

## Romans Session 141

### Israel's Unbelief Is Consistent With God's Person 3

*Romans 9:18-24 (NASB)*

<sup>18</sup> *So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.*

<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 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.*

This evening we are going to take on Paul's answer to the Jews Anticipated Question.

His response to the question, "*Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?*"

In other words, if God sovereignly **has mercy on whom He desires and hardens whom He desires**, how can human beings be held responsible?

How can they be blamed for their unbelief and sin, when their destiny has already been divinely determined?

You will note here that such reasoning challenges God's justice and righteousness.

As Israel was conquering Canaan;

*Joshua 11:18-20 (NASB)*

<sup>18</sup> *Joshua waged war a long time with all these kings.*

<sup>19</sup> *There was not a city which made peace with the sons of Israel except the Hivites living in Gibeon; they took them all in battle.*

<sup>20</sup> *For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, to meet Israel in battle in order that he might utterly destroy them, that they might receive no mercy, but that he might destroy them, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.*

Such commands of God, with which the Old Testament abounds, seem totally capricious and cruel to worldly, carnal minds, which accept only what fits their preconceived ideas of right and wrong, justice and injustice.

Consequently, they judge even God by their own finite, biased, and sin-tainted standards.

God's utterly sovereign will is just as clearly taught in the New Testament.

Later in this letter to Rome, Paul tells his readers:

*Romans 11:7 (NASB)*

<sup>7</sup> *What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;*

In his first letter to Thessalonica, he declares that:

**1 Thessalonians 5:9 (NASB)**

<sup>9</sup> ***For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,***

In His perfect wisdom, and in perfect righteousness and justice, God has destined some people for salvations by His grace and, by His grace and, because of their sin and unbelief, has left others to damnation by His wrath.

Speaking to unrepentant unbelievers, Peter writes,

**2 Peter 2:12 (NASB)**

<sup>12</sup> ***But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed,***

Many critics of such doctrine, supposedly coming to the defense of God's justice, fail to acknowledge that every human being since the Fall has deserved nothing but God's just condemnation to an eternity in hell.

If God were to exercise only His justice, no person would ever be saved. It is therefore hardly unjust if according to His sovereign grace, He chooses to elect some sinners for salvations.

It is not, of course, that we can fully understand what God reveals about His sovereign elections and predestination. It can only be accepted by faith, acknowledging its truth simply because God has revealed it to be true.

As believers, we know that, in ourselves, we deserve only God's rejection and condemnation.

But we also know that, for His own sovereign reasons, God has elected us to be His children and, in His own time and way, brought us to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, we also know that our human will had a part in our salvation.

Jesus said,

**John 6:37a (NASB)**

<sup>37</sup> ***"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me,***

That is the choice of God's will, but Jesus went on to say;

**John 6:37b (NASB)**

<sup>37</sup> ***"the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."***

This is the choice of man's will, which God graciously accedes to for all who believe in His Son.

Continuing simply to proclaim God's sovereign righteousness and justice rather than trying to explain it, Paul turns a question back on those who would question the Lord.

<sup>20</sup> ***On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?***

In other words, it is blasphemous even to question, not to mention deny, God's right to hold men accountable when they are captives of His sovereign will.

It is obvious from Paul's wording that the ones who might be asking such questions would not be seeking God's truth but rather self-justification. Attempting to excuse their own unbelief, sinfulness, ignorance, and spiritual rebellion, they would be apt to accuse God of injustice

But because human understanding is so limited, even sincere questions about God's sovereign election and predestination ultimately must go unanswered.

As already noted, it is one of the many truths about God that we must accept by faith, simply because He has revealed it in His Word.

Again, taking support from the Old Testament, Paul continues his rebuke of presumptuous unbelievers by showing the absurdity of anyone's questions God's rights

<sup>20</sup> *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 common use?*

Many centuries earlier, the prophet Isaiah had used that analogy;

*Isaiah 64:6-8 (NASB)*

<sup>6</sup> *For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*

<sup>7</sup> *There is no one who calls on Your name, Who arouses himself to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us And have delivered us into the power of our iniquities.*

<sup>8</sup> *But now, O LORD, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand.*

Also using that figure, Jeremiah wrote,

*Jeremiah 18:3-6 (NASB)*

<sup>3</sup> *Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel.*

<sup>4</sup> *But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make.*

<sup>5</sup> *Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,*

<sup>6</sup> *"Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel."*

Although it is to an infinitely greater degree, God is the creator of men much as a potter is the creator of his clay vessels. And it is no more rational, and far more arrogant and foolish, for men to question the justice and wisdom of God than, if such were possible, for a clay bowl to question the motives and purpose of the craftsman who made it.

To his humanist friend Erasmus, Martin Luther said;

*Mere human reason can never comprehend how God is good and merciful; and therefore, you make to yourself a god of your own fancy, who hardens nobody, condemns nobody, pities everybody. You cannot comprehend how a just God can condemn those who are born in sin, and cannot help, themselves, but must, by a necessity of their natural constitution continue in sin and remain children of wrath.*

*The answer is, God is incomprehensible throughout, and therefore his justice, as well as His other attributes, must be incomprehensible.*

it is on this very ground that St. Paul exclaims, **“O the depth of the riches of the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out”** now His judgments would not be past finding out, if we could always perceive them to be just. (See Martin Luther *o the Bondage of the Will*, trans. J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston [Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1957], pp. 314-15)

To fully understand God, we would have to be equal to the God who made us, a notion even more absurd than a clay pot’s being equal to the potter who molded it.

Whatever God’s sovereignty may mean in its fullness, it does not mean and cannot mean that He chose for men to become sinful.

The perfectly holy and righteous God is not responsible in the slightest way for the sinfulness of His creatures.

Making that truth plain, James declares,

**James 1:13 (NASB)**

**<sup>13</sup> Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.**

Habakkuk said of the Lord;

**Habakkuk 1:13a (NASB)**

**<sup>13</sup> Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You cannot look on wickedness with favor.**

As in the rest of Romans 9, for that matter in the rest of Scripture, the closing three verses of this passage do not attempt to show the source or origin of evil or try to explain the humanly inexplicable consistency of God’s justice with His righteousness.

The apostle simply makes a declaration in the form of a rhetorical questions:

**<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?**

Paul then gives two reasons for, although not a complete explanation of, God’s allowing sin to enter and contaminate His universe.

The Greek term behind **willing** is much stronger than this English word connotes. The Greek word carries the idea of determined intent, not indifferent or helpless acquiescence.

**First**, Paul says, God determined to allow sin in His creations because it gave Him the opportunity **to demonstrate His wrath**.

Listen, God is glorified in displaying **His wrath**, just as surely s in displaying His grace, because both of those attributes, along with all the others, comprise His divine nature and character, which are perfectly and permanently self-consistent and are worthy of adoration and worship.

Even God’s anger, vengeance, and retribution poured out on sinners are glorious, because they display His majestic holiness.

Something for us to dwell on for sure for that does not fit our idea of fairness, and so disturbs us.

Next time we look at the second reason for God's allowing sin to enter and contaminate His universe.