

## Submission to the Sovereign # 33

Romans 9: 14-23

We are continuing to consider the words of Paul, having the people of Israel in mind. Many of the Jews were unwilling to embrace salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. Some were willing to accept Jesus as the Christ, but refused to submit to faith alone. Many of the Jews still sought righteousness through adhering to the Mosaic Law and placed great emphasis on their heritage and relation to Abraham.

Paul knew that God had not forsaken the Jews; and although it would be in a time yet future when God deals with them again nationally, he sought to reveal truth to those who would hear. Paul earnestly desired all people, Jew and Gentile alike, come to Christ in salvation.

Our text today is tied to the passage we considered in our last study. Those verses dealt with God's sovereign dealings with Israel, and all men for that matter. The verses we have read today certainly continue that line of thought. As we look at this passage, we must bear in mind the sovereignty of God. Even though we will never fully understand all the Lord does, we must trust Him, knowing His ways and purposes are always just and right. I want to consider the [eternal truths](#) Paul speaks of here as we think on: [Submission to the Sovereign](#).

**I. The Sovereign Will of God (14-18)** – Here Paul discusses the sovereign will of God being displayed throughout His dealings with Israel. Notice:

**A. The Argument (14)** – [What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.](#) Bear in mind, this verse follows Paul addressing God's dealings with Jacob and Esau. He knew some would charge God with being unfair and acting in a manner contrary to His righteousness. Paul quickly refutes such a charge, declaring that such a thing must never be considered because it will never be founded in truth. Although we can't fully comprehend the will and ways of God, we must accept them and trust the Lord in His actions toward all men.

**B. The Affirmation (15-16)** – [For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.](#) <sup>[16]</sup> [So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.](#) Here Paul refers to [Exodus 33:19](#). Moses had been on Mt. Sinai with the Lord, receiving the Law. God spoke to Moses, telling him to get down from the mountain quickly because the people had turned to idolatry. Upon confronting them for making the golden calf and worshiping an idol, Moses called for those who were on the Lord's side to join him. The Levites obeyed and were commanded of Moses to slay those who rebelled against the Lord. The Levites slew 3,000 Israelites for their rebellion. In reality, all were guilty and worthy of death, but God chose to show mercy and compassion instead of consuming them all.

- Were we not all worthy of death as well? I don't know about you, but I am thankful for mercy and grace! God would have been just to have consumed Israel in the wilderness and He would have been just to have allowed us to die in our sin. Through their rebellion, Israel had forfeited any and all right to God, but He chose to extend mercy! The same is true of us. In our sin and rebellion against God, we had no right to expect anything from God, especially pardon from our sin. His mercy and grace overlooked our sin and provided the means of salvation!

**C. The Appropriation (17-18)** – *For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.* <sup>[18]</sup> *Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.* Paul also reveals the sovereignty of God relating to His dealings with Pharaoh during the time of the Exodus. There are two extremes to which people often go when considering the sovereignty of God. Some go to the extreme regarding His mercy. They argue that a loving, gracious God would never punish the guilty and allow them to suffer a Christ-less eternity, separated from Him. These tend to believe that all people will eventually be saved, regardless of their actions or acceptance of Christ. We know, through the authority of Scripture, that line of thinking and doctrine is untrue. Secondly, some would take God's sovereignty to an extreme point of view and argue that He hardens the hearts of those He will, and thus there is no hope for their salvation. We have already discussed this point of view. I am entirely convinced that God is sovereign in every way, and His dealings with humanity are not thwarted by the plans or will of men. However, as we look at this illustration, we must do so with caution. As with all Scripture, we must look at every passage within its context.

- God's dealings with Pharaoh were for a specific purpose: to reveal His power and that His name would be praised throughout the earth. It is interesting to discover upon studying the plagues and the conversations with Moses, Pharaoh's heart was hardened 20 different times. Examining the Scriptures, we find that 10 of those times Pharaoh hardened his own heart, and ten of those times God hardened Pharaoh's heart. The first mention of his heart being hardened was the result of his own disbelief and hardening. Throughout the plagues, God offered opportunity for repentance, but Pharaoh continued to harden his heart. It wasn't until after the 8<sup>th</sup> plague that the agency of hardening is ascribed to God alone. (See John Phillips commentary, page 150.) His continued rebellion and hard heart brought about the divine judgment of God.

- Consider the thoughts of Alan Carr: Again, some will cry "*Unfair! What about man's free will?*" [Verse 16](#) tells us that it has nothing to do with man's will, but God's alone! You see, man cannot believe because man will not believe! His will is bound in sin, wholly and totally! Some will charge that this makes God guilty of condemning some while saving others. In all fairness to God, man is born into this world condemned, [John 3:18](#); [3:36](#). Can we face the fact this evening that we are sinners? Can we understand that we are sinners by birth and sinners by choice? It is not God that condemns man, sin condemns men! Men don't go to Hell because they are sent by God, they go to Hell because they are sinners! That having been said, someone who demands that God act fairly toward all men is a fool! If we got fair and just treatment, we would all be in Hell tonight!

Salvation is not about God being fair, salvation is about God extending grace on whom He will! Salvation is not based in justice! Salvation is purely the work of grace! That is, “*the unmerited and undeserved love of God for lost sinners.*”<sup>i</sup>

**II. The Sovereign Ways of God (19-23)** – In our closing verses, Paul speaks of the sovereign ways of God, His actions and dealings with men. Consider:

**A. The Mystery (19)** – *Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?* Paul speaks of the mystery men seek to understand and the question they seek to answer. If God is sovereign, and we know He is; why would He find fault in those who merely responded to His sovereign will? In keeping with the context: why did God find fault in Pharaoh since he responded to the hardening of God? Again we must consider the sovereignty of God in relation to the moral responsibility of humanity. God had revealed enough truth to Pharaoh for him to have responded favorably to God. Pharaoh was guilty of hardening his own heart against the revelation of truth. In essence, he was without excuse. According to what we discovered in Chapter One of our study in Romans, all men are without excuse. God reveals enough of Himself through creation for one to know there is a God in heaven who created this world.

**B. The Humility (20)** – *Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?* Paul declares that man has no right to question, criticize, or challenge the sovereign authority of God. It is absurd to think any man would possess more wisdom than the God who created us. Some even carry this to the extreme of trying to excuse sin. They would seek to blame God for their sinful ways and lustful desires, assuming He created such a desire in their heart. Although we will never fully comprehend the sovereignty of God, we must humble ourselves before Him in complete surrender and submission!

**C. The Sovereignty (21)** – *Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?* Paul affirms the absolute sovereignty of God here. The Potter has control over the clay. He fashions us as it pleases Him.

- Take a moment to consider *Jer.18:4 – And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.* Jeremiah speaks of a piece of clay that was marred in the hand of the potter. The word marred has the idea of being “*spoiled, ruined, corrupt; to act in disobedience.*” This could be said of all men prior to their salvation, and some assume God has created some for honor (salvation) and others for dishonor (condemnation.) However, notice a phrase in [V.22](#) which speaks of the clay: *endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.* God patiently endured, with much longsuffering those fitted to destruction. The word fitted is key. It reveals an act on the part

of the vessel, fitting itself for destruction, choosing to rebel against the hand of the Potter. As with Pharaoh, these rejected the tender mercies of God and He then allowed them to have their way! [Titus 2:11 – For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men](#). God reveals Himself to all in such a way that they are without excuse. Continued rebellion against the pleading of the Spirit will result in one being deemed a vessel of dishonor, rejected of God.

**D. The Glory** (22-23) – Lastly Paul speaks of the glory of God that is revealed through His dealings with man. He discusses two aspects of God’s glory revealed in His dealings. Consider:

➤ **His Power** (22) – [What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction](#): Sadly all men will not respond to the mercies and grace of God. Pharaoh was a prime example of such rebellion. His denial of the true and living God in no way detracted from His deity or power. In fact, God revealed His power in a mighty way through the rebellion of Pharaoh. Men are arrogant creatures, many of which feel as if they are accountable to no one. However, God is sovereign and will share His glory with no man. He can even use the rebellion of men to demonstrate His awesome power.

He is longsuffering, but His glory will not be denied. I rejoice that we serve a sovereign God who possesses all power and authority!

➤ **His Mercy** (23) – [And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory](#). God’s great mercy reveals the riches of His glory. The glory of God is greatly revealed within a fallen world. We are surrounded by depravity and lustful desires. When God reaches into the mass of wickedness and cleanses a man of sin, changing his life eternally, His glory is revealed for all to see. We are incapable of such a transformation within ourselves. God alone can take a heart of stone that is prone to sin and create a heart that is tender toward Him and seeks righteousness. Every born again believer bears witness to the great glory of the God who redeems!

**Conclusion:** I think you will agree that this too has been a difficult portion of Scripture to discern. I certainly don’t have all the answers, but I know we serve a gracious, loving Lord. He allowed His only begotten Son to bear our sin on the cross in order to provide for our redemption. Rather than seeking to fully understand all of God, we ought to rejoice that provision has been made. He is in no way obligated to anyone, and yet He made provision for all. If you are saved, rejoice in your salvation and serve the Lord faithfully. If you are unsaved, believe the Gospel (the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus to atone for sin) and be saved today!

---

<sup>i</sup> The Sermon Notebook - The Sermon Notebook – Romans.