

# ROMANS BIBLE STUDY

## Romans 9:13-18 (b)

### Lesson #27

#### Introduction

The verses that we're looking at in these present lessons are controversial indeed, but not because there's any credible argument over what they say, rather because what they say runs so contrary to the common perception. The bible describes God as being infinitely loving and forgiving, And at the very same time unimaginably severe. Unless we know both sides of God then we don't know the real God of the Holy Scriptures, just the one we've created in our own minds. It's common to hear people say "well my god is a loving god" by which they mean they have conjured up a one sided god in their own minds who has no power or authority and is basically subservient to humanity. But this is not even close to the holy, omnipotent, sovereign, and majestic God portrayed in the pages of holy writ. The God portrayed in the pages of scriptures freely exercise His authority over His creatures and uses them as He sees fit. He judges or forgives as He desires without explanation or apology. None of the pagan world, and very little of Christendom know the first thing about the true and living God of the holy scriptures. And that's why these verses are so shocking to so many people.

#### God's Right to Choose and to Act

*13 Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." 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.*

Romans 9:14-18 (NASB)

Verse 14 is a direct response to the preceding verses that Paul had just written, where he said:

*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."*

Romans 9:10-13 (NASB)

#### Verse 14:

It was this statement that prompted Paul's words in verse 14: *What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!* This comes right to the heart of the matter. Can God make His own personal choices of who to love and who to hate without being unrighteous in the process? Is God unrighteous if He loves one and hates another? Is it unfair for God to have preferences of His own and then to act upon those preferences? If it is, then it's certainly unfair and unrighteous for us humans to do that either. Do we feel unrighteous and unfair when we love our own spouse and children and not necessarily those of every other family in the neighborhood? Do we humans have rights and privileges and preferences that would be unfair for God to have? We make friends with some people in our neighborhood and we intentionally avoid others based on our own perception of the morals and behaviors of those individuals and the merits of such relationships. We don't think of this as wrong, we think of it as sensible and responsible behavior. We consider the long term consequences of relationships and the influence they are likely to have on us and our children. If we forbid our children from associating with certain other children because we have good reason to believe those children are involved in dangerous or illegal behaviors are we being unloving and unfair to those children? Maybe, but don't we have an even greater responsibility to those whom we love to protect them from things that will do them serious harm? And aren't we exercising our rightful authority to make such decisions on behalf of our loved ones? We understand this perfectly well, don't we?

So, why do we immediately accuse God of unrighteousness for loving whom He will and hating whom He will, and then acting upon those choices? Is God truly sovereign in the affairs of mankind? Does God first plan, and then ordain, and then actively bring about all things according to the council of His own will? (Eph 1:11; Isa 46:8-11) The scriptures repeatedly say that He does. It would seem that many of us would agree that perhaps He has the right, but then we object when He actively exercises that right. We're willing to accept that God has the right to love or hate whomever He desires,

but if He actually does it we're shocked. Arthur Pink was so very right in his assessment of Christendom, we have created a powerless and impotent god who's unable to use whatever rights he might actually have because he's bound by our concepts of his character and authority. The Apostle Paul shows no reluctance whatsoever in declaring God's sovereign authority, and he goes on to show some immediate uses of that authority, and then he asks *What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!* God's free exercise of His sovereign authority to choose whom He loves and whom He hates, and then to act upon that choice in the lives of mankind does not seem to trouble the Apostle Paul in the least, **and he makes it clear that it is by no means unjust for God to do so.** (v.14)

We have to clearly grasp this much before we can go on with the rest of Paul's teaching. God both has and freely exercises His sovereign authority to choose whom He will show mercy upon and whom He will use for other purposes that He deems desirable. There can be no denying that God either does not intend for everyone to be saved and enter into His eternal kingdom, or He does, but He isn't capable of making it happen. There are no other possibilities. Paul is forever answering which of these two is the case in this chapter of his epistle to the Romans. The next few verses of this chapter are among the most hotly contested in the Holy Scriptures. And it's not because they're difficult to understand, but rather because what they say is too clear to deny, but runs so contrary to the prevailing concept that we have of God. These next few verses (14-25) do not describe an impotent god that is constantly being thwarted by Satan, and always held in restraint by the impenetrable wall of human "free will." Just the opposite, in fact so much so that we shudder to hear it, and recoil in sheer shock at what Paul says about God, and how He seemingly indiscriminately uses people and manipulates lives for nothing other than His own private purposes. It's as if we're nothing more than pieces on a giant chess board, to be used at the player's own discretion to accomplish his predetermined strategy.

This is simply not how we think of ourselves. In fact, if anything we think we're the purpose of all existence, and God is just there to make everything work out for our best interest. We think He exists to serve us, to materially prosper us, to fulfill our needs, and to make us feel good about ourselves. Boy, does Paul throw a bucket of cold water on that theory! As I keep saying, we do understand what Paul says in these verses, but we weren't expecting it, and we just don't like it. We've been taught that we're the centerpiece of creation, and God loves us in such a way as to abrogate His authority over us. We think His love for us abrogates His commandments upon us, that's what we've been taught. And we think we're His reason for living. The good news is, to some small degree there is truth in that concept, because we are His sovereign choice as a loving family and eternal worshipers, but it is we who worship Him, not the other way around. As long as mankind thinks that God is restrained and/or limited to some extent in His available choices and behaviors by our human concepts and perceptions of importance, then we will never be able to know and understand the sovereign and all powerful God of Holy Scriptures. Most of us have heard it said that He (God) is everything and we (humans) are nothing, and for the most part we say "Amen" but then, when we actually see that principle put into action, we recoil in shock, and perceive God as unfair. We think that we and God are measured on the same balance scale, and this concept causes us to make endless errors in judgement. We all realize the absurdity of trying to weigh a battleship and a rat on the same balance scale, but we don't seem to realize that it's even more absurd to try to weigh Almighty God and mankind on the same scale.

God told an arrogant and disobedient Israel, who had long been ignoring His commandments and though they were getting away with it: *21 "These things you have done and I kept silence; You thought that I was just like you; [but] I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes. 22 "Now consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you in pieces, and there will be none to deliver.* (Psa 50:21-22) Do you see that God does not see humans as His equals, He sees us like parents see their young children. Parents rightly believe they have absolute authority over their children, and do not have to explain themselves. Parents give children orders and commandments as they deem fit to accomplish their purpose for themselves and those children, and feel no obligation whatsoever to debate or explain those orders and commandments. Nor do the children have any right or authority to accept or ignore them as they desire. We all know that it is impossible to rightly discuss or debate rules and regulations with young children, so we simply dictate our rules to them with full authority. Of course this is an infringement on their "free will" but there is nothing unfair nor unrighteous about this behavior, although the children will fervently argue to the contrary. This would only be unfair if it involved two parties of relatively equal status, but like parents and children, we humans are not even close to being of equal status with God. But like children, we argue that we're being treated unfairly when God asserts His divine sovereign authority over our lives, and behaviors, and yes even our eternal destinies. The idea of 'unfair' is all because we don't comprehend, or more likely,

don't want to admit to the magnitude of the difference between us and our Creator. But God has spoken to us about this also in the passages from Isaiah: 8 *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord.* 9 *"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts [higher] than your thoughts.* (Isa 55:8-9)

We read these verses but we just don't let them sink into our brain. We go right on thinking as we did before. We read verses of scripture and then we think we can either accept them or reject them, we think they're subject to our ratification, and if they seem unfair to us then we just ignore them or attempt to redefine their meaning. Why don't we accept that scriptures are not suggestions that we adopt or reject, they are divine facts, they are God's revelation to us of His divine nature and His scope of power and authority? Everything that God says and does is righteous, this is not an issue for debate, it is a fact. Questioning or debating the word of God is not something that man has authority or ability to do. This is exactly what Paul means in the forthcoming verse where He asks: 20 *On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?* (Verse 20) In other words, who do you think you are to question either God's actions or His motives, do you think He has to justify or explain Himself to you? Will you pass judgement on God? Will you call Him into account for His actions, and then decide if He is righteous? The scriptures define the meaning and bounds of authority of God's righteousness, it is us who need to bring our thinking into alignment with God's thinking, not the other way around. If God declares that He makes choices and predeterminations in the lives of men then that is a fact for us to accept, it is not a point of discussion for us to approve or reject. The bounds of God's righteous authority over both angels and men clearly includes the use of His creatures as He deems fit to suit His long term purpose. He is God, we are not. The next few verses demonstrate this, but we have to get our thinking clear before we're ready to read it and accept it, because it challenges our preconceived notions of fair and unfair, and of God and the extents of His authority.

#### **Verse 15:**

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."*

We think, and we've been taught, that all choice begins with us, and then God reacts to our free choices. This is the currently popular Arminian theology, but it just doesn't match up with the teachings of the holy scriptures. According to scriptures, it is He who first chooses us, not the other way around. (Jn 15:16,19: Rom 8:29-30) And He has every righteous right, and full authority to do with each and every one of us as He full well pleases, just as the chess player has the right to either protect or sacrifice any piece on the board that belongs to him. God makes the personal declaration: *"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."* This is the truth, and this is what Paul is telling us in no uncertain terms, and this is why there is so much debate and controversy. The chess player is not obligated to any individual piece on his board, and he is not obligated to esteem them all the same, but he uses them as he sees fit to accomplish his overall goal. Paul is teaching us that God also sees His creation in such a way that He may freely use any and all parts, human, angelic, or otherwise precisely as He wishes to accomplish His intended purpose, and that He actually does just exactly that. He uses people and angels to accomplish His intended purposes, and according to scriptures, He does so without any sense of unrighteousness or unfairness on His part, just as a chess player feels no sense of unrighteousness or unfairness when he sacrifices his rook or queen to accomplish a long range plan to win the game. (Or like God sacrifices His only Beloved Son to redeem and save His chosen children for eternity)

Now I realize that at this point some may feel that what we're saying perhaps makes God appear as cold and uncaring, but that's not the case at all, and I don't want anyone to think that that's what we're implying. Let me try to establish a basic principle that supports much of the teaching in this chapter. We constantly hear the question asked as to why a loving God would allow this or that to happen, or to allow evil to enter into His creation in the first place. Well, let me ask a question. What makes "good" desirable and "bad" undesirable, and how do we measure the relative value of these two principles? Is everything that's good equally good, and everything that's bad equally bad, or are there varying degrees? How do we recognize the difference between, and relative values of, good and bad?

Another example, if your wife asks you to pick up a pound of hamburger on the way home from work, how would you do that if you had no concept of what a pound represented? What if you didn't know a pound from a ton? How much hamburger would you bring home? You see, we must have certain base concepts to use as references. Now, in the same

way, how would we know the value of the loving mercy of God if we had no concept whatsoever of the wrath of God? If the wrath of God were a complete mystery to us, then what would be our concept of the value of His forgiveness and lovingkindness? Every balance scale must have something on both sides to make any sense. If there's nothing on the other side then a pound looks the same as a ton doesn't it? It's only when we have a means of comparison that we can make assessments and comprehend value and quantity. God obviously wants us to understand both the value and the magnitude of both His lovingkindness and His wrath, so that we can understand what He wants us to know about Himself.

It is meaningless to speak of a loving and forgiving God to those who have no concept of wrath and punishment for sin and disobedience. It is the stark contrast between the two that defines and quantities all that God is. We must know what darkness is to possibly understand what light is. He is a loving and forgiving God, AND He is a wrathful and judgmental God all at the same time, (Rom 11:22) and we must see all of this to understand and appreciate the value and magnitude of either. For us to love Him and appreciate Him as He wishes, He intentionally shows us clearly what lies on the other side of the balance scale. This is a must for us to see and comprehend, so that we have a standard of measure with which to evaluate His lovingkindness and forgiveness. In quantity It's like knowing the difference between a pound and a ton, and in principle it's like knowing the difference between light and darkness. There are basic units of measure that humanity must grasp to be able to understand what God desires for us to know about Him, and good and evil, triumph and tragedy, forgiveness and judgement are but a few among those essential principles. And it is for this reason that God has ordained their existence in His creation, and He uses them when, and where, and through whomever He sees fit, to accomplish His purpose. Now, From this do we begin to see the value and magnitude of His mercy and lovingkindness upon us, if in fact we are among His chosen. Do we see the magnitude and severity of what He could have fully and justly done with us if He had chosen to do so? Do you see why we worship Him so intensely and eternally when we fully understand all the possibilities that could have been? Just exactly how valuable is God's love and forgiveness; it is beyond any possibility of measurement, it is priceless and boundless to those who really understand all that God is, and all that He can and will eventually do. It pains me to see how cheap and easy salvation is perceived to be by our present standards. And now this brings us nicely into the next verse:

#### **Verse 16:**

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

This kind of sums up everything we've said so far in this lesson and the previous one as well. This verse is directly linked to the previous one where Paul just said:

*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,* Romans 9:11 (NASB)

This verse really clashes hard with the popular Arminian idea that we're all free and capable to make the choice as to whether we believe in Jesus or we don't. How can Paul say that it does **not** depend on the man who **wills** if indeed our human will is truly free from constraints and fully able to make that choice? These two concepts are mutually exclusive, and there's no denying it. As far as *the man who runs*, most of us pretty much accept and agree that works (the meaning of the metaphor "runs") is not the determining factor in the final destination of man. But, if man is truly free and capable of deciding for himself to believe in Jesus or not, then it certainly **does** depend on him who wills, this simply cannot be denied. If the Arminian theology is correct then it almost entirely depends on the man who "wills" because this is the "decision" that we hear about in all the evangelistic crusades. The popular evangelist urges us to exercise our "free will" and make a "decision for Christ" while the Apostle Paul says adamantly that it does NOT depend on him who "wills" any more than it does on him who "runs." But rather entirely and wholly on God, who shows mercy on whomever He chooses to show mercy. And by inescapable extension, does not show mercy on whom He does not choose to show mercy.

Now of course there is a decision made in the process, but that decision is the followup response to the preceding initial act of saving faith, dispensed into the heart and mind of God's elect by the Holy Spirit, at the choice and direction of God the Father. (Jer 31:31-34; Eze 36:26-27; Eph 2:8-9) For this reason Paul says that *it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy*. No one can simply decide by their own human will to believe in Jesus Christ. It is God's gift of saving faith, (Eph 2:8-9) provided by His grace alone, that accounts for the final outcome of every soul ever created. This is the mercy of God that Paul is referring to.

There is no possible way to make Paul's teaching in these verses mean anything else. Not depending on the man who

“wills” means precisely that, that no man (or woman) can obtain that new heart and renewed mind by the exercise of their own “free will.” The New Covenant promise of a new heart and renewed mind is a gift of God, and is only obtainable by His grace alone, it is not something that any man or woman simply “wills” by their own unaided decision, nor earns by their own merits. This simply cannot be said more clearly, but yet practically every evangelist ends by asking the hearers to “make a decision for Christ.” or “invite Him into your heart”, when neither of these terms are biblical, and both run directly contrary to everything that the scriptures teach. If you’re moved to seek the Lord then ask Him for His precious gift of repentance and saving faith. It is by these that you are made able to believe in Him.

If this clashes with your theology then your theology is flawed, and you need to make a correction. It is not the word of God that is wrong, and ignoring it doesn’t solve the problem. Telling people that they have the ability to believe in Jesus Christ, at anytime they choose, with only their own free will to do so, is just not true, and it frustrates millions every day. Rather we are taught in the scriptures to encourage people to ask God for forgiveness of sin, through the precious gift of saving faith in Jesus Christ, as a gift of His grace alone, because we don’t have the ability to truly believe in Him, nor the desire to repent of our sins, simply of our own free will, and this is what Paul is telling us loud and clear in these verses. It is a tragedy what passes itself off as evangelism in Christendom today. If you are an Arminian then you have only two choices. Either what Paul is saying in this verse is wrong, or your theological perspective is at least partially incorrect, and needs adjustment, there are no other alternatives. The outcome of every soul, and the decisions they will make, are ordained by God from before creation. (Isa 46:8-11, Rom 9:16; Eph 1:11) This is what the bible teaches, it isn’t subject to our approval or ratification, it is the inerrant and everlasting word of God. (Mat 34:25; Mk 13:31; Lk 21:33)

Just some final comments on this verse. The “it” that it does not depend on within the context of this verse is speaking of those whom God has chosen to love and those whom God has chosen to hate, as Paul said in verses 12 and 13. And it also includes what God has chosen to do with those individuals as well. So, God’s love, God’s hate, and God’s choice of positions and purposes in life are the immediate context of verse 16. In the forthcoming verses this becomes even more clear, and Paul expands on the scope as well.

#### **Verse 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."*

I wonder if we realize the full scope of the implications that Paul is making when he uses this quotation from Exodus 9:16 that clearly and unreservedly demonstrates God’s sovereign choice of both **who** He uses and **how** He uses them to accomplish His purposes? This verse says that God made the intentional choice to raise up Pharaoh as head over Egypt for the distinct purpose of demonstrating His own power in destroying him (killing him) and his entire army by drowning, as they pursued Israel through the Red Sea. This would result in God’s name being proclaimed throughout the known world of that time and even to the present. And so it did, and continues to do. In this example God had a predetermined purpose, that His name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth. To that end He sovereignly chose a person, and raised that person up to the position of Pharaoh of Egypt. He did this knowing full well that He would harden the heart of this person so as to resist the will of God, and in so doing this person would perish, that he would die by drowning in the Red Sea. Both the choice of this action and the means by which all of this would happen were entirely within the control of God, and would result in the fulfillment of the original purpose of God for the proclamation of His name throughout the whole earth. There is no possible way of denying the point of this example. It shows that God feels completely free and righteous to use various people in ways that result in their death and destruction to accomplish His own purposes. Is there any credible dispute as to this being the point and conclusion of this example? If so, please present it, otherwise we must accept it. God’s divine and eternal plan includes the salvation of some and the destruction of others, and He chooses who is who, and what is what, and doing that in no way assaults His righteousness, His fairness, or His integrity. If we think that it does then we’re wrong, and we need to get our thinking straightened out. He is God, that means something.

If I may once again quote the words of Arthur W. Pink, from his book “The Attributes of God” he says: *“The most dishonoring and degrading conceptions of the rule and reign of the Almighty are now held almost everywhere. To countless thousands, even among those professing to be Christians, the God of the Scriptures is quite unknown.”* End quote. Oh how astute were brother Pink’s observations.

This verse that Paul has referenced was selected because it serves as an example to us of the boundless sovereignty of God, and the extents of His righteous authority over all creation, including humans and angels as well. It is virtually lost to present day Christendom. The god that we now call “our god” is just exactly that, he’s a figment of our own carnal minds. We have created him ourselves, and stripped him of all authority and majesty, and limited his powers so as to make him but a poor victim, well meaning perhaps, but powerless to control anything. The thought that He sovereignly chooses and controls everything whatsoever that comes to pass is utterly unthinkable to us, and assaults our self-esteem, that we’ve worked so hard to elevate. Just who is this God of the scriptures who manipulates human beings and uses them like pawns to suit His own purposes? Well, let’s see, Did the God of the scriptures cause Job’s children to all be killed, and all his possessions to be lost, and his body to be plagued by sores, just to prove a point to Satan. And did He do all of this without ever telling Job what was happening or why He was doing it? All of this happened to serve as an example to all humanity, because through it all Job never cursed God, nor questioned His authority or His righteousness to do all those things. Again I agree with Arthur Pink, we do not even know the true God of Holy Writ, and when we get a glimpse of Him we shudder with amazement, and hurl accusations of unrighteousness at Him. There is truly no fear (no reverence, no respect ) of God before the eyes of humanity, and sadly this even extends into Christendom. Even among my dear Calvinist brethren there is a reluctance to ascribe to God the full righteous authority to actively determine the fate of human beings. The human beings that He has created out of the dirt of the ground. For this reason we often hear the terms “active” and “passive” when speaking of the will of God and His interaction in the lives of mankind. The next verse will serve as a demonstration of this principle:

**Verse 18:**

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

This verse can be very important for what it says and also for what it does not say as well. It settles the dispute between passive and active if we’re willing to accept it. This verse describes two direct choices made by God, one is the choice of mercy and the other is the choice to harden, and both are said to be made by God himself. It does not say, nor in any way suggest, that He made one choice actively and one choice passively, the sentence implies a direct decision by God in both situations. Now, having said that, He may bring one to pass actively and the other to pass passively, but the choice and the means to implement that choice, are ultimately God’s direct decision. If we perceive that who and how God chooses men for certain purposes has the potential of discrediting God, or diminishing His righteousness, then we seek ways to explain or mitigate this damage. And this is what has been done with the terms Supralapsarianism, and Infralapsarianism. Because many of my dear Calvinist brothers believe that God’s indiscriminate choices and uses of man, whenever and however He pleases, especially concerning reprobation, is a potential mark on God’s righteousness they have undertaken to explain or mitigate this by making the distinction of “active” versus “passive.” I would love to go into each of these terms but that would exceed the scope of this lesson, so if anyone is interested in understanding the meaning and logic of these terms I commend to you the work of Phil Johnson which is posted on the internet. Just type the word Supralapsarianism into your search engine and look for his article.

Let me say that I understand the motive of those who argue against God’s direct and active reprobation of mankind, but the issue isn’t about how I feel or how you feel, it’s about what God says and how to rightly interpret it, do we agree on this? If we don’t then there’s nothing more to discuss, but if we do agree that it’s God’s intent and not our feelings that matters then let’s seek to determine what God says and what He means by what He says. Let’s look at some Old Testament examples. The first is God speaking to Moses about returning to Egypt and confronting Pharaoh before it ever happened:

*21 The Lord 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. (Ex 4:21)*

We have probably all heard the argument that God only hardened Pharaoh’s heart after Pharaoh had first hardened it himself, but this verse is from the time when Moses was still exiled in Midian and had not yet gone back to Egypt. God told Moses from the beginning that He himself would harden Pharaoh’s heart so that he would not let the people go. There is no possible way to make this a passive action by which God simply allowed Pharaoh to harden his own heart, that is exactly the opposite of what this verse says and we all know it. But this isn’t the only time God said this very same thing, so it’s not just an anomaly, it’s a pattern, a principle that’s being hammered home by multiple blows. Another example:

*3 "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. (Ex 7:3)*

Again God delivers another blow of the hammer of sovereignty, so that none can claim ignorance. And then, just to pound a third strike of the hammer He says again:

*4 "Thus I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord." And they did so. (Ex 14:4)*

So I ask you, what is a God fearing, bible believing person supposed to conclude from these verses? That God only passively allows men to fall into sin and disobedience, or that He actually causes it by actively hardening their hearts, which will assuredly produce that result? Forget for just a moment any ramifications or ethical dilemmas this causes, and just answer the question as to what these verses say and what they mean. There can be no doubt as to the answer, can there? These verses say that God can and does cause the hardening of the hearts of men to accomplish His own purposes. And doing so in no way diminishes His fairness or His righteousness. He considers this to be entirely within the scope of His divine and sovereign authority. If we accept that, then all the ethical dilemmas caused by our own flawed, overinflated human concepts simply vanish away. God, without debate, feels that He has full authority to use men and angels in ways that result in their destruction and damnation without overstepping His authority or tarnishing His integrity or righteousness or fairness. If we feel that He does not, then one of us has to wrong. Who would that be? It is an under appraisal of the authority, sovereignty, and utter transcendency of God over all else that exists, that lies at the root of our debates over His methods and actions. The moment we began to limit God's options, that the scriptures clearly detail that He both has and uses, we set ourselves at odds with the word of God, and have to invent terms and explanations to justify our deviation from the literal meaning and interpretation.

The word of God is not something we read and ponder and then ratify or reject, or tweak and adjust. We do not sit in judgement over the scriptures, the scriptures are the inerrant truth from God, and our job is to study them, understand them, accept what they say, and then bring our thinking into alignment with what they teach us. (2Tim 3:16-17) We do not have to apologize for what they say, nor do we have to justify God for His words or His actions, we have to rightly and literally interpret them, and having done that we must accept what God tells us without dispute. The word of God is not given to us for our critique, it is given for our instruction. When or if what the scriptures teach runs against our human concepts that's when we're being taught the difference between truth and error, and we can either argue or we can learn. But we never have to apologize for, or try to justify, the word of God. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets, he didn't say to the people "listen up guys, and tell me what you think of this?" He said listen oh house of Israel for "Thus saith The Lord." If the word of God is our foundation then all interpretation must be based upon it, not our feelings or concepts. Let's look at another example from the Old Testament, where the prophet Isaiah was speaking to God about the serious moral decay of Israel. This is what he says to God:

*17 Why, O Lord, do You cause us to stray from Your ways And harden our heart from fearing You? Return for the sake of Your servants, the tribes of Your heritage. (Isa 63:17)*

You simply can't make this verse mean anything but what it says. Isaiah asks God why He causes Israel to stray from His ways, and why does He harden their hearts? There can be no possible doubt that Isaiah perceives that God is at the heart of the situation. Now, someone might ask, how has God caused the straying and the hardening of their hearts? Was it by a direct action or was it by a passive action? A credible argument might be made on both sides. But any such argument would be about the means of implementation, not the choice and the cause. Paul isn't speaking about how God accomplishes His will, he's talking about God being the One who has the will, and Who makes the choices. The means aren't the issue, it's Who makes the choice that's being discussed, so passive or active, though admittedly different, are not pertinent to the issue at hand. Yes, God has active means and God has passive means, and He uses both of these to accomplish His predetermined will. Again this verse says: *So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.* We simply can't just ignore the last half of this verse that says that God hardens whom He pleases. Whether it's actively or passively, either way it is God's choice to have mercy and it is God's choice to harden, and He does this freely as He desires with no apology and no explanation. This is what causes us the problem, we want to know why God chooses as He does, and how we affect that choice, but God is telling us implicitly that He makes it of His own free will, and we have absolutely no means to influence His choices.

This makes us feel helpless and totally dependent, and we humans just simply hate this. We just have to feel like we're somehow in control, but God says otherwise. The sin of pride rests at the foundation of both angelic and human destruction, and God will not tolerate it. He is God, we are not, and no one will ever enter into His kingdom without learning and fully accepting this fact.

The argument that God only takes direct actions for the good of man, and passive actions that result in the reprobation and destruction of men is not consistent with scriptures, in fact it runs directly opposite. There are those who argue that God only "passes over" some and leaves them to their own fallen nature. So His involvement is only passive, and this has some truth in it to be sure. But like R.C. Sproul argues in his book "Chosen by God" there is an equal ultimacy to both God's active means and his passive means, in as much as God is the One who chooses and then through whatever means He has determined, assures that what He has ordained will certainly come to pass. We must remember that it is God who actively implemented the physical and spiritual **consequences** of the fall of man, whereby the heart and mind of man has been made sinful from conception. Just exactly what physically and spiritually happened to Adam and Eve when they disobeyed, and the full meaning of "you will surely die" is beyond our understanding, but God did something to the human species that made them spiritually dead and unfit for heaven. God didn't directly make the choice for Adam and Eve, nor did He force them to disobey, but He did implement the consequential results of that disobedience, which was sure and certain death for them and all who were their offspring. It cannot be denied that the reason that every human after Adam and Eve are born spiritually dead and sinful is because God did something to humans that makes them fallen sinners from their very conception. The responsibility for the disobedience is on Adam and Eve, but the resultant consequences of that disobedience are entirely the choice and making of God. God chose the punishment and actively implemented it in the human species. He did this because it was His predetermined purpose to do so. He planned the fall so that He could both provide and demonstrate His mercy, through Jesus Christ, on those whom He has chosen to show mercy. And according to this verse, and the following verses, (19-24) He made specific provision for the reprobate so that He could do exactly what He did with Pharaoh, make a public demonstration His power and wrath, so that His Name might be known throughout the whole universe. That's what the bible says. We've just read and discussed the verses, and what they say cannot be denied. God tells us straight out that He actively hardened the heart of Pharaoh producing his reprobation, and He did it for the predetermined purpose of killing Pharaoh by downing him in the Red Sea. And God makes no apology nor offers any defense of His actions. God uses man as He chooses to fulfil His purposes, and if our pride, or our human concept of fairness, won't let us accept this then it's our loss. But we can't claim that we weren't told in the simplest and clearest terms. We just don't seem to be willing, or able, to perceive the vast difference between us and God. We actually seem to think that we can judge Him by our interpretations of fairness and righteousness, that we can weigh Him in our human balance scale, but this is a mistake of the highest magnitude. God makes the rules and establishes the standards. Righteousness is what God says it is, not what we puny humans think it is. His righteous authority over us includes every facet of our existence, both now and for all eternity. (Lk 12:5) And when He exercises that authority, whether for mercy or for wrath, He is totally within the bounds of His own holy nature and righteous character. He is God, we are nothing. Thank God He chooses to have mercy on some and demonstrate His lovingkindness, because He has absolutely no obligation whatsoever to do so, either legal, ethical, or moral.

The verse that we're examining now says: *So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.* Does anyone in the universe really believe that God was surprised when Adam and Eve disobeyed His command to abstain from eating the fruit of that tree? The inescapable fact that Jesus Christ would eventually come into the world and suffer and die for the sins of those chosen by God from before creation is the central theme of the whole bible. All of this begins by the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the consequences that it had on every descendent after them. It was right there that the need for the Savior was implemented. It was right there that the pool of fallen humanity, destined to hell and destruction, for the purpose of demonstrating God's wrath was produced. It is from among this very same pool of fallen humanity that God had predetermined to save a small remnant for the purpose of demonstrating His mercy and lovingkindness. This was not accidental, this was designed before creation ever began. You can call this active or you can call it passive, but either way it was the choice and design of God, and He saw to it, by whatever diversity of means, that it all came to pass. (Isa 46:8-11) He chooses, and He causes it to come to pass, that's the truth that Paul is teaching us in this chapter. I know this causes many of us to recoil in shock, and Paul knew that too, which prompted him to say what he does in one of our next verses:

*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?* (Verses 19-20) The point is, we humans do not have the position, the right, or the authority to call God into account, or pass judgement upon Him for His choices or His actions, that's simply the way it is. He is God, we are not. Two totally different entities. If you don't get this, or if you can't or won't swallow your pride, then you'll surely choke to death on the verses coming up in our next lessons.

At the beginning of this study of Romans I said we would get into some extremely controversial topics, and I made the promise that I would not skirt the issues but would speak clearly and directly on the subject matter. This is what we're doing now, and you can see why the verses stir up so much dissension. Undoubtedly I will be labeled by some as a "hyper-Calvinist", an accusation I deny and find troubling, but the scriptures say what they say and they mean what they mean, so how can anyone call themselves a bible teacher if they don't have the courage to take the words literally, contextually, and historically as they were intended when they were written? Therefore, please pay close attention, and decide for yourself if what we're teaching is precisely what the scriptures are saying. Just being different doesn't make anyone right, and neither does being popular make anyone wrong, but traditionally the truth has never been popular, at least not for long. Therefore, I encourage everyone who holds the holy scriptures in high regard to exercise careful discernment, and diligently pursue the truth.

To Him be the glory forever, Amen.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami  
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