not just in regards to prayer but in all things pertaining to God and our relationship with Him.

But the point Paul is making is that it does not depend on man when it comes to God acting according to His will and good pleasure.

Rom 9:16 "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

Here Paul brings salvation back into the picture as God sovereignly chooses one and does not choose another. He gives mercy to one and not to another. Again, don't forget that Paul is contrasting God's judgment, which we all deserve, with His mercy, which none deserve.

Outside of God choosing us, calling us, justifying us and glorifying us we would all go our own way willingly, which is to reject God because that's what we naturally desire to do. But before we get the idea that God's sovereignty in choosing leaves out our responsibility to choose God, let me remind you of what Paul says in this same letter to the Romans.....

Rom 1:18-20 "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that **MEN ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE.**"

The same Paul who says that God alone chooses to show mercy and compassion on whom He desires also records these words as we see in Act 17:30 that God.... "commands all people everywhere to repent."

All men are given the command to seek God to find forgiveness. No man has an excuse before God to say that he didn't deserve hell or was denied access to the Father because Christ's blood wasn't sufficient to cover his sin.

All men are part of God's design whether they choose to repent or not.

Rom 9:17-18 "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." [Exodus 9:16] 18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."

Since God is God He can choose to do whatever pleases His will. In the case of Pharaoh God used him to demonstrate His Almighty power which was proclaimed in all the earth. Pharaoh chose, of

his own volition, not to listen to the repeated attempts of Moses to submit to God and let Israel go.

In God's mercy He showed Pharaoh on numerous occasions His power and miracles and yet Pharaoh chose not to submit to God. Because of Pharaoh's own hardness of heart God simply allowed Pharaoh to continue in that rebellion.

Exo 11:10 "Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh, but the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go out of his country."

Pharaoh chose to continue in his hardness. It wasn't as though Pharaoh really wanted to believe God and submit to the Lord, and that God wouldn't let him by creating a hardness of heart in Pharaoh. The hardness was already there. God simply let it run its natural course by not intervening in life giving mercy and compassion in changing Pharaoh's heart to be receptive.

Charles Hodge points out that "the reason of Pharaoh being left to perish, while others were saved, was not that he was worse than others, but because God has mercy on whom He will have mercy; it was because, among the criminals at His bar, God pardons one and not another as seems good in His sight. He therefore, who is pardoned, cannot say it was because I was better than others; while he who is condemned must acknowledge that he receives nothing more than the just recompense of his sins."

In Pharaoh's case God simply allowed Pharaoh to continue in his rebellion and used him to demonstrate God's power. And so in reference to this case Paul continues in Rom 9:18 "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."

But some will always misunderstand the Sovereignty of God and accuse God of being some deranged puppet-master who pulls the strings of human beings so as to fulfill a plan that sends some to hell while others He saves from the fire. 'No one has a choice', they argue.

Again, Paul anticipates this question.

Rom 9:19 "One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"

In other words, if God is sovereign and He has mercy on some and hardens others who in the world can do anything contrary to what

God has already determined to do? And if we are only doing what God has foreordained then how can He blame me or find fault with me for who I am?

The bottom line to this argument is, 'If God made me what I am, then how can He condemn me if I'm only acting on what I am according to His will?'

This a bad line of argument because it excludes the fallen will of man who desires, by his own nature, to rebel against God. You see, it makes God the author of sin. And with that line of argument, if God is the author of sin then He cannot be a just judge over sin, because no one can resist His will.

The first thing we need to understand is that according to the word of God, God is not the author of sin.

Jam 1:13-14 "When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed."

The attitude of sinful man always trying to blame someone else for his sin is what Paul addresses here in our text. And in essence what the question asserts is that God is to blame for man's sin and subsequent judgment.

Paul's initial response to such an attitude is met with an abrupt halting to the question.

Rom 9:20 "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" [Isaiah 29:16; 45:9]

Now before we jump to a conclusion that we can never come to God to ask questions about our situations, or the ways in which God is working in our lives, we must keep this question that Paul addresses in its context.

The implied statement is that God can't blame me for being a sinner because that's what He made me, according to His Sovereign will. And along with that goes the sentiment that if God has unjustly condemned me then He is not perfect in all His ways, and therefore He is no God at all who deserves my allegiance.

To that Paul responds, 'who do you think you are to talk back to your Creator in that way and to accuse Him of any injustice? '

Paul does not mean to say that we shouldn't go to God and be honest with Him and ask what His will is for us. We need to seek God's answers to questions we have about life, our walk with Christ and what it is that will please our Lord.

But to come to God and falsely accuse Him of being anything less than God is something Paul doesn't tolerate here. But then he goes on to explain God's prerogative in working in the lives of people, and Paul compares it to a potter and his clay.

Rom 9:20-21 "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" [Isaiah 29:16; 45:9] 21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?"

Never forget that God is Creator. He is the perfect God who does what is best according to His will and pleasure, which is always faultless. And if He chooses to form us to be used by Him according to His will who are we to say that God is unfair?

Not only is He the Potter, He is the Master Potter. And though one of His creatures has chosen to rebel against the Creator, that vessel used in the Potters hand can and will still be used to glorify God even as Pharaoh was.

Rom 9:22-23 "What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath--prepared for destruction? 23 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory--

Even those who choose to rebel against God and deserve His wrath are treated by God with great patience, even though their destruction is something God has ordained in His sovereign will.

That great patience of God comes in the form of allowing men to see God's creation and to reach out to the Creator for salvation. It comes in the form of not destroying them outright for their sin. God is longsuffering and desires that none perish, but men are commanded to accept or reject the Creator God. That choice has eternal consequences which only men are responsible for. They cannot blame God for the fact that they are sinners deserving His wrath.

On the other hand, God's longsuffering with sinful men is designed by God to show the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy which He prepared beforehand. For those whom God has chosen

to give His mercy and compassion in a saving way, we must view that as undeserved.

With humbleness of heart we should ever throw ourselves on the mercy seat of Christ with thankfulness and praise God every day that He has given us life in Christ, because, like Pharaoh, we deserved only wrath.

Don't ever grow complacent in so great a salvation. And never assume that we deserved this grace from God which He prepared for us before the foundations of the world.

Give thanks and praise and adoration to God forever, who saves and who commands all to come to Jesus Christ. If you've tasted the kindness of the Lord, as He has opened your blind eyes to the truth, then savor your salvation in Christ with a life of love and obedience to the One who has called us from the darkness of sin to His marvelous light of life in Jesus Christ.