

ROMANS BIBLE STUDY

Romans 9:19-24 (a)

Lesson #28

Introduction

Often verses can only be rightly understood if read in the context of the previous verses. This is one of those times, so let's reread the preceding verses before we read the ones we're studying in this specific lesson. I'll start at chapter 9, verses 10 and following, and then we'll read verses 19-24.

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)

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)

Vessels of Mercy and Vessels of Wrath

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? 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. Romans 9:19-24 (NASB)

Verse 19:

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

Paul had just spoken some very intense things about God's use of His sovereign authority over humanity. He had just said straight out that God intentionally chose a man through whom He would **demonstrate** His power, and He would do that by first raising him up to supreme leader of Egypt and then drowning him to death, along with his whole army in the sea. God did this for the purpose of visually displaying His power to the whole earth. This is what He says He did, and He makes no bones about it. He offers no justification, nor provides any excuses for His actions. God clearly feels free to use men in any manner He desires to accomplish His purposes. He does not feel like He is violating anybody's rights nor overstepping His boundaries of righteousness or fairness.

Our human perspective is to weigh God's actions on our human balance scales and assess the merits and fairness of His actions. We fail to see that the finite cannot make value assessments of the infinite. The creature cannot make value assessments of the Creator. Every attempt to "justify" God on our balance scale will fail miserably. The very thought that we humans can, and occasionally need to make "excuses" for God's actions is so absurd as to be laughable. God clearly sees the relationship between Himself and us in a very different perspective than we perceive. He feels perfectly free to flood the whole earth and kill all the inhabitants, and then start all over with just four males and four females of His own choosing. He destroys whole cities for moral decadence, He destroys other cities for worshiping false gods and prolonged violent behaviors. God, beyond debate, feels free to use mankind as He sees fit to suit His purposes. And He says exactly that, in the plainest and simplest language, in these verses we're examining in these lessons. (vv. 17-18; 21-24) For some reason it seems nearly impossible for us humans to either see or accept the vast cavern that separates us from God, in both the authority to make choices, and the freedom of actions that He has to accomplish those choices.

Our first mistake is to think that we can call God into account before our court of justice. And then render a verdict with our own scales of justice. We dare to talk back to God, and demand an explanation from Him, when we should be falling to our knees and asking for His mercy for our disrespectful arrogance towards Him. There are many things we can and should ask of God, but an explanation or justification from Him for His actions is not one of them. God gave no explanations nor justifications with His Ten Commandments, He simply wrote them in stone and presented them with the declaration "Thus saith the Lord." There are things that it's just not acceptable to do before God, and questioning His authority or His righteousness are among those things. When we overstep our boundaries God usually does not even try to reason with us, He simply speaks and demands that we listen and learn. And this is exactly what Paul is saying in the next verse. He has asked the question that the people were thinking in their minds: *"Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"* But instead of offering up a defense for God, or an explanation, Paul says:

Verse 20:

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?

By this response Paul is saying that it isn't God's responsibility to justify His actions to His creatures, and for us to demand that He does so is totally out of line on our part. Paul's answer is a resounding rebuke on mankind that we have absolutely no right nor authority to question God's choices or His actions. The question itself is an insult to God, and demonstrates the truth of the earlier verses from chapter three that declare that *there is no fear of God before our eyes*. (3:18) According to Paul, we humans do not have any rightful place (meaning rightful authority) to question why God does what He does. God has said that the outcome of everything and every person is determined by His choice, (v. 11) and He has mercy on whom He chooses and He hardens whom He chooses, (vv. 15 & 18) and He has every right to do that, and it is in perfect harmony with His holiness, His righteousness, and His integrity when He does so. If we think otherwise then we are wrong, and we need to adjust our thinking accordingly. We do not need to make endless "excuses" for God, nor devise lengthy "explanations" (like active and passive) that try to mitigate His actions. As we said earlier, the God of the holy scriptures is both a merciful and forgiving God, AND a terrifyingly severe and wrathful God at the very same time, and failing to recognize the full extents of **both aspects** of His character and nature is to diminish the full scope of who and what He truly is. God has chosen to reveal to mankind, not just by words but by public display, the vast boundaries and extents of His power and His glory. He has used both men and angels in this display, and has made it even more clear with the holy scriptures, which are a written account of these things, and serve to describe and explain whatsoever He desires for us to know about Himself. God speaks, and God demonstrates visibly by all things created, including men and angels.

Probably the most offensive and resented teaching of the bible, the most debasing and humiliating and utterly humbling, is the fact that our ultimate fate and future are not of our own choosing nor of our making, but are predestined by God alone. We've already discussed verse 11 that says: *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*, and then following up in verse 16: *So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy*. And then summarizing everything in verse 18: *So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires*. Look, This is not rocket science, this is crystal clear, it can't be misconstrued, and if you claim you don't understand then you're hopelessly ignorant, or more likely, you're just plain lying, because you don't like what it says. It implies that God is everything and we are essentially nothing. It implies that we have no inalienable rights as human beings and hold no rightful claims to authority over our lives or destinies. We absolutely hate this, and we will not accept it without a fight. We are filled with pride and self-importance, which we received as the judgmental consequences implemented by God on the human species, and even the universe, for the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. As we said in our last lesson, this is where the story effectively begins. This is where the sin of disobedience resulted in God's implementation of the warning that "you shall surely die." That single act prompted God's response of reprobation on the human species. We were made sinful both by declaration and by physical and spiritual constitution. We were constituted "fallen" and reprobate and unfit for the kingdom of God. We are conceived in that state. When the seed meets the egg, the resultant life created is sinful, reprobate, and unfit for the kingdom of heaven. The responsibility for that sin lies with man, but the resultant consequences of that sin were entirely implemented by God. From that day forth man is a fallen and sinful being in the eyes of God and has no valid claim as to any rights, nor expectations of self-determination. Then, God does whatsoever He pleases with this vast pool of degenerate humanity.

As much as we don't like this, it is nevertheless exactly what God chose to do, and it forms the working material for everything God will do in the public display of the vast extents of both His wrath and His mercy. The next couple of verses explains this, and if we understand what we've just discussed then we'll have no problem with what we're about to read, even though it is painfully brutal in its candor and honesty about God's sovereign authority to choose and to act according to His own good pleasure. These verses humble man like no other, and will challenge everyone who believes the holy scriptures to carefully examine their perspective on the relationship between God and man. He's about to tell us some things about Himself and us that are amazing, so much so that we're scarcely able to believe it. After saying: *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?* Paul follows up with the statement:

Verse 21:

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?

Well, here we are. When it comes right down to it, it's really a question of authority isn't it? Is a potter righteous if he makes a vessel for honorable use, but then unrighteous if he makes one for common use? Has the potter abused the clay by deciding what it would be without asking it first? Does the potter have any moral or ethical obligations whatsoever towards the lump of clay as to what he does with it? Does the lump of clay have any inherent rights of its own, and is it entitled to an explanation from the potter as to why he made it into what it is? These are rhetorical questions aren't they? We know the answer because we all know and accept that clay does not have any inherent rights. The potter and the clay are two totally separate entities, they are not on the same plane of existence or importance. We can't compare the rights of clay with the rights of the potter, because clay has no rights to begin with in the realm of the potter. To the potter, clay is simply his product, his means to accomplish his goal, it's not his equal. And therein lies the distinction. It isn't that clay has no value, but that clay has no rights nor authority in the realm of humanity. A potter will not even consider having a verbal debate with a lump of clay as to what he makes out of it, will he? In fact this is silly isn't it, clay can't possibly think or communicate on the potters level.

Now Paul is using this example of a potter, and a metaphor of clay to make his point. And what is that point? The point is that there is a fundamental difference between a potter and the material that he uses to accomplish his work. Now applying that metaphor to us humans, who are the clay, Paul is saying that we humans do not exist on the same plane as the potter (representing God) and as such any debates of fairness on the potter's (God's) part are entirely meaningless. We cannot expect God to debate his use of us any more than a potter would debate with a lump of clay as to what he does with it. The difference between the clay and the potter is representative of the difference between us humans and God. We do not exist on a plane of even debate. Even if clay were alive and conscious, like animals and poultry, it would still not get to debate it's fate. We kill animals for food and never provide any explanations. Some we may take as a pet and others we might have for dinner, and the choice is entirely ours. We accept this because we recognize that there is an order of importance and priority in the universe. The combination of fallen pride inherent in man, and the sorely simplistic teachings coming from most pulpits, has left us with the idea that the clay is on the same plane of existence as the potter, and has reasonable expectations of self determination as to its use and purpose. By this I mean that we have come to see ourselves as existing on the same plane as God, and now feel like He's overstepping His authority when He makes choices about our lives without our consent. The simple truth is, in the presence of God we are but dirt, and concerning our place in His plan, and the final outcome of our lives, we were never assigned a seat at the planning table, nor even given an invitation to attend the meeting, and furthermore, at that time we didn't even yet exist.

Before God ever began tangible creation He first planned it out completely. (Isa 46:8-11) He made a plan and then designed all things whatsoever necessary to implement that plan. He designed every creature with a nature that would cause their voluntary participation in the plan. He does not coerce us, but rather has designed us, and our innate nature, so that we will, by our very own choice, do precisely what He has planned. He uses means that were planned from before creation began, and then implemented at precisely the right time to suit the timetable of God. This is the consistent teaching of the holy scriptures, both Old and New Testaments. Jesus repeatedly made the statement that "My time has not yet come." He was totally aware of the precise timetable of God the Father.

This verse is preparing us for the next statement, so we have to be in sync here or we aren't ready to proceed. By "in sync" I mean we have to have our thinking in complete alignment with what Paul has already told us. Paul is setting the record straight as to what are God's rights to choose and to act, and what is our proper response to that principle. He has just told us that God makes all the choices as to who receives mercy and who gets hardened. In verses 10-13 Paul said that God makes choices of the destiny of humans before they are born, based entirely upon His own will, and in verse 14 he says: *What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!* With this statement Paul is declaring to all humanity that **God is not unjust** in choosing and acting in any manner that He pleases when using some men for honor and some men for dishonor; when showing mercy on some and demonstrating wrath on others. It is not possible to make these verses say something else, no matter how much we might think we need to do so. Please don't think that this preacher doesn't comprehend the magnitude of this teaching, because I assure that he does. But what will we do, shall we twist the scriptures to suit our own concepts, or shall we revise our human concepts to suit the holy scriptures?

What does this verse actually mean, what is Paul telling us when he says: *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?* Is there anybody old enough to read who will claim that they don't understand what Paul is saying? He is saying, metaphorically, that just as a potter has every right to make vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor, in like manner, God has every right to make vessels that He will use to demonstrate His mercy, and vessels that He will use to demonstrate His wrath and power. And that is exactly what He has done with all angels and all humans. Before we were ever born, before we ever did anything good or bad, God chose some for mercy and some for wrath. I said earlier that this is a preparatory verse, because it firmly establishes God's rightful authority, and righteousness, to make vessels (meaning people and angels) for whatever uses He decides is necessary to accomplish the purpose that He has predetermined them to do. We must get past the questions of righteousness, fairness, and authority, before we're ready to hear what God has made humans to do. Once we accept God's sovereign authority, and cease to question His righteousness, then we can be told what God has predetermined living beings to accomplish. If He chose to drown, or otherwise destroy every one of us on earth and start all over again tomorrow, that would be completely within His rightful place to do. Do we understand that? I didn't say do we like that, because I know we don't like it, but it is the reality of the situation. It is a necessary fact for us to know to rightfully fear and respect the eternal, omnipotent, God of creation. When we understand this we can fully appreciate His mercy and tireless patience with an ungrateful and disobedient humanity. But instead, we think we're all good, and God is the bad guy. Every day that He withholds His wrath on a disobedient and disrespectful humanity, that calls evil good, and good evil, (Isa 5:20) is a cosmic tribute to His mercy.

Okay, we've got it. God has every right to make vessels, meaning people and angels, for whatsoever He deems necessary to accomplish His predetermined purpose, and this is not an infringement on our rights nor on His righteousness. If we think otherwise then we are wrong, and we need to adjust our thinking, accept His authority, and stop making "excuses" for God. So, let's read the next verses:

Verses 22-23:

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.

This verse, just like the preceding, makes a contrast between two distinct categories. The previous verse spoke of vessels for honorable use versus vessels for common use. This verse goes farther still in describing vessels of wrath prepared beforehand for destruction, versus vessels of mercy, prepared beforehand for glory. The maker of the vessels had a predetermined purpose for each of the two and carefully and intentionally prepared them for the purpose they would serve. They would be perfectly suited, by their very construction and constitution, to do exactly what they were intended.

In the first part of this verse Paul says that God most certainly is willing to demonstrate His power and to make His wrath known to all beings. Like the example of the Pharaoh of Egypt in the preceding verses. (vv. 17-18) That God both can and will demonstrate His wrath through direct actions is indisputable. If He wouldn't then His mercy would be meaningless, wouldn't it? And this is what's being explained to us in these verses. If we don't get this then we've missed the whole

point. Which point is completed with the next few words of this sentence: *endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?* In this verse God says that He intentionally made some vessels for the distinct purpose of demonstrating His wrath, and their end result is like that of Pharaoh, certain destruction. They were made as a public demonstration of one of the aspects of the divine nature of God. We have already determined that we don't have any right to question the authority of God, but if we haven't learned that lesson, that then we might think to ourselves "why would God do such a terrible thing?" Well, even though we don't have any right to ask that question, nevertheless God chooses to give us any answer anyway.

23 And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory. This verse explains the preceding verse. It completes the picture. It explains the two contrasting groups and tells us why they exist. It says, in absolutely clear and unmistakable terms, that God intentionally made two distinct groups of people to serve two distinct and predetermined purposes. And what does He say are those purposes? The one, the vessels of wrath **prepared** for destruction were made by God to demonstrate His power, and the other, the vessels of mercy **prepared** for glory, are intended *to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy.* These two groups have been planned and carefully prepared for the final assessment of God, in which He finally and eternally displays the full extents of both His power and wrath, and His mercy and glory. He has planned all along to publicly demonstrate both extents of His divine nature, because He has determined that we must know, by visible demonstration, both extents of His power and glory to truly know who this God is whom we have been chosen and painstakingly prepared to worship for all eternity. He has done all of this to make us suitable to the task for which He has chosen us. Which is, to be His personal family of eternal and loving worshipers.

For us to know the love of God we had to see the wrath of God played out through visible vessels of wrath, on which God would demonstrate the consequences of sin and evil. Abstract principles alone are insufficient. It is essential to actually see the consequences of sin and evil to fully understand the value of forgiveness and redemption. So God made visible living vessels of wrath that would demonstrate the destruction that results from sin and disobedience. And He made living and visible vessels of mercy on which He would demonstrate *the riches of His glory* to those vessels. Now you might be inclined to argue, or to complain, or to kick and scream, but in the end this is what these verses have said, and there is no credible argument to the contrary. Believe me, if it weren't what they say, or what they mean, then this preacher would not be teaching it, but it is what these verses say, so what else can one do? I promised at the beginning of this epistle to accurately teach whatever the scripture say, regardless of the popularity of that teaching. Unlike that which so many teach today, the scriptures are not given to make us feel good about ourselves, they are given to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with much patience and instruction. (2Tim 4:2) Because: *16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, [fully] equipped for every good work.* (2Tim 3:16-17)

According to this verse, God made vessels of wrath, which He has prepared for destruction, and is fully willing to demonstrate that wrath on those vessels, but He is patiently waiting for the predetermined time to exercise that wrath, until every vessel of mercy that He has prepared beforehand has had their time to be born and receive that gift of saving faith (Eph 2:8-9) so as to lose none of His chosen children (Jn 6:39;10:28-29) that were written in the Book of Life from before the creation of the world. (Eph 1:4; Rev 13:8,17:8) God will fully and thoroughly pronounce and execute judgement on those vessels of wrath when all the predetermined events have run their course and the designated time has arrived. It will not happen even a minute or second before that time, nor can it be delayed a single second either. God patiently restrains His wrath on vessels prepared to receive it so that His chosen vessels of mercy can all have their allotted time to come to repentance and saving faith in Jesus Christ. (2Pet 3:9) God planned it **all** from the beginning and He will certainly bring it all to pass in the time frame that He has set. (Isa 46:8-11) I realize this is a crushing concept to those who believe that we humans are the master's of or fate and the captain's of our soul's, but that just isn't what God says. God says that He controls everything, and that He planned it all before we ever even existed. (Verses 10-18) What more can we say?

Now, assuming that we have made a compelling case for God's sovereign authority and His willingness to use that authority, one might be at odds as to how God actually exercised His control over us when we feel that we're in control

of our lives and decisions. This is a fair question and it's one that has spurred much debate. Do we actually have what we call "free will" or don't we? Well first we have to decide exactly what we mean by the term "free will." Do we mean that no one is forcing us to do something that we don't want to do ourselves? If that's what we mean then we do indeed have free will. If we are free and live in a country of freedom, then we are not forced to make decisions by external coercion. But, is that the only possibility by which we might be influenced? What if we are internally influenced to make predetermined decisions by things we've seen or heard, or by ideas or desires that we have ourselves? If you have the ability to influence how someone thinks then you have the ability to influence their choices and decisions, don't you? This is what propaganda is designed to do, to influence decisions by influencing thinking.

We may be free from coercion, but yet not free of internal thinking that influences our choices and decisions. As for mankind, we can be free from external coercion, but no human is free of corruption of their mind. Our mind's are damaged by sin, and our affections are naturally prone toward evil, so every choice and every decision is predictably biased by our own mindset. Paul quoted Old Testament when he said: *"There is none righteous, not even one; 11 There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; 12 All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one."* (Rom 3:10-12) We don't have to have someone threatening us with force to be influenced, we just need to have a wrong mindset and wrong motives. We don't have to be under external coercion, we can just as well be under the influence of a corrupted mind for our will to be enslaved. This corruption will work just as well as coercion in controlling our decisions and choices. And this is the situation with unregenerate humanity. Their mind is already predisposed to evil, and their choices, made freely and unforced according to their own concept, will always be made according to that fallen and sinful mindset. God uses all things according to their innate nature, and He has predetermined the nature of all things, and set into motion all the factors and circumstances by which they acquire that nature. Fallen man is prone to sin because God made him that way as the resultant consequence of disobedience in the Garden of Eden. Fallen man desires sin instead of righteousness because that is what God made him desire when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command to abstain from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The knowledge of good and evil, absent of the Spirit of God and His righteousness, makes man desire evil. And every man (and woman) will predictably choose and practice evil of their own unforced will. But their will is not free of corruption, so they are not really free of that innate influence to choose what is according to their very nature.

This is where many apply the argument that God only passively allows some people to choose sin, and in that respect I suppose I agree. But if He implemented the consequence of the fall, by which man has become sinful by nature, then how passive is that really? If you find comfort in saying that it's passive then be my guest, but having written the genetic code that runs the whole process, and designing the human spirit and how it works, just how passive can that be? But more directly, the previous verse says that God freely chose to prepare some vessels for destruction and some for glory and the means by which that comes about are completely designed and implemented by God alone. Now some will indignantly ask if I'm implying that God is the author of sin. Let me reply with the same answer as Arthur Pink, by asking that you please define what you mean by the term author? If you are asking if we're implying that God directly performs evil then we will most certainly say a resounding "NO", but then we must ask how, and by whose authority and provision did evil get into creation in the first place. Certainly Satan was the entity, and Adam and Eve were the perpetrators, but will you argue that it was against God's will, and against His predetermined design? You can't answer yes to that either can you? So, whatever you may mean by the author of sin, there is no escaping the fact that sin is in this world because God wants it here; to serve a temporary purpose that is essential to the full preparation of His chosen, and the demonstration of the extents of His power and His glory. God does not personally perform evil, but He most certainly uses it through other creatures who are designed to do so, to accomplish His ultimate purpose.

This verse speaks of two distinct groups. The pool of humanity that forms both groups was created when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and incurred the threatened consequences "you will surely die." Whatever God did, and however He actually implemented that punishment we still don't fully understand, but the results we do understand. Every single offspring that came from the genetic line of Adam and Eve was thereafter conceived and born spiritually dead and sinful by innate nature. There are no exceptions for gender, age, physical or mental condition, race, nationality, nor anything else given in the scriptures. If there were we would grab them immediately, but there simply aren't any given.

Okay, now we're ready to tackle the question of reprobation. This is a very controversial subject, and there are several perspectives on the matter. Nevertheless the main question is - does God cause the reprobation of some Himself, or does He simply stand passively by as they make themselves reprobate? Is God active in the process or is He always just passive? The truth is that the answer one comes up with is more influenced by what they perceive to be the impact on God's righteousness and fairness than on what the scriptures actually say. It's not hard to answer this question, the verses we're studied in the last few lessons leave us with a crystal clear answer. The problem is what it does to our concept of God. We go into "protect" mode when we hear something that we think assaults God's righteousness, and I'm not opposed to that, it's good. But we've already been carefully told and taught that God has the sovereign right and full authority to make vessels for dishonorable purposes. But if we don't believe that then we can't accept what these verses say, no matter how clearly they say it. So, again, reading those preceding verses one more time:

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, (v.11)

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." (v.15)

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

18 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. (v.18)

Okay, there's no escaping it, the verses say that God chooses to have mercy on whom He pleases and He chooses to harden whom He pleases, and it's not based on the man who wills nor the man who runs, but entirely on God's decision. Easy words to understand, but admittedly very hard to accept. They humble and reduce mankind to a state of mere vessels in the hands of God, to be used at His discretion for the accomplishment of His eternal purposes. And that's contrary to everything we think about ourselves, and sadly contrary to what is the popular teaching coming from the vast majority of the pulpits of today. But that is the teaching of the holy scriptures, and we ignore it at our own peril.

One key word in this discussion is the word rendered in English as "prepared." This Greek word means just what it means in English. It means prepared in the sense that it is fashioned and conditioned for a specific purpose. Paul says that God has prepared some vessels (meaning beings) for destruction and some for glory, and He also implemented the means by which they would become what He intends for them to be, and serve the purpose He desires them to serve. All of this was decided and planned in what we call eternity past, for the lack of a better term, and it works itself out progressively, without any deviation, according to God's predetermined timetable. As far as God being the moving force behind all human choices and actions, let me quote from the Historical and Theological Introduction to Martin Luther's book "The Bondage of The Will." as translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston:

*"The idea of a meritorious act is the idea of an independent act which is in no way necessitated by God for man or performed by God in man, but is carried out by man acting in some sense apart from God. And there is no such action as this in God's universe. The Creator **directly** energizes and controls all the acts of His creatures. All events are necessitated by His immutable, sovereign will. Human actions are genuinely spontaneous, and authentically express each man's nature, for God works all things according to their nature; but the fact that it is God who works all man's works in him means that human actions can never be independent of God..."* End of quote. (Page 51)

There are differing opinions on this matter, but the scriptures, without debate support this quotation. Man does as he pleases, he makes choices as he wishes, according to his own nature, but it is God who directly controls everything by His preemptive control of man's very nature. This is what is meant by the verse when it says that some vessels were prepared beforehand for destruction. Prepared in the sense that their very nature is prone to sin and evil, and their choices and desires are influenced by that fallen sinful nature. They love sin and hate righteousness in the depths of their heart's and mind's, and they despise and persecute those who follow after Jesus Christ. This is God's preparation process for vessels of destruction, and they will ultimately, and deservedly, be used in the demonstration of His wrath and power. Who these individuals are is not something that is being decided by those individuals everyday. It was decided by God before He ever began creation, before there ever was time and space and tangible matter, it is only the visible and tangible working out of that process that is happening here and now in linear time. The vessels that God predetermined for destruction will be destroyed, and the vessels that He has predetermined for mercy will be glorified, and that's the message that Paul is conveying to us for evermore in these verses in chapter 9.

I believe there's still more to be said on this subject, so we'll continue in our next lesson, but I'll close this one for now. To Him be the glory and honor forever. Amen.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami

Robert Andrews, Pastor

04/14/13