

## Israel's Unbelief and the Character of God - Part 2

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** Romans 9:14-24  
**Preached on:** Sunday, April 22, 2012

Let's take our Bibles and turn to Paul's epistle to the Romans chapter nine.

We come, again, to this text after being away from it for almost a month and we are looking at the second part of the topic of Israel's unbelief and the character of God. And we will focus this morning on verses 18 through 24. Let me read this text to you. Romans nine beginning with verse 18.

So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.<sup>1</sup>

As we approach this magnificent passage of Scripture, may I remind you of what the psalmist tells us in Psalm 119 verse 18. He says:

"Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Thy law."<sup>2</sup>

That should be our prayer here today as we approach this passage of Scripture. He also went ahead to say in verse 27:

"Make me understand the way of Thy precepts, So I will meditate on Thy wonders."<sup>3</sup>

Again, I trust this is the prayer of your heart, that the Holy Spirit will illumine your heart and mind so you can understand these astounding truths of God's revelation to us.

Now it has been a while since we have examined this text, so a quick review is necessary to help us, once again, regain the context. Someone has well said that a text without a context becomes a pretext for a proof text. We don't want to be guilty of that. In fact, all manner of heresy can be, quote, proven from Scripture. And that is typically because it is misinterpreted, especially out of context. So let's wrap our minds around what the apostle is dealing with here.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 9:18-24.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 119:18.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 119:27.

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You will recall that the Jews had become convinced that they were they spiritual descendants of Abraham simply because they were his physical descendants, that because they had come from Abraham's loins and because they adhered to the mosaic law, because they adhered to the rabbinical traditions that their salvation was guaranteed. But Paul has made it clear that not all who are of Israel are heirs of God's promise. You will recall in verse six he said:

“For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.”<sup>4</sup>

So not all ethnic Israelites are spiritual Israelites. And he then went on to prove his proposition by citing God's dealings with Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and Esau, proving, therefore, that Israel's unbelief is consistent with God's promises and does not contradict his words. There are children of the flesh, he says, and there are children of the promise. And from that amazing truth another principle emerges, one that helps us understand why we are saved and that principle is this, that in eternity past God took the initiative in salvation and solely on the basis of his uninfluenced, sovereign good pleasure, he graciously chose certain ones to be saved and those whom he chose will certainly be saved whenever he calls them, those and no others.

To which the Jews replied, “That is not fair.” And virtually everyone who hears this doctrine says the same thing.

So Paul demonstrates that God elects those who will become heirs of his promise without any consideration of human merit as was in the case of Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and Esau.

Now, such a doctrine also posed a huge problem with the Jews for another reason and that had to do with Israel's unbelief and the character of God. The first one had to do with the promises of God. Now this has to do with the character of God. And the logic goes like this. If God is the one that chooses and that takes the initiative in salvation and chooses some, but not all, solely on the basis of his own good pleasure, then he would, therefore, bring disgrace upon his character. They would say it is unfair for God to show mercy on some and not all. He must save all, not some. That is the idea. You see, man cannot have a God who is free to do whatever he pleases. So anticipating this Jewish objection he says in verse 13:

“Just as it is written, ‘JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED.’”<sup>5</sup>

And here is the objection that he brings up.

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 9:6.

<sup>5</sup> Romans 9:13.

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“What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!”<sup>6</sup>

And he then proceeds to defend the justice and character of God by offering two illustrations to prove his point. The first one is in verse 15 and here he cites from Exodus 33 verse 19.

“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>7</sup>

Basically what he is saying is that when it comes to the disposal of my mercy and grace, I am going to do whatever I want to do without any stipulations, without any influences other than my own good pleasure and I will do these things to accomplish my purpose to glorify myself. And it is interesting. Nowhere does Paul give us even a hint of the cause of God’s elective choice other than in the person of God himself. He then offers this conclusion in verse 16.

“So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.”<sup>8</sup>

Then in verse 17 Paul offered a second proof to demonstrate that God is not unjust or unrighteous in making his eternal choices without regard to human merit or ethnicity. He cites another passage from Exodus that the Jews would have been very familiar with. We see this in verse 17 and it comes from Exodus nine verse 16 and following. And here in verse 17 he says:

“For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH.’”<sup>9</sup>

And, as you will recall in that story, God illustrates there are two groups of undeserving sinners. There are those who were a part of Israel that had been delivered from their bondage of Pharaoh and yet we see the other group that were not delivered even Pharaoh and the Egyptians. In fact, God hardened his heart. And why did he do that? He did that in order that God might multiply his miraculous signs in the land of Egypt by extending that season of judgment which would therefore give the world an opportunity to even more fully see the glory of his person, that the whole world might exalt and proclaim the name of the Lord.

So then Paul offered his conclusion in verse 18.

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<sup>6</sup> Romans 9:14.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 9:15.

<sup>8</sup> Romans 9:16.

<sup>9</sup> Romans 9:17.

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“So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.”<sup>10</sup>

So Paul’s point in this illustration of Pharaoh is to prove, once again, that there is no injustice or unrighteousness in God to show mercy on some and to harden the hearts of others. After all, no one deserves mercy. No one can demand it. And yet in his infinite love, he gave it to some, not all, ultimately to bring glory to himself. So this in no way disgraces the character of God. Instead, it actually exalts his character, because all men are unworthy. There is nothing unjust if God shows mercy to some of them and not all of them. And because he is the sovereign creator, eh gets to do what he wants to do, which is whatever he pleases. And because he is perfectly righteous, nothing that he ever does is unjust or unrighteous.

Now many times people will say, as I did when I was a young man, “Well, I just can’t understand this kind of God.”

And, of course, my response is, well, of course not. We are too ignorant. His ways are not our ways. If we had the mind of God, we would be equal to God. So, of course, we don’t fully understand these things. But, my friends, if you say something different, if you say, “I just don’t believe in this kind of God,” now the issue is not one of ignorance, but one of arrogance. You see, your problem is that you refuse to submit to the authority of the Word of God. You want a God that you can control, one made in your image rather than admitting that you were made in his image, that he is the creator, that you are the creature.

So what we see here is that the Jews, like all men, fail to understand the true nature of God. Moreover, they failed to acknowledge the depth of their depravity. They fail to see their helpless and hopeless state because of their sin, which, by the way, was the very topic that Paul spent so much time explaining at the beginning of this epistle. They saw themselves as far more righteous, far more deserving than they truly were. They had, shall we say, a high view of man and a low view of God.

I might add that this is at the very heart of the problem today with Neo Evangelicalism in our world with the Church today. Most today believe in a man made god and they preach a man centered gospel resulting in a man centered worship. So it is little wonder why so many people have such a visceral hatred of the doctrines of sovereign election and predestination. Beloved, only when we understand what God has said about our total depravity and our total inability to save ourselves will we ever be able to understand that man’s only hope of deliverance is the sovereign grace of a merciful God.

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<sup>10</sup> Romans 9:18.

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My dear friend and mentor who a number of years ago went home to be with the Lord, Dr. Charles Russell Smith summarized this with such great precision when he said, quote, “Until we are willing to grant that there is no way that God could be unjust to fallen, sinful creatures, we will have serious difficulties with the doctrine of election,” end quote.

So Paul answers the first objection. He proves that it is not unfair for God to show mercy to some and not all, that it does not disgrace his character. And then he moves to the second objection and this brings us to where we want to examine the text this morning. The second objection goes like this. It is unfair for God to hold a man responsible for what he has determined. Notice, Paul has just said in verse 18:

“So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.”<sup>11</sup>

Verse 19.

“You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’”<sup>12</sup>

You see, at stake here is the righteousness of God. And I would ask you. Is this what you believe? Do you believe that it is unfair for God to hold man responsible for what he has ordained? And if you do, I would challenge you to listen very carefully because you will find the answer to this question, to this issue in Scripture.

You know, we see illustrations of this all through Scripture, like those already cited in the stories of Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and Esau, but you will remember, for example, in Joshua chapter 11, beginning at verse 18. The context there is the conquest here of the land of Canaan and God empowered the Israelites to come in and to kill the wicked Canaanites. And in Joshua 11 verse 18 we read:

Joshua waged war a long time with all these kings. There was not a city which made peace with the sons of Israel except the Hivites living in Gibeon; they took them all in battle. For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, to meet Israel in battle in order that he might utterly destroy them, that they might receive no mercy, but that he might destroy them, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.<sup>13</sup>

Now, in our finite reasoning and preconceived ideas about right and wrong, we can't understand God's standard of justice. But is our inability to understand God sufficient

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Romans 9:19.

<sup>13</sup> Joshua 11;18-20.

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reason to question him? Later in Paul's epistle to the Romans in chapter 11 verse seven we read a similar thing. There he says:

“That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened.”<sup>14</sup>

I could cite you Scripture after Scripture that speaks of this great mystery of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Likewise, in his first letter to the saints in Thessalonica, he says, referring to believers:

“For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>15</sup>

So clearly it is God who is in control of this ultimately. And yet man is responsible to repent and to believe. So, again, all through Scripture, God reveals himself to be the almighty sovereign who is free to do whatever he pleases. And, again, whatever he does is perfectly just. Now, of course, this ignites the objection which Paul now addresses in verse 19.

“You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’”<sup>16</sup>

Now I find it remarkable here that Paul gives absolutely no explanation that would somehow vindicate God from some perceived injustice. We must remember that it is a perceived injustice. It is one that is conceived in the heart and mind of fallen, sinful men, finite men. We have preconceived ideas of right and wrong, all of which are hopelessly biased in our favor, right? Absolutely, ideas that never take into account the astounding depths of our depravity which renders us all guilty before a holy God.

Now notice, he answers this anticipated objection by asking an imaginary antagonist a question in verse 20. He says:

“On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it?”<sup>17</sup>

Now, I wish to examine what follows in Paul's argument under three headings. We are going to see, number one, the stinging rebuke. Secondly, we are going to see the assertion of God's rights, in other words, his authority. And then, thirdly, Paul will deal with the explanation of God's reasons. So the rebuke, the rights and the reasons.

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<sup>14</sup> Romans 11:7.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:9.

<sup>16</sup> Romans 9:19.

<sup>17</sup> Romans 9:20.

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First of all the stinging rebuke in verse 20.

“On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?”<sup>18</sup>

It is as if he is saying, “What blasphemous arrogance for you, oh man, to accuse God of being unjust by asking the question stated in verse 19: Why does he still find fault? For who resists his will?”

Will you notice the designation, oh man? My, doesn't that put us in our place? Oh, man, we are but creatures made by the creator. How utterly absurd for the creature to pit himself against his creator. And worse yet, how blasphemous, how arrogant for a depraved, finite little creature that lives in rebellion to his maker to even question him at all. I mean, this is preposterous. And then, to go beyond that and to assert that God has no right to show mercy to some and harden others as he pleases to accomplish his purposes to bring glory to himself.

“...who are you, O man, who answers back to God?”<sup>19</sup>

There is the stinging rebuke. It is dripping with sarcasm. Can there be any greater chasm in all the universe than between God and man? And the answer is yes, as we will see.

Now please understand, dear friends. There is nothing wrong with asking this question with a heart of humility seeking divine truth. The problem arises when out of resentment and out of rebellion we contend with the plain teaching of the Word of God, when we refuse to submit to what God has said. To say it a little bit differently, when we pull out a black sharpie and use it as a highlighter or, shall I say, a black outter? And we blot out those pesky little passages that do not square with our sense of justice or our self serving view of God.

“...who are you, O man, who answers back to God?”<sup>20</sup>

Now, the Holy Spirit's rebuke here is reminiscent of God's reprimand against Job's accusation of God's injustice with him. You will remember in Job chapter 40 verse two.

“Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Job 40:2.

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My, what a statement. Who are you to find fault with God? Friends, who are we to find fault with him? Who are we to think that we could ever understand him even if he were to try to explain what he does?

Job was right when he said in chapter nine verse three:

“If one wished to dispute with Him, He could not answer Him once in a thousand times.”<sup>22</sup>

But, as you know, in the book of Job later on his sinful flesh began to overpower his reason and on one occasion his friend Elihu rebuked him for charging God with some perceived injustice and he said in chapter 33 verse 13:’

“Why do you complain against Him, That He does not give an account of all His doings?”<sup>23</sup>

And that is the attitude that we must have.

My friends, I want to say it in utmost kindness to you, but it may come to a shock or come as a shock to you that God does not owe us an explanation about what he does, nor could we understand it if he did.

I would submit to you. God is the one that literally speaks things into existence. And we need ingredients and recipes just to bake a cake. And we are going to contend with God? God is the one who works all things after the counsel of his will and we can't even control our tongue. We can't even manage our households. I don't know about you, but I struggle with operating the remote control. I don't even know how to fully work my smart phone. It out smarts me. And I am going to contend with God? How foolish.

We who are least holy are going to challenge the one who is most holy? Utterly absurd.

Now, indeed, there will always be a tension, as I have said before, between man's responsibility and God's sovereign election and predestination. It is an inscrutable mystery. It is beyond our ability to comprehend, but we accept it by faith because God has revealed it to us in his Word. And we are to submit to the authority of his Word. Moreover, we rejoice knowing that we deserve condemnation and there would be justice, but yet we receive mercy by his grace alone. That is where our preoccupation needs to be.

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<sup>22</sup> Job 9:3.

<sup>23</sup> Job 33:13.

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So after his stinging rebuke of presumptuous unbelievers who would dare contend with the almighty, Paul continues to proclaim these truths without any attempt to explain them, because, again, God has not chosen to reveal these things to us. And so, secondly, he deals with the assertions of God's rights, in other words, his authority.

Notice again in verse 20, the second part of the verse. He says:

“The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it?”<sup>24</sup>

Verse 21.

“Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?”<sup>25</sup>

Now the Jews would have understood this concept about the potter, clay. They would have been familiar with this analogy because the Holy Spirit had used it before through the words of, for example, the prophet Isaiah and Jeremiah. In Isaiah chapter 45 verse nine we read:

“Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker — An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’ Or the thing you are making say, ‘He has no hands?’”<sup>26</sup>

Likewise in Isaiah chapter 64 verses six through eight. And here we discover the proper attitude. There we read:

For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. And there is no one who calls on Thy name, Who arouses himself to take hold of Thee; For Thou hast hidden Thy face from us, And hast delivered us into the power of our iniquities. But now, O LORD, Thou art our Father, We are the clay, and Thou our potter; And all of us are the work of Thy hand.<sup>27</sup>

And in similar fashion we see God speaking through his prophet Jeremiah chapter 18 beginning in verse two where the Lord said, quote:

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<sup>24</sup> Romans 9:20.

<sup>25</sup> Romans 9:21.

<sup>26</sup> Isaiah 45:9.

<sup>27</sup> Isaiah 64:6-8.

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"Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I shall announce My words to you." Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel."<sup>28</sup>

So the Jews would have been very familiar with this kind of imagery.

Now I want you to notice how Paul shifts from the absurdity of sinful man questioning God's justice to the absolute right that God has, the authority that the creator has to do as he pleases. Again, in verse 20:

"The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it?"<sup>29</sup>

And here Paul really expands his ridicule to an even greater level, a ridicule that is beyond that chasm between God and man. For at least man has life and he has a brain, unlike the clay. I mean, can there be anything more ludicrous than a brainless, lifeless, helpless lump of dirt quarreling with its potter? That is the point.

But there is another amazing truth that God reveals to us here in this statement. Will you noticed the phrase, "The thing molded"? It could be translated the thing formed. It comes from the Greek word *πλασμα* (plas'-mah). We get our English word plastic from the Greek noun *πλαστος* (plas-tos').

Now what I want to point out here is that he does not say, "The thing created." He says, "The thing molded." This is a very important distinction. Let me explain why. Perhaps you have heard this. I have many times. People will foolishly and in great anger contend that God is a monster because he creates some people just so that he can send them to hell. Have you heard that? I have heard that many times. Such is the argument of one who is willfully ignorant and arrogant and who seeks to justify his unbelief.

Now think about it. When God creates, he creates *ex nihilo*, meaning he creates things out of nothing. But here the lump of clay already exists. It is the lump of fallen humanity. And here he is merely forming as he pleases that which already exists. So here the picture is that of God dealing with fallen sinful humanity that lump of condemned clay as the result of Adam's sin.

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<sup>28</sup> Jeremiah 18:2-6.

<sup>29</sup> Romans 9:20.

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You will remember Paul has already defined this in Romans chapter five verse 12.

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.”<sup>30</sup>

And in verse 19 he says:

“For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.”<sup>31</sup>

To bring this home, I could put it this way. Every infant enters the world with a sin nature, inherited from Adam. And that sin nature predisposes that child to eventually rebel against God and eventually he will as the child grows older. He will intentionally and consciously rebel against God which will become the basis for his sentence to eternal damnation unless he repents.

So this thing formed of which Paul speaks refers to this lump, this mass of perdition that is entirely unable to please God and, thus, stands guilty and condemned before God. We are by nature children of wrath according to Ephesians 2:2.

Now to jump ahead for a moment in verse 22, the Holy Spirit describes those whom God cast over in salvation as, quote:

“...vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.”<sup>32</sup>

Very important here. A technical thing, but it is crucial when we try to understand Scripture. The Greek verb here is in the passive voice and so it is... God is not the one who is doing the preparing. No. It is sinful man that prepares himself by his willful rebellion in unbelief. Yet at the end of verse 23 he describes the vessels of mercy. Now this is very different. Those whom the potter has formed for honorable use, those on whom he has set his mercy and saved by his grace. The text goes on to describe what the sovereign potter has done. Now mark this. He says:

“...which He prepared beforehand for glory.”<sup>33</sup>

My friends, this is not in the passive voice. It is in the active voice. It is very different. Here the subject is the one doing the preparing. It is God himself who prepared those whom he saved beforehand for glory. So man prepares himself for condemnation. Therein is the law. But God prepares man of salvation. So Scripture is clear. The lump of

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<sup>30</sup> Romans 5:12.

<sup>31</sup> Romans 5:19.

<sup>32</sup> Romans 9:22.

<sup>33</sup> Romans 9:23.

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clay in the potter's hand has already rebelled against him. He has not created them as such. They have chosen to rebel against him. Because of man's sin, man has prepared himself for destruction and the potter merely molds that vessel of wrath for a day of judgment.

So, my friend, this idea that God creates some men just to send them to hell is a lie. It is conceived by those who refuse to humble themselves before what God has revealed in his Word. My how I tire of such foolish, ignorant and blasphemous dribble.

Now come back with me to the issue of God's right to do as he pleases. Now how can he illustrate it more clearly? Verse 20, again.

“The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it?”<sup>34</sup>

Well, obviously not. The analogy here is designed to evoke the only rational response and that is, “Well, that is ludicrous. That is preposterous. That is outrageous.” And yet isn't it interesting how presumptuous unbelievers will do this all the time. And in verse 21 he says:

“Or does not the potter have a right over the clay?”<sup>35</sup>

The term right merely means the authority, the authority or the ability to rule or to have control over the clay.

“...to make from the same lump...”<sup>36</sup>

Again, that lump of sinful humanity that has already prepared itself for destruction by its own rebellion.

“...to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?”<sup>37</sup>

Well, of course he has the right to do this, to have mercy on whom he desires and harden whom he desires as verse 18 indicates.

Now the potters of those days and, frankly, the potters in many parts of the world even today, especially in the near east, will take clay and they will use it to mold some things into beautiful vessels for eating, for drinking, for decoration and then they will mold into

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<sup>34</sup> Romans 9:20.

<sup>35</sup> Romans 9:21.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

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vessels other that are often, shall we say, kept out of sight, many times kept under the bed, if you understand my meaning.

So we all understand this analogy. Now the question is: Does not the sovereign creator of the universe also have the right, just like any potter, the right over the clay of fallen humanity to do what he wills? To make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

Paul is asking: Does not our maker have the right to choose from the lump of fallen humanity some to everlasting life and allow others to remain in the condition of their wretchedness that they have chosen for themselves? Does not he have that right? Of course he does.

But then Paul moves from an assertion of God's rights to an explanation, number three, of God's reasons, verse 22.

“What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?”<sup>38</sup>

Now note the word willing. In the original language it has the idea of to intentionally or to purposefully determine to do something. It is a word that is much stronger than our English idea of willing which often has the idea of some kind of passivity, some, well, I guess I am willing to let that happen, some indifferent type of compliance.

No, this term speaks of a determined intentional purpose. And here he sets forth two reasons why God allowed sin to enter into his perfect universe and to contaminate it. Here in this verse, number one, to demonstrate his wrath; number two, to make his power known.

You know, we must never forget, my friends, that everything that God does is designed to bring glory to himself. We are not the center of the universe, he is. And, frankly, this is why so many people have such difficulty with these doctrines. So in order to more fully reveal his divine nature and character so that he can be more perfectly worshipped, first of all he intentionally purposed to, it says:

“...endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?”<sup>39</sup>

Again, passive voice. Because of their conscious rebellion they have prepared themselves for destruction making themselves be vessels of wrath. God molds them on that basis.

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<sup>38</sup> Romans 9:23.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

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And, my, think of the millennia of years that he has showed his patience, how he has endured this. He has tolerated this wickedness. He has put up with it.

Now some will ask, "I wonder." And maybe you have asked this. I have. Lord, why are you enduring this so long? It is more than I can tolerate and I am so far beneath your holiness. It is not even funny. And yet you continue to endure. You continue to be patient and long suffering. Why?

Can I give you three very brief reasons why I think it is true? I think, first of all, he wants to demonstrate his compassion towards sinners. Yes, God is a God of wrath. He utterly loathes sin, but he is also a God of mercy and grace. He is patient with sinners. Scripture tells us that he is slow to anger. He is compassionate, full of compassion. He is longsuffering towards those who hate him that they might repent.

Ezekiel 18:32 we read that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. His desire is that no man should perish, 2 Peter 3:9. But that is not what he has decreed. All through Scripture we see that God often decrees his own displeasure as in the crucifixion of his dear Son, all to bring glory to himself.

But I think a second reason why God is so patient is that God wishes to give man ample opportunity to destroy himself and, thus, confirm man's pride and his inability to save himself.

Sometimes we use the phrase: well, I am just going to give him enough room to hang himself. That is the idea. I mean, look at the world today. With all of the advancement that we have had in science and technology, all of the years for the psychologists and the philosophers and the sociologists to figure out what is wrong with the world, you would think by now we would have it down, that by now we would all get along. But all you have to do is just look at our country, the most prosperous country in the history of the world and we are in a moral free fall. It is astounding.

But I believe that God wants to prove that man is utterly incapable of creating his own Utopia. He needs to submit to a holy God. And I think there is a third reason and that is God is patiently waiting and waiting and waiting to make his judgment on man all the more astounding when it comes.

2 Peter three you will recall how Peter talks about the mockers, those scoffers following after their own lusts, he says. And they are saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? You really think Jesus is going to come again and there is going to be judgment upon the world? It is never going to happen. Only fools believe that."

And then suddenly one day God is going to snatch away his Church and he will pour out upon the world unimaginable wrath that will absolutely dumbfound the world. We see

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By David Harrell

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this in his tribulation judgments. We read about it in various passages of Scripture, especially in Revelation chapter six through 19.

One day, dear friends, according to Scripture, men are going to cry out for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them and to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. And they had plenty of time to repent. It has been over 2000 years since we have had the gospel. So, indeed, God continues to wait.

But there is another reason Paul gives of why God has allowed sin to enter into his perfect world and contaminate it, not only so that he will endure with much patience, the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, but, secondly, he also intentionally purposed to, notice, endure with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. Why? To make his power known.

He wants to make his power known. Now think about it. He made it known first in creation and, again, in the judgment of the worldwide flood in the days of Noah. And in countless ways we have seen God demonstrate his power in judgment as he has judged sin throughout redemptive history. But, oh, dear friends, a day is coming when he will make his power known in ways that will boggle the mind, as I just mentioned, when he pours out his wrath upon the earth during the time of the tribulation and his seal judgments and his trumpet judgments and his bowl judgments, all of which will make the way for him to return as King of kings and Lord of lords and establish his glorious kingdom upon the earth, a day when he will renovate the earth, return it back to edenic splendor and then at the end of all of that he will finally cleanse it once and for all and recreate the heavens and the earth.

Now I find it fascinating that though God hates sin, he has ordained it to enter into his perfect universe. And, again, the reason why is to dramatically display his glory through his holiness, through his wrath, through his mercy, his grace, his love and his power. And you must bear in mind that while God is never the cause of sin, he does bring it about indirectly through the willing, voluntary actions of moral creatures. This is evident in God's testimony of himself when he said in Isaiah 45 verse seven—and here I use the King James Version. He says:

“I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.”<sup>40</sup>

And why does he do this? To bring glory to himself. So the idea Paul is conveying here in verse 23 or verse 22 could be paraphrased something like this. If God has done all of this, how can man argue against it? What possible objection could be made against him?

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<sup>40</sup> Isaiah 45:7.

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But notice the third, final reason here why God chose some, but not all. Not only to demonstrate his wrath and his power, but finally in verse 23:

And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.<sup>41</sup>

Again, remember the phrase, “which he prepared before glory,” active voice. God is the one doing the preparing here. My friend, had God chosen everyone for salvation we would have never understood the glory of his sovereign grace, would we? We would have never understood his holiness, his hatred of sin, his power and his wrath. We would have never understood this phrase, “The riches of his grace.”

And, by the way, isn't it interesting to note here how the Spirit does not use this phrase to describe his power and wrath. But he reserves it here to describe what he has done for those vessels of mercy which he prepared beforehand for glory. He saves the idea of the riches of his glory for those on whom he has shown mercy. Oh, child of God, let this truth crush your pride once and for all and fall on your face in humble adoration and praise before the one who has done this. Dear friend, if you want to see the greatest demonstration of the glory of God all you need to do is look upon those vessels of mercy which he prepared beforehand for glory. Look upon the transformed sinners that have been saved by his grace.

Samuel Davies captured this perfectly in the words of his hymn. He said this.

Great God of wonders all thy ways,  
Are matchless, Godlike and divine.  
But the fair glories of thy grace,  
More Godlike and unrivaled shine.

My, what a marvelous truth. My friends, I would challenge any of you who for whatever reason resent God for choosing some and not all. Those of you who, perhaps, have come to Scripture and you distorted certain passages, you have gone to herculean lengths to somehow torture the text to make sure it doesn't say what you don't want it to say, or perhaps you have just ignored these passages all together. I have talked with a number of pastors who have said to me, “Dave, I would never ever preach on any of this in my church, because if I did, I would lose my job.” How tragic. But if you fall into that camp, I would plead with you to repent, to repent, to submit yourself to the authority of the Word of God.

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<sup>41</sup> Romans 9:23-24.

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There is no injustice when God shows his power and his wrath upon those who so richly deserve it, but, oh, the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy. My. We serve a glorious God, don't we? We serve a glorious God and he is going to be the potter whether you like it or not, whether you understand it or not, which reminded me of Isaac Watts' words, quote:

Earth from a far ahs heard thy fame,  
And babes have learned to lisp thy name,  
But, oh, the glories of thy mind,  
Leave all our souring thoughts behind.

Indeed, he is a God beyond our ability to even remotely comprehend. May we worship him as such.

And, finally, my friend, if you are hearing me today and you have never pleaded for God's undeserved mercy, I plead with you to do so today. Jesus has promised that all that the Father gives me shall come to me and the one who comes to me I will certainly not cast out. Oh, dear friend, if this is you, won't you humble yourself today? Be like a desperate beggar that comes to the gate pleading for that which he cannot provide for himself. And that which he does not deserve saying, "Nothing in my hands I bring, only to thy cross I cling."

Let's pray together.

*Father, these truths are so humbling to us. We grant that there is so much that we do not understand because you do not want us to understand. But those things that you have revealed to us we cannot only understand then and we do understand them, but, Lord, we want to live consistently with them. So thank you for this amazing passage of Scripture hat reveals once again that we serve a sovereign God, a holy God. And it is our desire to give glory to you in all that we do. May you grant it to be so by the power of your Sprit I pray in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.*

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