

The Sovereignty of God and Election

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God elected some to salvation; does He also elect some to condemnation? Why is that God has chosen to harden some, rather than show mercy to them? Can a just God harden a man's heart and then judge him for rejecting God?

In the book of Romans, Paul discusses the choices that God has when dealing with mankind. Since God is sovereign, He can do as He pleases with men without taking away the responsibility of man to obey His Word¹ or the liability when he does not obey. In chapter nine of Romans, Paul repeats what was stated to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will show compassion to whom I will show compassion"². Whether or not God shows mercy to a person is not dependent upon if a man desires mercy or works for mercy, it is solely based upon God's choice³. He is not obligated to save anyone. When God chose to call the seed of Abraham through Isaac, to show that His choice was not based upon actions of the person, but rather according to His own desires, it was told to Rebecca before the children were even born that the older would serve the younger⁴. This does not mean that man is not responsible for His actions. One cannot say, "How can God find fault for who can resist His determinate will?"⁵ As the ones who are created, who are we to criticize God, who is the creator?⁶ Can the clay that is taken from one lump criticize the potter for how it is used? The potter has authority over the clay to use some for honor and some for dishonor⁷.

But if, assuming it is true, God, the one desiring to manifest the wrath and to make known His natural ability, bore by much longsuffering vessels pertaining to wrath, the ones having been put in order⁸ for the purpose of destruction⁹, also in order that He should make known His glory upon vessels pertaining to mercy, which He has prepared before hand unto glory, whom also He called us, not only out from Israel, but also out from Gentiles... Romans 9:22, 23

God takes from the one lump of mankind, which are all unsaved¹⁰, and uses them as He desires. He shows mercy toward some, others He uses to manifest who He is to the world, and still others He

¹ Romans 9: 1-33

² Romans 9:15

³ Romans 9:16

⁴ Romans 9:10-11

⁵ Romans 9:19

⁶ Romans 9:20 "answer" means "to respond with criticism". See also Luke 14:6

⁷ Romans 9:21

⁸ For the use of this word see: Matthew 4:21; Mark 1:19 (put in order or preparing nets); Luke 6:40 full trained; Christians being put in order in the same mind, 1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:11. The context and meaning of the word work together to show that the action is passive, God is the one who in the past performed the action. This word does not mean to prepare in the sense of predetermining, but rather to get something ready for use. The vessels of wrath, which God has decided to use for His purpose would not be the ones getting themselves ready for this, because it is God's plan, not theirs. This is not election of the fallen, because the focus is on stringing together certain, not all, vessels that belong to wrath and to use them for a specific purpose.

⁹ This is a destruction that is in time, not eternal. God has chosen to use some of the vessels that belong to wrath to show His natural ability and wrath through to the whole world as He did with Pharaoh.

¹⁰ Romans 3:23; 2:12; 5:12; Ephesians 2:3

does not directly address¹¹. From the vessels pertaining to wrath, which are all unsaved, God has put in order some of them for the purpose of destruction. “Put in order” is a word that is used for arranging or preparing a net for fishing¹². God does not determine that anyone will be lost, all are lost¹³; rather, He choose to take from some of the unsaved and string them together to show His wrath, natural ability, and make His name known upon all the earth. “The ones having been put in order” is a passive participle¹⁴. God is the one who put them in order for this purpose. He did this in the past, with the results abiding still today and into the indefinite future – that is, God is not finished using unsaved mankind for His purpose yet. To show this, Pharaoh is used as an example of how God used an unsaved and unrighteous man to manifest His wrath and make known His name in all the earth. God raised him out from the other Pharaohs and used him for His purpose. Pharaoh had already rejected God, and God was under no obligation to him to show mercy¹⁵. God shows mercy to whomever He desires and hardens whomever He desires. In the very next verse there is a change from “putting in order” to “preparing beforehand”. The vessels of mercy are prepared beforehand, not the vessels of wrath. Before the creation of this universe God determined that those chosen to be in Christ would be used for His glory¹⁶. We cannot reverse this and say that since He prepared beforehand the vessels of mercy before the foundations of the universe then He had to also choose the vessels of wrath – that is predetermine those who will go to condemnation. Adam’s sin condemned the entire world, not God¹⁷.

Now we have only looked at one side of the “if” clause, so to finish the thought in verse twenty-two we need to look at the other side of the clause, which takes us all the way down to verse thirty. “Then, what will we say? That Gentiles, the ones not pursuing righteousness, obtained righteousness, moreover, the righteousness out from faith, but Israel, the ones pursuing righteousness of law into a law of righteousness they did not arrive. Because of why? That *it was* not out from faith, but *it was* out from works of law. For they stumbled at the stone of stumbling.”

¹¹ Romans 9:13 “Jacob I loved, but Esau I was indifferent towards”. The English word “hate” is stronger than the Greek word, which means indifference not hatred. God did not express hatred towards Esau; He simply let him go his own way.

¹² Matthew 4:21; Mark 1:19

¹³ For all have sinned and lack concerning the proper opinion belonging to God, Romans 3:23

¹⁴ Why passive and not middle? The voice of a verb expresses how the action is being performed. In the Greek language there are three voices: active – the subject of the verb is performing the action; middle – the subject of the verb is performing the action and the results of the action are done to the subject. English does not have this concept. To express this, we use the concept of “doing for oneself, or one’s own benefit”; passive – the action is being performed on the subject of the verb. The form of the participle can be either middle of passive. To determine how the action is being performed we have to look at the context and normal use of the word in Scripture. Although Romans 9:22 is the only place where this participle is used in the accusative case there are other passages where it is also used in the passive or middle voice, which show the more common use is passive. Luke 6:40 a student is put in order (fully trained) by the teacher; believers being put in order in the same mind and knowledge, 1 Corinthians 1:10; being put in order in one’s Christians life 2 Corinthians 13:11. With this in mind and the context of Romans chapter 9, the participle would be passive. The vessels of wrath did not in the past put themselves in order with the result that they are still in that order for the purpose of being destroyed so that God can manifest His wrath and natural ability to others on the earth. This would have required all of the vessels of wrath that were to serve for this purpose to get together in the past and put themselves in order. As you can see, the action was performed on the vessels not by the vessels.

¹⁵ Romans 9:17 Many of our most popular English versions leave out a preposition. Prior to the word “raised up” is a preposition that means “out from” God raised him out from the other Pharaohs (or other vessels belonging to wrath) to manifest His wrath and make His name known through him.

¹⁶ Ephesians 1:4

¹⁷ Through one man’s sin death came to all, Romans 5:12. Not just physical death, which came from Adam’s sin and was passed on to all mankind, but also spiritual death – separation from God - because of Adam’s trespass, Romans 5:14. A trespass is in the mind and happens when a person determines to go against God’s standards. When Adam determined to eat the fruit, by that expression of his will he separated himself from God; hence, spiritual death. Physical death was a result of Adam actually eating the fruit and thereby sinning (Sin is lawlessness, 1 John 3:4). Genesis 3:6; 1 Timothy 2:14

Since God strung together through history some out from the lump to make known His name, natural ability, and wrath and prepared before hand the vessels pertaining to mercy to manifest His glory – express a proper opinion of Him, and this choice is not by what a man does, but solely based upon God’s desire to do so, then it only goes to show that the reason the Gentiles obtained righteousness was because it was out from faith, not by work, which Israel attempted to obtain through the law but did not attain to a law of righteousness.

We inherit a sin nature from Adam as a result of his rejection of God; however, throughout history God has continually given man opportunity to follow Him and obtain salvation. Those who continue to reject His offer, God uses for His own purpose to show forth His natural ability and to make known His name throughout the earth. God did not choose for any to fall, but determined to save some out of those who fell¹⁸. In light of the Decree¹⁹, God made mankind good and blessed man;²⁰ He allowed man to fall through his own self determination²¹; He determined to save some while leaving the rest to face their fate of condemnation²²; He provides a Redeemer for the save;²³ and He sent the Holy Spirit to effect redemption among the saved²⁴.

Election does not just refer to obtaining salvation. Christ is the elect of God²⁵; God elected some of the angels not to fall²⁶; Christians are part of an elect generation²⁷. Apart from His plan for the Church, God has a plan for unsaved mankind²⁸, the nation of Israel²⁹, and Gentiles³⁰.

God did not elect anyone to fall, but rather allowed the fall by man’s own determination to sin. Because the fall came by man’s own choice, God is under no obligation to save anyone. We can see an example of this with the angels. God chose that some would not fall, but does not offer salvation for any who chose to follow Satan. Therefore, God is just if He chooses not to show mercy to any or only some of mankind. And He is also just in choosing to use some of the fallen to manifest to the world His natural ability, wrath, and to make His name known throughout the earth by hardening their hearts and destroying them before the eyes of all, just as He did with Pharaoh.

¹⁸ 2 Peter 3:9

¹⁹ What God determined to do before the creation of the universe

²⁰ Genesis 1:27-29

²¹ 1 Timothy 2:14

²² Romans 8:33; 9: 15, 16

²³ Titus 2:13, 14

²⁴ Titus 3:5

²⁵ 1 Peter 2:4, 6

²⁶ 1 Timothy 5:21

²⁷ 1 Peter 2:9, 10

²⁸ Revelation 14:9-11; 20:11-15

²⁹ Romans 11:1, 23, 26

³⁰ Romans 11:17, 25