

The Potter and the Clay (*Part 1*)

Romans 9:14-21

Thought for the Day: In His sovereignty, God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden.

Romans chapter 8 is the climax of Paul's discussion of How We Obtain Righteousness—a Right Standing with God. It is absolutely full of wonderful promises and blessings from God for the person who puts his or her trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. But in chapter 9, we are confronted with a difficult question. God also gave wonderful promises and blessings to the Old Testament nation of Israel and yet it appears that those promises have failed. It appears that God is not able to keep His word. So how can we be sure that God is able to keep His promises to us in the Church? Is He trustworthy, or not?

Note Paul's conclusion in 9:30-33: 1) How do we obtain righteousness—a right standing with God? By putting our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; 2) Is God able to keep His promises to us in the Church? Is He worthy of our trust? Absolutely! You will never be put to shame by trusting in Jesus! 3) Why does it appear that God's promises to Israel have failed? Because she pursued righteousness—a right standing with God—through the works of the law rather than accepting God's gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 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."

- God is God! "It's His game; He gets to make the rules!" (*T.W.*)
- God has the right to have mercy on whom He chooses to have mercy and to have compassion on whom He chooses to have compassion.
- "If God gave anyone exactly what they deserved the results would be disastrous! Both Isaac and Jacob were scoundrels. God demonstrated unexpected grace when he chose these men in spite of their weaknesses and failures. That same grace is available to us in God's offer of salvation. If we were to receive what we deserve, we would have no hope. We should come to God for mercy, not for justice." (*The Life Application Commentary*)
- In other words, we ought not to question or challenge the sovereignty of God—rather, we should humbly come to Him and ask Him to extend His grace and mercy to us, recognizing that we are deserving of neither! And then live for Him and serve Him with eternal gratitude.

16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

- God's choices are proactive, not reactive. He does not choose people because they desire to have a relationship with Him or because they are working to earn His approval. He chooses people according to His own will and purposes and then extends mercy to whom He chooses.
- Because grace is a gift, God the giver has the right to offer it or to withhold it as He wills. (*Charles Swindoll, Insights on Romans, p. 195*) If God gave grace and mercy only to those who deserve it, no one would be saved!
- "Paul makes it clear that God's mercy and compassion have nothing to do with what people want or try to achieve... This fallacy remains as strong as ever—people still think good intentions are the key to unlock the door to eternal life. [But unfortunately, at the time] they get to try the lock, they will find that their key does not fit. Others imagine that their efforts are building an invisible ladder to heaven made up of service, family, position, reputation, good work, and desire, although none

of these rungs will support a feather! People are so busy trying to reach God that they completely miss the truth that God has already reached down to them. We cannot earn God's mercy—if we could, it would not be mercy.” (*The Life Application Commentary Series*)

17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

- “This hardening process is referred to at least fifteen times in Exodus 7-14.” (*Warren Wiersbe, Be Right, p. 115*) It is obviously a significant part of the story!
- God did not force Pharaoh to choose or to act contrary to his own will. He simply allowed Pharaoh to pursue that which was *already* in his own sinful heart.
- “God only gave Pharaoh over to what Pharaoh had *already* chosen to do.” (*New King James Study Bible, p. 1896*)
- The natural consequences of Pharaoh’s own *freely-made choices* became God’s judgment upon him. God’s judgment upon a rebellious people is that He often simply allows them to fully experience the natural consequences of their own choices and behaviors. (Cp. Galatians 6:7-9 – “A man reaps what he sows.” Hosea 8:7 – “Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.”)
- After each of the ten plagues that God brought upon Egypt, Pharaoh had the opportunity and the choice to repent and to relent—but he chose not to do so.
- In His sovereignty, God used Pharaoh’s sinful rebellion to accomplish His own will and purposes. But why does God act in this way? What is His motive? What is He trying to accomplish? (Exodus 6:1-8; 7:1-5)
- God does what He does in the way that He does it so that we might know that He is the Lord—and that, in humility, we might submit to Him as the Lord of the universe!

SUGGESTED APPLICATIONS:

1. Have you put your faith in Christ alone for your salvation or are you still trying to earn your way to heaven?
2. Have you put your faith in Christ alone for your salvation or are you still afraid that He is not worthy of your trust?
3. Are you letting God be God or do you think that you have the right to challenge His authority over His universe?
4. Do you believe that God is unjust or unfair when He chooses one to the exclusion of another? (If God exercised only justice without mercy, no one would be saved!)
5. In your heart of hearts, do you think that God chose you because you’re pretty special? Because you’re just a little bit better than others?
6. As you contemplate God’s mercy to you, in practical terms, how do you express your gratitude to Him for His grace?
7. Do you believe that God is unfair for allowing people to pursue their own desires and ambitions and then reaping the natural consequences of their choices?
8. If God is judging America for her rebellion against Him, what should be our personal response?