

Romans Chapter 9
New American Standard Bible®

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Most of us have heard comments similar to the following:

“I believe God is this way. There is no other way he can be.”

“Well, I think you are wrong, because God certainly must be the way I see him.”

One of the problems we all have with God is making him fit and conform to our image of what he must be and how he must act in any given situation. We want God to be the way we want him to be, and not necessarily the way he actually is. We want him to be simple and predictable within our ability to see and understand. We want him to fit the pattern we have drawn up.

The problem is that that may not be the way he is at all. The box in which we want to store God likely doesn't fit God at all. The simple truth is that it is easy for us to misread God's actions and believe that he is trying to accomplish things that are not his will at all.

God gives us incredible opportunities and rich privileges, and when he gives us special blessings, we tend to jump to the conclusion that God we are his chosen ones, or that he likes us more than others and has given us special consideration over other people.

That was the problem the Jews had in Paul's day. They believed, as do many Christians (although not necessarily the Church) that they had special standing before God, higher than other Christians.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul has already stated three principles God follows when He acts:

1 – God never bases redemption or salvation on natural privileges: inheritance, ancestry, education or opportunity. All these natural privileges, though they may be granted to an individual and may give him great access to knowledge about God, do not guarantee that a person is chosen of God.

2 – With those whom God chooses, God always precedes that choice in history with a divine promise of his activity on their behalf. God himself promises to act. He never bases salvation upon what human beings are going to do, except as they respond to what God does. We must understand that redemption always has at the heart of it a promise that God has given and that we are to respond to.

3 - God's choice is never based on the behavior of individuals, whether good or bad. This is difficult for us to accept but Paul proves it in the case of Jacob and Esau, in which a choice was made before the boys were born, before they had opportunity to do anything, either good or bad. God made a choice. Therefore, salvation or redemption never is based on human works.

If these are true, what is the basis on which God chooses? If it is not works, if it is not the natural advantages which he himself gives, then what is it? In the second half of Chapter 9 Paul states that it is based on God's sovereign right to choose. God has a right to choose. That is the final resolution.

¹⁴What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! ¹⁵For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." ¹⁶So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. ¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." ¹⁸So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

Paul writes that salvation is not based on human effort or human choice -- it is the sovereign God who chooses. We may not understand (with our limited human view), but the ultimate reason for God's choice of anyone is that God chose him. He chooses whom he wants.

God is sovereign. He is not responsible to or answerable to anyone, certainly not to us and our desires. In the example Paul uses he shows God stating his sovereignty when he addressed Moses,

"I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."

Paul knew Moses well when he used him for an example. Moses was a nobody. Worse than that, (the truth was) he was a murderer. In a fit of anger, he killed a man. Fearing what would happen when the Pharaoh's soldiers discovered the crime, he buried the body (hid it), so he was a criminal, murderer, who attempted to hide his crime. Yet, he was the one the Sovereign God chose for the purpose Moses served. He placed him above the most famous and powerful king (Pharaoh) of that time and made him one who will likely never be forgotten. There are very few people who have access to God's word or to people who have access to it who do not know the name Moses.

God also demonstrated his sovereignty over Pharaoh. He made him (a man no greater than Moses in God's view) the ruler of a great nation and the most powerful man of his time. He allowed Pharaoh to resist God (as men everywhere do) so that God might demonstrate his power and attract the attention of men everywhere to his greatness.

As the humans we are, with our limited understanding (and limited/tunneled/short term/self-centered view), we tend to see and think of God as a "Superman" – an enlarged, more powerful version of us, who although infinitely stronger, still sees and thinks the way we do, and that is likely an eternity away from correctness and fact. When we act as we think God should, we seek vengeance and show a destructive nature so that we can enlarge our stature and increase our standing (power). God has no need for this, The things he does, he does for the overall benefit of his creation (the benefit of mankind). Everything God does is necessary to the welfare and benefit of his creatures, regardless of what we may see at our moment. The more his creatures understand the goodness and greatness and glory of God, the richer their lives will be, and the more they will enjoy life. Jesus said, "This is eternal life, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent," (John 17:3 KJV).

And so Paul comes to the conclusion that God has mercy on those whom he wants to have mercy and he hardens those whom he wants to harden. Immediately somebody objects. Paul acknowledges this in verse 19:

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

This pretty well sums up human thought. "God is to blame for everything bad and wrong. Who can resist his will? Why would he find fault, since these things are true? God uses men to do evil and then blames them for doing evil. What makes that our fault?"

Paul answers the question of those who challenge God in four ways:

²⁰On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?

"Who (can) answers back to God?" "The thing molded will say Why did you make me like this?"

We do not understand the reasoning of a Sovereign God. There is no way we can, so what right do we have to question?

²¹Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

God made us (just like the potter makes the vessel) and can do with us as he wills (just as the potter). The use for the vessel is the directive of the potter; even beautiful vessels can be put to common (simple) use if that is the will of the potter. Even a very simple vessel can be devoted to a high use, if that is the desire of the potter. The use and function for the vessel is as directed by the one that made it.

In the same manner, the farmer plants and harvests as he desires. The cattleman raises his herd and sends them to slaughter as he desires. We understand those things. It is the same with God.

²²What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? ²³And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. ²⁵As He says also in Hosea, "I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, 'MY PEOPLE,' AND HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED, 'BELOVED.'" ²⁶"AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO THEM, 'YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE,' THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD."

²⁷Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL BE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED; ²⁸FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD ON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY."

Paul's thought here is that God has plans and objectives that we do not see (cannot see). As we have the free will to resist God, He demonstrates his great patience (longsuffering) with us in allowing us to resist Him. For centuries and centuries, God has put up with the snarling, nasty, blasphemous, accusing remarks of men, and has done nothing to them. He has listened to all the cheap, shoddy, vulgar things that men say about him, and allowed them to treat him with hostility and anger and never does a thing but patiently endure it and wait for us to come to an understand of His will for us and then respond to it. Sadly, some never do see God and respond to his call for us.

For some to be saved, must some be lost? Paul suggests here that without the display of wrath on God's part, no Gentiles ever would have been saved -- only the elect of Israel, and only a remnant of them. But, as it is, the Gentiles, those of us who never had the advantages that Israel had, are included, as Hosea and Isaiah both predicted.

Paul's Final Argument:

²⁹And just as Isaiah foretold, "UNLESS THE LORD OF SABAOTH HAD LEFT TO US A POSTERITY, WE WOULD HAVE BECOME LIKE SODOM, AND WOULD HAVE RESEMBLED GOMORRAH."

If God had not dealt with us as He has, would we all have become like Sodom and Gomorrah? These are two places of total desolation. There is absolutely nothing left of these two places. The truth is that we are born lost, and without action by God, that is where we will remain.

**"There is none that does good, no, not one! There is none that seeks after God, not one!"
(Romans 3:10-11)**

So, how can we tell if someone is chosen or not?

³⁰What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; ³¹but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. ³²Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³just as it is written,

**"BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE,
AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."**

How can you tell? Look at how they deal with Jesus (the stumbling stone). God has placed a stone in the path of society. When we walk down a path and come to a big flat rock in the middle of the path, there are two things we can do. We can stumble over it, or we can stand on it, Paul says it is one way or the other. That is what God says Jesus is – the stumbling stone. We have faith in Jesus or not:

"AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

The Jews believed they could work out their salvation on the basis of their own behavior, and their righteousness before God, stumbled over the stone. They rejected Jesus. In their insistence on basing righteousness before God on works and the Law, they stumbled over the stone of stumbling and were unable to save themselves.

God put Jesus (the stone) in the midst of human society to reveal those whom he has called, and those whom he has not. Jesus taught this very plainly: "No man can come to me except my Father draw him," (John 6:44); and "all that my Father has given me shall come to me. Him that comes to me I will never, never cast out," (John 6:37 KJV).

"AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."