

Salvation and The Jews – Pt. 2 – Romans 9:14-18

(Does God Eternally Predestine Some Individuals to Mercy and others to Hardening?)

INTRODUCTION:

1. Romans 9 is a somewhat difficult chapter that Calvinists have always appealed to for their doctrine.
 - A. The main idea they propose from this chapter is that God unconditionally predestinates certain individuals to salvation, and the rest to condemnation.
 - B. In our last lesson we answered the Calvinist's claim that God's choice of Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau proves God unconditionally predestinates *individuals* to salvation or condemnation.
 - C. Today I would like to consider the Calvinist's claim that Romans 9:14-18 teaches that God unconditionally and arbitrarily predestinates *individuals* to mercy and hardening. The basis of their claim is as follows:
 - i. They state that 9:14-16 teaches that God arbitrarily and unconditionally bestows mercy and compassion, leaving others to face condemnation.
 - ii. They state that Paul's use of Pharaoh in 9:17-18 shows that God predestines some to mercy and others to hardening and, therefore, condemnation.
 - D. My job today is to examine their claims and compare them to the context and proper application of these passages.
2. It is my hope that we can learn from Paul's answers to the Jews concerning God's choices and grow in respect of these choices and make sure our lives into harmony with them.

BODY:

I. Was God unjust to reject the Jews (9:14-16)?

- A. Paul anticipates an argument that if the Jews are no longer God's people of promise, He is being unjust (9:14).
 1. Why, because doing so unjustly ignored *who Israel was* as descendants of Abraham, and *all that Israel had done* in keeping the Law.
 - a. How could God ignore Israel's heritage, including the fact that they were the only ones who were keeping God's Law? Does none of this matter?
 - b. How could God allow upstart Gentiles who had none of these *credentials* be a part of His Israel today, especially without being circumcised and keeping the Law first?
 2. God's choice to save *those of faith* did not mean God was against the Jews.
 - a. Israel had an advantage (Rom. 3:1-2 – "What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? ² Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.").
 - b. And, God desired their salvation (Rom. 10:11-12, 23 – "I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. ¹² Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!... ²³ And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.").
 3. Paul's emphatic response to this accusation is "certainly not!"
 - a. God has the right to choose those through whom His purposes will be served!
 - i. God's choosing Isaac for His purposes did not condemn Ishmael, nor did choosing Jacob for His purposes condemn Esau!
 - ii. Thus, God's choice of *people of faith* in Christ for His purposes today, even though Gentiles were included, did not condemn national Israel.
 - b. So, the problem was not with God, but with Israel *unjustly* refusing to accept Jesus as God's Messiah to them and the world!
 - B. Paul proves his assertion of God's justice in doing this by God's words to Moses (9:15-16).
 1. God said to Moses that He would have mercy and compassion on *who He chooses* (9:15).

- a. This quote is taken from Exodus 33:19 in a context that shows God is a God that shows mercy *without it being based on the merits of those receiving it* (9:15).
 - i. In Exodus 32 Israel had committed idolatry through the golden calf and 3000 Israelites died as a result (Ex. 32). Sin has consequences.
 - ii. So, in Ex. 33 Moses goes before God to plead with Him to return His *presence* among the people and to ask God to show him His glory that He might be a confident leader of God's people (cite 33:12-18).
 - 1) God's response was a promise to show His presence among Israel and to show Moses His glory, seeing *He chooses to show mercy and compassion* (33:19 – “Then He said, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”).
 - a) This was not God saying that He was arbitrary in His bestowal of mercy, although people read it into our English translations.
 - a. What would a statement of arbitrariness here serve?
 - b. Instead, God was making it known that He is a God of mercy—it is what He does!
 - b) *Tyndale Commentary on Exodus* makes this clear: “Commentators point out that the **Hebrew phrase used here does not imply any abrupt arbitrariness on the part of God**, as its English translation might suggest. It simply draws attention to the fact that **these are qualities of God** which may be seen in certain specific historic instances, without going into further detail.”
 - 2) So, Paul's quoting of Ex. 33:19 tells us...
 - a) That God is merciful, and His mercy is not restricted by man's actions or dictates, seeing mercy is given to *sinners—the undeserving*.
 - b) Therefore, the Jews' attempt to claim rights to God's mercy by being descendants of Abraham and their works of Law was contrary to God's way and to mercy itself.
 - b. So, Calvinists have taken a simple statement of God's merciful nature and mistakenly made it teach that God *arbitrarily* and *unconditionally* chooses some on whom to show mercy and others to reject to condemnation!
 - 2. Calvinists, however, will reply that Paul says mercy comes *without conditions* (9:16 – “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.”).
 - a. Before one jumps to that conclusion/interpretation, remember the context involves *national Israel* feeling unjustly slighted because *God's new Israel is those of faith in Christ*, rather than those of the Law and lineage of Abraham.
 - i. So, the contextual application would be that God shows mercy by His choice, not because man wills it, or feels deserving of it, or that he seeks to earn it!
 - ii. For, as we have said, mercy is for the undeserving—for sinners!
 - b. So, again, Paul's point is that *the Jews have no claim that obligates God's mercy upon them*, seeing mercy is applied to the *undeserving* by God's sovereign choice.
 - i. Israel may have thought they wanted justice, but they needed mercy because their works condemned them (Stephen by HS - Acts 7:52-53 – “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,⁵³ who have received the law by the direction of angels and **have not kept it.**”).
 - ii. So, Israel should have been thankful that God chose to show them mercy *conditioned upon their faith* (Rom. 3:20-23 – “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.²¹ But now the righteousness of God **apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,**²² even the righteousness of God, **through faith in Jesus Christ,**

to all and on all who **believe**. For **there is no difference**; ²³ for **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God”).

- iii. So, God’s mercy *is not merited, or earned*, but is given *conditioned on faith, or trust in Christ and His works*.
- 3. This does not mean that God applies mercy unconditionally.
 - a. Just because God makes His own choices concerning to whom His mercy will be given doesn’t mean that God cannot place conditions upon receiving it!
 - b. Israel’s reception of God’s mercy was conditional.
 - i. The Israelite had to confess and forsake his sin (Prov. 28:13 – “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes *them* will have mercy.”).
 - ii. The Israelite must turn from his wicked ways and thoughts and return to God (Isa. 55:7 – “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”).
 - c. Nothing has changed in Christ—mercy is still conditional (Rom. 11:22-23 – “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, **if you continue in His goodness**. Otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³ And they also, **if they do not continue in unbelief**, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.”).
 - d. So, if by God’s sovereign prerogative He has placed conditions on the reception of His grace/mercy, who has the right to question it?

II. God’s choice to show mercy to Israel brought hardening upon Pharaoh (9:17-18).

- A. Calvinist claim these verses teach that God has predestined some to mercy/salvation, and others to hardening/condemnation.
 - 1. But, we must remember that Paul is providing more proof *from the scriptures* that God is not unjust in making true Israel one of faith in Christ over works of the Law.
 - 2. So, as we shall see, the application again is that God is not unjust in choosing an *Israel of faith*, even though doing so was *hardening* national Israel!
- B. Paul reminds them that God put Pharaoh on the throne so that through his arrogant rejection of God’s will, God’s power and name would be known by the world (9:17).
 - 1. God was not unjust in...
 - a. Making this man a king, seeing all rulers have their position by God’s will (Rom. 13:1)
 - b. *Using Pharaoh* for His purpose of showing His power and spreading His name.
 - i. In doing this, God chose *this* Pharaoh, knowing that his arrogance would not immediately allow Israel to be freed! Thus, God’s power over him would be seen.
 - ii. Contrary to Calvinism, God putting Pharaoh on the throne for His purposes *says nothing* about God *making* Pharaoh *evil* by an eternal decree!
 - iii. It was Pharaoh’s *wicked* and *unbelieving* heart that made him the perfect choice to be the one through whom God would show His power.
 - c. *Demanding* that Pharaoh let Israel go (*obey*) so that God might show them mercy.
 - 2. How did God harden Pharaoh’s heart?
 - a. Again, there is not a word in this context that God’s made this decision in eternity and that Pharaoh was created hardened by God and having no choice in the matter!
 - b. Context: God hardened Pharaoh’s heart by *forcing him to make a choice to submit to God’s will or face the consequences*. God knew such a demand would harden his heart.
 - i. History shows that as Pharaoh bristled at God’s demands, God’s power through the plagues was shown to Him, Egypt, Israel, and the world (Ex. 7:14-18, 22-23).
 - ii. Pharaoh did not make these sinful choices against his will, seeing he *hardened his own heart* (Ex. 8:15 – “But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not heed them, as the Lord had said.”; also 8:32; 9:34).

- iii. What this shows us is that the person being hardened was a *willing contributor to the hardening*. God didn't make him do anything against His will!
 - c. And, since it is God's right to demand obedience of anyone, even if He knows that person will not obey, the plagues that befell Pharaoh were his own fault!
 - i. He could have obeyed, and God's power would have been seen in Israel's immediate release and the word getting out of how mighty Pharaoh bowed to the God of Israel!
 - ii. Yet, God knew that *this* Pharaoh would serve his purposes, even in his rebellion.
- C. **Paul conclusion:** God has mercy on whom He wills and hardens whom He wills (9:18).
1. This is not a statement of how God arbitrarily dispenses mercy, seeing God's mercy in delivering Israel out of Egypt wasn't arbitrary (Gen. 15:13-14 – “Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.¹⁴ And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.”).
 2. The truth:
 - a. If God chooses to show mercy to *spiritual* Israel, the Israel *of faith in Christ*, He is just in doing so.
 - b. If requiring faith in Christ for salvation causes some to be hardened, even if it is the Jews who are being hardened, God is still just in doing so.
 - c. In the end it was Israel's choice to reject the Christ, not some proposed injustice with God, that caused Israel's demise and continued to harden them against God.
 - i. The Jews could show the world God's glory, even today, by choosing to trust in Christ and be delivered from sin's bondage, as was Israel out of Egypt.
 - ii. But if not, God glory will be still be shown in the riches of God's mercy being shed upon the Gentiles through Christ!
 - iii. The choice was and continues to be theirs!

CONCLUSION:

1. God has determined to save the world by faith in Christ—that is the only way (Acts 4:12 – “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”).
2. As was true with national Israel, God has chosen to force you, a sinner, to make a choice today—either submit to Christ in faith and be saved, or reject Christ and be hardened and face the consequences.
3. God has placed the fate of your soul in your hands. Will you *come* to Christ in whom salvation is found through *faith* and *obedience*, or will you *reject* Him another time—maybe the last time you will have a chance to obey—and be lost?
4. This choice is your today!