

## **An Unrighteous God - God Forbid Romans 9:14-18 (NKJV)**

14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." 16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

In our passage this morning Paul anticipates the objections.

If God bypassed Ishmael in favor of Isaac and chose Jacob over Esau without regard to their works or accomplishments then it seems that God is unjust.

The choice of Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau must be construed as a merciful one. In other words, the stunning thing for Paul was not that God rejected Ishmael and Esau but that he chose Isaac and Jacob, for they did not deserve to be included in his merciful and gracious purposes. Human beings are apt to criticize God for excluding anyone, but this betrays a theology that views salvation as something God "ought" to bestow on all equally. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament - Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament – Romans*.

God is holy and must punish sin; but God is loving and desires to save sinners. If everybody is saved, it would deny His holiness; but if everybody is lost, it would deny His love. *Bible Exposition Commentary - Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Right (Romans)*.

Because all men are sinful and deserve God's condemnation, no person is wronged or treated unjustly if God chooses to condemn him. That is justice. His mercy toward any person is purely by His grace. *MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Romans 9-16*.

So let us see how Paul handles this objection to God sovereign choices.

In our passage today Paul denies that God is unjust and sets down two examples.

- I. God is not, cannot be unjust, unrighteous.
  - A. If God acted only on the basis of righteousness, nobody would ever be saved. *Bible Exposition Commentary - Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Right (Romans)*.
  - B. God's faithfulness to his promises is assured since it does not depend on human beings but on himself alone. But the manner in which Paul establishes the thesis raises a serious question about God's righteousness. If God calls apart from works and before people are born, then how can he be righteous? This issue occupies Paul in verses 14-23. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament - Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament – Romans*.

1. The problem is that we misunderstand two things.
  2. We misunderstand the extent of human depravity and sin in just how far we fell.
    - a. People look at the current situation with the family from California and wonder how anyone could be so evil, and I have heard secular news sources use the word depravity.
    - b. But this is not at all difficult, for if it were not for the grace of God in restraining this type of actions there would be many more.
    - c. Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:8
    - d. Paul said, "But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." 2 Timothy 3:13
  3. The second thing we do not understand is the holiness and righteousness of God.
    - a. It was not that Jacob pleased God and Esau did not.
    - b. It was not that Jacob had a better heart than Esau.
    - c. Both men, even before they were born stood as part of a condemned race of people called humanity.
    - d. Romans 3:5 (NKJV) 5 But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.)
- C. Paul uses the strongest possible words and construction to deny that God could be unrighteous.

## II. The proof from Exodus 33:19

1. Exodus 33:19 (NKJV) 19 Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."
- B. It is important to understand what brought on this declaration of God.
1. Moses has given them the law before he received the tables of stone from God on Mt Sinai.
  2. The people has sworn to keep it.
    - a. Ex 19:8 Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.

- b. Ex 24:7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.”
3. Then Moses goes into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone.
4. But while he is there the people build a golden calf and worship it there and proclaim that the calf was the god who had brought them up out of Egypt.
5. The calf or bull was a chief deity of the Egyptians that God had destroyed.
6. As a result 3,000 are put to death and God tells Moses that He will destroy the entire nation and raise a new one from Moses’ descendants.
7. But Moses intercedes for the people and God does not destroy them.
8. Then Moses asks to see the full glory of God and God gives him this answer.
9. “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”
- C. Would God have been just to destroy the entire nation?
- D. Would God have been just to destroy half the nation.
- E. The truth is that they all deserved death, even Aaron Moses’ brother.
- F. Sometimes God show wrath and judgment while at other times is is merciful and has compassion.
  1. He is free to do this Paul say to whomever He wills.
  2. That is what Paul’s interpretation is of this passage.
  3. God has that freedom since all deserve judgment.
- G. 16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.
  1. All of Paul’s bragging days about all that he had done for God was before he came to Jesus.
  2. Paul understood that even for the best Christian it is the work of God in us and the glory should never be taken for ourselves.
  3. Philippians 2:12 ¶ Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

4. All are guilty and worthy of condemnation.
5. We cannot save ourselves, only God can save us by His grace and His mercy.

III. The second illustration is that of Pharaoh.

1. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth."

B. The story of the exodus is one of the best know stories from the Bible.

1. Pharaoh was a typical ruler that saw himself as supreme and that the God of these Hebrews was totally unknown to him.
2. He saw the Hebrews as property not to be discarded and was determined to will the contest between God and himself.
3. But the passage says that had raised up Pharaoh for the purpose of getting glory for Himself.
4. And that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh.
  - a. Exodus 4:21 (NKJV) 21 And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.
  - b. Exodus 7:3-4 (NKJV) 3 And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. 4 But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments.
  - c. All God had to do was to allow Pharaoh to be just as rebellious as he wanted.
  - d. Even Pharaoh's advisers were not as bad as Pharaoh for they saw that only the true God could accomplish the things that came upon them.
  - e. **Unto Pharaoh.** The haughty and oppressive king of Egypt: thus showing that the most mighty and wicked monarchs are at his control. *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament.*
  - f. Isaiah 10:5-7 (NKJV) 5 "Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger And the staff in whose hand is My indignation. 6 I will send him against an ungodly nation, And against the people of My wrath I will give him charge, To seize the spoil, to take the prey, And to

tread them down like the mire of the streets. 7 Yet he does not mean so, Nor does his heart think so; But it is in his heart to destroy, And cut off not a few nations.

It is comforting to know that God's power to save is not limited to how good we are or how attractive we might look. The God who calls the lost choir member to salvation can also reach the most depraved human being and rescue that person from perishing.

[Evangelist] Luis Palau tells of a woman in Peru whose life was radically transformed by the power of Christ. Rosario was her name. She was a terrorist, a brute of a woman who was an expert in several martial arts. In her terrorist activities she had killed twelve policemen. When Luis conducted a crusade in Lima, she learned of it and, being incensed at the message of the gospel, made her way to the stadium to kill Luis.

Inside the stadium, as she contemplated how to get to him, she began to listen to the message he preached on hell. She fell under conviction for her sins and embraced Christ as her Savior. Ten years later, Luis met this convert for the first time. She had by then assisted in the planting of five churches; was a vibrant, active witness and worker in the church; and had founded an orphanage that houses over one thousand children. *Michael P. Green. Illustrations for Biblical Preaching, p.81. Practical Illustrations - Practical Illustrations – Volume 7: Romans.*

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" (v. 19). 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. *MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Romans 9-16.*

Human responsibility is not at all denied here: man ought to will, and ought to run. But we are all nothing but sinners, and can do,—will do, neither: unless God come forth to us in sovereign mercy. *Romans Verse-by-Verse; Newell.*

Exodus 34:6-7 (NKJV) 6 And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, 7 keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

The citation of (Exodus) 33:19, therefore, represents a principle because it describes the very nature of God, the way he characteristically acts—in sovereign freedom in showing mercy and also withholding it. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament - Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament – Romans.*

In addition, the “hardening” word group in Paul (σκληροτῶσι, sklerotes, hardness; παρουσῶσι, poroun, to harden; παροσῶσι, porosis, hardness) denotes an inflexibility and insensibility to the gospel that hinders people from being saved (Rom. 2:5; 11:7, 25; 2 Cor. 3:14; Eph. 4:18).

*Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament - Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament – Romans.*

Romans 2:5 (NKJV) 5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

Romans 11:7 (NKJV) 7 What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

Romans 11:25 (NKJV) 25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

2 Corinthians 3:14 (NKJV) 14 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.

Ephesians 4:18 (NKJV) 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;

Not of him that willeth. This does not mean that he that becomes a Christian, and is saved, does not choose eternal life; or is not made willing; or that he is compelled to enter heaven against his

own choice. It is true that men by nature have no desire of holiness, and do not choose eternal life. But the effect of the influences of God's Spirit on the heart is to make it "willing in the day of his power," Psalms 110:3. *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*.

Psalm 110:3 Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness  
From the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. KJV

John 12:40 (NKJV) 40 "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."

But before we proceed further, we may observe that this very objection clearly proves, that inasmuch as God elects some and passes by others, the cause is not to be found in anything else but in his own purpose; for if the difference had been based on works, Paul would have to no purpose mentioned this question respecting the unrighteousness of God, no suspicion could have been entertained concerning it if God dealt with every one according to his merit. *Calvin's Commentaries*.