

# ROMANS BIBLE STUDY

Romans 9:19-24 (b)

Lesson #29

## Introduction

Who is God, or perhaps even more significant, what is God? Is He a person, just like us, or something entirely different? These are not insignificant questions, are they? Man has been asking these questions for about 6,000 years. But the answer, nevertheless seems to evade the vast majority. Mostly because we have no context, no background against which to compare Him. How do we relate to an entity that is self-existent, and eternal. Both of these are entirely impossible within the space and time constraints in which we live and exist. In tangible space and time, everything must have a beginning. We cannot even perceive of something that simply exists apart from linear time and physical space. Something that exists completely outside the seemingly inescapable restraints of our known universe. But we have a serious conundrum here, because we freely acknowledge that it is impossible to make something out of nothing. So, either all the matter and energy that constitutes our known universe has existed forever, without any beginning, or it was created at some point out of nothing. Neither of these situations fits our concept of possibility. But yet, here we are. How do we unravel this conundrum? How do we reconcile our logic with our senses?

The problem is that we are trying to make sense of something **outside** of our space and time constraints using logic that is confined to **within** our time and space constraints. The rules and regulations of time and space only apply **within** time and space, they are meaningless outside that realm. So our logic is incomplete, sometimes even contrary to our figuring out the answers to our questions. When mankind tries to analyze God, and figure Him out using only those earthly and human senses and logic that are applicable to this time and space continuum, then we get flawed results, because our tools are inadequate and in many cases inapplicable. God is not limited by time and He is certainly not constrained by what we perceive as space or distance, these are completely irrelevant terms to God. He has applied these restraints to us, but certainly not to Himself. If He chooses to destroy all humanity and begin again, this is absolutely His right. But for any human being to attempt this would be a heinous genocide. God can do things, that humans cannot. And this applies to both ability and authority as well. God can do things that are impossible for man to do, and He can do things that are not allowed for man to do. God has transcendent power and God has transcendent authority. By transcendent we mean that His very person and existence and authority are entirely outside the time and space constraints that were made for humanity. Every time we try to apply our restraints, and logic, and authority to God we get the wrong answer, because He transcends them. The right to choose and to act that belongs to God would indeed be completely out of line for man, because man is not God. Yes, the rules are different, because the entities are different, both in composition and in content. God and man are not weighed on the same scales of justice, nor do they share the same authority to choose and to act with absolute righteous sovereignty. What is perfectly right for God can be very much over the boundary of authority for man. The simple fact is that God cannot possibly, by definition of His self and position, overstep His authority. There is no boundary marker for God because there is no one, or no thing existent to set any such boundary. The boundaries of human behaviors are set by those who have rightful (or powerful) authority over us to set such boundaries, but there is none who have any such power or authority over God. Certainly we humans do not, but many seem to think that we do.

If God makes a declaration, or sets a boundary, or prohibits an action, then that is His sovereign right to do. It is not subject to human ratification, nor is it open for debate among humans as to its justice or fairness. In human governments, at least those which are democratic, the citizens get to have a say in the laws of that society. Public debate is invited, and each is afforded the opportunity to voice their opinion. We highly value this form of government, and consider it honorable. But we err most egregiously if we think that God runs a democracy. Were the 10 Commandments provided by God to Moses and the Israelites a democratic document? No, not even close. God runs a Theistic Dictatorship, not a democracy. Our ignorance of God, and our democratic upbringing makes this offensive to us, so we rebel against it. We think we get to choose whether we will accept it or reject it. Our country is openly rejecting almost every law that God has given us, and we're seeing the devastating results this is causing, though we won't admit it's the reason. The world hates God outright, while the professing church claims to love a powerless and non-existent, non-judgmental, all loving god that it has conjured up in its own carnal mind.

It's almost impossible to even find a sermon preached today that recognizes and honors the transcendent and all powerful and sovereign God of the holy scriptures. Every sermon makes God out to be some one-sided, all-loving, never ever judgmental god that will save and forgive everybody. We hear that God really wants everybody to be saved, but He just can't get them to accept His offer. We're told that He has limited himself so as not to overstep His boundaries on human free will. So in effect, He is the unwitting victim of His own doing. His self-imposed limitations has stripped Him of His ability to carry out His own deepest desires. And now He is just like us, limited by self-imposed boundaries. This is so far from the omnipotent God of holy writ that it makes a true believer ill to even hear it. The plethora of gods outside the Christian church are diverse and perverted, but the god inside the Christian church is now nothing more than a harmless and powerless victim of circumstance, held captive by his own self-imposed limitations, and completely at the mercy and whim of humanity who has all the power of choice and outcome. What became of the God of the bible, where did He go, or when did He die? According to some, that's exactly what happened. According to some when man became sufficiently wise and technologically advanced he no longer needed any god, so the whole concept was abandoned. This is an apt description of my beloved country, and the rest of the world as well. Either there is no god, or if there is he's just like us, and his authority is no greater than ours.

From the foregoing we begin to see why there are so many diverse opinions and ideas in the world. Because we have either denied God, or replaced God, or redefined God, we have come to think we live in a democratic universe and we all get to have our own opinions of right and wrong. To be benevolent, we might say that God is free to state His opinion, but we're still free to accept it or reject it as we see fit. We lack any perspective of transcendency and complete otherworldliness of God. There is no fear of God before our eyes, therefore there is no true wisdom in the world, and very little in the church. (Pr 9:10; Rm 3:18) No matter what the scriptures say, we interpret it as we think it should say, from our human, non-transcendent perspective. We make it say what we want it to say, or formulate lengthy rhetoric to explain away the uncomfortable difference. We hear God say that He has done something, or determined something that we deem unfair, or undemocratic, and we immediately spring to His defense. But God has every right, and full authority to make choices and perform actions that we humans cannot, and when He does so it is perfectly right and holy and righteous. As we said earlier, God can rightly do things that humans cannot, and this is His transcendent right of choice, because He is completely different, completely over and above human beings. He is not made of that substance which we are made, and He is not limited to that which we are limited. We cannot rightly make the choices that God can make, and we cannot rightly do the things that God can do, but He can, and He does so all the time. And this is right and proper and needs no defense nor excuses. Now, let's apply this to a particular point of scripture. Consider these verses:

*<sup>19</sup> You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" <sup>20</sup> 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? <sup>21</sup> 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 [dishonorable] common use? <sup>22</sup> 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? <sup>23</sup> And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, <sup>24</sup> even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.* (Rom 9:19-24)

This group of verses starts off with a question proposed by Paul on behalf of his listeners, and then answered with a very distinct point. The point is that there are choices, and situations, and actions made by God that are His divine prerogative, made for reasons of His own choosing, and He does not acknowledge any obligation to answer to humanity for them. In fact it's implied, with undeniable clarity, that it's altogether improper for us to even ask God to explain himself to us.

These verses, by use of metaphor, go on to ask if God has the sovereign right to make some people for honorable use and others for dishonorable use. This is mostly rhetorical, because like the metaphor of the potter and the clay, we all freely recognize that God has every right to make people for whatever use He deems desirable, and He owes no explanation to any of them. He is God, He is transcendent, and the people belong to Him just as the pots belong to the potter. And just as a potter has more than one use for pots, and some are honorable and some are dishonorable, likewise God has more than one use for people, and some are for honorable uses and some are for dishonorable uses.

The most common error in examining and interpreting these verses is in assuming that they're about us, and our salvation, which, admittedly, is a part of them, but that is not the main emphasis of these verses. These verses are speaking of how God makes choices, and uses people, to accomplish His own predetermined purposes. These verses tell us that God had a definite purpose for both groups, the honorable and the dishonorable, and that purpose was to demonstrate the boundaries of His power, His authority, His mercy and His glory. Just like the metaphor is not about the clay pots themselves but about the potter who makes them, likewise, the implication being made in these verses is not about the people, but about the God who makes those people, and the purposes that He has for making them. These verses are mostly about God, not about man. So many very wise theologians seem to miss this perspective, and end up trying to explain God's frame of mind, or mental perspective in such a way that it appears fair to our human senses. These verses are not about soteriology, they are about sovereignty. They are about the potter, not the pots, they are about the Creator, not the creature. These verses are a clear declaration of God's authority to make and use people in whatever ways He desires to suit His divine and eternal purposes. Just like the example of Moses and Pharaoh.

If we miss this perspective we find ourselves trapped in a mental quandary that cannot be resolved. For instance, if a privy pot we're able to ask the potter why he made it that instead of a flower pot, how would he justify his actions, and not appear to have discriminated unfairly against that pot? Why did that pot deserve to be the dishonorable one? You see the problem? It's impossible to answer this question and maintain the human perspective of fairness isn't it? So what do we conclude? The same thing that Paul concluded - <sup>20</sup> *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?* Do you see what Paul is saying? He's saying that the problem isn't that we don't have a good answer, it's that we are asking an invalid question. We have the wrong perspective, it isn't about the pot, it is about the needs and wishes of the potter, and his absolute sovereign authority to make pots for whatever he needs to suit his purposes. The potter does not answer to the pots, and God does not answer to humanity. It is our asking Him to explain and justify His actions that's the problem, not His lack of an answer. We create the problem by asking the question, and this is the undeniable meaning and teaching of these verses. And furthermore, the potter knows full well in advance what he's going to do with the flower pot and what he's going to do with the privy pot. So he makes them, prepares them, shapes and fashions them for the very purpose that he intends. Now, so that I'm perfectly clear, according to this group of verses, God has a predetermined purpose for all things, and He prepares them for their intended use by various and diverse means, both passive and active, that were built into the creation plan. Take for example the verse from Proverbs 16:4 *The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.* Everything whatsoever that God has ordained and brought about, by His diverse means, will in fact serve that predetermined purpose for which He intended it in the first place.

The greatest objection that we hear is that God does not actively force anyone to do evil, and on that point I wholeheartedly agree, but at the same time, it is God's predetermined will that things do what they are intended to do, (Pro 16:4) and everything necessary to insure that they do so, willingly, has been built into the creation plan. God does not have to force anything, He has pre-designed creation so that all things will, by their very own choosing, do what He intended them to do before they were ever made. (Isa 46:8-11; Rom 9:9-18) Mankind willingly does evil because of the ramifications of the fall in the Garden of Eden. God does not have to force anyone to do evil, all He has to do is ease up on His continuous restraints and mankind will do unthinkable evil by their very own choosing. (Rom 1:18-32) But mankind got that way by God's use of means to bring about the fall, and this was by His (God's) own choosing. Yes, man made the decision of his own will, but God chose and created the circumstances that would assure that humanity would make that choice. No one can deny that this is what the scriptures teach. You might argue that it seems unfair, but you can't deny that this is what the scriptures teach. And these verses tell us that the idea that it's unfair is a wrong perspective, because we creatures cannot demand an explanation from our Creator as to why He made us what we are, or what He chooses to do with us. The whole reason that the two theological perspectives of Supralapsarianism and Infralapsarianism exist, is to try to reconcile a dilemma caused by applying human perspective and logic to an omnipotent and sovereign Creator who transcends our self-centered human perspective. Again, this whole group of verses is Not about the salvation of man (soteriology), or what's fair to man, they are about the sovereign right of an Almighty God to choose any and all human beings, solely at His own discretion, and to use them as He sees fit to accomplish His own predetermined purposes. The issue isn't fairness, the issue is authority, so it only makes sense when it's viewed from that perspective.

Unless we get that we'll be stuck in an endless loop of meaningless debates and lofty rhetoric about God's fairness and righteousness that cannot be resolved, because the question itself is entirely inappropriate. Just accept what the bible says, keeping it in its proper context and perspective, and it all makes perfect sense.

The next couple of verses, 22-24, go on to reveal the intended uses that God has predetermined for both the vessels of dishonor (wrath), prepared for destruction, and the vessels of mercy (honor), prepared for glory. These verses say that God chose to make two distinct kinds of people. One of those kinds was intended for destruction, so that He could demonstrate the frightful extents of His power and wrath upon them, and the other kind was so that He could demonstrate the riches of His glory on people made for mercy. These verses say that God, with full intent and purpose, made two distinct groups of people, so that on those two groups He could demonstrate the very extents of both His power and wrath, and the riches of His mercy. To comprehend these two perspectives it is mandatory to see them both, otherwise there is nothing against which to compare them. To know and appreciate the value of His mercy it is absolutely necessary to see the extents of His wrath and power. And to perceive the full scope of His hatred for sin, and the devastation that it causes, it is necessary to see what was available for those who were chosen for mercy. This verse makes it abundantly clear that God intended from the very beginning to have both of these groups exist because He needed both to accomplish His purpose. And consequently He put into place every means, and every situation by which each and every person would freely fulfill His intended purpose by their own voluntary choices. It's not that God only wanted vessels of mercy, but some of them rebelled by their own choice, and this resulted in the unintended consequential damages of destruction. That is by far the most popular idea that is currently taught in most churches today, but that is not at all what the scriptures teach. The vessels for dishonor, destined for destruction were just as much a part of God's original design plan as the vessels of mercy that are destined for glory, in fact they must both exist for either to be understood and have any meaning.

We can see that all (things, people, circumstances) are as it was planned from before creation. (Isa 46:8-11) God planned everything and everyone before creation ever took place. It is an exercise in futility to debate the logical order of thinking in God's planning of all things. It is an exercise in futility to debate whether God is passive or active in His interaction with individuals, particularly regarding sin. (Supralapsarianism verses Infralapsarianism) God has set into being, and energizes (either actively or passively) every act and thought of man so as to assure, by whatever means, that they will fulfill His intended purpose for that individual. And this is the transcendent, sovereign, and divine right of a Being that exists completely apart and above all else that is or exists, in heaven or on earth. To ask Him to explain His choices, or defend His actions is entirely out of line for any human, or even any angel. To think that we must, or even possibly could, defend His actions or choices is arrogant and disrespectful. His choices are just and His actions are holy and righteous, and if we think they aren't then we err most tragically, and must immediately repent of such madness. He is God, He is transcendent, He is sovereign, He is righteous, and He is holy, and we must learn what that means or we are not fit for His kingdom. It is God who designed and brought about, through the use of various means, the fall, (the reprobation of humanity), and it is God who designed the redemption and salvation of some of that fallen humanity, also by the use of various means of His own choice and His own doing. (Eph 2:1-10) It is impossible to have a redemption unless there was first a fall, and it is impossible to recognize mercy where there is no visible display of wrath and judgement. Both are, and were, a part of the original plan of God, and He intentionally made some for one and some for the other. These verses make that so clear that it can't be confused, even though it's resisted by many because they don't or won't accept it. But, like the Lord said to Paul in his later account from Acts 26:14, *It is hard for you to kick against the thorns*. If we won't accept, at face value, what the scriptures say, then we never seem to be able to put it all together and arrive at a meaningful and lucid conclusion. Are the scriptures complex, yes? Do they require diligent and prayerful study, yes? But, when kept within the intended context, and proper perspective, they can always be interpreted directly and literally. Applying them outside of their proper context, or from the wrong perspective is the most common reason for scriptural differences of interpretation. This is just like what Satan did with Jesus during His time of fasting. But it was Christ's perfect knowledge of scriptures that afforded Him protection and which He used to correct Satan's perversions. It is scriptures, rightly interpreted and properly understood that provides correct answers and affords genuine spiritual protection.

At the end of our last lesson I said that I still had more to say on these verses, and this is what we've been doing. I don't want to move on until we've said everything that needs to be said and covered everything that needs to be covered. Because perhaps the most glaring problem of the churches of today is the whole concept of God, and who He is, and how He operates. He is routinely being presented as a sentimental and flexible god who really loves everybody and wants them all to be saved, and after all, there's scriptures that seem to say this isn't there? But then again there's scriptures that say <sup>21</sup>"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. <sup>22</sup>"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup>"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, You Who Practice Lawlessness. (Mat 7:21-23) So what are we to conclude, does God want every human being to be saved, or just those vessels of honor chosen beforehand for glory? Who are those who God says that He never knew? Does this mean that there are people being born that God never knew about, is this what we think that verse means? Of course not, we know that God is omniscient, and there is not one molecule, let alone a whole person that has escaped God's knowledge. But the words must mean something, and this is where we see the principles of context and perspective used to get right answers. Our current verses have told us that God has chosen vessels (meaning people) from before creation upon which He intends to demonstrate His mercy and display His glory, and these are those whom He knows and He loves with an eternal love. Then, He has created vessels of wrath which are destined for destruction, and regarding these He says that He never knew them, so they must depart from His presence. So, if we read verses that say that God wishes all to be saved, then the context of the "all" must be all of the vessels of mercy, and not those of wrath destined for destruction. It is knowing and recognizing the context that affords clarity and uniformity of direction, otherwise it seems like the scriptures keep flipping back and forth.

God freely chose to love Jacob and to hate Esau before either of them were even born, before either had ever done anything good or bad, this is what the scriptures tell us. And it tells us the reason, so that God's purpose, according to His choice would stand, not because of anything either of them would do. (Rm 9:11) But this is absolutely contrary to everything we think is fair and righteous, isn't it? We're routinely told that we determine our eternal destiny, by our own choice and doing, in either believing or rejecting the gospel of Jesus Christ. We're taught that the choice is ours to make of our own free will. But is this consistent with what Paul says in chapter 9, verse 11? Absolutely not, and yet we go right on teaching it in our churches every single day. And the result is that we fill up our churches with bogus converts, professors of faith by works of the flesh. False converts who will be told to depart from Christ because they showed no evidence of authentic divine regeneration by the indwelling Spirit, which is only acquired by the gift of God, not the free will choice of man. Our churches are overwhelmed by these false converts who profess faith in a fictitious god, and show no evidence of repentance or faith, and feel perfectly free to ignore God's scriptural commands and make whatever worldly rules and exceptions they see fit, all in the name of love and tolerance. But love of who, and tolerance for what would seem to be the fit questions. Is it love of God or love of self, and is it tolerance for righteousness or tolerance for sin that characterizes their charity? We know the answer to these questions by the kinds of things that these so called churches accept and approve. Things that the scriptures, the divine Word of God, clearly forbid, but that the world is now endorsing and accepting and calling good and fair and loving. When the values of the world become the values of the church, then the church has deceased, and is occupied by unbelievers who are masquerading as believers. If the believers can't reverse it, then they must depart from that apostate entity, but not from assembling together in some form or fashion with other true believers. (Heb 10:25)

For a church to get into such a state there must be a serious departure from scriptures. And to get so far from scriptures there must be a vast departure from the knowledge and reverent fear of the true and living God. And this is what has been done. The god of today's churches has been stripped of power, stripped of wrath, stripped of authority and completely redefined as a poor captive of human will, loving everyone and trying his utmost to get them all saved, and never getting angry or even upset with their disobedience and ambivalence toward him. It is these who will be shocked with the words of Jesus Christ to depart from His presence because He never knew them, just as they never really knew Him, despite their many professions and flashy works. In the end it is a life of obedience to the commandments of God, of conformance to His thinking and to His will that demonstrates authentic faith born of regeneration by the Spirit of God. True believers don't disagree with God, they don't endorse or approve things that God forbids, and if they sin they call it sin, and ask God for His forgiveness and repentance of heart and mind.

There is no hope for a recovery of the churches unless there is a recovery of the transcendence and sovereignty and authority of Almighty God. Unless there is a genuine fear of God there will be no divine wisdom in choices and actions, (Job 28:28; Pro 9:10) and I'm speaking of the churches, because the world will never have such an attitude. Unless we stop inviting false converts, and turning the policy and practice of the churches over to them, we'll never see any recovery in the churches. At least two thirds of the Deacon bodies of every church in my area that I've attended for any period of time are unregenerate. What do we expect if we invite the world into our church, for it to suddenly start behaving like believers? I guess we do, but that sure isn't what's happening, instead our churches are looking just like the world, and proud of it! They boast of exactly that, and court the unregenerate to come and make a home there, because they won't have to change a single thing. But I have to ask, which is better, huge churches filled with predominately unregenerate members, or very small churches comprised of only true believers? I guess that depends on your perspective, does the church exist to entertain man or to acceptably worship God? It appears that we have an abundance of the former and a severe shortage of the latter. But all of this is happening just as it's been planned from before creation, and God's plan is proceeding along just as intended. Despite all of our concerns and all of our fears, <sup>28</sup>we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; <sup>30</sup>and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. <sup>31</sup>What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us?

In conclusion I'm going to shock some of you but the teaching of these verses is clear. They teach unmistakably that God has freely chosen some persons to be the objects of His eternal love and glory, and He has chosen some to be the objects of demonstration for His wrath and power. According to scriptures, but contrary to popular opinion, God does not love everybody the same. The vessels of mercy will know Him and He knows them, closely and intimately. (2Tim 2:19) But the vessels of wrath, prepared for destruction, these He says He never knew, (Mat 7:23) and like Esau He hated them, and they will not know His love nor His mercy, but will reek the full consequences of their sin and hatred of God as a visible demonstration of His power. The God of the holy scriptures is a God that commands fear and respect. This is the God that fills the pages of scripture from beginning to end, and Who will execute His vengeance on the whole earth, the God who said Vengeance is Mine, I will repay. (Dt 32:35; Rom 12:19; Heb 10:30) This is the God before whom we will all give and account, unless we've been washed in the blood of Jesus Christ and are clothed in His righteousness, for real, not just in word, but in deed and in truth. (1Jn 3:18) Concerning the true and living God, the writer of Hebrews declared in his epistle to the churches: *It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* (Heb 10:31) *And again, for our God is a consuming fire.* (Heb 12:29)

It goes without saying that the world desperately needs a massive dose of the fear of God, but sadly the church seems to need the same prescription, but as long as we keep filling our churches with false converts that will never happen, and all we can expect is for the sick churches to get worse and worse, as the percentages of true believers declines. Unless we come to terms with the authority of God, and accept that He has not chosen to save everybody, we will be inclined to accept anyone who wants to join our churches, regardless of their repentance of sin, their view of scripture, or their conformity to Christlikeness, and this will continue to disqualify our churches from worship. Yes, we certainly have been commanded to preach the gospel to all who will hear it, and we optimistically hope they will be granted faith to believe, but we know that not everyone has faith, and it is God's choice not ours that makes that determination. If you have received that priceless gift of saving faith it is my sincerest desire that you know exactly Who to thank for it, and that you come to fully understand the value and rarity of that precious gift. It will take an eternity to even begin to thank God for His mercy and lovingkindness toward us who believe in His Son Jesus Christ, because He granted us, totally unworthy sinners, that saving faith that leads to forgiveness and eternal life. Even to share in His eternal glory. To Him alone be all glory and honor forever. Amen.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami  
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05/18/13