
God Is Sovereign

Romans 9:14-29 - Read Passage: epmkg.com/Romans9

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Notes

THEODICY B: THE JUSTICE OF GOD (vv. 14–18)

Again Paul anticipates his antagonists' outcry and says it for them in verse 14: "What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!" Or as Phillips renders it, "Do we conclude that God is monstrously unfair? Never!" At first it appears that Paul does not really answer the question but simply says it is impossible for God to do anything unjust. But the answer is sufficient. Luther comments, "Why, then should man complain that God acts unjustly, when this is impossible? Or, could it be possible that God is not God?"

If we say God cannot be fair and be a God who elects, we show a faulty concept of God. If we think of God as an enlarged man, with human emotions and motives, how misled we are. God is infinite—we are finite. He knows all—our knowledge is incomplete and ephemeral. A. W. Tozer wrote:

The Church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshiping men. This she has done not deliberately, but little by little and without her knowledge; and her very unawareness only makes her situation all the more tragic.

The fact is, God is perfect. Perfect in knowledge, wisdom, power, presence, faithfulness, goodness, justice, mercy, grace, love, and holiness. Therefore, he is perfect in his choices.

God does not answer to anyone, is not responsible to anyone. He is totally, absolutely sovereign. Paul vindicates the assault on God's character with the examples of Moses and Pharaoh.

For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. (vv. 15,16, quoting Exodus 33:19)

This took place on Mt. Sinai after Moses had made intercession for his people’s sin in making the golden calf and then asked God to show him his glory. “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion” means that God’s mercy and compassion cannot be subject to any cause outside his free grace. God had mercy on the Israelites (not destroying them for their idolatry), not because they deserved it, but simply because he chose to be merciful.

In verses 17, 18 the thought moves from Moses to Pharaoh—from the leader to the oppressor:

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.” Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

Pharaoh deserved death, but God did not strike him down. Rather, he allowed him to continue to live and reign so that God could demonstrate his power in the repeated defeats of Pharaoh. Pharaoh became an international illustration of God’s supremacy.

Paul mentions that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, but does not take time to indicate the other side of the coin—that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. (The Exodus account reveals both.) In truth, God gave Pharaoh opportunity to repent, but Pharaoh resisted God and therefore hardened himself to divine rule. Sunlight melts ice but hardens clay. God was not unrighteous with Pharaoh. He gave him repeated opportunities to believe. The point is, God is sovereign and acts according to his own will and purposes. He is perfectly just, for he is God.

THEODICY C: GOD’S JUSTICE CONTINUED (vv. 19–29)

Paul anticipates another angry question in verse 19: “One of you will say to me: ‘Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?’” The reasoning goes like this: “Paul, you say that Pharaoh was manipulated to work out God’s plan—that Pharaoh’s evil actually brought glory to God. How can Pharaoh be held accountable for his actions since he was used by God? Your God is unfair!” What is the answer to this?

To begin with, “But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?” (v. 20). Tiny man—whose life is just a breath, whose history proves over and over that despite all his learning and

technological triumphs he repeatedly makes colossal errors and falls into unspeakable barbarisms—this puny man stands before the God who knows the end from the beginning, who has never learned anything because he knows everything, who is the perfection of wisdom and love—and talks back to him. How absurd!

In verses 20, 21 Paul continues this point by drawing the ancient analogy of a potter and his clay (taken from Jeremiah 18:1–10 and Isaiah 45:9): “Shall what is formed say to he who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ 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?” Does clay ever talk back to the potter? Of course not! Moreover, the clay of mankind is sinful through and through. There is no neutrality in man—he is an enemy of God. So the question is not, “Why are some made to dishonor?” because dishonor is the natural state of the clay. The question is rather, “Why are some selected for honor?”

In this respect, Dr. Barnhouse wrote:

Calvin was very guilty at this point. He attempted to deduce from this passage what has come to be called “double predestination.” The Bible nowhere announces the predestination of the lost. It would seem that Calvin and others have drawn an inference in purely human logic. They would hold that the choice of Jacob implies the reprobation of Esau. Both of these brothers were born in sin; they both had the nature of Adam. They both grew up in sin. They both were children of wrath, disobedient by nature. If there had been any merit in these two sons, God would have been unjust in not rewarding that merit. The choice of one deserving man over another deserving man would have been favoritism. When we see that the two were equally undeserving, the whole picture becomes different. Everything that is said in the entire Bible about the nature of fallen man may be said—must be said—about both Jacob and Esau. God determined, for causes that are to be found in Himself and have not been revealed to us, to show favor to Jacob.

As believers, we must rest in this: God is not answerable to man for what he does. However, he can be relied upon to act consistently with his character, which has been disclosed supremely in Christ. With such a God, why should any of us question his ways?

In addition, God has purposes which we are incapable of seeing. Paul suggests this by posing a hypothetical example:

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? 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 us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? (vv. 22–24)

Sometimes we wonder why God withholds judgment of the ungodly. It may be that he does it to better display his glory to his beloved. We must bow before God, realizing he has noble purposes we cannot see.

Lastly, Paul calls us to realize that Israel's failure and his choices of Gentiles was prophesied in the Scriptures, namely Hosea and Isaiah.

As he says in Hosea: "I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one," and, "It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality." It is just as Isaiah said previously: "Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been like Gomorrah." (vv. 25–29, quoting Hosea 2:23; 1:10; Isaiah 10:22, 23; 1:9)

"My friends," Paul is saying, "the failure of the Jews and the inclusion of the Gentiles has been in God's plan from the beginning. God is just. His word has not failed." Paul succeeds in defending God.¹

14–16 In verses 6–13 Paul's argument is that God's faithfulness to his covenant is not to be judged by the extent to which those physically descended from Abraham are partakers of salvation. God's faithfulness is vindicated by the fact that the covenant promise contemplates those who had been sovereignly chosen by God to be possessors and heirs of his covenant grace. The purpose of God according to election stands firm and this insures that the covenant promise has not come to nought. The word of God has not failed. So these verses are a vindication of God's veracity. At verse 14 the apostle deals with another objection that is anticipated or that might be urged. It is the question of the justice of God. The two questions asked are similar to those of 3:5. The form of the second question is in this case different and points up the ultimate and decisive question of justice. "Is there unrighteousness with God?" A negative answer is implied and Paul answers with the strongest form of denial at his disposal.³¹ The thought of injustice with God is so intolerable that it must be dismissed with abrupt and decisive denial. Verse 15 is an appeal to Scripture in support of "God forbid". As illustrating Paul's conception of the place of Scripture it is significant that in answering so basic a question as that of God's justice he should be content to adduce the witness of Scripture. He quotes from Exodus 33:19. This is God's answer to Moses' request, "Show me, I pray thee, thy glory" (Exod. 33:18) but,

¹ Hughes, R. K. (1991). *Romans: righteousness from heaven* (pp. 176–180). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

perhaps of greater relevance, to the anxiety of Moses expressed in verses 13–16 that he should find favour in God’s sight and that God’s presence would prove that Israel were God’s people separated from all other people upon the face of the earth. Although Paul quotes this word without in any way restricting its application to the question at issue, the force is increased when we take into account the particular occasion on which it was spoken. The favour shown to Moses is hereby certified to proceed from God’s sovereign mercy. Even Moses and with him God’s people can lay no claim to any favour; it is altogether a matter of God’s free choice and bestowment.

It is not necessary to press the distinction between the two terms “have mercy” and “have compassion”. There are two emphases in the text. The first is the reality, security, and effectiveness of God’s mercy. This is accented by the two parallel clauses, the one expressing his favour in terms of mercy, the other in terms of compassion. The second emphasis is primary. It is not so well expressed in English unless we render “on whom” as “on whomsoever”, accentuating God’s free and sovereign choice. In this context we may not tone down the soteric import. This is Paul’s answer to the question of justice that arises from the sovereign discrimination on God’s part on which Paul had based his argument in verses 6–13. This differentiation, as shown above, is concerned with the realization of God’s covenant promise in those who are the beneficiaries of the election of grace. If lesser import were given to the mercy and compassion of God, the apostle’s answer would fall short of the question with which he is dealing.

The all-important aspect of verse 15 is that in support of the “God forbid” of verse 14 the mercy of God is not a matter of justice to those who are partakers of it but altogether of free and sovereign grace. This is true whether the mercy be viewed as the theocratic election of Israel to covenant privileges or, in terms of what is the apostle’s particular interest, as the mercy that is unto salvation. Justice presupposes rightful claims, and mercy can be operative only where no claim of justice exists. Since mercy alone is the constraining consideration, the only explanation is God’s free and sovereign determination. He has mercy as he pleases. This is the emphasis of Exodus 33:19 and to this Paul makes his definitive appeal. Back of this thesis is the polemic of the apostle in the earlier part of the epistle for the principle of grace.

Verse 16 can be regarded as the inference drawn from the Scripture quoted in verse 15 but it is preferably regarded as a statement of what is involved in the truth just asserted. The relation would then be as follows: if God has mercy on whomsoever he wills, “then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy”. The emphasis falls here on the exclusion of man’s determination as the negative counterpart to God’s exercise of mercy. The first negation refers to human volition, the determination belonging to man’s will; the second refers to man’s active exertion (*cf.* 1 Cor. 9:24, 26; Gal. 2:2; 5:7; Heb. 12:1). The mercy of God is not an attainment gained by the most diligent labour to that

end but a free bestowal of grace. No statement could be more antithetic to what accrues from claims of justice or as the awards of labour.

17, 18 Here another proof from Scripture is introduced. The most distinctive feature of this passage is that it expressly mentions the opposite of mercy. Verses 15, 16 had referred only to the exercise of mercy. If all men were the recipients of this mercy there would be no interference with the sovereignty of its exercise. It would have been of God's free choice that he determined to make all men its beneficiaries. We could not but think, however, of differentiation in the bestowal of mercy in such a context as this because it is with such the apostle is dealing. So in this second appeal to Scripture the negative of mercy is expressly stated—"whom he will he hardeneth" (vs. 18). The sovereignty of which the apostle is speaking is, therefore, not an abstract sovereignty but that which was concretely exemplified in the history connected with Moses in the twofold exercise of this determinative will of God, "he hath mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth". In view of the sustained emphasis on the free, sovereign will of God we must recognize that this sovereignty is just as inviolate in the hardening as it is in showing mercy. Otherwise the relevance to the subject in hand would be impaired. This is but another way of saying that the sovereignty of God is ultimate in both cases and as ultimate in the negative as in the positive.

The way in which the instance of Pharaoh is introduced is again significant for the apostle's use of Scripture. The words quoted are the word of God spoken to Pharaoh through Moses. But here the formula is not "he saith", as in verse 15, but "the scripture saith", indicating that this has the same effect as "God saith".

The word quoted (Exod. 9:16) is that spoken through Moses after the sixth plague, that of boils upon man and beast. In view of the preceding verse (Exod. 9:15), the verse quoted could be understood of the preservation of Pharaoh from being cut off from the earth in that particular instance by the pestilence of boils. But the term that Paul uses here, "raise up", is one that is used in the Greek Old Testament in the sense of raising up on the scene of history for a particular purpose (*cf.* Numb. 24:19; 2 Sam. 12:11; Job 5:11; Hab. 1:6; Zech. 11:16). So, with many commentators, the quotation is best taken here as referring to the position Pharaoh occupied by the providence of God on the scene of history and to the role he played in connection with the redemption of Israel from Egypt. The adamant opposition of Pharaoh became the occasion for the display of God's great power in the plagues visited upon Egypt and particularly in the distraction of Pharaoh's hosts in the Red Sea and the passage of Israel as on dry land. That God's name was thus published abroad in all the earth is abundantly verified and this signal manifestation of his power is the theme of Scripture elsewhere (*cf.* Exod. 15:13-16; Josh. 2:9, 10; 9:9; Psalms 78:12, 13; 105:26-38; 106:9-11; 136:10-15).

In verse 18 we have the same kind of explicatory conclusion as we found in verse 16: "So then he hath mercy on whom he will". This is to the same effect as verse 15 in its

emphasis upon God's sovereignty in the exercise of his mercy. But there is the new feature in this case, that the sovereign and determinative *will* of God is mentioned and bears the emphasis. Like verse 15 it is a statement that has general application to God's exercise of mercy; whoever is the recipient of mercy owes this favour to God's sovereign will. The main question in this verse is the kind of action implied in the words "whom he will he hardeneth". Like verse 15 and the first part of verse 18 this is a statement with general application to every case that falls into this category. But since this verse is an inference from verse 17 or, preferably, an explication of what is involved in the providence of God referred to in verse 17, we must regard Pharaoh as an example and the example particularly in view. As Moses, in this context, exemplifies mercy, so Pharaoh hardening. Furthermore, since the hardening of Pharaoh's heart is so frequently mentioned in the general context from which verse 17 is taken, there can be no doubt but Pharaoh's hardening is in view. What then is this hardening?

The harshness of the term could be relieved by the view that God is said to do what he permitted. God allowed Pharaoh to harden his own heart but the action of hardening was Pharaoh's own. Analogy could be appealed to in support of such an interpretation (*cf.* 2 Sam. 12:11; 16:10; Psalm 105:25). As Hodge says, "from these and similar passages, it is evident that it is a familiar scriptural usage, to ascribe to God effects which he allows in his wisdom to come to pass".

There can be no question but Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Although the instances are comparatively few in which the activity of Pharaoh is expressly mentioned (*cf.* 7:13; 8:32(28); 9:34), yet they are sufficient. But, preponderantly, the terms are to the effect that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart (*cf.* Exod. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8). The term used by Paul is the same term as occurs in each of these latter instances in the Greek Old Testament. With this sustained emphasis on the Lord's action it would not be proper to dismiss the interpretation that God did harden Pharaoh's heart unless there were compelling biblical grounds to the contrary. A contextual consideration and the teaching of Paul earlier in this epistle constrain the conclusion that God's action is in view. The text is concerned with the sovereignly determinative will and action of God. This is patent in connection with his mercy: "he hath mercy on whom he will". The determinative will comes to effect in the act of having mercy. These same emphases must be carried over to the hardening: "whom he will he hardeneth". The parallel must be maintained; determinative will comes to effect in the act of hardening. Furthermore, Paul had prepared us for such a conception by his teaching in 1:24, 26, 28 where he deals with judicial abandonment to lust, to the passions of dishonour, and to a reprobate mind (*cf.* comments on these verses). Thus a positive infliction on God's part is the only interpretation that fits the various considerations.

The hardening, it should be remembered, is of a judicial character. It presupposes ill-desert and, in the case of Pharaoh, particularly the ill-desert of his self-hardening.

Hardening may never be abstracted from the guilt of which it is the wages. It might appear that the judicial character of hardening interferes with the sovereign will of God upon which the accent falls in this text. It would be sufficient to say that this cannot be the case in the counsel with which the apostle is dealing. It is impossible to suppress or tone down the sovereign determination of God's will any more than in the first part of the verse, as noted earlier. But it should also be observed that the sin and ill-desert presupposed in hardening is also presupposed in the exercise of mercy. Both parts of this verse rest upon the premise of ill-desert. Indeed, the whole argument of the apostle in this section in refutation of the objection that there is unrighteousness with God (vs. 14) is conducted on the premise that salvation is not constrained by the dictates of justice, that it proceeds entirely from the exercise of sovereign mercy, that God has mercy on whomsoever he wills. The differentiation, therefore, overtly expressed in verse 18, is altogether of God's sovereign will and determination. In reference to the judicial act of hardening the sovereignty consists in the fact that all, because of the sin and ill-desert presupposed in mercy as well as in final judgment, deserve to be hardened and that irretrievably. Sovereignty pure and simple is the only reason for the differentiation by which some are consigned to hardening while others equally ill-deserving are made the vessels of mercy. There is thus no escape from sovereignty in the will to harden or in the action which brings this will to effect. Hence Paul can say without any more reserve than in the case of mercy, "whom he will he hardeneth".

9:19-26

The objection here is one that arises from the assertion at the end of verse 18 that God hardens whom he will. If God determinatively wills to harden men and puts that will into effect, how can those subjected to this hardening be condemned? Are they not in that state by the will of God? This question is reinforced by the consideration that no one can frustrate this will of God. The will of which Paul is speaking in the preceding context and which the objector has in view is not the will of precept but the will of determinate purpose. The way in which the objection, as it pertains to the irresistibility of this will, is stated should be noted. We might expect the question to be: who *can* resist his will? But the tense used has the force of a present condition and is properly rendered: "who withstandeth his will?" The objector implies that in the premises of the apostle's teaching there is no one who has placed himself in the position of withstanding God's will. It is not necessary to particularize the objector as Philippi does and say that Paul is "thinking of an arrogant Jew, such as alone he has to do with in the whole of the present exposition". The objection is the common one, inevitably encountered when dealing with reprobation. How can God blame us when we are the victims of his irresistible decree?

20 The answer is the appeal to the reverential silence which the majesty of God demands of us. The eloquence of the contrast between "O man" and "God" must be observed. On this contrast the other emphases rest. The conjunction rendered "nay but" (*cf.*

10:18; Luke 11:28; Phil. 3:8) in this instance serves to correct the self-vindication implied in the preceding questions. Based on the contrast between man in his weakness and ignorance and God in his majesty the emphasis falls on *thou*: who art *thou*? And then the presumption of man's attitude appears in the arrogance of replying against God. The method of answering the objection is similar to what we found earlier in 3:6. There Paul's appeal was to the universal judgment as an ultimate datum of revelation. When we are dealing with ultimate facts categorical affirmation must content us. So here, when dealing with the determinate will of God, we have an ultimate on which we may not interrogate him nor speak back when he has uttered his verdict. Who are *we* to dispute his government?

The apostle's answer is significant not only as illustrating his method and the assumptions upon which this method is based but also for what he does not say. If, in the matter concerned, the determinative will of God were not ultimate, if the differentiation of verse 18 were not due solely to God's sovereign will, then the apostle would have to deny the assumption on which the objection is based. This he does not do. In Calvin's words: "Why, then, did he not make use of this short answer, but assign the highest place to the will of God, so that it alone should be sufficient for us, rather than any other cause? If the objection that God reprobates or elects according to His will those whom He does not honour with His favour, or towards whom He shows unmerited love—if this objection had been false, Paul would not have omitted to refute it."

The latter part of verse 20 goes more conveniently with verse 21.

21 The thought here is the reproduction of what we find repeatedly in the Old Testament (*cf.* Isa. 29:15, 16; 45:9; 64:8, 9; Jer. 18:1–6). God's sovereign right, pleaded here after the pattern of the potter's right over the clay, belongs to God as Creator in the disposal of his creatures as creatures. It must be borne in mind, however, that Paul is not now dealing with God's sovereign rights over men as men but over men as sinners. He is answering the objection occasioned by the sovereign discrimination stated in verse 18 in reference to mercy and hardening. These, it must be repeated, presuppose sin and ill-desert. It would be exegetically indefensible to abstract verse 21 and its teaching from these presupposed conditions. In other words, Paul is dealing with God's actual government and with the sovereign determinations of his will actualized in this government. The same is true of the Old Testament passages of which verse 21 is reminiscent. Suffice it to refer to Isaiah 64:7, 9 which supplies the context of verse 8.

The similitude is that of the potter making vessels of different character from the same lump of kneaded clay, one to serve a high purpose, another a purpose less noble. No one questions his right to make these distinctions. He has not merely the power; he has the *authority*. There is no warrant for the interpretation or objection that Paul represents God as esteeming mankind as clay and dealing with men accordingly. He is using an analogy and the meaning is simply that, in the realm of his government, God has the intrinsic right to

deal with men as the potter, in the sphere of his occupation, deals with clay. But the kind of differentiation is as great as is the difference between God and the potter, on the one hand, and between men and clay, on the other.

22-24 These verses are an unfinished sentence (*cf.* Luke 19:42; John 6:62; Acts 23:9). Literally the Greek terms are “but if” and their force is properly rendered by “what if”, as in the version, or, as Sanday and Headlam observe, “like our English idiom ‘what and if’”. Understood thus the three verses are an expansion and application of what underlies the analogy appealed to in verses 20b, 21. If God in the exercise of his sovereign right makes some vessels of wrath and others vessels of mercy what have we to say? It is a rhetorical way of reiterating the question of verse 20.

The interpretation of these verses may more suitably be discussed in the order of the following details.

1. “Vessels of wrath” and “vessels of mercy” are best regarded in terms of verse 21. The potter makes vessels for certain purposes. So here the vessels are *for* wrath and mercy. It is true that they are vessels deserving wrath but this cannot apply in respect of mercy to the vessels of mercy. Hence both should be taken in a sense that can apply to both. This view is to the same effect as that of Calvin who says that vessels are to be taken in a general sense to mean instruments and therefore instruments for the exhibition of God’s mercy and the display of his judgment.⁴¹

2. The participle “willing” has been interpreted in two ways: “because willing” or “although willing”. In the former case the thought would be that because God wishes to give more illustrious display of his wrath and power he exercises his longsuffering. In the latter case the meaning would be: although God wills to execute his wrath he nevertheless restrains and postpones the execution from the constraint of longsuffering. In the one case longsuffering serves the purpose of effective display of wrath and power, in the other case longsuffering inhibits the execution of the just desert. In favour of the latter it could be said that according to 2:4 God’s longsuffering is a manifestation of the goodness of God directed to repentance and could hardly be represented as the means of promoting the demonstration of God’s wrath. Before reaching a decision on this question other considerations bearing on the interpretation of verses 22, 23 have to be taken into account.

3. The governing thought of these verses, as of the preceding, is the twofold way in which the sovereign will of God comes to expression. This is apparent from several considerations but from none more than from the two designations, “vessels of wrath” and “vessels of mercy”. This same emphasis upon God’s determinative will must be present in the word “willing” at the beginning of verse 22. It harks back to verse 18 and also to the term “will” in verse 19. So “willing” is not simply wishing but determining.

4. It would not be proper to suppress the parallel between “to show his wrath, and to make his power known” (vs. 22) and “that I might show in thee my power” (vs. 17). There is surely reminiscence of the latter in the former. Hence what God did in the case of Pharaoh illustrates what is more broadly applied to vessels of wrath in verse 21. Pharaoh was raised up and hardened, in the sense explained above, for the purpose of demonstrating God’s power and publishing his name in all the earth. If we interject the term “forbearance”, we must say it was exercised in this case in order that God’s great power might be displayed. From this consideration, namely, that of the parallel, there appears to be a compelling reason to subordinate the longsuffering of verse 22 to the purpose of showing his wrath and making his power known. If we bear in mind the determinate purpose of God upon which the accent falls and that those embraced in this purpose are vessels of wrath and therefore viewed as deserving of wrath to the uttermost, the “much longsuffering” exercised towards them is not deprived of its real character as such. It is only because God is forbearing that he delays the infliction of the full measure of ill-desert. Furthermore, the apostle has in view the unbelief of Israel and the longsuffering with which God endures their unbelief. He is reminding his unbelieving kinsmen that God’s longsuffering is not the certificate of God’s favour but that, awful though it be, it only ministers in the case of those who are the vessels of wrath to the more manifest exhibition of their ill-desert in the infliction of God’s wrath and the making known of his power. In the light of these considerations the participle “willing” (vs. 22a) can and should preferably be understood in the sense “because willing” rather than “although willing”. The total thrust of the context indicates the subordination which the former alternative implies.

5. The “willing” (vs. 22), as indicated already, has a twofold reference. The first is “to show his wrath, and to make his power known”. The second is “that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy” (vs. 23). This is parallel to other expressions earlier in this chapter, especially to verses 16b, 18a. But no expression used hitherto is of comparable richness. The same term is used for making known as is used in verse 22 for making known his power upon vessels of wrath. Yet there is an eloquent contrast in respect of what is made known. Now it is “the riches of his glory”. God’s glory is the sum of his perfections and “the riches” refer to the splendour and fulness characterizing these perfections. It is to be borne in mind that in the bestowal of mercy there is no prejudice to any of God’s attributes. But it is not this negative that bears the emphasis. It is that the perfections are magnified in the work of mercy and in no action is there so effulgent an exhibition of God’s glory (*cf.* Psalm 85:9–11; Rom. 11:33; Eph. 1:7, 12, 14; 2:4, 7; 3:8, 16; Col. 1:27; 1 Tim. 1:11). Glory in this instance is not to be identified with the glory mentioned at the end of verse 23. The latter is the glory bestowed, the former the glory of God manifested. The correlation, however, is noteworthy. The grandeur of believers’ bliss will consist in the fact that therein the richness of God’s glory will be manifest and it would fall short of “glory” if this were not the case.

6. The vessels of wrath are “fitted unto destruction”. The question disputed is whether they are represented as fitted or prepared by God for destruction or whether they are viewed as fitting themselves for destruction. It is true that Paul does not say that God prepared them for destruction as he does in the corresponding words respecting the vessels of mercy that “he afore prepared” them unto glory. It may be that he purposely refrained from making God the subject. However, we may not insist that God is not viewed as fitting them for destruction. In verse 18 there is the agency of God in hardening. In verses 22, 23 the analogy of verse 21 is being applied and the vessels of wrath correspond to the potter’s vessel unto dishonour which he prepares for this purpose. They are also vessels of wrath and, therefore, as observed above, vessels for wrath, and wrath corresponds to destruction. For these reasons there is nothing contrary to the teaching of the context if we regard God as the agent in fitting for destruction. At the same time we may not dogmatize that the apostle intended to convey this notion in this case. The main thought is that the destruction meted out to the vessels of wrath is something for which their precedent condition suits them. There is an exact correspondence between what they were in this life and the perdition to which they are consigned. This is another way of saying that there is continuity between this life and the lot of the life to come. In the general context of the apostle’s thought there is no release from human responsibility nor from the guilt of which perdition is the wages.

7. The vessels of mercy God “afore prepared unto glory”. In this case there is no question as to the agent. The vessels of wrath can be said to fit themselves for destruction; they are the agents of the demerit which reaps destruction. But only God prepares for glory. The figure of the potter is applied without reserve; vessels unto honour correspond to vessels prepared unto glory. The “afore prepared” points to the parallel truth indicated in “fitted unto destruction” that there is continuity between the process of operative grace in this life and the glory ultimately achieved. The glory meted out is something for which the precedent state and condition prepared the vessels of mercy (*cf.* 2 Tim. 2:20, 21).

8. Verse 24 must be understood in the light of the differentiation which permeates this whole passage from verse 6 onwards. This differentiation is the answer to the objection that the word of God might appear to have come to nought. It is the differentiation which the purpose of God according to election causes to be, exemplified in “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated”, vindicated in God’s sovereign prerogative to have mercy on whom he will and to discriminate between vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy. Since the apostle is not thinking abstractly nor dealing merely with the past, he brings this to bear upon the concrete situation which he encounters and upon the way in which God’s sovereign will unto salvation is realized in the present. So he says “even us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles”. This is the conclusion to what in English has been rendered as a question (vss. 22–24) with the implied answer that we have no reply against God (*cf.* vs. 20). Paul applies what he had said respecting vessels of mercy prepared

beforehand unto glory to actual experience in his own case and that of others. He finds in the call of Jews and Gentiles the illustration of God's working grace.

Although in verses 22, 23 there is not direct reference to the decretive foreordination of God in the expressions "fitted unto destruction" and "afore prepared unto glory", it is not possible to dissociate verse 24 from the earlier passage in which calling is given its locus in relation to predestination (8:28–30). Never in Paul is calling anything else than according to purpose and, therefore, the mention of calling in this passage harks back to the sovereign will and purpose of God repeatedly appealed to in the preceding verses. Thus the predestinarian background cannot be denied.

Calling here has the same meaning as elsewhere, the effectual call to salvation (1:7; 8:28, 30; 1 Cor. 1:9; Gal. 1:15; 2 Tim. 1:9). It is neither necessary nor proper to think that the preparation mentioned in verse 23 preceded the actual call. The call would rather be the inception of the preparatory process.

The reference to both Jews and Gentiles is all-important. That there should be the called from Jewry belongs to the argument of the passage as a whole. The covenant promise has not failed but comes to effect in the *true* Israel, the *true* children, the *true* seed (*cf.* vs. 6–9, 27, 29; 11:5, 7). This is expressed in the words "not from the Jews only". The form, however, signifies that the covenant promise and the electing grace of God have broader scope than Jewry. So "but also from the Gentiles" is added. In 4:12–17 the interest of the apostle differs from that of the present passage. There the polemic is focused upon justification by faith in opposition to works; here the interest is the fulfilment of the covenant promise. But there is a close relationship between the two passages, as may be seen particularly from 4:16. Basic in Paul's thought is the promise given to Abraham that in his seed *all the families of the earth* would be blessed.

25, 26 These verses are an appeal to Old Testament passages in confirmation of the call of the Gentiles, drawn from Hosea 2:23; 1:10. There might appear to be a discrepancy between the purport and reference of these passages in the prophecy and as applied by Paul. In Hosea they refer to the tribes of Israel and not to the Gentile nations. There should be no difficulty. Paul recognizes that the rejection and restoration of Israel of which Hosea spoke have their parallel in the exclusion of the Gentiles from God's covenant favour and then their reception into that favour. Of Israel it had been said "Lo-ruhamah; for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel" (Hos. 1:6). But this is not the final word. God will again betroth in lovingkindness and "in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God" (Hos. 1:10). So it is with the Gentiles, once forsaken of God but later embraced in covenant love and favour. The same procedure is exemplified in both cases and Paul finds in the restoration of Israel to love and favour the type in terms of which the Gentiles become partakers of the same grace. "In the place where" (vs. 26) may best be taken as referring in Paul's application to "every place, where the people had been regarded as aliens, they should be called the

children of God". Thus "the utterance of God ... is conceived, in the plastic spirit of poetry, as *resounding in all Gentile lands*". "I will call" in this case should be understood not precisely in the sense of "called" in verse 24 but as "named". It is the new denomination that is expressed and the significance resides in the designation "my people" (*cf.* Numb. 6:27). The various designations, "my people", "beloved", "sons of the living God" express differing aspects of the new relationship and, correlative with the effectual call (*vs.* 24), are all soteric in their import.

9:27-33

27-29 In the two preceding verses the call of the Gentiles had been supported by and represented as the fulfilment of Old Testament promises. In these three verses the Isaianic witness is adduced to confirm Paul's thesis that the covenant promise did not contemplate or guarantee the salvation of all ethnic Israel. This is the proposition with which Paul began: "they are not all Israel, that are of Israel" (*vs.* 6). It is the thesis implicit in the statement of verse 24, "not from the Jews only". If all Jews were *ipso facto* heirs of the promise, this *form* of statement, identical with "also of the Gentiles" and coordinate with it, could not be used. The apostle is showing now from the Old Testament that prophecy itself had spoken of the remnant and of the seed as those to whom salvation belonged and apart from whom the nation would have suffered the destruction of Sodom.

Verses 27, 28 are taken from Isaiah 10:22, 23. This passage occurs in the context of the Lord's indignation executed upon Israel through the instrumentality of Assyria as the rod of God's anger and the staff of his indignation (*cf.* Isa. 10:5). From the desolation only a remnant of Israel would escape. This is spoken of as the return of "the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God" (*vs.* 21). Paul's quotation follows the Greek version with some modification and contraction. In verse 22 he changes "the people of Israel" to "the number of the children of Israel" and verse 23 he condenses. These adaptations do not interfere with the sense. In all cases, as Philippi says, "the fundamental thought is still this, that in the destruction of Israel and the salvation merely of a holy remnant, a divine judicial punishment is carried out". Here again Paul finds in escape from the Assyrian conquest an example of God's government of Israel as it applies to the actual situation with which he is dealing. This scripture demonstrates that God's promises do not pertain to the mass of Israel but are fulfilled in the remnant.

The main thought of verse 28 is the efficacy with which God accomplishes his word and the decree of which the word is the utterance. It is the emphasis of Isaiah 14:24: "Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand". "Finishing it" refers to accomplishment, "cutting it short" to the expeditious despatch with which the accomplishment takes place. The reference in Isaiah 10:22b, 23 is to the thoroughness and the despatch with which God's punitive judgment will be executed. Also, so widespread will be the destruction that only a remnant will escape. This same emphasis should be understood in the apostle's quotation. The salvation of the remnant and the significance of

the remnant are thrown into bold relief by the dark background of judgment with which this salvation is contrasted (*cf.* Amos 3:12).

Verse 29 is quoted from Isaiah 1:9 and adheres to the Greek version without modification. The only difference from the Hebrew is that “a little remnant” is rendered “a seed” in the Greek. In Paul’s teaching here “seed” and “remnant” have the same denotation. “Seed”, occurring here for the first time after verse 8, points back to that same meaning, namely, the seed who are partakers of the promise. The reference to the remnant is to the same effect as in verse 27 but the accent of the two verses differs. In verse 27 it is that only a remnant will be saved, in verse 29 that the remnant is the preserving seed apart from which the nation would have been given up to utter destruction. Both verses are closely related to the thought of verse 28. That only a remnant is saved points up the severity and extent of the judgment executed. That a remnant is saved is the evidence of the Lord’s favour and the guarantee that his covenant promise has not failed. It should be noted that it is by God’s gracious action that a seed is maintained: “except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed”. In accord with the sustained stress upon the sovereign will and determinate purpose of God in the preceding context the same is still applied to the reservation of a remnant and the preserving of a seed.²

² Murray, J. (1968). *The Epistle to the Romans* (Vol. 2, pp. 24–41). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.