

God's Choice: Part 2

Romans 9:19-29

June 26, 2011

Last week we saw that God is in charge of everything, even over who is saved and who is not saved. As Paul was making the case for this truth he paused to look at two objections to it. The first, that God is unjust, we looked at last week. Paul's answer to that was to refer to God's declaration to Moses in Exodus 33, *"God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."* (Romans 9:18) This morning's passage begins with the second objection to God's sovereignty over our eternal destiny, and then moves on to conclude Paul's argument for God's absolute sovereignty over who is brought into His kingdom.

Since those who receive God's mercy are chosen by God, there is two obvious questions. Last week it was asked, "Is God unjust?" Paul answered "No." This week Paul addresses those who say that, since it is God's choice whether or not we will come to Him and be saved, why does He still hold anybody accountable for their sins? If I am still in my sin because of God's choice, how can He count my sin against me? Paul put it this way, *"One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?'"* (v.19) This is a common complaint of those who hear this truth.

Paul's answer to it is simple and direct. *"[W]ho are you, O man, to talk back to God? 'Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"* Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble

purposes and some for common use?" (vv.20,21) Paul points out that we are hardly in a position to argue with God or to tell Him He is wrong. God made us. He formed us from the dust of the ground. The life that energizes every cell in our bodies is from Him. The planet on which we live was crafted by Him. The air we breathe is provided by Him. When dealing with the issue of people blaming God for their sin Jesus' brother, James, pointed out, *"Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."* (James 1:16-18) Just because our fallen minds and hearts don't like something doesn't make it evil. As God's creation we are in no position to **question** Him.

We established last week that we are all deserving of condemnation and hell. From our perspective in this fallen world we think it horrible that God would condemn anybody. Yet, looked at from God's perspective, it is only the result of His grace and direct action in the world that anybody get to heaven. This must always be our starting point. All hearts are turned from God until the Holy Spirit moves in those God has chosen to turn them to Him. We are all God's enemies until He turns us into His children. Our hearts were all turned against God until God changed them. It is God's work in us that gives us a heart for Him and a desire to follow Him.

Paul compared God to a **potter**. He was not the first to make this comparison. It shows up a couple of

times in the Old Testament because it is such an apt picture of God's relationship with His creation, including us. The potter is free to do whatever he or she wants with the clay. The clay does not get to decide what it is.

I have here a work of art formed from clay. A little clay, a little glaze, some skilled craftsmanship, and a hot furnace will get you a beautiful teacup. Clay, glaze, and craftsmanship go into making those really expensive dishes we only get out for special occasions or our most honored guests. Of course, the same clay, glaze, and skill can also shape the seats we hide in our bathrooms and generally don't talk about in polite company. The raw materials are basically the same. It is the will of the maker that determines whether the clay becomes a teacup or a toilet.

This is exactly Paul's point. God made us. He designed us. We are fashioned according to His will, and more importantly, for His purpose. We have no right to question anything He does. If He makes us for common use, so be it. If He makes us for noble use, so be it.

So, what is God's purpose in doing things this way? Paul begins to look at that by asking a series of questions. *"What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?"* (vv.22-24)

The first purpose Paul raises is the **revelation** of God's wrath and power. Again, we are consumed with our desire for happiness and we assume that God is dedicated to our happiness as well. God isn't. God's chief concern is for His glory and honor. Since Adam, Eve, and everybody after them has willfully sinned against God, God's wrath must be assuaged and His creation must be reminded of His power. God acts out of His wrath, but He does not act rashly. His responses are measured. He does not lose control when He lashes out. Thus, He demonstrates His wrath and power, at least in part, by patiently bearing with the objects of His wrath. He waits until their sin is complete and they have satisfied themselves in the hardening of their hearts against Him. God desires to glorify Himself by displaying His good and appropriate wrath and power against His creation which has rebelled against Him.

The second purpose is to make the **riches** of His glory known to the objects of His mercy. God is not only a God of vengeance and wrath. He is also a God of love and mercy and He has decided to be gracious to some of those who deserve destruction and instead bring them into His glory. As Paul wrote to the church in Rome he recognized them as part of this group. If you are listening to me know and you desire God and want to be pleasing to Him, you are most likely part of the chosen as well. There are those, not visibly different from the people around them in any way, through whom God has chosen to reveal His glory by being merciful to them.

With this, Paul made his way back to his original point which brought him to the topic of God's

sovereignty to begin with. It's not physical descent from Abraham which makes a person a member of God's people, it is faith. This has been Paul's point throughout this letter. Yet even faith is a gift from God. God chose which of Abrahams descendants He would bless. God has also chosen to bless some who are not physical descendants of Abraham. God has not only prepared some Jews to display His **glory**, He has even prepared some Gentiles.

In Paul's day, especially among the Jews, this was an incredible statement. The Jews were so convinced that they were God's chosen people, and the Gentiles could not be saved, that they had basically given up trying to share God's grace and mercy with those around them. They were content being in while the rest of the world was out. Yet God had blessed them that they might be a blessing to others. He had chosen them so that, through them, He might redeem the others He had also chosen.

This statement was so remarkable, that Paul looked to the Old Testament to support it. Paul started his case that God's salvation extends beyond the Jews by appealing to the stories of the patriarchs. We ended last week with Paul's appeal to God's statement to Moses. As Paul comes to the end of his argument that the Gentiles are included he appeals to the prophets.

Paul began with the prophet, Hosea. Paul paraphrased Hosea's prophecy, and even mixed up the order of the two statements and the two passages to which he looked. First, Paul paraphrased Hosea 2:23: *"I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those*

called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'" Then, Paul referred to Hosea 1:10: *"In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"* Through Hosea God declared that He would call back to Himself those who had rejected Him. Those He had said He no longer loved because of their sin He would love again. Those He had said were no longer His people because they had rejected Him and His ways would be His people again.

There is a difficulty here in that, in Hosea, this statement by God is limited to the Jews. It was God's way of saying that, even though much of Israel was destined for destruction, He would not completely wipe them out. There would be some to whom God would show mercy. Paul applies it here to the Gentiles. His point seems to be that, just as God chose among the Israelites who would be saved and who would be destroyed, God is also free to choose from among the Gentiles. They are not physical descendants of Abraham, but they are still made by God, and thus God is free to choose them just as He chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thus, even Gentiles can be included in those God calls, "my people," and "my loved one."

From Hosea, Paul moved to Isaiah. Here he more closely quotes the prophet. Look with me at Isaiah 10:22,23. *"Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous. The Lord, the LORD Almighty, will carry out the destruction decreed upon the whole land."* Again, Isaiah was talking about Israel and the fact that God would leave a

remnant to be saved out of the destruction He would bring on them. Paul extends the point to say that the remnant includes Gentiles as well as Jews. Just as not all Jews will be saved, some Gentiles will be. God brings judgement on sin, but in His grace and mercy that judgement does not lead to the destruction of all. God's people will not be like Sodom and Gomorrah which were wiped off the map completely.

God is not unjust, though by our limited understanding it may seem He is. We dare not judge Him by our standards, especially since we do not even begin to live up to His. Thanks be to God, however, that He has chosen to save some, and that those He saves are kept by His power and omnipotent hand. There is nothing that can tear away from Him those He has chosen for Himself. There is nothing that can take His children out of His hands. If you belong to Him then your sins are forgiven, you are destined for an eternity in His loving presence and coming to know His infinite greatness, and you walk this earth a new, cleaned vessel. There is nothing visible about the people of God when He chooses them. It is His choice and is not dependant on anything about those He chooses. Yet, once chosen, His people are different. We are no longer sinners, we are God's children and saints in the heavenly kingdom. We begin to look like our master. We begin to act like Jesus. Our characters are molded to be the same as His.

We will look at how this happens over the next several weeks. For now, let us rejoice that God's destruction is not complete, but that He has saved a remnant for Himself. If we are in Christ, then we can

rejoice that God has chosen us to be a part of that remnant.