

## **God's Unquestionable Sovereignty** **Romans 9:16, 18-21 (NKJV)**

16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. . . .  
18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. 19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" 20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

One of the things that I run across in my studies is that most writers begin by telling their readers what a difficult passage this is.

And it is difficult and we could even say impossible to fully comprehend.

When even Paul delves into the eternal purposes of God he is over his head. There are some things that we will not understand but are supposed to accept about God, knowing that someday we will understand it in heaven.

Notice that Paul does not answer the question, the objection, but rather rebukes those who would ask it.

God's sovereignty is hated by Satan and men alike, for no other reason than that they want to be sovereign.

. . . there is no doctrine more hated by worldlings, no truth of which they have made such a foot-ball, as the great, stupendous, but yet most certain doctrine of the Sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. Men will allow God to be everywhere except on his throne. They will allow him to be in his workshop to fashion worlds and to make stars. They will allow him to be in his almonry to dispense his alms and bestow his bounties. They will allow him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light the lamps of heaven, or rule the waves of the ever-moving ocean; but when God ascends his throne, his creatures then gnash their teeth; . . . *Spurgeon's Collected Sermons (Met. Tabern. Pul.) - - Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit. Divine Sovereignty 5/4/1856*

Hence the Apostle adopts again the words of an opponent; for he saw that the mouths of the ungodly could not be restrained from boldly clamouring against the righteousness of God: and he very fitly expresses their mind; for being not content with defending themselves, they make God guilty instead of themselves; and then, after having devolved on him the blame of their own condemnation, they become indignant against his great power. *Calvin's Commentaries.*

Herein lies the problem. Instead of admitting guilt and repenting of their sin, man instead wants to blame God. Like Adam in the garden, "It's because of the woman you gave me."

Like a good politician that has been caught in a crime, he deflects the focus onto others.

So here man's response is, "Why does He still find fault?"

If God is sovereign and His will is always done, then He is the one to blame."

We see this in those who so foolishly make God responsible for all that is wrong in the world.

You hear them say, "How can there be a God when there is so much suffering and wrong in the world?"

So Paul wants to address this, not answer it. He addresses this by telling us that God is sovereign and we are not. That He is God and we are not. That He does as He wills and we do not. That God is righteous and just and we are not.

I. So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy v-16

A. Let's get one thing clear. Let us understand man.

1. The liberals want us to believe that men and women are for the most part basically good and they want to do what God wants and they love God.
2. This is so laughable that it hardly would need attention if not so many people believed it.
  - a. We have evolved so far that we are the only species that aborts their young because they might be a burden.
  - b. Show me any child that is not a burden.
  - c. We are the only species that attempts to destroy all those not like ourselves, called genocide. With more cases in my lifetime than ever before.
  - d. And the grand goal of socialism in the world killed over 100 million people in the lifetime of my grandmother.
3. Not the scripture is right and man is just a liar.
  - a. Romans 3:9-18 (NKJV) 9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. 10 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. 12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." 13 "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; 14 "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." 15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 Destruction and misery are in their ways; 17 And the way of peace they have not known." 18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."
4. So then let us understand, Paul is not saying that people are just standing

in line to please God and He is turning them away.

- B. Salvation is never and never was a product of works (running and willing).
  - C. Salvation is a gift, it is grace, it is mercy.
    - 1. And by definition is a work of God and not a work of man.
    - 2. “Salvation is of the Lord”, Jonah said when the fish spit him out.
    - 3. Jesus said to the disciple, I chose you, you did not choose me.
    - 4. Charles Hodge says, “How easy and obvious an answer to the charge of injustice would it have been to say, God chooses one and rejects another according to their works. But teaching as he does the sovereignty of God in the selection of the subjects of his grace and of the objects of his wrath, declaring as he does so plainly, that the destiny of men is determined by his sovereign pleasure, the objection (how can he yet find fault?) is plausible and natural.” Commentary on Romans.
  - D. Remember when the choice was made, “And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.” Romans 9:10-13
    - 1. 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.
  - E. This does not mean that the saved did not choose to follow Jesus.
    - 1. 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.*
  - F. But if God left any man or woman to their own devices they would never make it.
    - 1. Unless God intervenes in a person's life they will never be saved.
    - 2. 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.*
- II. Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

- A. That there is nothing in his doctrine inconsistent with the divine perfections; since he does not make men wicked, but from the mass of wicked men, he pardons one and punishes another, for the wisest and most benevolent reasons, vers. 22, 23. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans; Hodge.*
- B. The objection is founded on ignorance or misapprehension of the true relation between God and his sinful creatures. It supposes that he is under obligation to extend his grace to all. Whereas he is under obligation to none. All are sinners, and have forfeited every claim to his mercy; it is, therefore, the prerogative of God to spare one and not another; to make one vessel to honor, and another to dishonor. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans; Hodge.*
- C. It is not the showing mercy that most people have trouble with but the hardening.
1. But that is what God did to Pharaoh.
  2. 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.
  3. Exodus 7:3 (NKJV) 3 And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.
  4. Exodus 9:12 (NKJV) 12 But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh; and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.
  5. Exodus 10:1 (NKJV) 1 Now the LORD said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him,
  6. Exodus 10:20 (NKJV) 20 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go.
  7. Exodus 10:27 (NKJV) 27 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go.
  8. Exodus 11:10 (NKJV) 10 So Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh; and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go out of his land.
  9. Exodus 14:4 (NKJV) 4 Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD." And they did so.
  10. Exodus 14:17 (NKJV) 17 And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen.
  11. God's will prevails. When the Scriptures say that God hardened Pharaoh's

heart, it means that God forced Pharaoh to make the decision that was in his heart. God forced him to do the thing he wanted to do. There never will be a person in hell who did not choose to be there, my friend. You are the one who makes your own decision. *J. Vernon McGee, Thru the Bible Commentary, electronic ed., vol. 4 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 713.*

- D. Paul is telling us that this is also what happened to Israel and is why they do not believe.
1. Romans 11:7-10 (NKJV) 7 What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. 8 Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day." 9 And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them. 10 Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, And bow down their back always."
  2. 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.
  3. As even Jesus quoted from the Old Testament.
    - a. 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."
- E. This what God had done to the Gentiles in times past.
1. Romans 1:24-32 (NKJV) 24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, 30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32 who,

knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

F. And finally to both Jews and Gentiles.

1. 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,

"God's sovereignty is the first of all rights, the foundation of all rights, the foundation of all morality. If God is not God, what will He be? The root of the question is this; is God to judge man, or man God? God can do whatsoever He pleases. He is not the object for judgment.

*Annotated Bible, The - The Annotated Bible – Volume 7: Romans to Ephesians.*

So election is not only just. It is just, and God is right in choosing some and passing by others. But—and here is the important thing—election is the only thing that is just. Election alone starts with all people at the same point and on the same level, all of whom deserve hell. Then it saves some and passes by others, all entirely apart from anything whatever in these elect or reprobate persons. *James Montgomery Boice, Romans: God and History, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991–), 1071.*

Paul at first rebukes the spirit in which it is made, before he shows it to be unfounded. It is not the doctrine of the Bible, that God first makes men wicked, and then punishes them for their wickedness. The Scriptures only assert, what we see and know to be true, that God permits men, in the exercise of their own free agency, to sin, and then punishes them for their sins, and in proportion to their guilt. He acts towards them as a perfectly righteous judge, so that no one can justly complain of his dealings. This strictness in the administration of justice, is, however, perfectly consistent with the sovereignty of God in determining whom he will save, and whom he will permit to suffer the just recompense of their deeds. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans; Hodge.*

Isaiah 45:9 (NKJV) 9 "Woe to him who strives with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' Or shall your handiwork say, 'He has no hands'?"

Origen: Pharaoh's heart was hardened in the following way: God did not want to punish him immediately and completely. Although Pharaoh's wickedness was enormous, God in his patience did not withdraw the possibility of conversion from him. Instead he struck him lightly at first and then gradually increased the blows. But although God acted with patience, Pharaoh was hardened by that very thing and became even more angry with God and contemptuous of him... Therefore it is not that God hardens whom he wills, but rather that whoever is not softened by his patience is thereby automatically hardened. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture - Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – New Testament VI: Romans.*

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;

Psalms 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

God's mercy is not extended as a recognition of human will, nor is it a reward of human work. Human-willing and human-working are not motivating causes of God's actions. Man thinks that his decision and his effort cause God to look with favor upon him. Stifler states it succinctly when he says, "Willing and running may indicate the possession of grace, but they are not the originating cause" (The Epistle to the Romans, p. 172). God extends mercy, and He does it because he is God, my friend. Who are we to question Him? I bow before Him today. *J. Vernon McGee, Thru the Bible Commentary, electronic ed., vol. 4 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 713.*

Thou wilt then say unto me, why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will? This is the

second leading objection to the apostle's doctrine. If it be true, as he had just taught, that the destiny of men is in the hands of God, if it is not of him who willeth, or of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy, what can we do? If the fact that one believes and is saved, and another remains impenitent and is lost, depends on God, how can we be blamed? Can we resist his will? It will at once be perceived that this plausible and formidable objection to the apostle's doctrine is precisely the one which is commonly and confidently urged against the doctrine of election. There would be no room either for this objection, or for that contained in the 14th verse, if Paul had merely said that God chooses those whom he foresees would repent and believe; or that the ground of distinction was in the different conduct of men. It is very evident, therefore, that he taught no such doctrine. How easy and obvious an answer to the charge of injustice would it have been to say, God chooses one and rejects another according to their works. But teaching as he does the sovereignty of God in the selection of the subjects of his grace and of the objects of his wrath, declaring as he does so plainly, that the destiny of men is determined by his sovereign pleasure, the objection (how can he yet find fault?) is plausible and natural.

*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans; Hodge*