

Romans Session 139
Israel's Unbelief Is Consistent With God Plan
And with His Person

Romans 9:14-24 (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.*

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.*

Now we come to Paul's second point in explaining that Israel's unbelief is not inconsistent with God's revealed plan is that her unbelief in no way reflects against or demeans God's person, in particular His sovereign power and justice.

In this passage the apostle answers two anticipated questions that are often raised about God's electing some people for salvations while other are left to damnation.

THE FIRST ANTICIPATED QUESTION ANSWERED

Romans 9:14-18 (NASB)

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The question behind this paragraph is a question of God's fairness.

If He only chooses some to be the heirs of promise, and not others, people will say He is unfair.

Paul had just reminded his Jewish readers that God sovereignly chose Isaac above Ishmael, and Jacob above his twin brother Esau before they were born.

They were not chosen or rejected because of who they were or would be, or because of what they had done or would do
But rather;

Romans 9:11b (NASB)

¹¹ *so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls,*

That is, wholly on the basis of God's sovereign will.

Isaac and Jacob were "*the children of promise*" Ishmael and Esau were not.

So, in the sense of spiritual salvations, God has chosen some to believe.

The natural human response here is to assert that God was unjustly arbitrary in choosing one over the other long before they could have opportunity to trust or reject Him or to be obedient or disobedient.

And that thinking, and response is tantamount to saying that there is **injustice with God**.

So, Paul asks rhetorically if we have a right to accuse God of being unjust.

That accusation has been raised throughout the history of the church and is still heard today when God's election and predestination are proclaimed.

How can God elect one person and reject another before they are even born?

In the light of human wisdom and standards, especially in democratic societies, where all people are considered equal before the law, the ideas of election and predestination are repulsive and unacceptable.

Those doctrines, it is claimed, could not possibly characterize a God who is truly just and righteous.

To the saved but ignorant or immature mind, God simply could not do such a thing, and to the unsaved mind, a God like that would not be worthy of recognition, much less worship.

Shortly after his great afflictions began, Job's wife advised him to Curse God and die! (*Job 2:9*), implying that God was grossly unfair and did not deserve the worship of a faithful man who was allowed to be so tormented.

In the light of such human objections and conjectures, Paul proceeds to defend God's person.

May it never be! He declares, using the strongest Greek negative (*me genoito*), which he employs sometimes in this epistle.

The phrase sometimes is translated idiomatically, *God Forbid*,

The idea is that of **No, no, a thousand times no!** the very idea that God could be unjust or unrighteous to the slightest degree is blasphemy.

Even with his limited understanding of God, long before any of His revealed word was recorded, Abraham affirmed rhetorically,

Genesis 18:25 (NASB)

²⁵ *"Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"*

Because God Himself is the measure of righteousness and justice, He has no capacity for unrighteousness or injustice. It is His very character to be gracious, compassionate, merciful, and loving.

The Psalmist repeatedly declared that cardinal truth. "

David asserted that;

Psalm 7:9b (NASB)

⁹ *but establish the righteous; For the righteous God tries the hearts and minds.*

Psalm 145:8 (NASB)

⁸ The LORD is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.

Other Psalmists proclaimed:

Psalm 48:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ As is Your name, O God, So is Your praise to the ends of the earth; Your right hand is full of righteousness.

Psalm 71:19a (NASB)

¹⁹ For Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens,

Psalm 116:5 (NASB)

⁵ Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is compassionate.

Psalm 119:137 (NASB)

¹³⁷ Righteous are You, O LORD, And upright are Your judgments.

Psalm 119:142 (NASB)

¹⁴² Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, And Your law is truth.

With equal certainty Jeremiah testified;

Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NASB)

²³ Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches;

²⁴ but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.

By His very nature, God always has been and always will be righteous and just.

As He says through Malachi;

Malachi 3:6a (NASB)

⁶ "For I, the LORD, do not change;

As he did with the previous point, in response to the accusation that God 's sovereign elections is unfair, Paul cites two texts from the Old Testament Scriptures that clearly illustrate otherwise.

He does not resort to rational argument or to philosophical apologetics, but bases his assertion directly on God's own Word.

First, he cites Exodus 33:19

Exodus 33:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."

Moses had come through a very trying experience.; while he had been on Mount Sinai receiving the two tablets of the testimony from God, his brother Aaron, the high priest, led the impatient people of Israel to melt down their gold jewelry to make a calf to worship as if it represented the true God. (*Ex. 32:2-6*)

In response to that great apostasy, God commanded that about three thousand men be put to death. He would have been perfectly justified in killing all the Israelites who had participated in the idolatry, but He sovereignly chose to execute only those three thousand as a warning to the others and to preserve His witness nation.

Horrified by that great sin, Moses made intercession for his people, praying,

Exodus 32:30-34 (NASB)

³⁰ *On the next day Moses said to the people, "You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the LORD, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin."*

³¹ *Then Moses returned to the LORD, and said, "Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves.*

³² *"But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!"*

³³ *The LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.*

³⁴ *"But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin."*

Now, despite God's assurance that He would lead and protect His people as they entered and conquered the Promised Land, and despite Moses own nearness to the Lord, who spoke to him just as a man speaks to his friend, this loyal man of God deeply sensed his own inadequacy for such a formidable task and his own and his people's need for the Lord's continual presence guidance, and power.

In reply to the additional entreaty, God gave assurance, tempered by the declaration of His divine prerogative:

Exodus 33:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ *And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.*

In other words, His sparing the people and continuing to guide and protect them was purely reflective of His mercy and grace.

He had the absolute right to condemn or to save as He divinely saw fit.

God's Sovereignty and His grace not only are compatible but are inseparable.

Because all men are sinful and deserve God's condemnation, no person is wronged or treated unjustly if God chooses to condemn him.

This is justice. His mercy toward any person is purely by His grace.

Mercy and **compassion** are essentially synonymous, but **mercy** refers primarily to actions, whereas **compassion** refers more to the feeling or disposition behind the action.

Continuing simply to declare God's truth, rather than fruitlessly trying to explain the logic of what is beyond human comprehension, Paul goes on to say,

Romans 9:16 (NASB)

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

It is not man's choice or pursuit but God who initiates mercy for the sinner.
Salvation is never initiated by human choice or merited by zealous human effort.
It always begins in God's sovereign, gracious, and eternal will.
Those who receive God's **mercy** receive it solely by His grace.

Ishmael desired the blessing but failed to receive it. Esau ran for the blessing, as it were, but also failed to receive it.

As the writer of Hebrews explains,

Hebrews 11:17-18 (NASB)

¹⁷ ***By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;***

¹⁸ ***it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED."***

The same writer also makes clear, however, that God's choosing must be confirmed by man's faith.

Hebrews 11:20-21 (NASB)

²⁰ ***By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.***

²¹ ***By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.***

Esau received a blessing from his father but not the blessing he sought with tears, because he was ungodly and sought the blessing without repentance or faith;

Hebrews 12:15-17 (NASB)

¹⁵ ***See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;***

¹⁶ ***that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.***

¹⁷ ***For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.***

Next time we will see the second text Paul uses to deal with the arguments.