[Note to the reader: The diagramming of verses may not transfer to Kindle mode.]

***The Sovereign Mercy of God—Romans 9***

Possibly more than any other text of the Bible, this text throws open the curtain of the ultimate cause of salvation for God’s people, both individually and corporately. Although the Apostle Paul will give passing mention to man’s responsibility to repent and believe (vv. 30-33), this is not the primary burden or emphasis of the text which is clearly the sovereign mercy of God.

My message will follow what I believe are the **natural divisions** of the text.

***I.*** In spite of its many privileges, Israel has failed to believe the gospel ***(vv. 1-5).***

***II.*** In spite of Israel’s unbelief, the word of God has not failed. The **promises** to Abraham were never made to Israelites according to **natural** birth, but to Israelites according to **supernatural** birth ***(vv. 6-9).***

***A.*** God **promised** Abraham that Sarah would have a son—a supernatural birth by a woman too old to bear children.

***B.*** God **promised** Rebecca that he loved and chose Jacob instead of Esau before they were born and before they had done either good or bad, although they would have the same mother and father. Both of them would be biologically related to Isaac and Rebekah and also Abraham and Sarah.

***III.*** Salvation was never according to **man’s works**, but always according to **God’s sovereign choice** ***(vv. 10-13).***

***IV.*** Paul answers two objections to God’s sovereign choice in election ***(vv. 14-29).***

***A.*** ***First Objection (v. 14):*** God is unjust because He has mercy on some but hardens others***.***

***Answer (vv. 15-18):*** All are sinners, and God owes mercy to none. Therefore, He has the right to show mercy to some but to harden others.

***B.*** ***Second Objection (v. 19):*** If salvation does not depend on the will of man, but on the will of God, why does God find fault with unbelief since no one can resist the sovereign will of God?

***1.*** ***First Answer (vv. 20-21):*** God is the Creator who can do what he wishes with His creatures.

***2.*** ***Second Answer (vv. 22-29):*** The chief purpose of God is to glorify Himself. The sovereign election of some and the hardening of others is the grand demonstration of mercy and grace upon those He chose to save, and it is the grand demonstration of wrath and power upon those He chose to harden. Furthermore, this demonstration of wrath and mercy applies to both Jews and Gentiles.

***V.*** The sovereign election of God does not eliminate human responsibility ***(vv. 30-33).***

***Concluding Application***

***I. In spite of its many privileges, Israel has failed to believe the gospel (vv. 1-5).***

1I am telling the truth in Christ,

I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit,

2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.

3 For I could wish that I myself

were accursed,

*separated* from Christ

for the sake of my brethren,

my kinsmen according to the flesh,

4 who are Israelites,

to whom belongs

the adoption as sons,

and the glory

and the covenants

and the giving of the Law

and the *temple* service

and the promises,

5 whose are the fathers,

and from whom is

the Christ according to the flesh,

who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Paul is grieved because his countrymen, the Jews, do not believe the gospel. His grief is so intense that he could wish—if it were **possible**, and if it were **proper**—that he, himself, were damned if his damnation would result in the salvation of his countrymen according to the flesh—the Israelite people. He is not exaggerating his grief, but utters an oath bearing witness to the truth of his statement.

One could have expected better from the Israelites. God has blessed them above all peoples, and Paul makes a **long list of their privileges** in vv. 1-5. God adopted them as His national people. He revealed His glory to them in all the miracles He performed for them in the wilderness and in the ministry of Christ. He gave them His Law, the temple sacrifices which picture the sacrifice of Christ, and the promises made to Abraham. Not only this, but God gave them the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—whose lives were types (pictures) of Christ and who were ancestors of Christ.

In spite of these great privileges, Israel rejected their Messiah, Jesus Christ. Their unbelief brings up an **urgent question** which is not directly stated but implied: **Have the promises to Abraham failed because of Israel’s unbelief?** Paul anticipates this question in ***v. 6*** and answers it.

***II. In spite of Israel’s unbelief, the word of God has not failed. Why not? Because the promises to Abraham were never made to Israelites according to natural birth, but to Israelites according to supernatural birth (vv. 6-9).***

6 But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed.

For they are **not** **all** **Israel**

who are *descended* from Israel;

7 **nor** are they **all children**

because they are Abraham's descendants,

**but**: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED."

8 That is, it is **not** thechildren of the flesh

who are **children of God,**

**but** the **children of** the promise are regarded as descendants.

9 For this is the word of promise:

"AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON."

Not all of those who descended **naturally** (biologically) from the nation of Israel are actually the **true Israel**. Those who are the natural descendents of Abraham are not necessarily the true **children of God.** The reason for this is that **both Isaac and Ishmael** were natural descendents of Abraham, but the promises of God were given **only to Isaac**, not to Ishmael.

The **children of God** and the **fleshly descendents of Abraham** are not **the same group of people.** Just as the promise was made to Isaac and not Ishmael, so also the promise is made only to the **true** children of God. It is **the children of the promise** who are the **real descendents** of Abraham, the true children, and not merely **fleshly** descendents. Thus, the children of God, the children of the promise are the **true Israel within Israel.** There are **elect Israelites** within the **elect nation** of Israel.

The elect nation of Israel

Elect Israelites within the elect nation of Israel

And what is the **word of the promise**? “Sarah shall have a son.” What is so special about this promise? Sarah is 90 years old, so **how** will Sarah have a son? She will have a son **supernaturally** by the power of God. The birth of a child must be **supernatural** because Sarah was too old to have children. Ishmael, on the other hand, was born **naturally** since Hagar was still young enough to bear children.

Therefore, the **supernatural birth** of Isaac is the **foreshadowing** of the supernatural birth of **all** the **true** children of God—children who are born not **once**, but **twice**.

In **Galatians 4**, Paul uses the births of Ishmael and Isaac as representative of **children** who are produced either naturally by the **covenant of works** or supernaturally by the **covenant of grace**.

21Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. 23 **But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh,** *[that is, naturally]* **and the son by the free woman through the promise.** *[that is, through the supernatural promise of God to Abraham and Sarah]*

24 This is allegorically speaking, for these *women* are **two covenants**: one *proceeding* from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be **slaves**; she is Hagar…. 26 But the Jerusalem above is **free**; she is our mother. (Galatians 4:21-24, 26 NASB)

The **“slaves”** in ***Gal. 4: 24*** are everyone, Jews particularly but anyone else, who attempts to be saved by **human effort**—keeping some kind of law, the **law of God** or the **law of one’s conscience**. This is the natural, fleshy means of being right with God. This method of salvation **produces slavery** because a person **can never do enough** **to win his freedom** **or his acceptance with God**. How many times must a person attend church, read his Bible, witness, pray, give to charity, etc., before he is pleasing to God? He never knows how much he must do. A slave can never live in the master’s house. Someone working his way to heaven will never get there.

On the other hand, the **free children** are those who are saved supernaturally by grace. They are accepted by God because they are **united to Christ who bought their freedom through His perfect righteousness**. God accepts the work of Christ, and He therefore accepts them because of their relationship to Christ. **Free children** are accepted because of a **relationship**. Christ is their Brother, and they are the adopted sons of God. They already live in the house because they are not slaves; they are children of God. And because they are children of God who love their heavenly father, they will do as much as they can—not as little as they can—to be pleasing to Him.

It would not be correct to say that the promise of God to the physical Jewish nation has not been fulfilled since the Jewish nation—with few exceptions—has failed to believe in Jesus Christ. The promises of salvation were never really made to the **whole nation** in the first place. They were made only to a **small remnant** of Jewish believers who were actually saved.

In other words, God did not choose the whole Jewish nation for **spiritual** salvation. He chose the whole nation for **physical** salvation from Egypt, but this was only a picture of a **better salvation**—salvation from sin. For this better salvation, God chose only a small number of Israelites from the whole nation. So Paul is arguing here that God’s promises have not fallen to the ground. He has fulfilled His original promise to Abraham to make him a great nation. It just so happens that this great nation of believers now consists mostly of Gentiles, not Jews. But even some Jews are included, for he says later in Rom. 11: 1 that God has not rejected **all** of His elect Jews, for Paul is also a Jew.

I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. (Romans 11:1 NASB)

This brings us to the third point in Paul’s argument. The first point was

***I. In spite of its many privileges, Israel has failed to believe the gospel (vv. 1-5).***

The second point was

***II. In spite of Israel’s unbelief, the word of God has not failed. The promises to Abraham were never made to Israelites according to natural birth, but only to Israelites according to supernatural birth (vv. 6-9).***

Third,

***III. Salvation was never according to man’s works, but always according to God’s sovereign choice (vv. 10-13).***

Here, Paul throws back the curtain of the ultimate cause of salvation, and we will see that it is **not about us; it’s about God**. In ***Rom. 9:10***, Paul hints at **two ways of salvation**—salvation by **works** and salvation by **the gracious calling and election of God.**

10 **And not only this,**

**but** there was Rebekah **also**, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac;

11 for though *the twins*

were not yet born

and had not done anything good or bad,

so that

God's purpose according to *His* choice would stand,

**not** because of works

**but** because of Him who calls,

12 it was said to her,

"THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER."

13 Just as it is written,

"JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."

We may be able to understand that **Ishmael** was not a true **descendent** (a **child** of God) because he was **not the son of Sarah**, but the **son of Hagar**. But what do we make of **Esau**, who was not only the son of Isaac but also the son of Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, and not the son of a concubine like Ishmael? **Esau** was even the **twin brother** of **Jacob**, conceived in the womb at the same time. Esau was even the **firstborn** son, born seconds **before** Jacob. Therefore, God **reversed the order of blessing**, making Jacob, not Esau, the heir to the covenant promises.

If we are inclined to believe that Jacob—and not Esau—was selected as the child of the promise because he **had done something good**, consider the fact that God chose Jacob instead of Esau **before** either of them had been born and before either of them had done anything good or bad.

Furthermore, it would not be accurate to say that God chose Jacob instead of Esau because God **knew beforehand** that Jacob **would** do something good **after** he was born. It is true that Esau despised the covenant promise made to Isaac. He sold his birthright for a bowl of stew. But Jacob lied to his own father when he pretended to be Esau.

Moreover, if God chose Jacob because Jacob would later **value the promise of the covenant**, then God’s purpose would not be “according to *[God’s]* **choice**”, but it would be according to **Jacob’s** **choice.** In other words, God’s choice would be **controlled** by Jacob’s later choice. God would be **forced** to choose Jacob because Jacob chose to value the covenant promise. **To say it another way, God would choose Jacob because Jacob would later choose God.**

**But the burden of the text is to show us that God’s choice is** **free.** God’s choice does not depend on **someone else’s** choice. It depends only upon God, and he makes his choice **freely** and independently.

The text also says that God’s purpose is according to His **calling**, not according to a person’s **works**.

But if God choosing Jacob was conditioned by Jacob choosing God, then Jacob was chosen because of his **“works”,** not because of God **“who calls”.** But notice the words, **“not because of works, but because of him who calls.”** Paul will return to the question of works or grace later in ***Rom. 9: 30-33.***

Furthermore, the word for **“choice”** in ***v. 11*** is the word from which we get the word **“election”** (eklogh), so ***v. 11*** could be translated, “so that God’s purpose according to **election** would stand.” This is the way the *English Standard Version* and *New International Version* translates the verse.

ESV **Romans 9:11** though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of **election** might continue, not because of works but because of ahim who calls— 12 she was told, a"The older will serve the younger."

NIV **Romans 9:11** Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bada—in order that God's purposeb in **election** might stand: 12 not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger."1a

So then, who is electing whom? Do you know of anyone in the world that elected himself to office? It is clear from the text that Jacob has not elected himself to God’s favor. God has elected Jacob.

In ***v. 11***, **human works** are clearly opposed to God’s **calling.**

**not** because of works

**but** because of Him who calls,

What is this **calling** that Paul is talking about? This is the **inward call of the Holy Spirit**. God sovereignly **draws men to Himself** by the wooing of the Holy Spirit, convincing the sinner of his personal sin and the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.

***Romans 8: 29-30*** presents a clear picture of the **effectual calling** of God unto salvation. When God the Holy Spirit calls people to Christ, they will **not be able to resist** this call indefinitely. They may resist for a while, but eventually, those who are truly called of God will come to Him in faith. Just look at the text in Rom. 8: 29-30.

Those whom God foreknew are predestined. In the Bible, to **foreknow** someone means to love this person beforehand, before he was born. The word **to know** means to know intimately. Gen. 4: 1 says

ESV **Genesis 4:1** Now Adam **knew** Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain,

NIV **Genesis 4:1** Adam1 **lay** with his wifea Eve,b and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.

Obviously then, Adam did not simply **know about** Eve. He knew her intimately. God knows believers intimately. He foreknows us intimately because he chose us. Putting the two thoughts together, God fore-loved His people, He did not simply know about His people beforehand.

Notice also: All who are predestined are called. **Predestined** means to be chosen beforehand for salvation, even before the world was made, as Paul says in Ephesians,

3 aBlessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in bthe heavenly *places* in Christ,

4 just as aHe chose us in Him **before bthe foundation of the world**, that we would be choly and blameless before (Eph 1:3-4 NASB)

The NIV says, “before the creation of the world”. Then Paul says in Rom. 8: 30,

All who are called are justified. To be **justified** means two things: (1) to be **declared not guilty** of sin and (2) to be **declared righteous** in God’s sight. It is “just-as-if” you had never sinned, and “just-as-if” you were as righteous as Christ. “Just as” Christ is not guilty of sin, you are not guilty. “Just as” Christ is perfectly righteous, so you are perfectly righteous in the sight of God.

All who are justified are glorified. To be **glorified** means that we are made complete in Christ. It is described another way in v. 29, **conformed to the image of His Son.** This means that we will be made complete in Christ both spiritually and physically. God **makes** us to be (in the future) what He has **already declared** us to be (in the present). When God looks at us now, we are considered righteous, although we know that we are still sinful. But one day, we will be completely righteous in thought and deed—not just in God’s mind, but in practice. Moreover, when Christ returns, we will even be given a new body like His body which will never die.

Please notice something very important about this text in Romans 8. **None** of those who are initially **foreknown** are **lost**—**all** are predestined, **all** are called, **all** are justified, and **all** are glorified. God doesn’t lose anyone between foreknowledge and glorification.

"**All** that the Father gives Me **will** come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. (John 6:37 NASB)

"This is **the will of Him who sent Me**, that of **all** that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. (John 6:39 NASB)

Now, if we have not understood Paul so far in ***Romans 9: 1-12***, he makes it plainer for us in ***v. 13.***

Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED." (Romans 9:13 NASB)

But again, **when** did God love Jacob and hate Esau? Was it **after** Jacob chose God and **after** Esau despised God? No. He loved Jacob **before** he was born and had not done anything good or bad, and He hated Esau **before** he had been born or done anything good or bad.

Now, I will not argue with those who believe that the word **“hated” means “loved less”** as if to say that God loved Esau less than Jacob. It is clear that by choosing Jacob God loved Esau less. Yet, it is indefensible to say that the opposite of loving Jacob and including him in the covenant promise is loving Esau less. There is nothing in the text or in the history of Esau’s descendents which remotely suggests that Esau was finally saved. And **sending Esau to hell for eternity** sounds a lot like hate to me.

I will also not argue much with those who believe that **Jacob and Esau represent the corporate nations** rather than two individual persons. But if this is true, then **Paul’s whole argument falls to the ground.** He has already said that the promises did not belong merely to **Israelites according to the flesh**, and later he will argue that only a **remnant of Israel** will be saved and the rest will be **hardened** like Pharaoh. So if he is saying here that God loved the whole corporate nation of Israel but hated the whole corporate nation of Esau, then God has a strange way of showing this love because He rejected **most** of the individuals within the nation of Israel.

Application

What Paul has been describing here is the **doctrine of election—God choosing some people for salvation, but not everyone.**

We have seen from the text that election cannot be separated from the doctrine of salvation by grace. **The doctrine of election is the doctrine of grace brought to its ultimate conclusion.** Paul weaves the two doctrines of grace and election together not only here but elsewhere in his epistles. Here he says that **God’s choice of Jacob over Esau is not according to works** but **according to divine choice or election**. Salvation is caused by God who **calls** the sinner to himself. It is not caused by what the sinner does to **influence** God’s choice.

God does not choose the sinner because the sinner chooses God, but the sinner chooses God because God chooses the sinner—before he was ever born.

Later in ***Romans 9***, Paul says that there is an election of a **remnant** of the Jewish nation according to grace. He also teaches that **the Jews who attempted to be saved according to their works** were **not the elect.** Salvation by grace and grace alone apart from works is **fully comprehended** only if we comprehend the doctrine of election—that we are saved not by our works but by God who **calls us by grace.** I am **not saying** that we need to **understand** election in order to be saved. That would be salvation by works. Election is a complicated subject. I am saying that the **magnitude of God’s grace** is not fully understood unless we understand election.

Unless you understand that **you** could have been one of the people who were **not** chosen, and that you were chosen for **no other reason** than that God loved you before He created the world—before you had done anything good or bad and not because He knew what you **would** do—you will not fully appreciate the great salvation you have in Christ.

**Nevertheless, people still have many objections to the doctrine of election**, and beginning in ***v. 14…***

***IV.*** ***Paul answers some objections to God’s sovereign choice in election (vv. 14-24).***

***A. First objection (v. 14). God is unjust because He has mercy on some but hardens others.***

***Answer: All are sinners, and God owes mercy to none. Therefore, He has the right to show mercy to some but to harden others.***

14 What shall we say then?

There is no injustice with God, is there?

May it never be!

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."

16**So then**

it *does* not *depend*

on the man who wills

or the man who runs,

but on God who has mercy.

17 For 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."

18 **So then**

He has mercy

on whom He desires,

and He hardens

whom He desires.

This is probably not the first time Paul has taught the doctrines of election and reprobation; thus, he **anticipates objections** here that he has heard before.

Now, if God loved Jacob on the basis of some good found in Jacob, **then we would not accuse God of injustice**, would we? It would only be just **if God loved Jacob for his goodness**, for this is what Jacob would **deserve**. And if He hated Esau on the basis of some evil found in Esau, we would not accuse God of injustice to Esau because **this is what Esau would deserve**. But if God loved Jacob and hated Esau before they were born and not on the basis of some good or evil found in them **after** they were born, sometime in their lifetime, then we are tempted to accuse God of **injustice.** Right?

It sounds so **unfair**, so unjust. But does the accusation of injustice leave Paul speechless for an answer? Does Paul say, “You know. I never thought of that before.” No. Paul simply responds with, **“May it never be!”** or to paraphrase, **“God forbid that we should accuse God of injustice!”** Later Paul will extend his answer, but I am inclined to think that **his reasoning was** **something like this:**

“Surely **if** God **owed us something**, we could accuse Him of injustice. But as it is, He does not owe us anything. Well, maybe He does owe us something, ‘for the wages of sin is death.’”

“Therefore,” Paul would say, “God owes us death. Death is what we deserve. Now, it is true that Esau was not a rebel sinner before he was born, but **he proved that he was one after he was born.** But in fact, **Jacob also proved that he was a rebel sinner as well.** And we cannot blame God if both Jacob and Esau became rebel sinners—unless God should be blamed for sin—and certainly, none of us would accuse God of being the **cause of sin**.” I think Paul would have argued something like this.

Well, **if all of us become rebellious sinners**—and we do—**then** how does God **owe** any of us mercy and compassion? And how can He be unjust if He grants mercy and compassion to **some** of us, but **not all** of us”, if all of us prove later that we are disobedient?

What if I gave **some of you** in this room 500,000 Ush? Would the others in this room complain if I did not give **all of you** 500,000 Ush? But why would you complain? Did I **owe** you some money? But if I chose to give **some of you** 500,000 Ush but **not all of you**, why would you have reason to complain? Am I unjust because I am generous to **some people**, but not **everyone**? No, it’s my money, and you did nothing to deserve it.

Likewise, it is the sovereign privilege of God to **love whom He desires and to hate whom He desires—to have mercy on some people and to harden some people.**

As rebellious, **God-hating sinners**, we deserve God’s hatred, but it so happens that God decided to show mercy to **some** God-hating sinners.

But think of it another way. Some people are born in **Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan**. Others are born in the **US or Uganda**. Which groups of people are more likely to hear the gospel and become Christians—those in Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan or those born in the US or Uganda? Is God **unjust** for letting some people be born in Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia? No. God shows mercy upon some by letting them be born in the US or Uganda. He doesn’t show mercy on others by letting them be born in Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia where they will probably never hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**God’s Word to Moses**

God is not unjust for loving some and hating others. He is not unjust for blessing some with salvation but not others. Notice Paul’s quotation of ***Ex. 33: 19*** in ***v. 15.*** The word, **“for”** indicates reason. God is not unjust, and **here is the reason** found in ***Ex. 33: 19.***

For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." (Romans 9:15 NASB)

This may sound like an answer to you and me, but it made perfect sense to Moses, to whom it was first spoken. God was essentially saying, “No one has any claim on my mercy; therefore, I can give it to anyone I wish.”

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In this OT text, Moses requests that God show him His **glory.** But before Moses asks to see God’s glory he requests that God show him and Israel His favor by continuing His presence with Israel.

"For how then can it be known that I have found **favor** in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your **going with us**, so that we, I and Your people, may be **distinguished from all the *other* people who are upon the face of the earth?"** (Exodus 33:16 NASB)

God grants Moses his request, but He then says,

"I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." (Exodus 33:19 NASB)

We must understand the context of ***Ex. 33*** to understand ***v. 19***. In ***Ex. 32***, the nation of Israel worships the **golden calf** and God threatens to destroy the whole nation. Moses intercedes for the nation; and although many die, the nation is spared. Then in ***Ex. 33***, Moses pleads with God to **continue His presence** among the nation of Israel.

God grants Moses his request, but He makes it plain to Moses that **the people of Israel have no claim on His mercy and compassion.** The nation is rebellious and idolatrous. He will show mercy to **whomever** He pleases. In fact, He will later show compassion to the **Gentiles** who will one day be **distinguished** and favored **more than** the Jews. As far as showing Moses His **glory**, God insinuates (implies) that His glory consists in His sovereign **decision**to show compassion to whomever He wills. To paraphrase, “Moses, do you want to see my glory? My glory consists in my sovereign good pleasure to show mercy to whomever I wish—because no one deserves it.”

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**So then,** Paul says in ***v. 16***, salvation does not depend on the person who **exercises his will** or on him who **exerts effort to save himself** but on God who **exercises His will** **to show mercy to some**. This is entirely consistent with what the Apostle John says in his gospel,

1He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

“But!” you interrupt, “you see that God gave the right to become children of God to those who **received** Him.” To which I answer, “Yes, but why did **some** receive Him and the **Jews** did not receive Him? The answer is supplied in ***v. 13.***

13 who were **born**, not of blood **nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.** (John 1:11-13 NASB)

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And what does Jesus say to Nicodemus two chapters later in ***John***?

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3 NASB)

But Nicodemus is confused,

“How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" (John 3:4 NASB)

Then Jesus says,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of **water and the Spirit** he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 "That which is **born of the flesh is flesh**, and that which is **born of the Spirit is spirit**. 7 "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 "The **wind blows where it wishes** and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is **born of the Spirit.**" (John 3:5-8 NASB)

But Nicodemus still does not understand.

“How can these things be?” (John 3:9 NASB)

At this point, Jesus chides Nicodemus for his ignorance of the Scriptures.

“Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? (John 3:10 NASB)

In other words, “Nicodemus, don’t you read your Bible? What I have said is as plain as daylight in the prophet ***Ezekiel***. In that book God says of Israel,

“Then **I will sprinkle clean water on you**, and you will be clean; I will **cleanse you** from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 “Moreover, I will give you **a new heart and put a new spirit within you;** and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:25-26 NASB)

“Nicodemus, you are a **theologian in Israel**, and you don’t understand what I have said about being **born of water and the Spirit**? And you don’t remember the vision to Ezekiel about the valley of dry bones? That’s you, Nicodemus; you and all Israel—**dead** in your trespasses and sins. But God promised to make your dry bones live. So it is with everyone who is **born of the Spirit of God**.

‘The **wind blows where it wishes** and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going…’

Just like Ezekiel said,

“Then [God] said to me, ‘Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "**Come from the four winds, O breath**, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life."'" (Ezekiel 37:9 NASB)

In the Hebrew language, “breath” and “spirit” are the same word.

How does John say that we are **born again**? By a **person’s** will? No. But by the “**will of God”**. The analogy Jesus is making is clear.

As far as it depended on you, **you had nothing to do with being born the first time—physically**. Moreover, as far as it depended on you, **you also had nothing to do with your second birth**. In the **first birth** you were born of the **will of your parents**. In the second birth you were born of the **will of your heavenly Father through the Spirit.** You had nothing to do with it.

The other part of the analogy is the response of someone being born. When a normal baby is born, it cries. The crying did not give it birth. It is only the response to birth. Likewise, when you were born again, you responded in repentance and faith. The repentance and faith did not give you a new birth. They were simply the response of a new birth.

**God’s Word to Pharaoh**

God’s word to Pharaoh in ***v. 17*** is parallel to God’s word to Moses in ***v. 15***. In the Bible, “God says” and “Scripture says” are the same thing.

For 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." (Romans 9:17 NASB)

God’s word to Moses is further illustrated in **God’s word to Pharaoh** in ***v. 17.*** God has mercy on whom He wishes and compassion on whom He wishes. **Pharaoh is a supreme example.** Pharaoh now becomes a **contrast with Israel.**

God had compassion on Israel after they worshipped the golden calf even though they deserved His wrath as much as Pharaoh**. But God chooses not to have mercy upon Pharaoh**. He has compassion on whom He chooses. **Israel and Pharaoh** are now used by Paul in the same way he uses **Jacob and Esau.** God shows mercy to Jacob, but not Esau. He shows mercy to Israel, but not Pharaoh and Egypt.

God chose to raise Pharaoh to power in Egypt, and he became one of the most powerful men in the whole world at that time. What was **God’s purpose** in raising Pharaoh to power?

Two purposes: **First**, so that God could destroy **Pharaoh’s** **power** as a demonstration of **His almighty** **power**. **Second**, so that Pharaoh’s destruction would serve to proclaim God’s sovereign name throughout the whole earth so that all people would recognize that **He is God** and there is **no other.**

Now, why is Pharaoh a supreme example of God’s sovereign will in deciding **who will be saved and who will not be saved?** Well, if anyone had the power **to exercise his will independently of God**, Pharaoh had such power.

If anyone had the power **to demonstrate independent effort to save himself** and the Egyptian people, Pharaoh did. But Pharaoh could not even save his own firstborn. **So then** salvation does not depend on man’s **independent will or man’s effort**, but on God who exercises His sovereign will in doing what He wants to do. He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

**“Oh, but wait!”** someone says. Pharaoh **hardened his own heart**. After God removed the plague of frogs and the swarm of insects, the Scriptures say that Pharaoh hardened his heart.

But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, **as the LORD had said**. (Exodus 8:15 NASB)

But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go. (Exodus 8:32 NASB)

Yes, Pharaoh “hardened his heart…**as the Lord had said**.” But when did the Lord say, “Pharaoh will harden his heart”, in those exact words? When did God say that? **But God never said that.** He never said, **“Pharaoh will harden his heart.”** Rather he said to Moses,

“**When you go back to Egypt** see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but **I will harden his heart** so that he will not let the people go. (Exodus 4:21 NASB)

And again later in ***Ex. 7: 2-5*** God says,

"You shall speak all that **I** command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. 3 "**But I will harden Pharaoh's heart** **that I** **may multiply My signs and My wonders** in the land of Egypt. 4**When** **Pharaoh does not listen to you,** then **I** will lay **My** hand on Egypt and bring out **My** hosts, **My** people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt **by great judgments**. 5The Egyptians **shall know that I am the LORD**, when **I** stretch out **My** hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst." (Exodus 7:2-5 NASB)

Do you hear all the **I’s** and **my’s** in those four verses? **Six I’s and six my’s. My,—God is concerned for His own glory, isn’t He?** And He will not share it with another—not even Pharaoh and not with the gods of Egypt.

God said, **“I will harden Pharaoh’s heart.”** He never said, “But **Pharaoh** will harden his heart.” Nevertheless, Pharaoh did harden his heart just **“as the Lord said”**—that is, **because** the **Lord**

**said** that **He** would harden Pharaoh’s heart.

Notice also in ***Ex. 7: 4*** that God does **not** say, “**If** Pharaoh does not listen to you”. Rather, He says, “**When** Pharaoh does not listen to you.” There was no doubt in God’s mind that Pharaoh would not listen. Why? **Not** because God **knew beforehand** what Pharaoh would make an independent decision to harden his own heart, but because God had **willed** to harden Pharaoh’s heart.

After **eight** **destructive plagues**, Pharaoh still would not let the children of Israel go free. Only after all the first-born of Egypt were killed in the **ninth plague** did he allow them to go; and even after that, he chased after Israel to the Red Sea (***Ex. 14: 8***). **Was Pharaoh stupid**?

God had already knocked Pharaoh down nine times? **Was Pharaoh stupid, or did God harden Pharaoh’s heart…**

**…so that Pharaoh would not let the people go,**

**…so that God could demonstrate His power,**

**…so that everyone would know that only He is God?**

As Paul says in ***Rom. 9: 17*** which we have already read.

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "**FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, ….**

“This is why you were born, Pharaoh, and this is why I raised you to such power, so that I could knock you down.” O, that all national leaders could read and understand the story of Pharaoh! They don’t know that God raises them up just to knock them down.

Paul then concludes his argument in ***Rom. 9: 18,***

**So then** He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. (Romans 9:18 NASB)

The concluding statement in ***v. 18*** is essentially the same as Paul’s statement in ***v. 16*** which also begins with **“so then”** or **“therefore”** (NIV). Notice the parallels from ***vv. 15-18.***

15For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."

16 **So then** it *does* not *depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

17 For 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."

18 **So then** He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

Notice also the parallels **within** ***v. 18***. The obvious parallels are the two phrases **“whom He desires”.** But, further, **“has mercy”** is parallel with **“hardens”.** In other words, God has mercy on some, and He hardens some. What is the opposite of having mercy? **The opposite of having mercy is to harden.**

**But how does God show mercy?** He **“softens”.** He softens a person’s heart, **giving him repentance and faith**. “But wait!” you say. I thought repentance and faith was **my response to God’s grace**? Indeed it is—the response of a dead man who has been made alive. And where did you get this repentance and faith, and why do some people respond in repentance and faith and other people do not? God must first **give** you repentance and faith before you **respond** inrepentance and faith. He must first make your dry bones live; He must first raise you spiritually from the dead. When the disciples in Jerusalem heard that the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, had been converted to Christ, they said,

"Well then, **God has granted** to the Gentiles also the **repentance** *that leads* to life." (Acts 11:18 NASB)

**Augustine,** the great African Theologian, said it well, “God give me what you demand, and then demand whatever you will.” In ***Ephesians***, speaking of many Christian Gentiles, Paul says,

For by grace you have been saved through **faith**; and that **not** of yourselves, *it is* the **gift of God**; (Ephesians 2:8 NASB)

Repentance and faith are **gifts** of God granted **to some but not to others**. God **hardened** Pharaoh. **He did not grant Pharaoh the repentance and faith that leads to eternal life**. He did not soften his heart, enabling him to believe. He did not make Pharaoh’s dead bones live. If God had softened his heart, Pharaoh would have repented and allowed the children of Israel to go. He did not do this, giving God the opportunity to demonstrate His wrath and power against Pharaoh.

***B. Second objection (v. 19): If salvation does not depend on the will of man, but on the will of God, why does God find fault with unbelief since no one can resist the sovereign will of God?***

***1. First Answer (vv. 20-21): God is the creator who can do what he wishes with His creatures.***

In ***v. 19*** Paul **anticipates another objection** to the doctrine of election. He anticipates the first objection in ***v. 14.***

14 What **shall we say** then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!

Answer: Because God did not owe grace to anyone.

19 **You** **will say** to me then,

"**Why** does He still find fault?

For who resists His will?"

20 On 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?

21 Or 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?

It is clear from the OT text that Pharaoh could not resist the decreed will of God to harden his heart. This fact brings up the very question, “Why then does God find fault? For who resists His will?” If Pharaoh is the independent actor in the ***Exodus*** text, then Paul’s illustration and argument falls to the ground. The question, “Who resists His will?” **doesn’t make sense** **if Pharaoh resists the will of God by hardening his own heart.**

At this point, Paul’s **imaginary opponent** says, “What if I agree that salvation does not depend on the **will of man**, but the **will of God** who either decides to show mercy or to harden? But why does God find fault with someone who does not believe since this person is simply **demonstrating the sovereign will of God** who does not grant repentance and faith?”

Paul’s answer to this objection is found in ***vv. 20-21***.

The argument is essentially the same as the one in ***vv. 15-18***—**the sovereign privilege of God**. But here, it is the privilege ascribed to the **Creator**. God created us, and this gives Him the privilege to do with us whatever He wants to do. The potter decides what to do with **a lump of clay**. **Some** of this clay he will use to make a vessel for **“honorable”** use—**a vessel for carrying water or for eating food.** From another part of this lump he will make **a vessel for dishonorable use—a garbage pot or a chamber pot.** In the same way God decides what to do with the **“lump” of humanity**.

**“Oh!” but you say,** “**Some** clay is better suited for honorable use, and **some** clay is more suitable for dishonorable [common] use.” Some people are good and some are bad. **But Paul does not say this.**

The potter is not deciding what to do with **different** lumps of clay, but the **same** lump. There is **nothing different** about the clay which comes from the same lump. Some of the clay is not **more suitable** for honorable use and the other for more suitable for dishonorable use. The **only difference** is in the **independent will of the potter** to use the clay **as he wishes.**

Likewise, God sovereignly decides what to do with the **same lump of humanity**—**some** He will save, and **others** He will not save. It is His decision to make, and His alone, and His decision is not in any sense influenced by the **quality** of the individual. All humanity belongs to the **same** lump, and we have already seen from Jacob and Esau that **this lump** is bad, wicked, completely polluted. But the clay cannot say to the potter, **“What do you think you are doing? Why did you make me for this purpose?”** The idea of common clay arguing with a human potter is absurd, ridiculous.

It is likewise ridiculous or absurd for a man, the creation of God, to argue with God. No one can say to God, **“What do you think you are doing? Why did you make me for this purpose?** Why didn’t you make all people for honorable use? Explain yourself!”

And this is Paul’s answer to the question, “Why does God find fault, for who resists his will?” **We may not find his argument very satisfying.** It surely does not answer all of our questions about the way God deals with the human race.

The argument is very similar to the argument God gives Job. Job thought God had treated him unfairly, and he demands an explanation from God. God’s first answer to Job occurs in ***Job 38-39*** and basically amounts to this: **“You didn’t create the world; I did. And you do not sustain the world, I do.”** And this could have been the end of the argument, but God has pity on Job and continues His argument in ***Job 40-41*** in which He says, **“You cannot control the world; I can, and I control it according to my infinite wisdom, wisdom you cannot possibly understand. And Job, this is the end of the argument.”**

Paul could have ended his argument right here, but he continues.

***2. Second Answer to the objection (vv. 22-29). The objection is: Why does God find fault since no one can resist His will? Second Answer: The most important purpose of God is to glorify Himself. The sovereign election of some and the hardening of others is the grand demonstration of mercy upon those He chose to save, and it is the grand demonstration of wrath and power upon those He chose to harden.***

22 What if God,

although willing

to demonstrate His wrath

and to make His power known,

endured with much patience

vessels of wrath

prepared for destruction?

23 And *He did so*

to make known the riches of His glory

upon vessels of mercy,

which He prepared beforehand for glory,

24 *even* us,

whom He also called,

not from among Jews only,

but also from among Gentiles.

25 As 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."

27 Isaiah 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; 28 FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD ON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY."

29 And 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."

The **election** of some and the **reprobation** of others is the **GRAND DEMONSTRATION** of God’s mercy as well as the **GRAND DEMONSTRATION** of His wrath and power (see Jay Adams, ***The Grand Demonstration—A Biblical Study of the So-Called Problem of Evil.***)

He has already said something about this grand demonstration in ***v. 17.***

17 For 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."

But now Paul explains this demonstration further. Throughout human history, **God patiently “endured” (tolerated) rebellious unbelievers in order to demonstrate the riches of his glory upon believers.** God “put up with” unbelievers. What does Paul mean when he says God “endured”, or “put up with” unbelievers? He means that God put up with their sinful lives—their ill-treatment of other people, their covetousness, their lies, their immorality; and, most importantly, God put up with their ingratitude and hatred toward Him. He endured all this, but He did not have to. But He did so in order to demonstrate His final wrath upon unbelievers at the judgment, but most importantly, to demonstrate His mercy upon believers in salvation.

Believers were **“prepared”** beforehand for glory. Unbelievers were “**prepared”** for destruction—**like Pharaoh**. What God has done with the whole lump of mankind is **not a reaction** to what man has done or would do. It is the **outworking of His predetermined plan** which He worked out before He made the world (Adams). As Paul says in Ephesians,

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, 4 just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, **according to the kind intention of His will**, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Ephesians 1:3-6 NASB)

**The whole history of the human race is stage upon which the drama of redemption is played out for the salvation of the people of God and the grand demonstration of His mercy and wrath.**

**Would we understand the light without darkness?** Could we appreciate the **stars** without the blackness of **space**? Likewise, we would not understand or appreciate the **glory** of God’s grace without understanding His **wrath** upon unbelievers.

**This Grand Demonstration includes both elect Jews and elect Gentiles.**

**Furthermore, Paul says, this grand demonstration of mercy applies to both elect Jews and elect Gentiles.**

24 *even* us, whom He also called, **not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.** (Romans 9:23-24 NASB)

Paul now comes **full circle** back to his original argument in ***Rom. 9: 6-13***. The **objections** to the sovereignty of God in election and Paul’s **answers** to these objections are found in ***verses 14-23.***

But these verses are merely an **interruption** to Paul’s major theme**:** namely, God’s promises have not failed because of Israel’s unbelief. The promises of God were **never intended** for those who were merely fleshly descendents of Abraham.From the very beginning, they were intended only for those **whom God had chosen**. Isaac was chosen; Ishmael was rejected. Jacob was chosen; Esau was rejected. **National descent** does not guarantee the promise. It is not even necessary (Moo). It really has nothing to do with it. The deciding factor is **God’s sovereign choice.**

The argument actually goes even farther back to ***Rom. 8: 29-30****.*

For those whom He **foreknew**, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He **predestined**, He also **called**…. (Romans 8:29-30a NASB)

In what sense did God **foreknow** His elect people?Did He foreknow whether or not we would believe or disbelieve? Well, yes, because God knows everything in advance. **But** this is not the meaning of foreknow in ***Rom. 8: 29*.** The context of ***Rom. 9*** teaches us that God **loved** Jacob but not Esau, and that this love was **not conditioned** or **determined** by anything that Jacob would do in the future. God did not love Jacob because Jacob would believe; Jacob believed because God loved him. And He loved him before he was born or had done anything good or bad “so that God’s purpose according to His choice would stand.”

So then, God’s **love** for Jacob is the same as God’s **foreknowledge** of Jacob.

**Paul will now explore the doctrine of election as the doctrine relates to the Gentiles.**

Since Pharaoh and Egypt were rejected, **does this mean that all Gentiles are rejected** along with Pharaoh and Egypt? Absolutely not! Election also extends to the Gentiles. Why is this? Because, as Paul has already shown, the promises of God were not intended for those who were merely physical descendents. When regard to God’s calling and election, **physical descendent** makes no difference whatsoever.

Paul then uses two texts in the prophecy of ***Hosea***, ***1: 10*** and ***2: 23,*** to show that the Gentiles are included in the **GRAND DEMONSTRATION** of God’s mercy to elect sinners.To get the context, we will look at ***Hosea 1: 6-11***.

6Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. And the LORD said to him, "Name her **Lo-ruhamah**, for **I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel**, that I would ever forgive them…

8 When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and gave birth to a son. 9 And the LORD said, "Name him **Lo-ammi,** for you are **not My people** and I am not your God."

10 **Yet** the number of the sons of Israel Will be **like the sand of the sea**, Which cannot be measured or numbered; And in the place Where it is said to them, "You are **not My people**," It will be said to them, "*You are* **the sons of the living God.**" 11 And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered together, And they will appoint for themselves **one leader**….(Hosea 1:6-11a NASB)

***Verses 10-11*** **reverse God’s judgment** upon Israel, beginning with the little word, **“Yet”.** In spite of Israel’s spiritual adultery and the judgment of God which follows, God will restore Israel and have compassion on Israel. Israel who was called **Lo-Ammi, not my people,** will once again be called **Ammi,** **my people**.

Continuing His address to Israel in ***chapter 2***, God says,

1Say to your brothers, "Ammi," *[my people]* and to your sisters, "Ruhamah."*[she has received compassion]*

You can see from the context that ***v. 1*** of ***chp. 2*** should actually be included in ***chp. 1.*** (Verse and chapter divisions in the Bible are not inspired by the Holy Spirit. They were added later only as a convenience.) ***Verse 1*** of ***Chapter 2*** is part of the **reversal** of God’s judgment in ***1: 10-11.*** In spite of God’s judgment upon faithless Israel, (“**Yet”) their numbers will be like the sand of the sea.** And although God has called them **Lo-ammi**, not His people, He will once again call them **Ammi,** His people. And although their disobedience and spiritual adultery have brought God’s judgment, **yet**, they will once again receive compassion—**Ruhamah.**

Is God being “wishy-washy”? Is He **contradicting Himself?** Is He showing compassion one minute and judgment the next? Not at all. Hosea is prophesying God’s treatment of Israel over a period of **hundreds of years,** maybe even thousands of years depending on how we interpret ***Rom. 11***. Israel **was** judged. She was completely devastated by the Assyrians and taken into exile in 722 BC. After this, the northern Kingdom of Israel ceased to exist, and Israel became **Lo-Ammi**, not God’s people.

In other words, **Israel** was reduced to the **same level as the Gentiles** who were **not the people of God** (O. Palmer Robertson, ***The Christ of the Prophets***).She had lost her covenantal privileges because of her disobedience.

Beginning in ***v. 2*** of ***chapter 2*** of Hosea, the prophet once again repeats God’s judgment of Israel.

2 "Contend with your mother, contend, For she is **not my wife,** and I am not her husband; And let her put away her harlotry from her face And her **adultery** from between her breasts, 3 Or I will strip her naked And expose her as on the day when she was born. I will also make her like a wilderness, Make her like desert land And slay her with thirst. 4 "Also, **I will have no compassion on her children,** Because they are children of harlotry. (Hosea 2:1-4 NASB)

What follows in ***2: 5-13*** is a continuation of Israel’s judgment and condemnation if they fail to repent—and they did fail to repent. But in ***v. 14***, we see once again a **reversal** of God’s judgment upon Israel like the reversal we saw in ***1: 10-11*** and ***2: 1.*** God **would not renounce His covenant with Israel forever**. Like Hosea going after his **adulterous wife**, God would pursue **His** **adulterous wife, the nation of Israel,** and bring her back to Him. After treating her severely during her destruction and exile, he would woo her back to Himself.

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, Bring her into the wilderness And **speak kindly** to her. (Hosea 2:14 NASB)

"I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, In **lovingkindness and in compassion**, (Hosea 2:19 NASB)

"I will sow her for Myself in the land. I **will also have compassion on her** who had not obtained compassion, And I will say to those who were **not My people, 'You are My people!'** And they will say, '*You are* my God!'" (Hosea 2:23 NASB)

**Paul applies Hosea’s prophecy to the Gentiles.**

But the **interesting thing** about the passage in ***Hosea*** is this**:** **Paul does not apply the passage in *Hosea* to the Jewish people to whom it was originally written. Instead, he applies it to the Gentiles.** This becomes clear from ***Rom. 9: 23-24.*** He speaks of “vessels of mercy…prepared for glory…”

24 *even* us, whom He also **called,** **not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.** (Romans 9: 24 NASB)

Then he says, “As he says also in Hosea…” We see from Paul’s use of the text in ***Hosea*** that the **forsaken Israelites** become a picture (type) of the **forsaken Gentiles.** The Gentiles were once **Lo-Ammi,** not the people of God. At one time they were **Lo-Ruhamah**—they had not received the compassion of God. God did not give them the Law, the Covenants, or the promises which He had given the Israelites (***Rom. 9: 4***). Likewise, the Israelites who were given these things had them **taken away from them**, reducing them to the same status as Gentiles.

Throughout the history of Israel, the Gentiles had remained in **spiritual darkness**, and God had done little—**in comparison to Israel**—to eliminate that darkness except by saving a few isolated Gentiles—Rahab the prostitute in Jericho, Ruth the Moabite, Uriah the Hittite, the Assyrians of Nineveh who repented at the preaching of Jonah—all of these are representatives of other Gentiles whom God saved. But whole **nations** of Gentiles had remained in spiritual darkness.

From the point of view of **God’s sovereign election**, it seemed as if **the Gentiles** **had not been chosen—They were not His people and they had not received compassion.**

**But this would change.** God would not overlook the Gentiles forever. The question is: **when** would it change? The answer is found in ***Hosea 1: 11a.***

11 And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel **will be gathered together**, And they will appoint for themselves **one leader**….

The **ultimate fulfillment** of this prophecy could be none other than the gathering of Israel together under their **one leader**, their Messiah, Jesus Christ. This must be the fulfillment, because the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah were **never again united** into one kingdom with one king. Once the two kingdoms were divided under Rehoboam, there was never one Israel and one king. But when the **Apostle** **Peter** preached his great sermon on the **day of Pentecost**, three thousand Jews were converted under **one king**, the risen Savior, Jesus Christ. But what does this have to do with the Gentiles?

**The growth of the church did not stop at Pentecost with only Jewish converts.** Not long after Pentecost, the church of Antioch (***Acts 13***) began to send missionaries—Paul and Barnabas—to the **Gentiles** in Asia Minor, and then these missionaries went to Achaia and Macedonia, and the **rest is history**. The Gentiles have now been incorporated into the people of God—the church of Jesus Christ. And because of the ingathering of the Gentiles into the church, the number of the **sons of Israel, also called the sons of God,** are like the **sand of the sea**. They are too numerous to count. What do I mean? Are **Jewish Christians** too numerous to count? No. **Gentile Christians**. The **Gentiles** have become **sons of God—**as Paul says in ***Gal. 3:26.***

For you are **all sons of God** *[through physical descent?No.]* through **faith** in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26 NASB)

I hope you can see how Paul takes this OT prophecy, which is spoken **to the Jews in Hosea’s day**, and applies it to the **conversion of the Gentiles**. The Gentiles, who were not God’s people, are now God’s people—sons of God too numerous to count.

**But what about the Jews?**

Well, Paul has already said in ***v. 24*** that God **called both Jews and Gentiles**. The restoration of the Jews prophesied in ***Hosea*** **includes** the calling of the Gentiles, but it certainly does not exclude the Jews. However, things **must get worse for the Jews** before they get better.

As Paul writes the church in Rome, the chosen **nation** had been reduced to a small **remnant** of elect believers (***v. 27***).

Isaiah 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**; (Romans 9:27 NASB)

**But how could the chosen nation be reduced to such a small number of believers?** There are **two reasons**. Paul has already told us the **first** reason.

So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He **hardens** whom He desires. (Romans 9:18 NASB)

The **hardening** of the nation of Israel—just like the **inclusion** of the Gentiles—**is the sovereign will of God. The sovereign pleasure of God is always the ultimate reason**.

Paul’s **first** **answer** always goes back to the sovereign will of God. He does not **explicitly** answer the question: **“Why then does God find fault with unbelievers if no one can resist His will?” Rather, he says, “God does what He pleases, like a potter molding clay.”**

**But this is not Paul’s only answer.** There is **another reason** why the whole elect nation has been reduced to a **small remnant** of individual Israelites. What is it?

**The Israelites did not believe the truth.**

God is sovereign, but man is responsible for his actions. God’s sovereignty is on **one side of the coin**, and man’s **responsibility** is on the **other.** Paul assumes that his audience understands that these two things are **not contradictory** to one another. And if we were able to **interview Pharaoh** or anyone else in hell, and ask them the question: “**Why are you in hell?**” They would **not** say, “Because I was not elect.” They all would say, “Because **I did not listen** to the voice of God in creation or the voice of God in His word.”

This leads us to the **fifth heading** in Paul’s argument which begins with another rhetorical question: “What shall we say then?”

***V. The sovereign election of God does not eliminate human responsibility*** ***(Rom. 9: 30—10: 21)***

30 What shall we say then?

That Gentiles,

who **did not** **pursue** righteousness,

attained righteousness,

even the righteousness which is by faith;

31 but Israel, **pursuing** a law of righteousness,

did not arrive at *that* law.

32 Why? 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."

The Gentiles did not pursue the kind of righteousness taught in the Law of Moses. They had no idea of being in **right standing** with God through keeping the Law. They didn’t have the special revelation of the Law of Moses, and they did not pursue the special kind of right standing with God which was the **religious tradition** of the Israelite nation (cf. Murray, ***Romans,*** p. 43; but also Moo, ***Romans,*** who takes issue with Murray’s interpretation of “law” in v. 31, p. 626).

Surprisingly, however, the Gentiles attained the **righteousness which they had not sought.** Notice Paul’s statement in ***v. 30***, “Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness.” This statement reminds us of what Paul had said previously in ***v. 16***,

So then it *does* not *depend* on the man **who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy**. (Romans 9:16 NASB)

The Gentiles were not pursuing the righteousness of God **by their own efforts**. They were not “running” toward God, but they nevertheless **attained** (or “obtained”) the righteousness of faith.

**And how did the Gentiles attain this righteousness?** Not by keeping the Law, but **by faith in Jesus Christ.**

But this begs **yet another question:** **How is it that the Gentiles had such faith, and the Jews didn’t have it?** The answer to this implicit question has already been given earlier in the chapter, and for this reason, Paul does not continue answering the objections mentioned earlier—namely, “Is God unjust to choose some and not others?” (***v. 14***) and “Why does God find fault with unbelievers. For who can resist His will?” (***v. 19***). Paul has already dealt with those objections, although most people reading his answers will not be satisfied with his answers. But it doesn’t matter whether we are satisfied with them or not. Paul’s answers are the answers given to him by the Holy Spirit.

Paul’s answer to the question: Why did the Gentiles have faith while the majority of the Jews did not have faith is implicit in the early part of ***chapter 9***. The answer is: **not** because the Gentiles were **more intelligent** than the Jews or because they were **less sinful** than the Jews or because they were **less skeptical** than the Jews. **As we have seen** in ***Chapter 9***, Isaac was not a better man than Ishmael, and Jacob was not a better man than Esau, and Israel was not better than Egypt. As a matter of fact, Paul specifically asked this very question much earlier in ***Rom. 3: 9***.

“What then? Are we *[the Jews]* better than they *[the Gentiles]*? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE” (Romans 3:9-10 NASB).

If it were true that some were **better than others,** then God’s choice would have been based on a person’s merit, or a nation’s merit, and not completely on God’s free and sovereign election. Both Jews and Gentiles have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God (***Rom. 3: 23***).

The ultimate reason for one person’s faith and the absence of faith in another person is the **will of God**. Paul has already said that salvation does not belong to the man **who wills** or the man **who runs**—the man who makes an **independent decision** or the man who makes a **strong effort** to be saved. No. Salvation is based on **God’s will** to demonstrate His mercy. The Gentiles did not naturally have **more faith** than the Jews—otherwise, God’s purpose according to **His** choice would not stand.

But now that we know the ultimate reason for **anyone** being saved or lost, we need to look carefully at the opposite side of the coin—**man’s responsibility.**

**So how did the Gentiles, who were not pursuing a right standing with God (which Paul calls “righteousness”), attain this right standing?**

But let’s ask this question another way: **How does God demonstrate His choice?**  He **gives** repentance and faith, because without repentance and faith, **no one will be saved.** Jesus says so, “…unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:5 NASB).  **Repentance** literally means “to change one’s mind” about sin resulting in turning from sin toward righteousness. This does not mean that his life will be cleaned up completely in a day, but that his basic disposition or attitude toward sin has undergone a radical change. He does not look at sin and righteousness the same way he used to. Moreover, true repentance is always—always—followed by genuine faith in Christ. The two things always come in pairs, never alone—repentance **and** faith, not repentance **without** faith or faith **without** repentance.

In ***9: 30***, Paul says that the Gentiles **“attained”** the righteousness of God **by** **faith.** Literally, that word means **“seized” or “laid hold of”.** It is is the same word used in ***John 1: 5.***

The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not **comprehend** it. (John 1:5 NASB)

The verse could read, “the darkness did not **seize** it” or “the darkness did not **lay hold of** it”. Christ came in the flesh, but the majority of the Jews, living in the darkness of their own minds, did not lay hold of Christ by faith. Why? Because they did not comprehend Him or understand who He was. Their minds were dark. But the Gentiles **did** lay hold of Christ. They did **seize** their opportunity to attain the righteousness of God by faith.

Paul says that the Gentiles did not sit back and do nothing when they heard the message of the gospel. **God demonstrated his choice** **by giving Gentiles the faith that lays hold on Christ** and will not let him go—like a drowning man seizing a life jacket. And the enjoyment of sin that was once so important to him is no longer important. Why? Because, now, for the first time in his life, he knows that he is drowning—drowning in sin. And when the life jacket of Christ is thrown to him, he grabs it and holds on to it. And he keeps on holding on to it for the rest of his life, because he is **always** surrounded by an ocean of sin. He’s not like the man who is saved from drowning and says, “Lord, just get me out of this water, and I will serve you.” Someone pulls him out, and he quickly forgets what he said. This is not repentance. Repentance lasts a lifetime. It never stops.

Where does one get this kind of repentance? Again, I will refer you to ***Acts 11*** when Peter was telling the story of how the Holy Spirit had fallen on the household of Cornelius, the disciples in Jerusalem were amazed.

When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has **granted** to the Gentiles also the **repentance** *that leads* to life." (Acts 11:18 NASB)

The word “granted” is the same word used by Christ in ***Matt. 13: 11*** when He was veiling his teaching by speaking to the multitudes in parables.

And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" Jesus answered them, "To you it has been **granted** to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has **not been granted**. (Matthew 13:11 NASB)

It is also the same word used in ***John 6: 37*** and ***6: 65.***

"All that the Father **gives** Me will come to Me, and the one who **comes** to Me I will certainly not cast out. (John 6:37 NASB)

"But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. 65 And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one **can come** to Me unless it has been **granted** him from the Father." (John 6:64-65 NASB)

Repentance is a gift. Christians, likewise, are a gift from God the Father to the Son. **But notice in these passages that what God grants or gives does not in any sense eliminate the need for response.** God granted repentance to Cornelius, and he repented. Christ granted to His immediate disciples an understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but they, in turn, **believed** these mysteries. Everyone who is **given** to the Son by the Father **will come** to the Son in faith. Being **given** to Christ as a gift from the Father does not eliminate the necessity of **coming.** Jesus says, “**Come** to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28 NASB).

If a gift is offered to you, it is always necessary to **receive** the gift. Suppose someone offers you 100,000 Ush? Suppose he says to you, “Come to my house tomorrow, and I will give you 100,000 Ush.” But what if you do not come by? Will he give it to you? No. You refused to take the trouble to come by. If you don’t wish to receive his free gift, that’s your problem, not his. He offered it to you.

**It is clear that having emphasized the sovereign election of God in *9: 1-29*, Paul has shifted the emphasis to the responsibility of man in *v. 30.*** And he continues to emphasize this responsibility until the end of ***chapter 10***. In other words, people have a decision to make. Men must respond to the gospel—one way or another.

What about Israel? **Did they have a choice?** Yes. They **chose** to pursue a righteousness based upon **works**—law-keeping. But there was one big problem. They could not keep the Law and therefore failed to arrive at the righteousness promised in the Law to those who keep it (***Lev. 18: 5; Matt. 19: 16-19***). On the other hand, they **chose not to pursue** a righteousness which is **by faith.** Christ Jesus became a “**stumbling stone”** for them, and they tripped over the only One who could save them. Paul says in ***Rom. 10: 21.***

But as for Israel He says, "ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A **DISOBEDIENT** AND **OBSTINATE** PEOPLE." (Romans 10:21 NASB)

“But wait,” someone objects. “Israel really didn’t have a choice **because God hardened their hearts**.” But, hold on, have you been listening? Paul has already answered this same objection concerning **Pharaoh.**

You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? **For who resists His will?"** 20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? (Romans 9:19-20a NASB)

**Paul doesn’t say that Israel didn’t have a choice because God hardened their hearts.** In fact, he says just the opposite. Israel didn’t **pursue** the righteousness that is by faith; they were **disobedient and stubborn.**

You don’t call someone disobedient and stubborn **if he doesn’t have a choice**. That would not be **fair.** It would be like screaming at a lame man to walk, when he can’t walk. It is only fair if people **do** have a choice. Sovereign election does not rule out genuine choices. It does not rule out the responsibility to make the right choice. You may say, **“I don’t understand. God is sovereign and free in election, but He requires men to make a choice that they are spiritually incapable of making (?)”** Yes. And you don’t have to understand the problem philosophically. You just have to understand the text of Scripture as it is given.

Ask yourself, does the text here in ***9: 30-33*** indicate that Israel is responsible for its refusal to pursue the righteousness of faith? Does it? Yes. And does ***9: 30-33*** come directly after ***9: 1-29*** which clearly teaches God’s sovereignty in election? Yes. Then that settles it. Anything more, we do not have to understand. But maybe an illustration will help.

Suppose I take you outside on the balcony and say to you, “Okay. When I count to three, I want you to jump off this balcony, flap your arms and start flying.” What are you going to say to me? “I don’t have a choice”? No. That would not make sense. You’re going to say to me, “Don, you’re crazy. I can’t fly.” And right you are. You can’t fly, but you do have a choice either to jump or not to jump. I will not prevent you from jumping (actually, if you were crazy, I would stop you, but that ruins my illustration). The reason you won’t jump is because you are **incapable** of flying. The problem is not me, but you. You can’t fly.

In the same way, you have a choice to repent or not to repent. It’s your choice. God is not keeping you from repenting. No one is. There is no one, and there is nothing **outside of yourself** keeping you from repenting. The problem is: you can’t repent unless God gives you repentance. But you are still required to make the choice to repent, and if you don’t, you’re going to hell. It is not God’s fault that you are so sinful that you cannot make the right choice. Going back to the former illustration, no one is compelled to chase you down somewhere to give you 100,000 Ush. You have to come to him and get it. God is not compelled to give you repentance. That’s your responsibility. If you can’t repent; that’s your fault, not God’s. God did not make you into this sinful human being that you are, and He did not **force** you to sin. He also did not **force** anyone in here to believe. Do any of you think God **forced** you to become a Christian? Then you also cannot say that God is forcing others not to become Christians.

If you are honest with yourself, you will have to admit that in every situation in which you sinned, you willingly **chose** to sin. Sinning was the easy thing to do. Choosing not to sin was the difficult thing to do.

But understand this: you also have the choice to plead with God to **give you** repentance and faith; and if this prayer is sincere, He will give you repentance and faith. (But don’t pray as St. Augustine once prayed when he was not quite ready to repent, “Lord, give me sexual purity, but not yet.” Don’t pray for repentance and faith like this. God will not hear you.)

Getting back to Israel: **Who is to blame?** God, or Israel? **The fault is their own,** and disobedient Jews in hell are now cursing themselves for making the wretched choice not to believe in their Messiah, especially the ones who had their Messiah right under their noses. But not all the Jews were lost. **God did not destroy all of the Jews** like He destroyed the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (***9: 29***). He saved a **remnant** of the Jews according to His gracious choice (***9: 27***). And this is the subject of ***Rom. 11*** which we can study at a later time.

***God’s Intended Purposes Fulfilled through Human Responsibility***

**Acts 27**

This is a story about Paul’s journey to Rome and his appeal to Caesar after being examined by Agrippa and Festus in Acts 26. The ship he was sailing on made it to Crete and to a city called Fair Havens but only with great deal difficulty. By the time they got to Fair Havens, the best time for sailing to Rome had already passed, and Paul advised them to spend the winter in Fair Havens. The pilot and the captain didn’t agree with Paul, but wanted to sail around the western side of Crete to Pheonix and spend the winter in a better harbor. They didn’t listen to God’s prophet. But when they set sail, they got into trouble—just like Paul told them they would—and could not make it to Phoenix. A strong wind pushed them far south completely away from the island of Crete and then blew them along westward. The “three hour tour” turned into a 14 day nightmare.

You can see the direction they headed by looking on a Bible map of Paul’s journeys. But you will also notice that the ship did not land in North Africa as well it could have. But God didn’t want Paul to go to North Africa; He wanted Paul to stand before Caesar. Therefore, the wind of God took the ship to Malta off the coast of Sicily, just south of Italy. But before they got there, they had thrown all the ship’s cargo overboard in order to lighten the ship and make it easier to steer. After that they threw the ship’s tackle overboard since it wasn’t doing them any good anyway. And then, after all hope was lost and the men had not eaten for days, Paul delivers his “I told you so” speech.

When they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, "Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete and incurred this damage and loss. 22 "*Yet* now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but *only* of the ship. 23 "For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, 24 saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' 25 "Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. 26 "But we must run aground on a certain island." (Acts 27:21-26 NASB)

From this speech we determine (1) when a true prophet of God speaks, you should listen, because a true prophet never misses. Everything he says comes true. This, of course, means that there are very few, **if any**, true prophets living today. (Personally, I would say, **none**, but that’s just my opinion. But a true prophet does not run on percentages: 40%, 50%, or even 80%. No, he’s right on, every time. If God is doing something and is telling His prophets, He is not telling them lies. A true prophet never misses. (2) that there would be no loss of life among the ship, (3) the ship will be lost, (4) Paul is going to live long enough to stand before Caesar in Rome, (5) the repeated promise that no one on the ship will be lost (6) the ship will run aground on an island, the name of which is not given to Paul. We know that this island was Malta.

What happens? Well, the sailors were convinced that the ship would eventually be driven upon the rocks and broken to bits with them becoming mince meat inside it, so they craftily let down the small boat which was used for getting to shore. But when they attempted to do this Paul says, “It’s okay. God told me that there would be no loss of anyone sailing on this ship, so it doesn’t matter what you do. No one will die, so take the boat and leave us stranded here because God will supernaturally guide this ship to shore.” But he doesn’t say that, does he? He says, “No way.”

31 Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Unless these men *[i.e. the sailors]* remain in the ship, you yourselves *[i.e. the centurion and the soldiers]* cannot be saved." (Acts 27: 31 NASB)

Now, God had guided and preserved this ship through a fierce storm from Crete to Malta, and he could also land the ship in Malta without any help—**if He wanted to.** But Paul does not presume that God wanted to or that He was obligated to **supernaturally** guide the ship safely to the shore of Malta. If the sailors abandoned the ship by taking the shoring vessel to the beach, then **who** was going to steer the ship—Paul?, the Centurion?, the soldiers?, the other prisoners? None of these people knew anything about sailing ships.

He says, “If these sailors jump ship, all the rest of you will die.” **Paul did not presume (assume) that God’s intended purpose would be accomplished without the use of ordinary means.** And this is true even though Paul had a supernatural revelation of the future outcome.

Guess what? You and I **don’t** have a supernatural revelation of the future. Then how much more important is it for us to **use ordinary means for accomplishing God’s sovereign purposes—the only means that He has revealed to us?**

Will God save every one of His elect people? Yes. Is He able to save them without you or me or anyone else? Yes. Will He therefore save them without the use of other believers who witness, who live godly lives, who show God’s love for people, who preach the gospel? No. What does Paul say in Rom. 10?

13for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." 14 How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:13-14 NASB)

But Paul is not simply speaking of “preachers” who get behind pulpits and preach. He speaking of anyone who proclaims the good news of the gospel.

15How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!" (Romans 10:15 NASB)

**Acts 18: 1-11**

Let’s look at one more example. In Acts 18, Paul is in Corinth. As soon as he arrives, he begins to witness to the Jews every Sabbath in the synagogues. Many of these Jews resist his message and blaspheme (***v. 6***). You can imagine that Paul was very discouraged by their rejection, and on the basis of what he had already been through on so many missionary journeys, he reasoned that eventually the Jewish leaders would be out for blood just as they had been in other cities. Paul has every right to be afraid. A person never really gets used to being hunted like an animal. But then the Lord speaks to Paul in a vision.

"Do not be afraid *any longer*, but go on speaking and do not be silent; 10 for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." (Acts 18:9-10 NASB)

Two promises are given in this vision. One, God would not allow anyone to attack Paul. (And God obviously had not made this promise in many other cities. This was new, and very welcome news to Paul.) Second, God had many people in Corinth. But what did this mean? Did this mean that God had a standing army in Corinth ready to protect Paul? Did this mean that there was already a thriving church in Corinth? No. There was no militia to protect Paul and no thriving church. Had there been a thriving church, why was he there in the first place? Other than Rome, where Paul stood before Caesar, Paul only went to places where Christ had not been preached (***Rom. 15: 20***).

God was informing Paul that He had many of His elect people in the city, and all that was needed for them to be saved was the preaching of the gospel. “They’re out there Paul, so go get them.”

So what was Paul’s response to this promise? Well, he packed up his bags and left Corinth, right? God’s elect people were out there, but they would be saved whether he preached the gospel or not. Is this what Paul does? Is this his attitude? Look at the next verse.

And he settled *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. (Acts 18:11 NASB)

Paul’s confidence in the presence of God’s elect people—even though they were not yet saved—was his incentive for preaching. The elect would not be saved apart from the **ordinary means** of proclaiming the message. So, instead of saying, “There is no need to do anything because God’s elect will be saved no matter what,” Paul said, “Well then, many of the elect are here, and I must preach the gospel so that they will be saved.”

In summary fashion, Paul says in ***2 Tim. 2: 10***, “For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *and* with *it* eternal glory. (***2 Timothy 2:10*** NASB)

**Conclusion and Application**

Although none of us can fully understand the dynamic between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility, it is very important that you try to understand it, because it applies to everything you do. Among African Christians, I commonly hear the phrase, “God is in control.” And so He is. I fully agree that God is in control. But often I get the impression that because God is in control, there is nothing for me to do, or even, nothing I **can** do. God is controlling everything, **so things will just happen to me no matter what I do or don’t do.**

**Do you believe that?** If you do, I have an experiment for you. Go out here on High Street on Saturday night and lie down in the middle of road and see how long you last. “Oh no,” you say, “I would be killed in two minutes.” Well, I would only give you **one** minute; but since God is in control, it won’t matter what you do. You are going to die in one minute anyway. Let’s see; let me time it for you. You can see how ridiculous it is to think like this, and no one consistently lives this way. Do you look before you cross the street? But don’t you believe that God is in control? But you look both ways anyway—both ways because some careless boda-boda driver may be driving the wrong way down the street.

But when it comes to **big decisions and big responsibilities**, people are often willing to hide behind this “God is in control” idea. Actually doing something takes **too much effort** or **too much sacrifice**. Well, if I am going to get AIDS anyway, I might as well sleep around as much as I like. Nonsense. If you don’t want AIDS, be chaste before marriage and faithful in marriage. And don’t marry someone who is not chaste or faithful. I have had someone in the states ask me if I was scared of getting AIDS in Uganda. “No,” I said. “I am faithful to my wife. About the only other way I will get AIDS is through a blood transfusion. And I don’t work in a hospital where I am constantly exposed to bodily fluids. I am much more likely to get killed by crazy drivers in Uganda.”

And I believe God is sovereign over automobile accidents, but He has also commanded obedience to the civil government and traffic laws which state the legal speed limit at 100 KPH. But this is not how people in Uganda drive, especially the bus drivers. They drive 120-130 KPH and they pass slow traffic over hill tops and put not only their lives at risk but the lives of their passengers and other motorists at risk. If an accident happens and people get killed, it is only a **half truth** to say that God is in control, and He willed the accident to happen. Knowing what God is going to do is not your business. The accident happened because people are sinful, careless, and downright stupid in the way they drive; and they don’t mind at all if they run me off the road as long as they can get to their destination faster.

Yes, God **is** in control, but He has also given you some sense, some talents, and a whole lot of responsibility, and **He expects you to act responsibly.**

I was talking to someone in a village about three months ago. His crops were drying up because there was no rain. Well, okay, no one can make it rain, can they? But one kilometer from his garden was a big swamp with standing water. Maybe I’m missing something about his situation, but I asked him, “Why don’t you get jerry cans and fill them up half-way in the swamp, bring them back, and irrigate your garden. “Too far,” he said. Well, if I were him, I would not be meditating on the sovereignty of God in sending droughts. I’d be trotting to the swamp twenty times a day or more with jerry cans. I would do whatever it took to get my family through a drought, and trust in God to bring the results. As Oliver Cromwell, a famous Christian army commander said to his troops, “Trust the Lord, men, and keep your [gun]powder dry!” Or as Nehemiah said when he was building the wall in Jerusalem and being opposed every step of the way by godless Sanballat and Tobiah, “But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night” (Nehemiah 4:9 NASB)

What many people believe is **not divine sovereignty**; it is pagan **fatalism.** Everything just happens beyond our control. **But that just isn’t true.** Now, I believe that God has ordained everything that happens. The Bible says so. Paul says,

…we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose **who works all things after the counsel of His will,** (Ephesians 1:11 NASB)

And we know that God **causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. (Romans 8:28 NASB)

Well, how can God cause all things to work together for the good of His people if He is not in **control** of all things. So in Isaiah, we read,

"Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me, 10 **Declaring the end from the beginning**, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; (Isaiah 46:9-10 NASB)

God’s purposes cannot be stopped. Jesus says,

"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And *yet* not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 "So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:29-31 NASB)

Apart from the divine will of your heavenly father, nothing can happen to you, because He is truly in control, and He makes things happen.

**But I also believe that God has ordained the ordinary means by which He make things happen.**

Can we not see this in the Scripture passages we have read in ***Acts***? He uses the ordinary means of keeping experienced sailors on the boat to save everyone on the ship. He could have lifted the ship out of the water and set it gently down on the beach, but He didn’t do that. He could have saved all his elect people in Corinth without Paul’s preaching, but He just doesn’t work that way.

We cannot control the sovereign will of God, and we don’t know His reasons for allowing so much sorrow in the world. But we don’t have to know His reasons; we only have to obey His will and act responsibly and lovingly to our fellow man. We have to tell others about Jesus.

God is sovereign. No one in this auditorium believes this more than I do. But the world is not in a mess because God is sovereign. That much I know. The world is in a mess because men are born in sin and they continue sinning willfully and irresponsibly. That’s why the world has so much sorrow and pain.

**Applications of the Text**

***1. To Christians***: Rather than fighting the doctrine of election, fall down on your knees and thank God that you are the elect. And remember that you did not elect yourself, God did.

**2. *To those who are still unbelievers:*** **You are not in control. God is in control.** Do you want to play around with God, waiting for a **convenient time** to turn away from your sinful life and receive Jesus Christ as your Savior? **There is no convenient time for you.** You are totally and completely at the mercy of God. He holds you in His hand over the pit of hell, and He can drop you into hell any time He wants. He may not give you repentance and faith that leads to life. Instead, He may harden you more against the gospel. It is completely up to Him.

**So if I were you, I wouldn’t play around with God.** “But,” you say, “how do I know if God has chosen me? And if he has chosen me, He chose me before I was born, or He rejected me before I was born; so it does not matter what I do.”

**But who are you, o’ man,** **who seeks to comprehend the secret ways of God?** God not only chooses His people, but He also chooses the **means by which** they become His people—repentance and faith. As Paul says,

if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe **in your heart** that God raised Him from the dead, **you will be saved**; (Romans 10:9 NASB)

for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." (Romans 10:13 NASB)

**You can find out right now if you are God’s elect.** If you will…

**sincerely reject** your sinful life right now. This is called repentance.

and **sincerely trust** in Christ as your only Savior, right now;

and if you will sincerely make use of the means of grace God has given you:

the word, prayer, fellowship, and the Lord’s supper, which gives you a visible picture of God’s grace in the gospel,

and if you will then **sincerely begin** to live for Him right now,

**then you will know that you are the elect—that you are chosen by God.**

**Whose fault is it if you do not believe in Christ?** All day long God holds out his hands to a disobedient and subborn population of **Africans**—and **Americans**, and **Brits**, and **anyone** who has heard the gospel—saying, **“Why don’t you people believe?”**

**It is not as though God is keeping the doctrine of election a secret.** It is right here in the Bible in many places for all to see; and yet, sinners will still **stubbornly refuse to believe** in Christ. Like rebels in a burning building plotting to overthrow the government, they still think they have the **key** that opens the door to heaven, and **they can open this door any time they get ready**. But they fail to understand one important thing about believing. Believing in Christ is **always accompanied by repentance toward sin.** Most evangelical preaching doesn’t teach it this way. We just want people to **believe** in Jesus get **saved**, and **we get false professions of faith all over the place**. I preached one sermon in a village near Ibanda a few years ago and 40 people came forward to get saved. I could have written a newsletter telling all my supporters what **a great evangelist** I am. **But I didn’t**. I knew better, and I should know better. It takes something a lot more powerful than my preaching to save people. It takes the **will** of God and the **Spirit** of God to produce true repentance and faith—the kind of faith which changes a person’s life.

**Do you have that change of life?** I’m not asking if you are perfect. I’m sure not. But are you conscientiously attempting every day to live for God by keeping His commandments? I’m not talking about working **for** your salvation but working **out** your salvation in fear and trembling. Are you being truthful in all your relationships, even with bazungus? Are you faithful in your marriage? Do you work hard for your employer? This is the purpose of your election,

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, 4 **just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him**….(Ephesians 1:3-4a NASB)