

## **Romans (54)** **Election and Predestination (part 2)**

We are presently working through the passage of Scripture that sets forth more clearly, than perhaps any other, the sovereignty of God in the dispensing of salvation to sinners. To study and know Romans 9 thoroughly will result in one becoming a Calvinist in his theology; that is, he will become convinced in God's sovereignty in the bestowing the gift of salvation upon His elect, whom He had chosen long ago to be saved. Here Paul attributes our sovereign God as the determiner of the destiny of all human beings, some unto salvation, the rest unto their damnation. Last week we addressed verses 6 through 13. Today we will continue with verse 14ff. But for the sake of setting the context, we will read verses 6 through 29.

<sup>6</sup>But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, <sup>7</sup>and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." <sup>8</sup>This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. <sup>9</sup>For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son." <sup>10</sup>And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, <sup>11</sup>though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—<sup>12</sup>she was told, "The older will serve the younger." <sup>13</sup>As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

And the following is new for us today:

<sup>14</sup>What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! <sup>15</sup>For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." <sup>16</sup>So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. <sup>17</sup>For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth." <sup>18</sup>So then He has mercy on whomever He wills, and He hardens whomever He wills.

<sup>19</sup>You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who can resist His will?" <sup>20</sup>But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" <sup>21</sup>Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? <sup>22</sup>What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, <sup>23</sup>in order to make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory-- <sup>24</sup>even us whom He has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? <sup>25</sup>As indeed He says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" <sup>26</sup>And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" <sup>27</sup>And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, <sup>28</sup>for the Lord will carry out His sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." <sup>29</sup>And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah." (Rom. 9:14-29)

The apostle had set forth the reason that Israel had not embraced Jesus as its promised Messiah was due to the sovereign purpose of God. It was not to be imagined that God's Word, that is, God's promise

to save Israel had failed (v. 6). Paul stated that the fact that few from Israel embraced Christ was consistent with God's dealings with Israel in history. God had never intended to save all natural descendants from Abraham, for God had promised that only some of them would be saved and included in the number of His people. Just as God had chosen Isaac to be blessed, so God had chosen the relative few Jews who had believed on Jesus Christ. Salvation is the work of God's grace extended to people that He chose to be saved. The birth of Jacob and Esau proved Paul's point. These twin boys were born, but rather than Esau, the elder born inheriting the blessing of God, God chose that Jacob would be the recipient of His saving grace. God had loved Jacob free and fully, but He had hated Esau. Paul made it very clear that there was nothing about either of these men that had caused God to favor the one to the other; it was solely due to the sovereign purpose and grace of God.

Paul then addressed what he perceived to be a possible objection on the part of his readers. He asked the question in **verse 14**, providing the answer: ***“What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!”*** This is a rhetorical question worded for effect. Paul was saying in the strongest of terms, “No, the cause of Israel's unbelief due to the electing grace of God cannot lead to a charge of injustice on the part of God's dealings with them.”<sup>1</sup> And so, here “a negative answer is implied and Paul answers with the strongest form of denial at his disposal.”<sup>2</sup> The ESV identifies the false charge that God is characterized by “injustice.” It may be understood and translated better as “unrighteous.”<sup>3</sup> The point is this, the teaching of God's sovereignty in determining who will and who will not be saved among the human race cannot justly result in leveling the charge against God that He is unrighteous, or unjust. God is just in His dealings with fallen man.

Paul then argues that God has always dealt with His people according to His sovereign dispensing of mercy upon them. He quotes from Exodus 33:19 to show that this is the manner in which He deals with His people whom He favors. **Verse 15** reads, ***“For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’”***

The context of Exodus 33 is Moses desiring an affirmation from God that He would continue to be present with His people upon their journey to the land of promise. God had judged Israel for its defections. “Although God had had drawn back from destroying all the people, He has promised only to send an angel to lead them into the land.”<sup>4</sup> But Moses wanted assurance that God Himself would accompany His people. He therefore asked God to reveal His glory unto him. This was not merely a personal desire, but Moses as a representative and covenantal leader of his people desired to secure God's assurance that He would be accompany them as their God. And so, Moses asked for God to manifest His glory to Him. We read of this account in Exodus 33 and 34.

<sup>12</sup>Moses said to the LORD, “See, You say to me, ‘Bring up this people,’ but You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.’ <sup>13</sup>Now therefore, if I have found favor in Your sight, please show me now Your ways, that I may know You in order to find favor in Your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.” <sup>14</sup>And He said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” <sup>15</sup>And he said to Him, “If Your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. <sup>16</sup>For how shall it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not in Your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and Your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?”

<sup>17</sup>And the LORD said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in My sight, and I know you by name.” <sup>18</sup>Moses said, “Please show me your glory.”

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<sup>1</sup> Foe those who know a little Greek: the verb, *γένοιτο* is preceded by the negative particle *μή* indicating

<sup>2</sup> John Murray, *Romans* (Eerdmans, 1965), vol. 2, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> The KJV and the NKJV translate it as “unrighteous.” Paul's main concern in these chapters is that God is righteous in His dealings with Israel and the Gentiles regarding His dispensing of salvation. The translation of the term as “unrighteous” rather than “unjust” would seem to show forth this theme more readily to the English Bible reader.

<sup>4</sup> *The ESV Study Bible*, note on p. 199 (Crossway Publishers, 2001).

<sup>19</sup>And He said, “I will make all My goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you My name ‘The LORD.’ ***And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.*** <sup>20</sup>But,” He said, “you cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live.” <sup>21</sup>And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by Me where you shall stand on the rock, <sup>22</sup>and while My glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with My hand until I have passed by. <sup>23</sup>Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”

<sup>34:1</sup>The LORD said to Moses, “Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. <sup>2</sup>Be ready by the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to Me on the top of the mountain. <sup>3</sup>No one shall come up with you, and let no one be seen throughout all the mountain. Let no flocks or herds graze opposite that mountain.” <sup>4</sup>So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. <sup>5</sup>The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. <sup>6</sup>The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup>keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” <sup>8</sup>And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. <sup>9</sup>And he said, “If now I have found favor in Your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Your inheritance.” (Exo 33:12-23; 34:1-9)

And so, when Moses asked to see God’s glory, God revealed to Him His “goodness”, and that goodness of God is particularly manifested in His sovereign dispensing of His mercy on whom He chooses to have mercy. God assured Moses that He would be gracious to Israel because He had determined in His grace to be merciful to that people. God is sovereign in the bestowal of His grace. God is sovereign in the dispensing of His mercy. Even though Moses had acknowledged Israel to be a stiff-necked people, in other words, they were rebellious and resistant in nature (i.e. sinful), God had determined that He would be merciful to them. There was nothing about Israel that warranted God’s favor toward them. It was solely due to the sovereign will of God. This revelation of God’s “goodness” to Moses served as an argument for Paul that God is under no obligation to be favorable to anyone, but rather He chooses whom will be saved wholly by His grace.

God is merciful to some sinners, but not all. Mercy, by definition, is undeserved by the ones who are its objects. There is nothing that a person can do to earn mercy. Mercy must be bestowed freely upon the undeserving by the One to whom a debt of justice is owed. God may show mercy, but He not need do so. He is just in damning sinners when He refuses to show them mercy. This is what Paul declared in **verse 16: “So then, it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.”**

Now thankfully, our God is rich in mercy toward those He loves, and He has purposed to love His people in Christ from eternity. Paul wrote elsewhere, “But God, ***being rich in mercy***, because of the great love with which He loved us” (Eph. 2:3f). Mercy is natural to God; it is His nature to be merciful. James could reason with people based upon the mercy of God. “You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how ***the Lord is compassionate and merciful***” (James 5:11. Our Lord taught His disciples, “Be merciful, even ***as your Father is merciful***” (Luke 6:36). Our God is a merciful God.

However, although mercy is essential to the nature of God, God does not always grant mercy upon people who are under His wrath. God said, “I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful.” God is not merciful to all people at all times. And there are those to whom He has shown mercy in the past but He has withdrawn His mercy from them, such as was the case with King Saul (cf. 2 Sam. 7:15).

Since mercy is an essential aspect of God's nature, nothing outside of Him can be the cause of it.<sup>5</sup> His mercy must be a manifestation of His sovereign action. A person's misery cannot be the cause or source of God's mercy. A person's sin can be a cause of God executing His just judgment, but it cannot be a cause of His showing mercy. Mercy must come forth from His will.

The mercy of God arises from the goodness of His nature, from His special love to His people, and from His sovereign will and pleasure; who, as He loves whom He pleases, and "is gracious to whom He will be gracious"; so "He has mercy on whom He will have mercy" (Exod. 33:19).<sup>6</sup>

The mercy of God is infinite, because it is an aspect of the nature of God and the essence of God is infinite. Therefore the mercy God toward His people is eternal.

"The sure mercies of David", (Ps. 89:24, 28; Isa. 55:3) even temporal blessings, which flow from the mercy of God, are new every morning, and are daily continued; and spiritual ones always remain; the mercy of God never departs from His people, notwithstanding their backslidings; and though He chides them for them, and hides His face from them, yet still He has mercy on them (Ps. 89:30-33; Isa. 54:6-10; Jer. 3:12,14).<sup>7</sup>

We may rest confident in God showing us mercy from now unto forever. Mary, the mother of Jesus, could say, "And His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation" (Luke 1:50).

The mercy of God is manifested fully to sinners through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the channel through which the mercy of God flows to us. One cannot know God as a merciful Father unless they know and believe on Jesus Christ God's Son.

When we consider the teaching of the Word of God upon the subject of the mercy of God, we must distinguish between different objects on which God bestows His mercy. There is a *general mercy* that is extended by God to all His creatures. The very fact that God allows this fallen world to continue to exist is due to His mercy that He manifests to the world. "The earth, O Lord, is full of Your mercy!" (Ps. 119:64). God is "merciful" even to animals in that He protects them and provides for them. God is kind to the unthankful and unholy, and He makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and He sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Luke 6:35; Matthew 5:45). He preserves all people that live upon His earth. "Through the LORD'S mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not" (Lam. 3:22).

But aside from the general mercy that God shows to all, there is the *special mercy* of God to His elect.<sup>8</sup> In our passage of Romans 9:23 they are called "vessels of mercy", for God fills them and they bear along God's mercies. All of the blessings of salvation flow to His people due to His special mercy that He manifests toward them. When we come to Christ in faith we obtain access to His unending and undiminished stores of mercy. Peter wrote of those who had become Christians, "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but *now you have received*

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<sup>5</sup> John Gill, *A Body of Divinity*. (Turner Lassiter, n.d.) p. 86.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Pink distinguished God's mercy into three categories: "In endeavoring to study the mercy of God as it is set forth in Scripture, a threefold distinction needs to be made, if the Word of Truth is to be 'rightly divided' thereon. First, there is a general mercy of God, which is extended not only to all men, believers and unbelievers alike, but also to the entire creation: 'His tender mercies are over all His works' (Ps. 145:9): 'He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things' (Acts 17:25). God has upon the brute creation in their needs, and supplies them with suitable provision. Second, there is a special mercy of God, which is exercised toward the children of men, helping and succoring them, notwithstanding their sins. To them also He communicates all the necessities of life: "for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). Third, there is a sovereign mercy which is reserved for the heirs of salvation, which is communicated to them in a covenant way, through the Mediator. Arthur Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Reiner, n. d.), pp. 84f.

**mercy**” (1 Pet. 2:27). The mercy of God is special and distinguishing, in that God bestows it upon His chosen people. It is not limited to any family or nation, such as to Israel only, but is enjoyed by all that love and fear the Lord in every nation (Acts 10:34, 35).

God’s mercy is shown to us in God’s **election** of us. We deserved His eternal wrath and vengeance. But because of His mercy He chose us to be saved. Our **redemption** from sin through the death of Jesus Christ was great mercy showed toward us. Mercy delivered us from the realm of God’s justice into a state of peace with God. God’s mercy toward us was manifest when He first caused us to be **born again**.

<sup>4</sup>But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup>He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, **but according to His own mercy**, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-6)

**Arthur Pink** concluded his chapter on the mercy of God in his classic book, *The Attributes of God*, with these words:

But let our final thought be of God’s spiritual mercies unto His own people. “Thy mercy is great unto the heavens” (Psa. 57:10). The riches thereof transcend our loftiest thought. “For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him” (Psa. 103:11). None can measure it. The elect are designated “vessels of mercy” (Rom. 9:23). It is mercy that quickened them when they were dead in sins (Eph. 2:4, 5). It is mercy that saves them (Titus 3:5). It is His abundant mercy which begat them unto an eternal inheritance (1 Peter 1:3). Time would fail us to tell of His preserving, sustaining, pardoning, supplying mercy. Unto His own, God is “the Father of mercies” (2 Cor. 1:3).

“When all Thy mercies, O my God,  
My rising soul surveys,  
Transported with the view I’m lost,  
In wonder, love, and praise.”

As we return to Romans 9, we read in **verses 17** and **18** that Paul next speaks of those from whom God withheld His mercy, once again, to demonstrate God’s sovereignty in the matter.

***17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”***

God did not show mercy upon Pharaoh, ruler of Egypt. God had raised him up, that is, God had placed him in the position of authority over Egypt, in order that through His judgments upon Pharaoh, God might show forth His power to the people of the earth. God could have just as easily shown mercy upon Pharaoh early on and had moved him to let the Israelites leave their bondage to the Egyptians, allowing them to return to Canaan. But instead, God had caused Pharaoh’s heart to be hardened toward His people and His servant Moses. God so controlled Pharaoh in this manner in order that God might glorify Himself.

Paul quotes the book of Exodus once again. We read in Exodus 19 of God’s dealings with Pharaoh:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. <sup>2</sup>For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them, <sup>3</sup>behold, the hand of the LORD will fall with a very severe plague upon your

livestock that are in the field, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. <sup>4</sup>But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing of all that belongs to the people of Israel shall die.””” <sup>5</sup>And the LORD set a time, saying, “Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land.” <sup>6</sup>And the next day the LORD did this thing. All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one of the livestock of the people of Israel died. <sup>7</sup>And Pharaoh sent, and behold, not one of the livestock of Israel was dead. ***But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.***

<sup>8</sup>And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. <sup>9</sup>It shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.” <sup>10</sup>So they took soot from the kiln and stood before Pharaoh. And Moses threw it in the air, and it became boils breaking out in sores on man and beast. <sup>11</sup>And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils came upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians. <sup>12</sup>***But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh,*** and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

<sup>13</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. <sup>14</sup>For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. <sup>15</sup>For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. <sup>16</sup>***But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you My power, so that My name may be proclaimed in all the earth.*** <sup>17</sup>You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go.” (Exod. 9:1-17)

God had raised Pharaoh up to his position of power and had hardened his heart through the events preceding the Exodus of Israel, in order that God would display His great power to all the world. In other words, God had purposed to glorify Himself through His judgments upon Pharaoh and Egypt over which he ruled.

That God was successful in this is testified later in Scripture. Forty years later when Israel was ready to enter the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, two spies had been sent to Jericho to spy out the terrain ahead of the invasion. They were helped by a harlot who lived in Jericho. She helped hide the two Jewish men from the inhabitants of the city who were hunting for them. She gave the two men the reason for the favor she had shown to them. She said to them,

“I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. <sup>10</sup>***For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt,*** and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. <sup>11</sup>And as soon as we heard *these things*, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He *is* God in heaven above and on earth beneath. <sup>12</sup>Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the LORD, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father's house, and give me a true token, <sup>13</sup>and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.” (Josh 2:9ff)

Paul draws his right conclusion from all of this in **verse 18**: “***So then He has mercy on whomever He wills, and He hardens whomever He wills.***” Earlier in verse 15 he had declared, “***I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.***” There he was speaking only of God’s gracious dealings toward His elect. But in verse 18 he writes of God’s dealings with the elect **and** the reprobate, all whom God passed over in not choosing them to be saved. God hardens people in their sin in His judicial dealings with them. And so we see from this passage that

salvation is entirely dependent upon God's free will, not the so-called free will of man. "Salvation, then, is not ultimately based on human free will or effort but depends entirely on God's merciful will."<sup>9</sup>

Paul next addresses the expected false charge from objectors to his teaching. **Verse 19** reads, "**You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who can resist His will?'**" **John Calvin** wrote of the foolish response of wicked men who would charge God with injustice when they hear of His sovereign dealings among mankind.

Here indeed the flesh especially storms, that is, when it hears that they who perish have been destined by the will of God to destruction. 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 clamoring 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. They are indeed constrained to yield; but they storm, because they cannot resist; and ascribing dominion to him, they in a manner charge him with tyranny. In the same manner the Sophists in their schools foolishly dispute on what they call his absolute justice, as though forgetful of his own righteousness, he would try the power of his authority by throwing all things into confusion. Thus then speak the ungodly in this passage, — "What cause has he to be angry with us? Since he has formed us such as we are, since he leads us at his will where he pleases, what else does he in destroying us but punish his own work in us? For it is not in our power to contend with him; how much soever we may resist, he will yet have the upper hand. Then unjust will be his judgment, if he condemns us; and unrestrainable is the power which he now employs towards us." What does Paul say to these things? (John Calvin)

Paul's response to such a charge is indignance that one would even dare to lay a charge of unrighteousness upon God because of His sovereign dealings among fallen and condemned sinners. **Verses 20 through 24 read:**

*<sup>20</sup>But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" <sup>21</sup>Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? <sup>22</sup>What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, <sup>23</sup>in order to make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory-- <sup>24</sup>even us whom He has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?*

Paul reasons that since God is our Creator, He is free to employ us, His creatures, in any manner that He chooses. He is not answerable to us. Nor can we justly accuse Him of mismanaging the world. Just as a potter has the authority to determine what kind of vessel he will make from the clay that is his and at his disposal, so God equally has the same right over humanity.

The main idea that Paul is putting across is this: If even a potter has the right out of the same lump or mass of clay to make one vessel for honor, and another for dishonor, then certainly God, our Maker, has the right, out of the same mass of human beings who by their own guilt have plunged themselves into the pit of misery, to elect some to everlasting life, and to allow others to remain in the abyss of wretchedness.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *The ESV Study Bible* (Crossway, 2001), p. 2173.

<sup>10</sup> William Hendriksen, *Romans*. New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1980, 1981), p. 327.

When God first created Adam from the dust of the ground and formed him into human body into which He infused life, it was as God were a potter, fashioning from the dust His vessel for His use. SO it is with all humanity that comes forth through Adam. God is free to use us as He deems necessary.

We will close with the words of the English puritan commentator, **Matthew Henry**:

Whatever God does, must be just. Wherein the holy, happy people of God differ from others, God's grace alone makes them differ. In this preventing, effectual, distinguishing grace, He acts as a benefactor, whose grace is His own. None have deserved it; so that those who are saved, must thank God only; and those who perish, must blame themselves only, Hos 13:9. God is bound no further than He has been pleased to bind Himself by His own covenant and promise, which is His revealed will. And this is, that He will receive, and not cast out, those that come to Christ; but the drawing of souls in order to that coming, is an anticipating, distinguishing favour to whom He will. Why does He yet find fault? This is not an objection to be made by the creature against his Creator, by man against God. The truth, as it is in Jesus, abases man as nothing, as less than nothing, and advances God as sovereign Lord of all. Who art thou that art so foolish, so feeble, so unable to judge the Divine counsels? It becomes us to submit to Him, not to reply against Him. Would not men allow the infinite God the same sovereign right to manage the affairs of the creation, as the potter exercises in disposing of his clay, when of the same lump he makes one vessel to a more honourable, and one to a meaner use? God could do no wrong, however it might appear to men. God will make it appear that He hates sin. Also, He formed vessels filled with mercy. Sanctification is the preparation of the soul for glory. This is God's work. Sinners fit themselves for hell, but it is God who prepares saints for heaven; and all whom God designs for heaven hereafter, He fits for heaven now. Would we know who these vessels of mercy are? Those whom God has called; and these not of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles. Surely there can be no unrighteousness in any of these Divine dispensations. Nor in God's exercising long-suffering, patience, and forbearance towards sinners under increasing guilt, before He brings utter destruction upon them. The fault is in the hardened sinner himself. As to all who love and fear God, however such truths appear beyond their reason to fathom, yet they should keep silence before Him. It is the Lord alone who made us to differ; we should adore His pardoning mercy and new-creating grace, and give diligence to make our calling and election sure. (Matthew Henry on Romans 9:14-24)