

**Subject: *God's Sovereignty in Salvation***

**Scripture: *Romans 9:14-24***

We hear a lot about human rights, civil rights, women's rights, victim's rights, animal rights, and LGBTQ rights, but we don't hear much about God's rights. We hear a lot about man's will, but we don't hear much about God's will. In general people accept that God has the right to be sovereign in creation, but they don't always accept that God has the right to be sovereign in salvation. He can be sovereign in the use of His power, but He has no right to be sovereign in the bestowing of His grace.

In this scripture Paul states that God has the right to do what He does. He does not answer or give account to anyone. The Bible teaches that God makes choices of nations and individuals. God chose Abraham and the nation of Israel. He chose Isaac instead of Ishmael. He chose Jacob instead of Esau. God's choices were not based on anything good in them, but just because He wanted to choose them. We call this divine election. Now in verses 14-24, Paul deals with objections that people may have with divine election.

### **1. THE QUESTION OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS (vs. 14-18)**

If God chooses one person over another, does He somehow compromise His character? The answer is "God forbid" (NKJV, certainly not). How does Paul answer that objection? He simply quotes Scripture, as if to say, "That settles it."

#### **A. God's statement to Moses (vs. 15; Ex. 33:19)**

In verse 15, Paul quotes directly from Exodus 33:19. We need to remember the context of that verse. While Moses was up on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments and the Law from God, the people were at the base of the mount worshipping a golden calf. God had every right to destroy the whole nation, but instead He chose to show mercy and spare them. In verse 16, Paul makes it clear that God's mercy doesn't depend on human choice or human effort. Nobody deserves God's mercy. God is not obligated to show mercy at all. All sinners deserve God's judgment, but God gives mercy.

#### **B. God's statement to Pharaoh (vs. 17; Ex. 9:16)**

God allowed Pharaoh to live and rule to accomplish His own purpose, to demonstrate His great power and to declare His name (His glory, the sum total of God's character) in all the earth. This refers to God's plagues in the land of Egypt. The Bible says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. If you go back to Exodus you will find ten times where the Bible says Pharaoh hardened his heart and ten other times where God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Both were true, but God knew what the outcome was going to be from the very beginning.

**Exodus 3:19** *And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand.*

**Exodus 4:21** *And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.*

This doesn't mean that God actively caused Pharaoh to resist and not obey His will, but it means that God withdrew His influence and restraint from Pharaoh and allowed his wicked heart to rebel and become harder and harder.

God was right to pardon Israel and He was right to punish Pharaoh. God was right to show mercy to Israel and He was right to harden Pharaoh. God has the right to do what He wants.

## **2. THE QUESTION OF MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY (vs. 19)**

If God chooses one person over another and His will is sovereign, are people still held responsible for their choices and their actions? If God is in control, how can He blame anyone for sin and unbelief? Paul answers this objection in three ways:

### **A. Man has no right to question what God does (vs. 20)**

This question is wrong and improper to start with. It is the height of arrogance for a man to question his creator. As parents we teach our children not to talk back to us. How foolish for any person to talk back to his maker. God is not accountable to us for what He does.

### **B. God has a right to do what He wants (vs. 21)**

Paul uses the well known example of the potter and the clay. God is the potter and man is the clay. Does the clay talk back to the potter, "Why did you make me like this?" The clay does not represent man in his innocence, but man in his sinfulness. This refers to God's right to make of sinful men what He chooses to make. As a potter, He is free to make one vessel of honor (a noble purpose) and to make another vessel of dishonor (a common use).

For example, God used Moses as a vessel of honor and He used Pharaoh as a vessel of dishonor. He had the right to do as He pleased.

### **C. God is glorified in doing what He does (vs. 22-23)**

Paul describes two groups here: vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy. The vessels of wrath are like Pharaoh and the Egyptians. They are lost people who receive and deserve God's wrath for their sin and unbelief. The vessels of mercy are like Moses and the Israelites. They are saved people who receive God's mercy. Notice that for the vessels of wrath God desires to show His wrath and to make His power known. Notice that He endures these vessels of wrath with much longsuffering (patience). Notice that they are prepared for destruction. A close look at the word "fitted" means they prepared themselves for God's wrath. In other words they are responsible for the wrath they receive and they deserve it. One commentator said this about people fitted to destruction: "This is a ripeness of sinfulness that points to judgment. It is the work of man, who allows himself to deteriorate in spite of knowledge and conscience."

On the other hand, look at what Scripture says about the vessels of mercy, saved people. For the vessels of mercy God makes known the riches of His glory and notice that God prepares them beforehand for glory. In other words God is responsible for the glory they receive and they don't deserve it.

Every person who goes to hell deserves to be there. Every person who goes to heaven is there only by the mercy and grace of God.