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Romans

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!
Romans 9:14

To understand why Paul asks this, we simply need to go back to the previous verses concerning election. God chose Isaac and not Ishmael. God chose Jacob and not Esau. God said he loved Jacob but hated Esau. Is this somehow a demonstration of God being unrighteous? Paul's answer is an emphatic "Certainly not!" He uses the widely translated term *mē genoito*. The concept is unthinkable.

Remember the analogy that Paul has been making. He is saying that not all of those who are physically descended from Israel are actually of Israel. Those Jews who reject the idea of Jesus as the Messiah still hold fast to their Jewish identity, trusting that this brings about salvation. He has now shown that this is a false premise and that apart from the Messiah their heritage has no bearing on their status before God.

He has erected a box around them and shown them, from the very Scriptures which establish them as a people, that they are excluded from the promise if they reject their Messiah. And now he will show that they cannot claim that this demonstrates unrighteousness with God. In fact, it would be unthinkable even without his coming reasons. The very notion that the God of Abraham could be unrighteous is contrary to everything their Scriptures reveal.

His argument for the righteousness of God will be found in those Scriptures. He, taking their truthfulness as an axiom, will use them to make his case. However, from a scientific and philosophic standpoint, we can deduce that God cannot be unrighteous.

Science has demonstrated that time, space, and matter all occurred simultaneously; they had a beginning. They could not create themselves or they would have existed prior to their existence; a logical contradiction. Therefore, if they had a beginning, there was a Beginner - God.

This God is outside of time, space, and matter (before, beyond, after... outside) because He caused them to be; He created them. There is no material aspect to Him; He is perfectly simple and without parts. This must be so because if God had parts, there would be time associated with those parts. Therefore, God must be perfectly simple in this respect. There is also no possibility for change in God; He is pure actuality (He has no "potentiality" or "potential to become/change"). If God could "become" then He would be lacking attributes associated with the very concept of "God." He is. Further, any change would imply movement of time, but He created time and therefore He has no potential to change.

And this is just how the Bible describes Him:

Parts – No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. John 1:18

Eternal – ...He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen. 1 Timothy 6:15, 16

Pure actuality; no potential for change – I the LORD do not change. Malachi 3:6

Through this simple line of reasoning, we can determine that God, in fact, cannot be unrighteous. If He is righteous, then His righteousness is. It cannot increase or decrease. The same is true with His truthfulness, love, grace, mercy, holiness, and justice. These attributes are perfectly represented in Him, without change. They define His character.

Understanding this, we can determine that no text which claims to be from God which shows otherwise can be from God. The Koran, for example, shows God is vindictive and changing; it cannot be true. Searching the world's collection of religious texts reveals only one document which correctly portrays God as He is, the Holy Bible. Paul will return to this source, which proclaims Jesus as the Messiah, to show that there is no unrighteousness with God in His selection of some and rejection of others.

Life application: God is logical, orderly, and without contradiction or change. He is transcendent above from His creation, but He works within it and directs it, somewhat like a painter and his painting. If we can grasp His nature, then we can see more clearly where we err in our theology and we can correct it to align with His intent and His will for us as is revealed in the Bible. Never stop contemplating the nature of God as is revealed to us in His creation and in His word.

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." Romans 9:15

Again, Paul returns to Scripture to make his case. He asked the question, "Is there unrighteousness with God?" He then answered, "Certainly not." To show that this is true from a scriptural standpoint, he goes to the account of Moses as he led the Israelites in the desert. In Exodus 32 came the account of the golden idol. After their great and grievous sin, Moses pled with the Lord for a blanket forgiveness of the sins of the people; it was refused -

"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.'" Exodus 32:33

However, Aaron sinned in regard to the calf and yet he continued on as the high priest. Although not explicitly stated, this then must be indicating that the sin was one of continued disbelief, not just the sin of the golden calf. In chapter 33, the Lord first states that because of their rebellion, His presence wouldn't be in their midst as they made their journey to Canaan, but rather His Angel would go before them.

Moses then pled with the Lord for Him to go with them. The reason was that if He didn't, then how could there be a distinction between them and the other people of the world? What better way could His grace be demonstrated? And so the Lord, after having so tested Moses in this way, agreed. At this point, we see the following exchange -

"And he said, 'Please, show me Your glory.' 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.'"

It is this statement from the Lord which Paul cites to demonstrate that there is, in fact, no unrighteousness with God. In order to understand this, both grace and mercy should be defined in a simple to understand manner -

Grace - getting what you don't deserve

Mercy - not getting what you do deserve

Whether "grace" or "mercy" is being described, the same concept applies. God demonstrated mercy where it wasn't due and he bestowed grace where it wasn't due as well. Not destroying the Israelites for their unfaithfulness was a demonstration of His mercy. And the bestowing of His goodness continuing to go with them was a demonstration of His grace. Neither of these could be claimed, only accepted.

Likewise, the gift of His goodness passing before Moses was separate from any merit on Moses' part. Moses asked for something he didn't deserve and it was granted. Further, when he asked to see His glory, the response was that the Lord would "make all My goodness pass before you."

The "glory" requested is in fact pure goodness. This perfect goodness wasn't seen to Moses before this; it had been withheld. If this is so, and the display was unique to Moses, then how could someone else claim they deserved it? If they couldn't do this, then how could they claim that God is unrighteous? If He has unbounded goodness which is unseen to human eyes and which is undeserved to those eyes, then any display of His mercy and grace which would reveal a portion of that goodness is also unmerited.

We stand on planet earth and have been given life. No guarantee was given when we were born and whatever our lot is came about apart from our will. We don't deserve more, but because of the conduct of our lives, we certainly deserve less - either a withholding of His grace or a withholding of His mercy. All of this is seen in this one verse.

God is sovereign and whatever goodness He bestows upon us is completely unmerited. We have no right to make a claim on anything beyond what we have, whatever it is that we have. Try going outside and yelling at the sky, "I demand to be rich." What do you think the result will be? Now apply this to our salvation as humans. Who are we to demand heaven? Who are we to "earn" heaven? And who are we to "claim" heaven based on our human lineage?

If we can't make a claim against God based on any of these things, then how can we find unrighteousness in God? Jew or Gentile, we are actually all in the same boat.

Life application: Moses asked to see the glory of the Lord. The Lord responded that He would cause all of His goodness to pass before Him. Moses' eyes beheld the Lord's glory by beholding His goodness. Now, on this side of the cross, we

have that same honor. John 1:14 says, " And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The glory of the Lord is revealed in the person of Jesus. All of the goodness of God, His grace and truth, is seen in Jesus. How can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? And how can we make a claim against God when He has so revealed Himself to us?

So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. Romans 9:16

"So then" is given as a result of what Paul has been saying about election. He cited the case of Abraham's promise leading to Isaac, which means Ishmael wasn't selected. Not only that, but it was announced to him that his long barren wife Sarah would have a child and that it would be a son. He then cited the account of Jacob who was selected as the son of choice over Esau prior to the birth of the twins; Esau being rejected. This occurred before they had done any good or evil.

Following this, he cited the account of Moses and quoted Exodus 33:19 to show that God's sovereign decisions are in no way unrighteous. With these points settled, Paul now says, "So then..." Understanding these things we now know that "it is not of him who wills." From the context we can discern that this statement is not speaking about free will. In other words, this is not a text to say that we do not choose Christ. It is a text that says that God's election is based on His foreknowledge and His direction. That in no way negates our choice.

God chose Isaac and rejected Ishmael as the son of promise. God also chose Jacob and likewise rejected Esau. Is there anything in Scripture to indicate that either Ishmael or Esau wasn't saved? Esau is called "a fornicator and a profane person" in Hebrews, but it is speaking of what he did at a particular time, not every choice he made. Paul speaks about himself in a similar manner in 1 Timothy 1:13 - "...although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man..."

"He who wills" is speaking of our state before God. We do not "will" where we will be born, when we will be born, or to what family we will be born. We also don't decide what our genetic makeup will be, or how high will be our level of intelligence. These are sovereign choices of God, but they in no way indicate that we are not granted free will. These things, all of them decided by God, are a part of who we are and all bear on the free-will choices we make, but the choice is ours none-the-less. Did Esau not choose to sell his birthright? Did God not know that he would do so in advance? Does God's advanced knowledge somehow change that fact that Esau made the choice?

This being stated by Paul, and now understood by us, we can proceed to the next point which is that it is also not "of him who runs." The term he uses here is *trechontos*. This is a word used to describe an athlete in competitive games. When they are so engaged, they run with all of their effort and with intent of purpose. This isn't saying that we as individuals don't earnestly strive to be saved. People all over the world are doing so. Some strive by blowing themselves up for their salvation. Some strive by going to church and praying to Mary and saying the rosary. Some strive by joining a monastery. And so on...

Despite such effort of the will, there is no merit in it for salvation. The person who rightly pursues God and the person who wrongly pursues Him are both dependent on His mercy. However, only those who rightly pursue Him will receive it. We can "run the race" all we want, rightly or wrongly, and in the end it doesn't change our need for what God grants. We know this is so because Paul uses the same word for "runs" twice in 1 Corinthians 9:24 -

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it."

How could he say this at all if it weren't so?

Life application - In the end, salvation is of the Lord. The plan of salvation is His and it is up to us to accept that plan. There is nothing we can "will" to change it

and there is no amount of effort we can exert that will negate our need for it. We must come to Christ in order to receive God's mercy.