

Romans 9:14–21 NKJV 14 What shall we say then? *Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!* 15 For He says to Moses, *“I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.”* 16 So then *it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.* 17 For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, *“For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.”* 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. 19 You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” 20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed *it*, “Why have you made me like this?” 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

In the previous passage (Romans 9:1-13) we saw a classic example of a general principle of biblical interpretation: Every verse must be understood within its _____. Ignoring the context of a verse or a passage can lead to the misunderstanding of its _____ and message.

The context of the first thirteen verses of this chapter is very clear from the plain reading of the text. The context is _____, God’s chosen people. In chapter 9, verses 1-5, Paul grieves over what is happening to Israel. They are God’s chosen people whom God _____. They had the primary revelation of the Person of God. God entered into _____ with them, gave them the law, let them serve Him in the _____ and temple, and made a multitude of promises to them. From this people Israel came the patriarchs, and even Christ Jesus Himself. Yet, Paul mourns, most of the people of Israel have _____ Christ and are lost.

In verses 6 to 13, Paul discusses Israel’s rejection and God’s _____. He points out that Israel was not elected to serve God as His priestly kingdom based upon their _____ or merits. It was solely God’s choice. God chose Israel for this purpose; He did not choose _____. The thing of great importance we noted in this passage was that God’s choice, God’s election, was not an election to _____ but to service, the opportunity to serve God as the recipients of the Mosaic Covenant.

“What shall we say then?” affirms that the next verses retain the _____ context. Paul is asking, “In light of all we have stated about Israel so far, what shall we say?”

¹⁴ What shall we say then?

Is there unrighteousness with God?

Is there unrighteousness with God? In other words, “Was God _____ in choosing Israel and not choosing Edom (or any other nation)? Did God commit an injustice by choosing one nation and not choosing another?”

The answer is absolute: **Certainly not!** God is _____ unrighteous. Remember

Certainly not!

James 1:13 NKJV Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

Now the Holy Spirit through Paul offers explanation as to why God cannot be considered _____ in choosing one people over another people to be His people. As we consider Paul’s arguments, it is very important to remember that he is talking about _____ or people groups, not about individuals. In fact, note the subject matter of each set of verses in Romans 9.

VERSES	SUBJECT
1-5	Israel
6-13	_____ and Edom
14-16	Israel
17-21	Egypt
22-24	All God’s Children, the _____
25-26	Gentiles
27-29	Israel
30-33	_____ and Israel

For clarity’s sake, allow me to repeat the question being raised in verse 14, because the answer will take us all the way to the end of the chapter. Is God being unjust or unrighteous in His selecting one people group over another to be used by Him for particular purposes? As we saw previously, certainly not! Here are the reasons.

1. God does not _____ mercy to anyone. Paul quotes Ex. 33:19 where God and Moses are discussing God’s Presence with His chosen people Israel.

¹⁵ For He says
 to Moses,
*“I will have mercy
 on whomever
 I will have mercy,
 and
 I will have compassion
 on whomever
 I will have
 compassion.”*

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

Mercy means withholding the _____ justly imposed. If justice requires the penalty to be withheld, it is not mercy. Mercy is not the cancelation of justice. Justice determines the fault and sets the appropriate penalty. Mercy sets the penalty aside. _____ motivates mercy.

Verse 15, taken by itself, almost sounds like God is stingy in demonstrating mercy. In context, that is not the intent of the verse and certainly not the truth about God. In fact, if we follow the story of Ex. 33:19 on into Ex. 34:6, we find this statement from God about Himself:

Exodus 34:6 NKJV And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, _____ and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,

“Merciful” means _____ of mercy, and so God is.

Psalm 86:15 NKJV But You, O Lord, *are a God full of compassion, and gracious, Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.*

Psalm 119:64 NKJV The earth, O Lord, is full of Your mercy; ...

Psalm 145:8 NKJV The Lord *is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy.*

Paul’s point is not that God’s mercy is less than abundant but that it cannot be _____ or earned. It does not merely go to the one who _____ it or **wills** it nor to the one who _____ for it (**runs**). God determines the ones to whom He extends mercy. Since mercy is a gift and not a _____, God is not unjust or unrighteous when He does not grant it.

2. Paul’s next point in his explanation of why God is not unrighteous in choosing one people instead of another to be _____ people is really an explanation of God’s purpose (at least sometimes) in _____ mercy. The example is the nation of _____. The text speaks of Pharaoh, and what is said certainly applies to him personally, but the meaning is broader than just one man.

He is the head of the nation, and the whole nation suffers the plagues that fall.

The point of the discussion is the _____ of Pharaoh's heart. God did not show Pharaoh and Egypt mercy; instead God hardened the heart of Pharaoh so that God's power would be demonstrated through the falling of all of the plagues. So Paul rightly concludes, "Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens."

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

¹⁸ Therefore
He has mercy
on whom He wills,
and
whom He wills
He hardens.

And here the Calvinists have their favorite verse of Scripture. They say, "See, God in His sovereignty _____ Pharaoh for damnation, so God hardened his heart. It was not a matter of _____ for Pharaoh. God chose to withhold His mercy and harden Pharaoh. Pharaoh did not have the _____ to trust God because God did not elect him to salvation."

But that is not Paul's point here at all. First, he is not talking about Pharaoh's _____ destiny. Now, I am confident that Pharaoh is indeed in hell, because the Scripture says that he died while in the very midst of _____ against God by seeking to destroy the children of Israel. This certainly indicates that Pharaoh never repented and put his _____ in the Lord, so he clearly remained lost in his sins. But that is not what Paul is discussing.

Paul is examining the reason Pharaoh persistently kept _____ to obey God's command to let His people go. In spite of all the plagues and the misery and death they brought to Egypt, Pharaoh kept Israel in slavery. Common sense, even without faith in God, would have said, "Get them out of here. You are better off without them." But Pharaoh held on. Why? Because God _____ Pharaoh's heart so that he would not let Israel go until _____ of God's signs and wonders in Egypt were performed. Before the first plague fell, God said,

Exodus 7:3 NKJV And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.

And why, we should ask, why did God do that? Why did God harden Pharaoh's heart and prolong the plagues? And that is Paul's point here. God did it "that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." God withheld mercy to Pharaoh and Egypt in order to _____ mercy to the rest of the earth by leaving a testimony of His power, _____, and wrath. This testimony was so great that when a little girl named _____ grew up in the pagan city of Jericho, she heard the stories of this powerful God and believed. In faith she helped Israel take possession of the land God gave them and became one of the ancestors of Jesus, God's promised Messiah!

What if God had not hardened Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh had obeyed God's command and let Israel go? Would Pharaoh have been saved by that act of obedience? Of course _____! No one is saved by works. Pharaoh would have only been saved if he had _____ God, like Abraham did of old, so that faith could have been _____ as righteousness. God did not harden Pharaoh so he would not believe. Pharaoh already did not believe. God hardened his disobedience so that many could have a _____ that would lead them to faith!

Paul now envisions his readers taking up the case of the _____ who were tormented by all the plagues because of God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart. He sees them asking, "Then why did God _____ the Egyptians and let these disasters fall on them when they could not change God's will?" Notice that Paul does not _____ this question, immediately or later, because it is an _____ question. It _____ God sent the disastrous plagues because God blamed the Egyptians. He simply says, "God is Creator. It is His right to make each of us to serve His own _____."

God made one man an Israelite, and ultimately, the Israelites were set free and _____. God made another man an Egyptian. Ultimately they endured the pain, agony, death, and _____ of the plagues.

¹⁹ You will say to me then,
"Why does He still find fault?
For who has resisted
His will?"

²⁰ But indeed, O man,
who are you
to reply against God?
Will the thing formed
say to him who formed *it*,
"Why have you made me
like this?"

²¹ Does not the potter
have power
over the clay,
from the same lump
to make
one vessel
for honor and
another
for dishonor?

God alone determines which people group a person is born into, whether it be one “for honor” or “for dishonor.”

However, notice some things that are the same for the individuals in the two people groups.

- a. Both endured _____. The Israelite endured slavery, forced labor, and the government killing of his male children before his rescue by God. Afterward he experienced the trials of wandering in the wilderness, and died there, before reaching the Promised Land. He was among the vessels created for honor but that does not mean life was a bowl of cherries.
- b. Both were given the promise of knowing the Lord if they would _____ Him. This promise was not just to Israel, as Acts 15:17 and Acts 17:27 clearly demonstrate. Hebrews 11 offers us a catalog of heroes of the faith, people of Old Testament times that were saved by grace through faith. Of those, Abel, _____, Noah, and Rahab were all non-Israelites! Yet each of them came to know the Lord through faith.

This same question is asked all the time today. After Hurricane Katrina came through southeast Louisiana and southwest Mississippi, people were asking, “Why us?” or “Why them?” Some speculated that it was because of the great evil in New Orleans, especially as exhibited in the French Quarter. Maybe, but I personally doubt it. The reason I doubt that is not that New Orleans in general and the French Quarter in particular did not deserve God’s judgment. _____ deserved it. But if that had been God’s purpose, He would have done a better job. The French Quarter was one of the _____ damaged areas of central New Orleans, because it was built on naturally high ground. Just a few miles from the dens of iniquity that were spared on Bourbon Street was the Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, a congregation God had grown from less than a dozen people to several thousand with hundreds being saved out of New Orleans worst neighborhoods every year. The church was totally destroyed.

So why LA/MS? I have no idea. His thoughts are _____ than my thoughts. His ways are _____ than my ways. He is the potter. I am the _____. I have no right to say, “Why did You make me so that I would be here in the midst of this awful thing?” But in the midst of it all God promised each and every one

Jeremiah 29:13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

Each one had the opportunity to seek Him and find Him by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Each one had the opportunity to see the Master “cause all things to work together for good for those who love the Lord and are the called according to His purpose.”

God is _____ just and _____ of mercy.

Romans 9:22–33 NKJV 22 What if God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? 25 As He says also in Hosea: “*I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved.*” 26 “*And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ There they shall be called sons of the living God.*” 27 Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: “*Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved. 28 For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth.*” 29 And as Isaiah said before: “*Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, And we would have been made like Gomorrah.*” 30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 32 Why? Because *they did not seek it* by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. 33 As it is written: “*Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.*”

If we were not having to study through Romans in 60 minute segments, we would not have to pause at the beginning of each and remember the context established in the passage we studied last week. But none of us are able to study through each book of the Bible, twelve hours at a time, so that all of the background and context carries forward from one passage to another. So it is just a good and necessary discipline to stop and remember what preceded the text we now take up to study. This is actually a good practice anytime we study a portion of Scripture. We should always read before and after a particular passage to be sure that we understand it in its _____.

We worked hard establishing the context of all of Romans 9 in our previous study. We saw that the whole chapter is speaking of God’s purpose, election, and working among different _____ or people _____. It especially deals with God’s sovereign working with _____, but also includes God’s working in Edom, _____, the Gentiles, and in God’s children across national or ethnic boundaries: the _____. But we saw that the main point of the examination of context was that this chapter is focused on God’s work among people groups, not _____. So we pick up where we left off with this same context as we read verse 22.

²² What if God,
 wanting to show
 His wrath
 and
 to make His power
 known,
 endured with much
 longsuffering
 the vessels
 of wrath
 prepared for
 destruction,
²³ and that
 He might make known
 the riches of
 His glory on
 the vessels of mercy,
 which He had prepared
 beforehand
 for glory,

The first thing we want to ask about this verse is, “Who or what are the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?” They are some of those _____ or people groups such as are discussed throughout the chapter. After pointing out that the potter (_____) makes some things (nations) for _____ and some (nations) for dishonor, someone might well ask, “Why does God make them at all? He has perfect _____, so He knew in advance that they would turn out to be a pagan people, dishonoring the Creator who made them. So why did He go ahead and make them?” Verse 22 is the answer. Paul says, “Think about this - **What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power _____, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,** ²³ and that He might make known the riches of His _____ on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,

God went ahead and created these people groups who would turn against Him to _____ His wrath against sin and rebellion. In fact, God was very _____ with them (**much longsuffering**), giving them ample opportunity to repent.

Ezekiel 33:11 NKJV Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’

Did God know they would _____ turn, they would not _____? Of course. God knows everything. But He did not predestine them to _____. They chose to rebel, and God allowed it because He made them in His own _____ with freedom to choose. But God went ahead and made them, knowing they would reject Him, in order to demonstrate His power, _____, and wrath and especially to contrast that with the riches of His glory that He would make known to the vessels (nations, people _____) of mercy.

Now come the answers to two key questions that totally unlock the mysteries of Romans 9.

1. Who or what are these vessels of mercy?
 2. Since these vessels of mercy are prepared beforehand for the riches of God’s glory, why does God need to show them the contrast between His judgment and His mercy?
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²⁴ even us

whom He called,
not of the Jews only,
but also of the Gentiles?

²⁵ As He says also
in Hosea:

*"I will call them My people,
who were not My people,
And her beloved,
who was not beloved."*

²⁶ *"And it shall come to pass
in the place
where it was said
to them,
'You are not My people,'
There
they shall be called
sons of the
living God."*

²⁷ Isaiah also cries out
concerning Israel:

*"Though the number of the
children*

of Israel be

*as the sand of the sea,
The remnant will be saved.*

²⁸ *For He will finish the work
and cut it short
in righteousness,
Because the Lord will make
a short work
upon the earth."*

²⁹ And as Isaiah said before:
*"Unless the Lord of Sabaoth
had left us a seed,
We would have become
like Sodom,
And we would have been
made
like Gomorrah."*

1. Who or what are these vessels of mercy?

_____ are! Some from **the Jews**; _____ from **the Gentiles**. (Remember, the Gentiles compose all of the non-Jew people groups.) Then Paul starts talking about a people group called "**_____ people**." These are God's people. But Paul says an amazing thing. He says that people who were not a part of "God's people" have now been made a part of "God's people." They _____ people groups! At one time they were _____ a part of that group, and now they _____!

Paul is quoting Hosea (2:23) concerning this, and the context of this prophetic declaration makes it clear that Hosea is talking about _____, who were no longer God's people because they had broken the _____ covenant, and were therefore no longer considered the people of God. But God promised that one day they would again be called "**My people**," and they would be **beloved**, and they would be called "**_____ of the living God**."

Next Paul quotes **Isaiah** in 10:22-23. The point being that although there would be a vast number of Israelites, only a _____ number, a **remnant**, would **be saved** – would be a part of "**My people**." The Greek of verse 28 is tough. I like the Holman Christian Standard Bible translation the best: "**for the Lord will execute His sentence completely and decisively on the earth**." Paul refers here to the great _____ of God on the _____, first for following other gods that led to their captivity by the Assyrians and Babylonians, but then for rejecting Messiah which led to their dispersion over all the earth by the _____. And he again quotes Isaiah saying if the **Lord of _____ (Sabaoth)** had not **left** a believing **seed** (_____), all of Israel would have been utterly annihilated as were **Sodom** and **Gomorrah**.

Who or what are these vessels of mercy? They are those of different people groups who have been _____ and made a part of the people group called "**_____ people**."

The second question:

2. Since these vessels of mercy are prepared beforehand for the riches of God's glory, why does God need to show them the contrast between His judgment and His mercy?

The reason is seen when we discover how some Jews (but not _____ Jews) and some Gentiles (but not _____ Gentiles) become a part of "God's people."

The **Gentiles**, who for most of their existence have not _____ **righteousness**, Paul discovers are suddenly **attaining righteousness**. How? By _____!

Israel, on the other hand, long **pursued righteousness** by means of and through **the law**, or the Mosaic _____. But because the Mosaic covenant never offered to make them righteous, and because they could not and did not _____ up to the righteous standards of the law, they did **not attain righteousness** through it.

Why did most Israelites not obtain righteousness? Because **they did not seek it by _____** but instead sought it through the _____ **of the law**. God had warned them that the Chief Cornerstone, the Messiah, would become **a stone of offense** and a _____ **stone** to the Jews. This was so because the gospel Christ brought said they could never be _____ of being "God's people" because they were sinners. They were offended by that. They thought they were good enough to be "God's people" because they were _____ and because they at least tried to keep the law.

Most of the Jews just would not accept that salvation is "**by grace through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works so that no man can boast.**" (Eph. 2:8-9) They wanted to boast, but they did not want to _____. **So why did God need to demonstrate both His judgment and His mercy?** Because both motivate people to faith; judgment out of proper _____ of the Lord and mercy by showing the future glory of the _____.

³⁰ What shall we say then?
That Gentiles,
who did not pursue
righteousness,
have attained
to righteousness,
even the
righteousness of
faith;

³¹ but Israel,
pursuing the law of
righteousness,
has not attained
to the law of
righteousness.

³² Why?
Because *they did not
seek it* by faith,
but as it were,
by the works of the law.

For
they stumbled
at that stumbling stone.

³³ As it is written:
*"Behold, I lay in Zion
a stumbling stone and
rock of offense,*

*And
whoever believes on Him
will not be
put to shame."*

And why does God want to motivate people to believe?

Because whether a person **believes** – has **faith** – trusts in Christ, is what _____ whether they are saved and made a part of this people group called “**My people.**” They are not made a part of it because they were predestined by the sole and sovereign choice of God without regard to what _____ they would make in the time to come. No, God looked forward in his foreknowledge to see whether they would choose to respond in _____ to the sacrifice of His Dear Son on Calvary’s cross. Those whom He foresaw and _____, He predestined, because they would choose **faith.**

Those who go to hell go because they _____ to respond to God’s clear witness of Himself, first through _____ and then through Christ. They do not choose **faith**, so God in His foreseeing and foreknowing does not choose them to make them a part of “My _____.”

I find it fascinating that the end of this long discussion in the latter part of Romans 8 and all of chapter 9 that involves foreknowing, _____, God’s choosing, and election ends on this striking note: “ _____ **believes on Him will not be put to shame.**”
