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*“Divine Justice And Sovereign Mercy”*

ROMANS 9:14-18

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## AT A GLANCE

Perhaps no doctrine of the Church is more divisive than the doctrine of election. Predestination, Calvinism, election, doctrines of grace (TULIP) are hot topics in many Christian circles. When we began the series through Romans 18 months ago, we knew Romans 9 was coming. And with Romans 9, election. Paul didn't shy away from election and neither should we. We invite you to join us in our study of Romans 9 with a humble heart and open mind, seeking to know what God has revealed in His Word.

## INTRODUCTION

R.C. Sproul points out that of the three domains of God's sovereignty, almost everyone is good with God being sovereign over nature and over the law. They concede that God created everything out of nothing and upholds the universe by His will. Furthermore, all true Christians believe that God is right and just to impute upon humanity a moral law; that He is sovereign over right and wrong. Why? Because He is God and God is sovereign. Where 90% hop off the train, Sproul says, is when it comes to the third domain of God's sovereignty, which is His right to grant mercy to some and not to others. To many, this is simply not fair and they reject it. Romans nine confronts us with God's sovereignty in election, though. It's ok to wrestle with this, but we need to approach this subject with humility and embrace what the scripture teaches.

## ROMANS 9:14-18

**<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.**

## MODERN MAN PUTS GOD ON THE STAND

**Verse 14** begins **What shall we say then?** As soon as Paul quoted Malachi 1, “Jacob I loved but Esau I hated”, he could practically hear the exasperated moans and groans of the audience. “That's just not fair, Paul!” But he was prepared for objections, countering preemptively, **Is there injustice on God's part?** I remind you, be slow to judge God.

Daniel Doriani quoted C.S. Lewis here, “The ancient man approached God...as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man the roles are reversed. He is the judge: God is on the dock. He is quite a kindly judge: if God should have a reasonable defense for being the God who prevents war, poverty, and disease, he is ready to listen to it. The trial may even end in God's

acquittal. But the important thing is that man is on the bench and God is in the dock.” Oh, be slow to judge God modern man!

Is there injustice on God’s part? **By no means!** Paul concludes. Nothing could be further from the truth. There never has been and never will be. He could never give us injustice because what we are due, what justice demands, is infinite wrath for rebelling against an infinite God. That He has mercy on some is infinitely more merciful than God has to be.

## THE NAME OF THE LORD

**Verse 15 For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”** These words from Exodus 33:19 take place in the context of Moses’ petition for the Lord’s forgiveness of the Israelites who had turned from God and worshipped the golden calf. The Lord agreed to forgive Israel and Moses wanted assurance that it God would keep His word, so he asked to see His glory. God agreed and said I’ll make my goodness pass before you and proclaim before you my name, *The Lord*.

That is when God said, *“And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.” Exodus 33:19* Divine mercy, compassion, and grace are thus a revelation of His name. It’s who He is. He has the right to choose to give divine justice to some and sovereign mercy to others.

In the debate about God’s election, I never hear the demand that God gives *justice* to everyone. And yet the objection is “This is an injustice!” I hear no one clamoring that God gives justice to all people. Why is that? It is because those who have received God’s mercy understand that it is not in His justice that we find hope for salvation, but in His mercy.

However, we have no right to make demands upon God’s mercy. Imagine the creation holding up a fist to the Creator, against whom they have rebelled and forsaken and whose blessings they have squandered on their own selfishness, demanding that God gives to all the mercy that He chooses to give to some. The absurdity of such a thought! How much more audacious when the one shaking the fist has been undeserving recipient of His mercy!

## ENMITY IN THE HUMAN HEART

Charles Spurgeon said, “If there is one doctrine in the world which reveals the enmity of the human heart more than another, it is the doctrine of God’s sovereignty. When men hear the Lord’s voice saying, ‘I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,’ they gnash their teeth and call the preacher an Antinomian, a High Calvinist, or some other hard name. They do not love God except they can make him a little God. They cannot bear for him to be supreme. They would gladly take his will away from him and set up their own will as the first cause...” That is, the first cause of their salvation.

If there were any lingering doubt as to which will is the first cause in our salvation, which will is effectual, God’s will or man’s will, Paul puts the debate to bed in **verse 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.** Thomas Schreiner asserts, “This verse excludes in the clearest possible terms the notion that free will is the fundamental factor in divine election.” Saint, you did not choose God first. He first chose you and then you responded to Him in faith. *Ordo salutis* matters. Understanding the order of our salvation has massive effect on our lives and I will speak to this briefly at the end.

For now, Paul states explicitly it does not depend on **human will or exertion**. In other words, there is nothing we do to affect our salvation. Unless God shows us mercy by working in us, no amount of human effort or works or free will have any saving effect.

Consider the concept of presidential clemency. One of the privileges of being the head of the Executive Branch as the President of the United States is the choice to grant a pardon to someone

convicted of a crime. In choosing to grant clemency to one person, is the president then unjust for not granting it to every prisoner? No one has the no right to *demand* a presidential pardon. They are not denied justice when they get what they deserve, even if another gets what he does not. Likewise, Esau received justice while Jacob received mercy. No one received injustice.

## PHAROAH RAISED UP FOR THIS PURPOSE

Paul returns to the Exodus story in **verse 17**, this time backing up to the story of Moses and Pharaoh found in Exodus 9:16 to give another real-life example of God's sovereignty. **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 told Moses to say to Pharaoh that by now He could have struck him and his people with pestilence and they would have been cut off from the earth. But God had raised up Pharaoh for this purpose; literally caused him to stand. God's purpose in propping up Pharaoh as the most powerful man in the world? To show that God is more powerful and to make His name known in all the earth. That His glory would resound from the heavens to the earth. That it would cover the earth like the waters cover the seas. That everyone would know that Pharaoh is no god; Yahweh is God.

Once again one might say, "That's not fair!" What you need to remember is that despite many opportunities to humble himself, Pharaoh continued to exalt himself. God sent the seventh plague of hail and fire after giving Pharaoh opportunities to submit. We read that God hardened Pharaoh's after Pharaoh hardened his own heart numerous times. It's as if God said, "You want to exalt yourself to the place of glory? I'm not going to contend with you." God says, *"I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other..." Isaiah 42:8*

## SOLI DEO GLORIA

Jesus came proclaiming the Kingdom of God, exalting the name of the Father, living only for His glory. And now Jesus sits at the Father's right hand in a place of glory as the head of the Church. The church, His body, exists today to achieve the Father's will of proclaiming the glorious gospel of Christ to every nation, every tribe, and every tongue. We are Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem, and Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth **that [His] name might be proclaimed in all the earth.** It is our job, church, to live *solī deo gloria!* For the glory of God alone.

One day every knee in heaven and on earth will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Jesus will execute judgment over all the nations and there will be some from every ethnos, every nation, who were called unto life, whose name was written in the Lamb's book of life before the foundation of the world, who will inherit the eternal riches of God's mercy and will dwell under Jesus' perfect rule forever.

Likewise, there will be people from every ethnos who receive the just judgement for their sin. Who is in each group is not for us to know, nor even to try to know. Rather, what is ours is the task to go to the highways and hedges and compel any and all who would come to enter.

Some people imagine that on judgement day there will be innocent people who look at God and say, "How could you punish me?" They imagine that every person would respond to Jesus given the chance. I wonder, though, what they make of the many people who personally followed Jesus in His earthly ministry, observed firsthand the glorious miracles He performed, heard the authoritative teachings of our master, and witnessed His resurrection from the dead, yet still refused to bow their knees to Him?

What do you do with the nine lepers who failed to return to give thanks for their healing like the one did? What about Judas Iscariot, who walked with Jesus for three years, heard the gospel preached

over and over again, and sold Jesus out for 30 pieces of silver? What about the Pharisees who were primed to be looking for the Messiah and could not, no would not, acknowledge Him when He stood in front of their faces?

On judgement day there will be no whimpering and cries of unfairness. Rather sin will be revealed for what it really is in the presence of the holy God, and sinners exposed by the light of God's holiness will gnarl their lips as they begrudgingly bow their knees, gnash their teeth, and confess that Jesus is Lord in forced submission.

They will revile Him in their hearts and reject Him as King just as they did when Jesus was paraded around at the whims of the Romans and Jews. No one is going to level the accusation of injustice toward God on that day.

Sinners will get what they deserve, and saints will get mercy. **Verse 18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.** Paul didn't shrink back from the doctrine of election, and neither shall we.

Charles Spurgeon asks an insightful question, "How shall those who are the subjects of divine election sufficiently adore the grace of God? They have no room for boasting, for sovereignty most effectually excludes it. The Lord's will alone is glorified, and the very notion of human merit is cast out to everlasting contempt. There is no more humbling doctrine in Scripture than that of election, none more promotive of gratitude, and, consequently, none more sanctifying. Believers should not be afraid of it, but adoringly rejoice in it."

Indeed, we rejoice in God's divine justice and sovereign mercy. It is our assurance that God will hold us to the end because it was not we who chose Him, but He who chose us.

## TWO WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Let me leave you with a few words of encouragement and draw your attention back to the *ordo salutis*, order of salvation.

1. No one is too far gone! Because it does not depend upon human will or exertion, there is literally no one too far for God to save them. No one was more opposed to Christ than the man who wrote half the New Testament, including the letter we're reading today, Paul.

Paul hated Christ and the Church; even willing to kill Christians to stop the faith. That is, until Christ saved him. Paul repeatedly underscored the depth of his sin, I believe, to convey to the church and even those not yet in the church who might read his words, that there is no one too lost for Jesus to find.

When we meet the Paul's and Pharaoh's of the world, we might feel inclined to write them off as hopeless. This may be what you feel about loved ones in your family or in our sphere of influence. You might despair because it seems as though nothing will break through their hard hearts. Bring them to the throne of grace and fall upon the mercy of God in intercession.

Then again, hopeless might be how you feel about yourself. I also want you to know that you can be saved from God's divine justice and receive His sovereign mercy today if you will repent and believe the gospel. Jesus laid down His life for your sin to make you righteous. Sinner, I invite you to repent, believe, call upon Christ as Lord, and be saved.

2. Saints will be saved. For those who wonder how many times they can mess up before they get kicked to the divine curb, I want to also remind you that our salvation is not based on human will or exertion, but on God's mercy. Have you heard of the doctrine of perseverance of the saints? Some abbreviate it to "once saved, always saved" but that's easy to get twisted.

The whole concept of perseverance of the saints is founded upon the doctrine of election. Perseverance of the saints does not to say that no one who was ever part of the church and no one who was ever baptized and no one who ever walked an aisle or raised a hand or prayed a prayer or did some other kind of religious ritual will come to realize they do not actually believe the gospel and fall away from the church.

Rather the bible teaches that those who are saved now, whom the bible calls *saints*, will be saved in the end. "Those whom He justified, He also glorified," Paul said in Romans 8. He also said in Philippians 1, "*And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*" *Philippians 1:6*

Because you had nothing to do with your salvation, there is nothing you can do to lose it. If salvation begins with your choice, well, you might choose to let it go. But praise the Lord, no one chose Christ first, as Jesus said, "*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide...*" *John 15:16* If Christ chose you, He ain't changin' His mind! What a glorious word!

But watch this, you see what you were appointed to? To bear fruit! Paul said in Ephesians 2 that we're saved by grace through faith, but we're saved to good works prepared beforehand. What is that work? It is to make God's name known in all the earth to the praise of His glorious grace. Amen? Go in peace and bear much fruit by proclaiming the name of the just and merciful Lord our God!

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