



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 31



GOD'S RIGHTEOUS WORKING

^{9:14} 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 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? 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." – Romans 9:14-29 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

Speaking out of His profound fellowship with Christ, Paul confessed he had *"great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart"* for the Israelites, his *"kinsmen according to the flesh."* His desire for their salvation was so great he *"could wish"* himself accursed and cut off from Christ in order that they might be saved. All of the remarkable advantages

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. IS GOD UNRIGHTEOUS? (9:14)
- II. MERCY IS GIVEN BY DIVINE DISCRETION (9:15)
- III. HUMAN WILL AND EFFORT ARE NOT THE FOUNDATION (9:16)
- IV. PHARAOH WAS RAISED UP BY GOD (9:17-18)
- V. FLESH IS CONFUSED (9:19-21)
- VI. VESSELS OF WRATHY AND VESSELS OF MERCY (9:22-24)
- VII. A CHANGE IN STATUS (9:25-26)
- VIII. A REMNANT WILL BE SAVED (9:27)
- IX. THE WORK WILL BE FINISHED (9:28)
- X. THE LORD LEFT A REMNANT (9:29)

had been given to them, including “the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.” The “fathers,” Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, belonged to them, and the Lord Jesus Himself came from them (9:1-5). Over 1,500 years of Divine investment were focused on this nation. A God who cannot lie made promises to them, yet it appeared it had all been for nought. Throughout the centuries, the Lord held forth His hands to a “disobedient and gainsaying (contrary) people” (Rom 10:21). They “killed the prophets” (Matt 23:31), and “killed the Lord Jesus” (1 Thess 2:15). Because they “did not know” the time of their “visitation,” their house was left desolate, the holy city ravaged, and the temple decimated (Lk 19:43-44; 21:20-24; Matt 24:1-2).

In all of this, God was impeccably righteous, confirming He “will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation” (Ex 34:7). Equally true, God was righteous in preserving a remnant among a rebellious people (1 Kgs 19:18; Rom 11:6). He was right in judging the nation, yet not utterly destroying it. He was right in preserving the nation for the father’s sake. He was also righteous in opening the “door of faith unto the Gentiles” (Acts 15:18).

In his idle curiosity, man questions God, doubting His righteousness in all that He does. Thus some become “angry with God” when things do not go their way, or they are caused to pass through the sea of trouble and vexation like Job. Others simply ask “Why me?”, as though God had not been fair with them, or they deserved a better portion in this life.

We are living in a period of time when the wisdom of man has been unduly exalted—even to the point of questioning the authenticity of Scripture, as well as the righteousness of God. These are truly “perilous times” (2 Tim 3:1), for as soon as man begins to question God, he is immediately on shifting sand. One of the purposes of these lessons is to encourage wholesome and profitable thoughts concerning God and Christ. God is “King over all the earth,” “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever” (Psa 47:2; Rom 11:36). Christ “is over all, God blessed for ever” (Rom 9:5).

SALVATION IS THE WORK OF GOD

Throughout this section of Scripture, the Spirit is confirming that, from beginning to end, salvation is the work of God. In the end, when everything has been made clear, ALL of the glory will go to the Lord. The vast body of the redeemed will shout insightfully, “Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God!” ^{NKJV} (Rev 19:1). And again, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” ^{NKJV} (Rev 7:10). Without a single dissenting voice, the saved of the earth will join in the Psalmic expression, “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, But to Your name give glory, Because of Your mercy, Because of Your truth” (Psa 115:1). That is something of what is being confirmed in the book of Romans.

Consider What God Has Made In Regards to Redemption

- God MADE us the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Cor 5:21).
- He MADE many to be righteous by the obedience of Christ (Rom 5:19).
- Christ has MADE us free (Gal 5:1).
- God has MADE us accepted in the Beloved (Eph 1:6).
- He MADE us sit together with Him in heavenly places (Eph 2:6).
- He MADE both Jew and Gentile one

body (Eph 2:14).

- Peace was MADE through the blood of Christ’s cross (Col 1:20).
- God MADE Jesus to be wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to us (1 Cor 1:30).
- We have been MADE right by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:13).
- We have been MADE heirs (Tit 3:7).
- God can MAKE all grace abound to us (2 Cor 9:8).
- God can MAKE us increase and abound in love toward one another (1 Thess 3:12).
- We have all been MADE to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).
- Believers are a “new creation”—MADE by God (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Eph 2:10; James 1:18).

Because this is an aspect of God that is little proclaimed, I feel compelled to further declare what God MAKES. There is a remarkable depth to this facet of Divine activity. I am not stating these things to merely affirm their possibility. Rather, I intend for this to confirm that God is able to fulfill His promises to Israel.

- God **makes** dumb, deaf, seeing, and blind (Ex 4:11).
- He **makes** alive (1 Sam 2:6).
- He **makes** poor and rich (1 Sam 2:7).
- He **makes** a person’s way perfect (2 Sam 22:33; Psa 18:32).
- He **makes** sore and binds up (Job 5:18).
- He **makes** the heart soft (Job 23:16).
- He **makes** the trusting soul to lie down in green pastures (Psa 23:2).

Things God Made or Caused

It is necessary to confirm that God can, and does, intrude into human affairs, causing things to happen. Man is not the governor of his own affairs, and his will is not invincible.

- God MADE everything Joseph did to prosper (Gen 39:3,23; 45:8,9).
- He MADE Israel dwell in booths when they came out of Egypt (Lev 23:43).
- He MADE Israel wander (Num 32:13).
- He MADE the heart of the king of Heshbon obstinate (Deut 2:30).
- He MADE Israel joyful (Ezra 6:22; Neh 12:43).
- He MADE man’s strength to fail (Lam 1:14).

- He MADE Israel's joyful shouting to cease (Isa 16:10).
- He MADE sighing to cease (Isa 21:2).
- He MADE Ezekiel's face strong, or determined (Ezek 3:8-9).
- He MADE David glad (Psa 92:4).
- He MADE David wiser than his counselors (Psa 119:98).
- He MADE Israel to err, and wander from His ways (Isa 63:17).

The purpose for this brief diversion is to anchor our faith in the God who promises, and cannot lie. The fulfillment of His commitments is something that brings great glory to Him. It is also within both His prerogatives and power to bring

about that fulfillment in spite of seemingly impossible circumstances. The creation of the nation of Israel, and the birth of her ultimate offspring, Jesus, were impossible from the human point of view. Why should anyone think the fulfillment of His promises to them is any less possible? Is not the One who gave the promise capable of fulfilling it? Faith replies in the reasoning of our father Abraham: *"And being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform"* (Rom 4:20).

Men are often prone to think of God's promises as though they were mere possibilities. There must be a deliverance

from this mind-set if faith is ever to flourish. If we are made *"partakers of the Divine nature"* through the *"exceeding great and precious promises of God"* (2 Pet 1:4), the heart must be persuaded of the commitment of God to fulfill them. It is the prerogative of faith to do this.

Now, the Spirit will show us that God is absolutely righteous in all of His workings. Whatever He causes is RIGHT, whether it is cutting off branches, grafting in wild olive branches, or grafting in again the branches that were cut off. It is vital that we see this truth, in order that our faith might rest confidently in the One who has saved and keeps us.

IS GOD UNRIGHTEOUS?

" 9:14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! (God forbid! ^{KJV})." It is the manner of the Spirit to foresee fleshly doubts and answer them. These are always questions of doubt, erupting from hearts that are not pure or dominated by faith. They are not asked in a quest to find the truth, but are objections to the truth that has been declared. The Lord always answers such questions in a straightforward manner, and with minimal explanation. It is not God's manner to reason extensively with the flesh. The objections raised by the flesh are not valid. Therefore, they are always answered with affirmations, not reasoning.

IS THERE UNRIGHTEOUSNESS WITH GOD?

Flesh erroneously reasons, "There IS unrighteousness with God." While those precise words may not comprise the reasoning, yet they encapsulate how flesh thinks. The Spirit comes to grips with real issues, not the smokescreen reasoning of the carnal man. This is precisely why the flesh refuses to believe and obey God. It is why it is hostile toward the Creator. **It does not believe God is right.**

Jewish flesh reasons that God is not right in cutting off those who did not believe. Gentile flesh reasons that God is not right in keeping Israel beloved for the

father's sake, or in grafting them in again. Both lines of thought are completely wrong. Contemporaries would chide God by saying He was not being "fair," or that the difficulties that came upon them did not make sense, or were even unjust.

To be even more specific, this rhetorical question is asked because of the strong statements the Spirit has made. Ponder some of them.

- Was God unrighteous for restricting

Critical aspects of God's character were introduced in chapter eight. They were associated with His great salvation, and were addressed to our faith. Divine foreknowledge and predestination were declared to be pillars that are prominent in extricating men from sin and conforming them to the image of God's Son

Divine discretion is a fact. Yet it cannot be received by the flesh, which insists on such things as the "unconditional love" of everyone, even though no such affirmation is found in Scripture. It balks at God choosing a people independently of their own worthiness or achievement. Flesh cannot abide a God who actually rejects others who, like many, have an appearance of being good and industrious--like Ishmael and Esau. But God makes such choices, and does so righteously.

the recognized seed of Abraham as those coming through Isaac? (9:7-8)

- Was God unrighteous in loving Jacob and hating Esau before they were born? (9:11a)
- Was God unrighteous in loving Jacob and hating Esau independently of any good or evil they had done? (9:11b)
- Was God unrighteous in determining that the elder Esau should serve the younger Jacob, overriding the rights of the firstborn? (9:12)

Critical aspects of God's character

were introduced in chapter eight. They were associated with His great salvation, and were addressed to our faith. Divine foreknowledge and predestination were declared to be pillars that are prominent in extricating men from sin and conforming them to the image of God's Son (8:29-30). These qualities have also been declared as evident in the choice of the nation of Israel, and the persons of Isaac and Jacob. It is imperative that we acknowledge God was righteous in all of these things, making no attempt to explain them with the mind of the flesh.

I want to draw particular attention to the manner in which the Spirit answers the hypothetical question, "Is there unrighteousness with God?" This will not be the kind of answer a worldly philosopher would want. Nor, indeed, will it satisfy the idle curiosity of the religious "scholar." Nevertheless, this is Divine reasoning, and we do well to adapt our thinking to it.

GOD FORBID!

The KJV and ASV versions reads "God forbid," which is the expression of the sense of the text rather than a literal translation. Sophists object to the use of this expression, saying it is not a proper translation. They allow for the sense of words elsewhere, but not here.

The words from which this expression is translated are μη γένωιτο. This phrase is used fifteen times in the New Testament Scriptures, and is always an extremely strong expression (Lk 20:16; Rom 3:4,6, 31; 6:2,15; 7:7,13; 9:14; 11:1,11; 1 Cor 6:15; Gal 2:17; 3:21; 6:14). It is translated in a variety of ways.

"Certainly not,"^{NKJV} "May it never be,"^{NASB} "Not at all,"^{NIV} "By no means,"^{NRSV} "Out of the question,"^{NJB} and "Of course not."^{NAB}

It is an expression of strong aversion to the very thought that is suggested. The

manner is an imagination to be cast down (2 Cor 10:5-6). This is precisely what the following verses will do. They will throw the notion that God is unrighteous down to the ground, trampling it under the feet of Divine reasoning.

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words "God forbid" would be equivalent to saying, "May the Lord stop such a thought from entering my mind!" It expresses the spirit of the text, which is being uttered before the Almighty God, as well as unto finite man. It is best not to attempt to explain the text academically, or from a mere linguistic point of view. It is too strong of an expression to take that approach. **The idea is that God has made no provision whatsoever to entertain such a thought.** It is also that the man of God is repulsed by the very idea, and calls upon the Lord to protect him from such an imagination.

Men are simply not allowed to entertain questions about whether or not God is right. He IS righteous in all of His doings, and there is to be no question about it – particularly from those who "have sinned and come short of His glory" (3:23). The idea that it is possible for God to choose or work in an unrighteous

Whether it is Naaman questioning the propriety of dipping seven times in the River Jordan (2 Kgs 5:10-12), or king Saul questioning the wisdom of totally destroying the Amalekites (1 Sam 15:14-19), questioning the decrees and purposes of God is never right. It will not be tolerated by the all-wise God!

The people of God must exercise themselves to adopt a view of God and Scripture that yields to faith, not to reason. Although men are fond of theological views that promote questions, no such encouragement is found in the Word of God. Scripture promotes faith, for "faith cometh by hearing," not reasoning (Rom 10:17). If this seems strong, it will shortly appear to be extremely mild in the blazing glory of God's answer. He will not reason with flesh, but will strongly affirm the way things really are. We will be called to believe God and not question Him or doubt His righteousness.

MERCY IS GIVEN BY DIVINE DISCRETION

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."

Here is a stirring challenge to those who insist on passing the Word of God through humanly devised filters, or hermeneutics. I realize it is not popular to speak in this manner, and yet it is

necessary to do so. In the past few decades, there has been a remarkable trend toward human philosophizing in religion. The inclination has always been there, but never in such proportions as it has been since knowledge has been deified in the professed church.

The Spirit will simply affirm the truth—truth that has been asserted by God

Himself. He will offer no extended rationale for the statement as men desire, but will declare this is what God does. It is the business of men to bring their thinking into accord with this affirmation. What is more, until they do, they are wrong, and nothing will change that except to acknowledge that God is right in what He does. It is neither right nor safe to think in contradiction of God.

The statement is taken from Exodus 33:19, where God Almighty is showing His glory—His real Person—to Moses, the servant of God. In those days, this was not something everyone heard. But in our day, it is being published throughout the world in Paul’s exposition of the Gospel of Christ. Moses had asked the Lord, “Show me Thy glory.” Here was God’s response. *“I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and **will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.**”*

Notice, God is exposing Moses to His “goodness,” and is proclaiming His own Divine character—His “name.” This is not a novel or irrelevant view, but an essential one. In the very revelation given to Moses, Divine discretion was used. The goodness of the Lord, together with a declaration of His nature, was vouchsafed to Moses **alone**. God was not doing this merely because Moses asked, but because He willed to do so—God WANTED to do this.

The reading of the text appears clumsy, yet the meaning will come home to your heart. The idea expressed is *“I will have mercy on whomever I will [to have] mercy.”* A few versions pick up on this thought. *“I will show mercy to whom I will, I will take pity on whom I will.”*^{NAB} *“I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose.”*^{NLT} Whoever receives mercy from God receives it because He wills to show them mercy. Whoever receives compassion from God receives it because He wills to show it to them. He has not been motivated by their need of mercy and compassion, nor because they have sought it from Him. He has been moved by His own beneficent heart.

God chose Israel because He wanted to! He loves them for the fathers’ sakes because He wants to. He chose Isaac because He wanted to! He loved Jacob because He wanted to! If that is not enough for a person, then that person requires too much. It is unwise, indeed, to refuse God the right to do what He wants.

This answer is much like the one given in one of our Lord’s matchless parables. Declaring the Kingdom of God to be like a householder, or landowner, He spoke of that householder hiring groups of laborers throughout the day. He hired some “early in the morning,” some at “the third hour,” some at the “sixth and ninth hour,” and some at the “eleventh hour” (6:00 AM, 9:00 AM, 12:00 PM, 3:00 PM, and 5:00 PM). At the conclusion of the day, “the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire,

agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” (Matt 20:1-16). The response reads this way in the NIV. **“I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?”** Remember, Jesus is showing us the manner of the Kingdom! He is showing us the Father and His will.

Care must be taken when dealing with this facet of the Divine nature. There must be no provision for the entrance of doubt or unbelief. Nor, indeed, can we allow the tenderhearted to be crushed or bruised. God is not only righteous, He is also good.

The householder declared that his will and nature fully justified what he did. Thus, no fault could be found with it. Besides this, the laborers agreed to work for the wage, and it was none of their affair what other laborers received. That was given purely at the discretion of himself. It was not open for discussion. Further, his wages were an expression of goodness, not injustice.

Thus, no Gentile can raise an objection because mercy is still held out to the Jews. God does what He desires, and that should be good enough for us. We have agreed to receive His salvation, and have absolutely no input on what He desires for others – particularly “the Israelites,” Paul’s kinsmen according to the flesh. Recognizing this circumstance, Paul simply embraced the mind of the Lord concerning the Jews, refusing to question Divine preferences.

NOT A COLD DOCTRINE

Care must be taken when dealing with this facet of the Divine nature. There must be no provision for the entrance of doubt or unbelief. Nor, indeed, can we allow the tenderhearted to be crushed or bruised. God is not only righteous, He is also good. The very fact that He chooses to whom He will show mercy and compassion is an expression of His goodness. To confirm this, the Lord has condescended to reveal to the sons of men those to whom He wills to show mercy and compassion. Ponder what He says.

beginning from the last unto the first.” Beginning at the last and ending with the first, he gave every laborer an identical wage: “a penny,” or “a denarius.”^{NKJV}

The workers had not worked identical hours. Some worked twelve hours, others, nine, others, six, others three, and some only one hour. Therefore, the ones working longer remonstrated at the wages they received. It is written, *“they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.”* I should suppose their objection would be acknowledged as proper by most any labor consultant. But that is not a proper view.

Remembering that this is our Lord’s depiction of the Kingdom of God, consider the answer given to the complainers. *“But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou*

☐ *“ . . . to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite*

spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isa 66:2).

- ❑ *“The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit”* (Psa 34:18).
- ❑ *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise”* (Psa 51:17).
- ❑ *“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy”* (Matt 5:7).

It simply is not possible to be in any of the above categories and God NOT desire to show you mercy and compassion. He is faithful to His Person and Word.

Thus, we will not stumble at what God has said about Himself showing mercy to those He wills. That is His prerogative, and we have no right to question it. That circumstance, however, brings no disadvantage to anyone who desires mercy and seeks to find grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:15-16).

The Manner of God’s Answer

I cannot leave this point without again drawing your attention to the way in which God answers the objections of the flesh. He appeals to **His nature and will**, not to human reason. He does not dialog with us in the flesh, thereby leaving

us depending on natural resources. In so doing, faith is being promoted. He is leading us to trust Him, knowing He cannot do what is wrong, or conduct Himself unrighteously.

He is also impressing upon us the inferiority and unacceptability of human reasoning. **If we do not believe His words, they will confuse us.** As much as lies within us, we must labor to promote these vital perceptions in our preaching and teaching, never gravitating to the flesh. Whenever possible, we must extend ourselves to not leave men in the flesh, but in the Spirit.

WILL AND EFFORT ARE NOT THE FOUNDATION

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

As we proceed through this passage, it will become very apparent to you that the Spirit is eager to justify God. The one who

shows mercy.”^{NRSV} *“It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”*^{NIB} *“So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.”*^{NAU} *“So then, it is not by the desire or by the attempt of man, but by the mercy of God.”*

academic level, which is inferior. Even though the Spirit knows the response of flesh to such a teaching, He fairly shouts it out to us, showing that no man can stand before the God of heaven upon the basis of merit.

A POINT OF CLARITY

Before I go further with this matter, allow me to deal with a critical point. It is possible that a person might consider this statement either irrelevant, or beyond any possible comprehension. Such a person might reason, “If this is the case, then what point is there to seeking the Lord, or extending myself to please Him? If receiving mercy all depends upon what God desires, and has nothing to do with my desire or effort, I see no point to being fervent in my quest to lay hold on eternal life.”

This is a completely erroneous way of reasoning, and has been provoked by considering the wrong things. Ponder the text while recognizing that in ourselves, that is in our flesh, nothing good resides (7:18). Consider how frail you really are, so that you cannot do the things you desire, but find another law within you, warring against the law of your mind (7:18,23). If these things be true, and they surely are, is it not good to know that receiving the mercy of God is based upon God’s desire and not your performance? The very concept of salvation is based upon our helplessness and hopelessness. That is why we need a Savior.

This verse is saying the REASON for our salvation is found in God who has shown us mercy. It cannot be traced to our worthiness. It cannot even be traced to our willingness, or to our effort. Those things are not foundations of salvation, for they are neither consistent nor flawless.

hears what the Spirit is saying to the churches will conclude that *“all things are of God”* (2 Cor 5:18; Rom 11:36), and that God is righteous in all that He does. This verse particularly confirms this to be the case.

Other versions read, *“So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.”*^{NASB} *“It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”*^{NIV} *“So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who*

^{BBE} *“So it depends not upon a person’s will or exertion, but upon God, who shows mercy.”*^{NAB} *“So receiving God’s promise is not up to us. We can’t get it by choosing it or working hard for it. God will show mercy to anyone he chooses.”*^{NLT} *“So it is not a matter of what any person wants or what any person does, but only of God having mercy.”*^{NJB}

I have taken the time to list the various translations of this verse to confirm there is no question concerning the wording of the text, even on an

This verse is saying the REASON for our salvation is found in God who has shown us mercy. It cannot be traced to our worthiness. It cannot even be traced to our willingness, or to our effort. Those things are not foundations of salvation, for they are neither consistent nor flawless. To be sure, your will is involved, as well as your effort, but not on the foundational level. They are not what drives the Kingdom of God.

MANY HAVE DESIRED

Jesus once spoke of some noble souls who fervently desired to see the things made known in Himself. *“For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them”* (Matt 13:17). These were not the dregs of the human race. They were *“prophets and righteous men.”* If human will was sufficient to bring the blessing, they would surely have seen Christ’s day. If the effort of men could bring the blessing, these righteous men would have obtained it. However, they lived in spiritually primitive times that had not yet been fully cultivated for the blessing. Thus, they did not see what they desired while they remained in this world.

God’s mercy did not exclude them, of that you may be sure. We will see them in the glorified state (Lk 13:28-30). Christ’s atoning death reached backward, making them fully acceptable before God.

When God willed to bestow the mercy and compassion experienced in salvation, it came to a *“sinful woman”* (Lk 7:37-48), a lowly publican (Lk 19:5-9), and even *“publicans and harlots”* (Matt 21:31). I understand, it also came to godly Simeon, Anna, and Nathaniel. But the point of our text is that it was driven by God’s desire. **That** is what compelled Him to do what He did. Further, it was righteous, and will be openly shown to be so in the day of judgment. At that time, there will be no argument about the reason for our salvation.

THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR

The glory of our time is that this is

“the acceptable year of the Lord.” This is the time when the door of salvation has been thrown open, and the mighty God, in strict accord with His own will, has declared *“Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely”* (Rev 22:17). Let no one stand in fear and doubt, wondering whether God desires to show mercy and compassion to them! The Gospel announces this is the time He is receiving all who come to Him.

When Jesus began preaching, He returned to His home town, choosing to

Let no one stand in fear and doubt, wondering whether God desires to show mercy and compassion to them! The Gospel announces this is the time He is receiving all who come to Him.

throw open the door of salvation in a local synagogue. On that day, He read from the book of Isaiah. *“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”* Having closed the book, he returned it to the synagogue attendant, and sat down. With the eyes of everyone in the synagogue riveted upon Him, He boldly announced, *“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”* (Lk 4:18-21). **He had unveiled the heart of God!** He revealed what God wanted to do.

Since the death, resurrection, and enthronement of Jesus, the desire of God to show mercy and compassion has been preached throughout the world. It is an honest and truthful message that only requires faith to be experienced.

THE DOOR WILL CLOSE

There will come a time when this

wonderful door will close. Then, if men have not availed themselves of the very real invitation, it will be confirmed to them that man’s will and man’s effort cannot open it. In his parable of the ten virgins, Jesus referred to His own return. It will be a time when some who were invited, and who even made some cursory preparations, will be excluded. Following His return, Jesus said *“the door was shut.”* When those who spurned His revealed will came, *“saying, Lord, Lord, open to us,”* they were told, *“I know you not”* (Matt 25:1-12).

They wanted to come in, but could not. It is *“not of him that willeth.”* They extended effort to go to the door, but it was too late. *“It is not of him that runneth.”* They learned too late, that salvation is *“of the Lord.”* When He opens the door of salvation, no one can shut it. And, when it is finally shut, no one will be able to open it.

It is no wonder the Spirit admonishes us, **“See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.’ Now this, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire”** (Heb 12:25-29). Our solemn responsibility is to NOT spurn the words of the Savior who speaks from heaven. To do so will eventuate in sure condemnation.

Our text, then, is designed to provoke us to a firm and unwavering reliance upon, and attentiveness to, the Lord Jesus. Our sensitivity to Him must be raised. We might summarize it this way.

Rely completely upon the Lord to save you. Do not place confidence in

- yourself.
- ❑ Give the glory to the Lord for every aspect of your salvation.
 - ❑ Avail yourself fully of the “*acceptable year*”—the time of Divine acceptance, that was announced by Jesus, and which He is now fulfilling.

Because this passage of Scripture is generally neglected, it has a strange sound to many. It also deals with profound Kingdom realities that are not being declared with power and consistency. For this reason many good and sincere believers are intimidated by these things,

thus not regarding them as necessary or important. I encourage you to fight against such tendencies. Like all Scripture, these things have been written for our “*learning*,” and are “*profitable*” for things that equip you for serving God in your life (Rom 15:4; 2 Tim 3:16-17).

PHARAOH WAS RAISED UP BY GOD

“¹⁷ *For the Scripture says to 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.*”

Here we come to a text that is most difficult for the flesh. It will not fit into a convenient theology that emphasizes man’s will. Of course, one of the aspects of salvation that must not be overlooked, particularly when considering the Jews, is that the natural desires of men actually excluded them from Divine acceptance. The very presence of a desire for what God offers confirms the presence of His power. As the 110th Psalm prophesied, which is clearly a Messianic Psalm, “*Thy people will volunteer freely in the day of Thy power*”^{NASB} (v 3).

Keep in your mind that the Spirit is affirming realities that show God is righteous, and that there is no unrighteousness with Him. If the reasoning appears too difficult, then you must get into the realm from which it is spoken—the “*heavenly places*.” Faith will be able to receive this, even though your understanding lags behind, unable for the moment to see the sense of it all. However, faith will not hold this proclamation long until your understanding will no longer be “*unfruitful*” (1 Cor 14:14).

I want to again emphasis that the Spirit is showing us God is not unrighteous in any of His doings. He will now turn our attention to a key despot in Scripture. He will account for the presence of this despot, and the purpose that he served. You may or may not agree with what is said, but it is the truth, and

is to be acknowledged by you.

FOUNDED UPON SCRIPTURE

The Holy Spirit sends us straight to Scripture to confirm there is no unrighteousness with God: “*For the Scripture says . . .*”.

- ❑ Jesus spoke in the same manner. “*He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water*” (John 7:39).
- ❑ When speaking of Judas, He said, “*I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me . . . and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled*” (John 13:18).
- ❑ Earlier in Romans, Paul reasoned, “*For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness*” (Rom 4:3).
- ❑ Confirming the value of faith, it is written, “*For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed*” (Rom 10:11).
- ❑ The Gospel itself is confirmed by Scripture. “*And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed*” (Gal 3:8).
- ❑ The guilt of humanity and the appointed means to salvation are

declared by Scripture. “*But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe*” (Gal 3:22).

- ❑ The distinction of the children of promise from the children of Law is confirmed by Scripture. “*Nevertheless*

Of course, one of the aspects of salvation that must not be overlooked, particularly when considering the Jews, is that the natural desires of men actually excluded them from Divine acceptance.

what saith the Scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free” (Gal 4:30).

Notice that in these texts “*Scripture*” is used in the singular. This is more than a reference to a specific text of Scripture. It speaks of a unified body of articulated truth that is intended to instruct the people of God. Scripture, in this case, is a Divinely orchestrated history of the purpose of God and its outworking among men. It stands for the expression of the mind of God, and is a solid foundation for both faith and hope. There is no chance that it is not true and righteous.

THE PERSON OF PHARAOH

“For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh.”

Pharaoh is one of the principle characters of Scripture. Technically, the term “Pharaoh” is a general word denoting an Egyptian king. Abram confronted a “Pharaoh” in his trip from Ur to Canaan (Gen 12:15-18). Joseph served Potiphar, who was an officer of another Pharaoh (Gen 39:1). Joseph later became ruler of Egypt, second only to that Pharaoh (Gen 41:39-41). Moses was born during the reign of a Pharaoh (Ex 1:22-2:5).

Pharaoh remonstrated, saying he did not know the Lord, and would not let the people go (Ex 5:1-2). The following events encapsulate the activity of this Pharaoh.

- ❑ Following Moses’ order to let the people go, he increased their burden, making them gather their own straw for brick making (Ex 5:6-8).
- ❑ The people were scattered throughout the land of Egypt to gather straw (5:12).

The hard bondage brought on by this Pharaoh caused Israel to cry out in sorrow, and God heard them. The longevity of their tenure in Egypt allowed for a supernatural expansion of their numbers, until they even posed a threat to the Egyptians

The Pharaoh referenced by our text is the one confronted by Moses when the time came for God to deliver Israel from Egypt. Originally, the Israelites went into Egypt seventy strong. They were treated with respect, given a portion of the land to dwell in, and fared very well. However, *“when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose, which knew not Joseph”* (Acts 7:17-18). That Pharaoh turned against Israel, forcing them to work with hard rigor, and enslaving them to build his treasure cities, *“Pithom and Raamses”* (Ex 1:11).

The hard bondage brought on by this Pharaoh caused Israel to cry out in sorrow, and God heard them. The longevity of their tenure in Egypt allowed for a supernatural expansion of their numbers, until they even posed a threat to the Egyptians (Ex 1:7,12,20).

At the right time, God called Moses, who had been raised in Egypt, yet had been keeping his father-in-law’s sheep on the back side of the desert (Ex 3:1-15). He was to appear before Pharaoh and command him in the name of the Lord, *“Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.”*

❑ The Lord sent Moses back to Pharaoh, telling Moses he would now see what **He** would do Pharaoh (6:1). God declared He would harden Pharaoh’s heart and multiply His signs and wonders in Egypt (7:1-3).

❑ When Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and it became a snake, Pharaoh called for his magicians, who did the same with their rods. When Aaron’s rod swallowed their rods, **God “hardened Pharaoh’s heart”** and he refused to listen to Moses and Aaron (7:10-14).

❑ In the first plague, Aaron stretched his rod over the waters of Egypt and they became blood. After the magicians of Egypt did the same with their enchantments *“Pharaoh’s heart was hardened,”* and he did not listen to Moses and Aaron (7:15-22). Pharaoh returned to his house, unmoved by what he saw (7:23).

❑ In the second plague, Aaron stretched his rod over the waters of Egypt and frogs came out of them, covering the land of Egypt. When the Egyptian magicians did the same, Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, asking them to entreat the Lord for him, to take away the frogs. Moses did this, the Lord hearkened, and the frogs died out in the houses, villages, and

fields. When Pharaoh saw there was relief **“he hardened his heart,”** refusing to listen to Moses and Aaron (8:1-15).

❑ In the third plague Aaron stretched out his rod, striking the dust of the earth. The dust became lice throughout the land of Egypt, covering both man and beast. The Egyptian magicians were unable to duplicate this feat, and were never again able to perform their arts as in the first two plagues. They told Pharaoh, *“This is the finger of God!”* Nevertheless, *“Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had said”* (8:16-19).

❑ Early the next morning, God told Moses to stand before Pharaoh and demand, *“Let my people go, that they may serve me.”* If he refused, the plague of flies would come. He refused. (8:20).

❑ In the fourth plague, swarms of flies came upon the people, filled their houses, and were upon the ground. In the plague, the land of Goshen, where Israel dwelt, was exempted. No flies were there, as God made a distinction between His people and the Egyptians. Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron saying, *“Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land [of Egypt].”* Moses refused, saying they had to go three days journey from the wicked land of Egypt before they could make sacrifice to God. Pharaoh said he would let them go, but they could *“not go very far away.”* He begged that they entreat God for him, and Moses said they would. God heard Moses, removing the flies, so that *“there remained not one.”* Nevertheless, **“Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go”** (8:21-32).

❑ Again, the Lord sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh, telling him to let the people go. If he refused, God would send a terrible plague upon all the livestock of Egypt. Pharaoh refused (9:1-5).

❑ In the fifth plague a grievous pestilence was sent upon all the cattle of Egypt—horses, asses, camels, oxen, and sheep. Israel’s area (Goshen) was again exempted. *“All the cattle of Egypt died: but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one.”*

Pharaoh sent to see the condition of Israel's cattle, and *"there was not one of the cattle of the Israelites dead."* At that time, *"the heart of Pharaoh was **hardened**, and he did not let the people go"* (9:6-7).

- In the sixth plague, Moses took ashes from a furnace (soot), and threw it into the sky before the face of Pharaoh. It became a fine dust that fell upon both man and beast throughout the land. As it fell upon man and beast, festering boils broke out upon them. The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for they were upon them as well as the other Egyptians. At that time *"**the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses"*** (9:8-12).
- At this time, the Lord sent a special rebuke to Pharaoh for His obstinance. Our text is found in this rebuke. *"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Rise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, and say to him, Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: Let My people go, that they may serve Me, for at this time I will send all My plagues to your very heart, and on your servants and on your people, that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth. Now if I had stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, then you would have been cut off from the earth. **But indeed for this 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.** As yet you exalt yourself against My people in that you will not let them go"^{NKJB} (9:13-17).*
- In the seventh plague the Lord brought a grievous hail upon Egypt, such as had never before been experienced. Having mercy upon them, God told the Egyptians to gather everything they had in the field, for it would die from the hail if it remained there. Those who feared God in Pharaoh's house got their servants and cattle out of the fields as told. When the hail came, it was mingled with fire. It struck every man, beast, and herb of the field, and *"broke every tree."* This time Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, making a startling confession. *"I have sinned this time: the LORD is righteous, and*

I and my people are wicked." He begged Moses and Aaron to entreat the Lord for him, *"that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer."* Moses said he would do this, causing the thunder and hail to cease, that Pharaoh would know the earth was the Lord's. Yet, Moses added, *"But as for thee and thy servants, I know that ye will not yet fear the LORD God."* It is then noted that only the flax and barley had been destroyed in the plague of hail. The wheat and rye remained, for they were not yet fully grown. When Pharaoh saw that the thunder and hail had ceased, *"he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, neither would he let the children of Israel go; as the LORD had spoken by Moses"* (9:18-34).

- God then told Moses to go in before Pharaoh, *"for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son's son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD."* He was to rebuke Pharaoh saying, *"Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me. Or else, if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory."* The locusts would cover the earth so that it could not even be seen. They would eat every plant that remained, and every tree of the field. They would fill the houses of every one in Egypt, including Pharaoh. When Moses left, Pharaoh's servants said to him, *"How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?"* Pharaoh then called for Moses and Aaron saying, *"Go, serve the LORD your God. Who are the ones that are going?"* Moses informed him all would be going, old and young, sons and daughters, flocks and herds. Pharaoh refused to meet the terms, saying only the men could go. Moses and Aaron were then driven from his

presence (10:1-8).

- In the eighth plague the Lord brought an east wind upon the land. It brought locusts who went all over the land of Egypt, resting on all the territory of Egypt. They were severe, and were a unique kind of locust that had never before, nor since, existed. They covered the land and consumed all remaining vegetation. Pharaoh was so affected he called for Moses and Aaron in haste, saying, *"I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and entreat the LORD your God, that He may take away from me this death only."* Moses did entreat the Lord, the Lord brought in a west wind, and it carried all of the locusts out of Egypt, depositing them in the sea. Not one locust remained in Egypt. The Scripture then says, *"But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go"* (10:9-20).
- In the ninth plague, Moses stretched his hand toward heaven *"that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness which may even be felt."* It was a *"thick darkness,"* lasting for three days. The Egyptians could not see each other, and no one rose from their place for three days. During this plague *"all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings."* Pharaoh finally called for Moses and Aaron pleading, *"Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be kept back. Let your little ones also go with you."* Moses refused, saying the livestock had to go with them, and *"not a hoof shall be left behind."* Even though Pharaoh appeared to be a little sensitive, it is written, *"But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go."* The extent of that hardening is seen in Pharaoh's response. *"Then Pharaoh said to him, 'Get away from me! Take heed to yourself and see my face no more! For in the day you see my face you shall die!'"* Moses confirmed Pharaoh's doom when he said, *"You have spoken well. I will never see your face again"* (10:21-29).
- In the tenth plague, the Lord made preparation by having all of the people to ask their Egyptian neighbors for articles of gold and silver. He then

gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. The Scriptures tell us the Egyptians gave the Israelites what they asked, and they *“spoiled the Egyptians”* (Ex 12:36). The Passover was instituted that night, and was the means of preserving the firstborn of every Israelite family. At midnight, the Lord moved through the land killing the firstborn in every Egyptian house, and of the animals as well. A great cry of despair rose from Egypt, yet not even a dog moved his tongue against an Israelite. When the death of the firstborn occurred, Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron at night saying, *“Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also.”*

□ Following the exodus of the Israelites, the hearts of Pharaoh and the people were turned against Israel. Believing they had done the wrong thing, Pharaoh *“made ready his chariot and took his people with him. Also, he took six hundred choice chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt*

with captains over every one of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went out with boldness” (14:6-8).

□ As Israel stood before the Red Sea, fearful of the pursuing Egyptians, God told them He would fight for them. They were not to fear. He would cause them to walk through the Red sea. The Lord then said, *“And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen”* (14:9-17).

□ Stubbornly, the Egyptians pursued the Israelites, attempting to also pass through the sea on dry ground. The Lord looked down upon them through the pillar of fire and cloud, and *“He troubled the army of the Egyptians.”* Still, they moved forward. He even took the wheels off of their chariots, yet they drove on, even though they did so with great *“difficulty.”* Then, when they were all in the midst of the

Red Sea, the Lord commanded Moses to stretch his hand over the sea, causing the waters to return to their full depth. *“Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained”* (14:18-28).

God Hardened His Heart

Because the consideration of Pharaoh is vital to this passage, I have taken the time to provide an unusual amount of

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detail. It is as though the Lord has extended Himself to make this point, and it is important that we get it.

In the sections just listed, there are fourteen references to Pharaoh’s heart being hardened. Eleven of them declare it was something done TO Pharaoh. These include *“God hardened,” “was hardened,” “grew hard,” “the Lord hardened,” “I have hardened,”* and *“I indeed will harden.”* The first two references to the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart refer to the Lord. Three references declare Pharaoh did it himself.

When God called Moses, He told him of the coming obstinance of Pharaoh. He did NOT say Pharaoh would harden his heart. Rather, He declared, *“I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go”* (Ex 4:21; 7:3). These statements were both made in advance of the actual hardening – yet they make no reference to Pharaoh hardening his heart himself. **In fact, the words “he will harden his heart” and “Pharaoh will harden his**

heart” are not even found in the Bible. The words *“will harden”* occur only four times in any version of standard Scripture (Ex 4:21; 7:3; 14:4,17, KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, NIV, RSV, NRSV). In every case they refer to Pharaoh and his relation to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. In every case, it is God who did it.

I say this because some take the position that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart because he had first done so. That is, God ratified what Pharaoh himself had done, casting it, as it were, in stone. I myself once embraced this view, thinking it would present God in a more just and righteous stance. However, there is absolutely nothing in Scripture to support this view. In fact, it completely neutralizes the truth being taught in this text. God said **He** was going to harden Pharaoh’s heart. The first two references to his hardened heart credit it to God. The final observation of the chain of events credit it to God.

It is clear that Pharaoh’s action was the result of God’s work, not Pharaoh’s. Further, there is no reasonable explanation for Pharaoh’s reaction to God’s word and judgments apart from God hardening his heart. There is no form of reason that can explain his obstinance. Of course, this is the very point of the text, and the Spirit will affirm the whole history of Pharaoh was intentional, orchestrated by God Himself. God DID harden Pharaoh’s heart. He not only affirms it, but now erects teaching upon that fact. I understand this raises questions in the minds of some. However, the doctrine is not intended to raise questions, but trust. We do well to allow it to do so.

GOD RAISED PHARAOH UP

“Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up.” The Scriptures, when believed, will leave us trusting in a God whose judgments are *“unsearchable,”* and ways are *“past finding out”* (Rom 11:33). The god who fits neatly into human logic and theological systems is not the true God.

The only explanation for the appearance of Pharaoh is God! God

declares **"I RAISED YOU UP!"** He did not say "I used you," but *"I raised you up."* Pharaoh's presence in history is owing to a Divine purpose.

For whatever it is worth, the Greek word from which *"raised"* is translated is *ἐξήγειρά*. Its meaning is "cause to appear in history, call, into being, or raise up." In his Word Studies, Vincent says of the use of this word in our text, "Hebrew, *caused thee to stand*. Sept., *διετηρήθης thou wast preserved alive*. Only once elsewhere in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 6:14, of raising from the dead. The meaning here is general, *allowed thee to appear; brought, thee forward on the stage of events*, as Zechariah 11:16. So the simple verb in Matthew 11:11; John 7:52. Other explanations are, *preserved thee alive*, as Sept., *excited thee to opposition*, as Habakkuk 1:6; *created thee*." Thayer, a renown Greek lexographer, says of the use of this word in Romans 9:17, *"to rouse up, stir up, incite to resistance."* He also says of some of its historical usage, *"I have raised thee up into life, caused thee to exist, or I have raised thee to a public position, set thee up as a king."*^{Thayers Greek-English Lexicon}

These language references are not intended to carry the weight of Scripture. Nor, indeed, are they to be viewed as proofs of the truth of Scripture. I give them only to show that the statement made in our text is clear from any point of view. There may be a wide divergence of opinion on the implications of this text, but there cannot be on the statement of the text itself. Further, our faith must rest upon statement, not implication; upon affirmation, not explanation.

The appearance of Pharaoh is for evil, is as the appearance of Melchizedec was for good (Gen 14:18; Psa 110:4; Heb 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:110-21). Both individuals can only be accounted for in the purpose of God. Neither of them have any significance whatsoever outside of that Divine purpose.

God Has Raised Up People

The notion of God raising up people is not a strange one for those familiar with Scripture. God is said to have *"raised up judges"* (Judges 2:16), *"a deliverer to the*

children of Israel" (Othniel, Judges 3:9), *"David"* (2 Sam 23:1), and *"one from the North"* (Isa 41:25), etc. God raised up Cyrus, stirred up his spirit, gave him all the kingdoms of the earth, and charged him with building the temple (2 Chron 36:22-23). John the Baptist is described as *"a man sent from God, whose name was John"* (John 1:6). God stirred up Hadad the Edomite to be an adversary to Solomon (1 Kgs 11:14). It should not surprise us that God is said to have raised someone up—causing them to appear on the trestle board of eternal purpose.

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If we have difficulties correlating this with other affirmations of Scripture, that difficulty does not justify neutralizing the text. No person is right in forcing the text to mean something other than what God said. Nor, indeed, can we simply ignore the text, hoping that sometime in the future we may be able to see it more clearly.

difficulty does not justify neutralizing the text. No person is right in forcing the text to mean something other than what God said. Nor, indeed, can we simply ignore the text, hoping that sometime in the future we may be able to see it more clearly. Because Divine instruction and argument is based upon this text, we must believe it, even though we cannot understand it to our own satisfaction. If we fail to do this, the teaching that follows at once becomes insignificant.

The Spirit is not presenting us with some novel and inconsequential doctrine. If you are tempted to imagine this has nothing to do with salvation, and is therefore unimportant, ponder that the Spirit is confirming there is no unrighteousness with God. It is not possible for anything to be more closely associated with our salvation than God's righteousness.

THE DIVINE INTENTION

"Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth." You may not think that is upright, but the Spirit is, by this very statement, confirming that God IS righteous. **The extent to which God's purpose is being served by people may not be known, but that HIS purpose IS being served, even by despots, MUST be known!**

In this matter, it is confirmed that God alone *"is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased"* (Psa 115:3). Again it is written, *"Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places"* (Psa 135:6).

How appropriate that God has thus revealed Himself. **"The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He hath set the world upon them"** (1 Sam 2:7-8). When God brought the Assyrians to judge Judah, it

appeared as though they were operating in their own strength, and according to their own purpose. Yet God said of them, **"O Assyrian, the rod of Mine anger, and the staff in their hand is Mine indignation"** (Isa 10:5). They were raised up!

In the case of Pharaoh, the objective was not the same as with the Assyrians, but it was still God's objective. Our text shows that purpose to be twofold.

That I Might Show My Power In Thee
Other translations read, *"to demonstrate My power in you,"*^{NASB} *"that I might display my power in you,"*^{NIV} *"so that I might make my power seen in you."*^{BBE}

Power in Deliverance. In Pharaoh, God made known that the opposition of the greatest ruler upon earth could not

stop Him from delivering His people. They came out of Egypt with a high hand, and at the appointed time, even though the ruler of the land in which they resided said they could not.

Power in Judgment. God revealed His power by judging the gods of Egypt, overthrowing them in the plagues. In the last plague God said, *“For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD”* (Ex 12:12). The gods of Egypt could not turn the waters from blood to water. They could not get rid of frogs, flies, or lice. They could not heal the plagues that broke out upon man and beast. They could not stop the hail, purge the land of locusts, or cure the cattle. They were powerless to produce light when God brought darkness, and they could not keep the firstborn of their worshippers alive.

Power in overturning the counsel of the ungodly. Pharaoh, the singularly most powerful ruler in the world, determined NOT to release the Israelites as God commanded. Twelve times he asserted his will against the Lord (5:2; 7:14,22; 8:15,19,32; 9:7,12,35; 10:20,27; 11:10). In an act of Divine judgment, God brought Pharaoh to beg for the Israelites to leave. He moved the Egyptians to give them their gold and silver, pleading with them to leave the land. Pharaoh’s counsel was overturned, and the whole world heard about it!

Power in Eliminating the Enemy. The enemy, Pharaoh and his armies, were superior from every fleshly point of view. They had superior weaponry, chariots, and warriors. But at the very instant God asserted His will, they were drowned in the sea they sought to cross. At one moment, Israel was threatened by an aggressive and pursuing enemy. At the next moment, their own eyes saw all of their enemies dead. Israel did not raise a weapon against them. They plotted no strategy to divert the attack. God did it all, and there was not a thing Pharaoh and his hosts could

do about it.

That My Name Might Be Declared

God is zealous about being known among men. Not only does He desire for His greatness to be acknowledged, He also desires for men to have a personal and profitable relation with Him. This will come when His name is declared, or proclaimed—when what He has done is announced.

After their deliverance from Egypt, and before they arrived at Sinai, *“Moses told his father in law all that the LORD had done unto Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, and all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the LORD delivered them”* (Ex 18: 8). Forty years later when they came to possess the land of Canaan, Rahab, an inhabitant of Jericho, told two Israelite spies, *“For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt. . . And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in*

wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh” (Judges 11:16). Nearly 1,000 years later, Nehemiah testified how God *“didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea; and showedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a name, as it is this day. And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters”* (Neh 9:9-10). **The name of the Lord was being proclaimed!**

After Jesus had been enthroned in glory, Stephen stood before the Jewish counsel and proclaimed, God *“brought them out, after that he had showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years”* (Acts 7:36). To this very day, the overthrow of Pharaoh in the deliverance of Israel has been the subject of sermons and books. It has been the theme of songs, and even movies. **The name of the Lord is still being proclaimed!**

That is why God raised up Pharaoh. Were it not for the desire of God to have His name proclaimed throughout the earth, Pharaoh would never have been heard of – in fact, he might never have been!

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THEREFORE . . .

Now, what is the conclusion that must be drawn from these remarkable declarations? It would be interesting to hear the varied opinions of men – at least, if we had not received a word from God on the matter. Here is the word of the Holy Spirit on this subject.

heaven above, and in earth beneath” (Josh 2:10-11). **The name of the Lord was being proclaimed!**

Almost 300 years later, Jephthah reminded the king of the children of Ammon of the time *“when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the*

“Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.” Other versions read, *“So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires,”*^{NASB} *“Therefore God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden.”*^{NIV} *“So then He has mercy on whomever He chooses,*

and He hardens the heart of whomever He chooses,"^{NRSV} "So then, at His pleasure He has mercy on a man, and at His pleasure He makes the heart hard,"^{BBE} "So you see, God shows mercy to some just because He wants to, and He chooses to make some people refuse to listen,"^{NLT} "In other words, if God wants to show mercy on someone, He does so, and if He wants to harden someone's heart, He does so."^{NJB}

Whatever you think of God, you must make room for this verse. If this is something you do not believe God can do, then you simply have a distorted view of God. Exercise yourself to believe what He has said.

Not of Works

The Lord has now confirmed that His choices are not made upon the basis of human works or achievements. He chose Isaac because He wanted to! He loved Jacob because He wanted to! He does have mercy on whom He wills to have mercy.

The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart because He wanted to. That is what He affirms: "whom He wills, He hardens!"

Remember, the point is that there is no unrighteousness with God. He is righteous in all of His doings. He was righteous in choosing Isaac above Ishmael. He was righteous in loving Jacob

and hating Esau. He was righteous in hardening Pharaoh's heart, in order that might display His power upon him, and have His name proclaimed throughout the earth.

In a feeble attempt to show that God was not wrong in doing these things, some

He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. Furthermore, His will is always "good, and acceptable, and perfect" (Rom 12:2).

The difficulty encountered in this passage is not owing to any vagueness

The Lord has now confirmed that His choices are not made upon the basis of human works or achievements. He chose Isaac because He wanted to! He loved Jacob because He wanted to! He does have mercy on whom He wills to have mercy.

say there was just cause in all of the cases for His choice. They say Isaac was better, that is why he was chosen, also citing the mocking Ishmael did against Isaac. Again, such men say that God loved Jacob because he sought the blessing, and he hated Esau because he despised the blessing. Pharaoh, say they, was obstinate and wicked, so God simply confirmed his heart was hard.

But all of these are theological puffs of smoke. We do not need anyone to tell us why God made His choice. He has already told us, and with remarkable force. **"Therefore He has mercy on whom**

found in it. It is not because the Lord has not provided a specific reason for what He has done. Rather, it is because His reason conflicts with the wisdom of men. However, it is perfectly acceptable to faith. The person who truly believes will have no compunctions in saying, "Thy will be done!"

There is a great liberty in being able to simply believe the Word of God. What is more, that liberty will bring great satisfaction and peace to the heart, and, in due time, a rich understanding. As Paul once said, "I believe God!" (Acts 27:25). We do well to do so also.

FLESH IS CONFUSED

We are embarking on some of the strongest statements in all of Scripture. It is certainly not comfortable ground for the timorous and unsure. As the reasoning progresses, it actually gets stronger, and more devastating to the flesh. If a person is unbelieving, this passage will have the same effect as described by the prophet Isaiah: "But the word of the LORD was to them, Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little, that they might go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and caught" NKJV (Isa 28:13). This sort of reasoning utterly devastates the flesh, pummeling it to the ground. Further, that is precisely what it is intended to do. God will have no flesh glory in His presence.

But, for the soul that will humbly believe the Word of the Lord, casting down contradicting thoughts, the working of the Lord will begin to make perfect sense. It will not become the occasion for stumbling, but one of great hope. It will also assist the believer in seeing that salvation is truly "of the Lord," from first to last.

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?"

The Spirit now raises another objection of the flesh. This is how those without the mind of Christ think. I will venture to say you have probably heard people make this very statement. Now, the Spirit will declare how it is to be answered.

WHY DOES HE FIND FAULT?

"You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" As you might expect, this is exactly how the flesh reasons. If God shows mercy on whomever He wants to show mercy, and hardens whomever He wills, how can God blame men? How can

there be such a thing as guilt or transgression if God's will is being done? Of course, this kind of reasoning is not put forward regarding the showing of mercy, for flesh does not account mercy as something of great value.

This is a great moral question that has perplexed many. If it is true that Divine determination drives the purpose of God, what just reason can be cited for the damnation of the wicked or the reward of the righteous. Are not men, in such a case, mere robots, not responsible for their actions? That is how flesh reasons, and it will be interesting to see how the Spirit addresses that matter. We are already painfully aware of how men seek to answer the question.

Who Has Resisted His Will?

The words "His will" refers to the statement, "Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens." If God wills to show mercy to Isaac, is there anyone who can thwart that will? If God wills to reject Ishmael, is there anyone who move Him to accept him in the place of Isaac? And, if God wills to love Jacob, who is it that can move Him to hate Jacob? If He wills to hate Esau, who can constrain Him to love Esau? If He hardens Pharaoh, who can make him tender and pliable?

In the question, there is an underlying awareness that God is all powerful. If He determines to make all things work together for good to them that love Him and are called according to His purpose, who is the personality capable of voiding that determination? If God wills to justify, who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect? If God says no man will see Him without holiness, what person can cause Him to retract that word?

The issue here is not if God's will is or is not being carried out, but if it exempts men from responsibility. How will the Lord answer this? What will His approach be to human responsibility?

WHO ARE YOU?

The Lord never descends into the arena of flesh to caucus with the carnally

minded! The question is provoked by unbelief, and thus will be answered in strict accord with the Divine nature.

Notice, it has already been affirmed that there is no unrighteousness with God. It is further declared that He is good (Rom 11:22). Yet, the flesh shouts back at God as though He had no right to "find fault" in men like Ishmael, Esau, and Pharaoh, or those who reject His Son.

This is a great moral question that has perplexed many. If it is true that Divine determination drives the purpose of God, what just reason can be cited for the damnation of the wicked or the reward of the righteous. Are not men, in such a case, mere robots, not responsible for their actions?

"On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?"^{NASB}

The question is out of order. God is the one who interrogates man, and not vice versa. You may remember when all manner of questions arose over the experience of Job, God finally interrupted the dialog saying, "Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me" (Job 38:3).

When God attributes His actions to His will, we are to understand there is no higher authority than that. Those who object to that will are "talking back" to God.^{NIV} Such an action is most unwise!

THE ONE WHO IS FORMED

"Will the thing formed say to Him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?'" The NASB reads, "The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it?" It is difficult for me to conceive of a more strong response to the flesh. Immediately God reminds men of who they are. They are the created, not the Creator. They

have been formed, they are not the One who forms. They have been made, they are not the Maker.

An Explanation

We are not to understand from this that the response of men has nothing to do with how they are formed. The tenderness of David's heart had a great deal to do with how he was shaped. The fervency of Paul had much to do with how he was shaped. This is one reason we are admonished to not "quench" or "grieve" the Spirit of God (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19). Our submissiveness, humility, and tenderness, has a great deal to do with how we are shaped – how our character and nature are formed. But if men choose not to be submissive to the Lord, He will form them anyway, shaping and molding them into vessels that will serve His purpose—vessels of wrath.

Power Over the Clay

"Does not the potter have power over the clay . . . ?"

Here the Spirit begins a dialog that represents God as the Potter and the people as the clay. It may be a humbling view, but it is a true one. It is intended to teach us that everything and everyone will ultimately serve God's purpose. Furthermore, His purpose will not be served incidentally, but deliberately. He will MAKE His purpose to be served, whether through Pharaoh or through Moses. He is the Architect of human history, not men. This truth confirms to our hearts the ability of God to work "all things together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28).

The word "power" certainly includes the idea of strength and ability, so that God is fully able to override the intentions of men, causing their actions to serve His purpose. Joseph's brother, Potiphar's wife, and Pharaoh are cases in point (Gen 50:20). In our text, however, the word "power" also includes the concept of right or authority, so that what God does is to be considered just and righteous. **Remember, the Spirit is showing us there is no unrighteousness with God, not in any of His workings.**

Isaiah and Jeremiah. In answering the objection of the flesh [that God cannot find fault if men are shaped by Him in the first place], the Spirit appeals to Scripture. At least three times Isaiah uses the figure of a potter and the clay. Jeremiah also uses this parallel.

Isaiah 29:16. Isaiah pronounced woes upon Israel who went about to fulfill their own will, imagining that God was not aware of what they were doing. Like all men who live in ignorance of the Living God, they could not imagine their secret counsels were known by the Lord, or that He could do anything about it. The Spirit therefore moved Isaiah to say, *“Woe to those who seek deep to hide their counsel far from the LORD, And their works are in the dark; They say, ‘Who sees us?’ and, ‘Who knows us?’ Surely you have things turned around! Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay; For shall the thing made say of him who made it, ‘He did not make me?’ Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it, ‘He has no understanding?’”* NKJV

In their thinking, wayward Israel had turned things around, or *“upside down”*.^{NIV} They thought they were carrying out their own will, and determining their own future. But they were not. God was shaping them to fulfill His good pleasure, not their own. He would use their waywardness to serve His purpose and actually throw their own to the ground. They gave no credit to God for what they were doing. Nevertheless, God remained the Potter, and they remained the clay—in His hands! They could not impose their will upon God. Rather, God caused all of their works, including their wickedness, to serve His purpose. He was the Potter, they were the clay.

Isaiah 45:9. This is the specific passage to which our text refers. In it God declares He will pour down righteousness from the heavens, and salvation and righteousness would spring up from the earth. *“Rain down, you heavens, from above, And let the skies pour down righteousness; Let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation, And let*

righteousness spring up together. I, the LORD, have created it. Woe to him who strives with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’ Or shall your handiwork say, ‘He has no hands?’” NKJV

In this passage God is reasoning with wayward Israel, and with those who object to the way in which He works. **Those who argue against God** are quickly told they are nothing more than clay in His hands, and He will shape them as He

Those who argue against God are quickly told they are nothing more than clay in His hands, and He will shape them as He pleases. In fact, the wicked are even like “potsherds,” or broken pieces of pottery, having no significance at all in themselves.

pleases. In fact, the wicked are even like *“potsherds,”* or broken pieces of pottery, having no significance at all in themselves. Like Pharaoh, their ONLY significance is how God uses them to bring glory to Himself.

Although the psychiatrists have attempted to sanctify the act of being angry with God and questioning His intentions, our text shows the wickedness of such a response. A professing Christian who is so irritated by trouble and inconvenience that he grows angry with God, has, in fact, said *“Why hast Thou made me thus?”* Far better to respond like righteous Job: *“Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?”*^{NKJV} (Job 2:10).

Mark it well, that this is applied to those who reply against God, question His intentions, and object to His will. This is

not the way in which He speaks to the humble. Although they also are being shaped by Him, that shaping is for their good as well as His glory. In the case of His enemies, it is not for their good at all.

Isaiah 64:8. When spiritual vision is clear, the people know that God has shaped them—that He is the Potter, and they are the clay. Through Isaiah, such a confession is made. *“But now, O LORD, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand.”* Such a response brings glory to God because it is the truth.

Jeremiah 18:4-6. God gave a special lesson to Jeremiah, showing that He was not only the shaper of men, but that He would be mindful of men’s response to that shaping. He can REMAKE people. *“And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: ‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?’ says the LORD. ‘Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!’”*

The Lord raises a weighty question, indeed! Does He not have the right to do with people as He pleases? Is He not the One who has made them? Is it ever proper for man to question God, or challenge His decision, even finding fault with Him?

A modifying thought. Now, lest men imagine their response has nothing at all to do with how God shapes them, the Lord continues with an illuminating thought. *“The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it”* (vs 8-10).

How marvelously this was demonstrated in both Egypt and Israel. At the first, God used Egypt to bless Israel, caring for them and favoring them in the time of famine. Afterward, when they rebelled, He used them to get great honor for His name. Israel, on the other hand, has been judged harshly by God for its rejection of Christ, yet when they call out *“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,”* they will be reestablished. God has the power to shape AND reshape, and He is always righteous in what He does.

Samson. Samson provides us another example of God’s work as Potter. On one occasion, Samson saw a woman in Timnath, one of the daughters of the Philistines. Being attracted to her, he told his parents, *“I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife.”* Knowing God had strictly charged His people not to take wives from among the heathen (Ex 34:15-16; Deut 7:3-4), his parents answered: *“Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?”* Samson insisted they get the Philistine woman for him, for she pleased him. The Spirit then adds this explanation: *“But his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD; that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines. For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel”* (Judges 14:1-4). **God is the Potter, men are the clay!**

David numbering Israel. On one occasion, David was moved to have Israel numbered. His aim had to do with military strategy, and thus he said, *“Go, number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it.”* Joab, sensing that this was not the right thing to do, challenged the command. *“Now may the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times more than there are, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king desire this thing?”*^{NKJV} He knew God’s people were not to put their trust in the number of soldiers they had, but in the Lord, who

could increase their numbers and their power. Nevertheless, David’s word prevailed, and the army was counted. The armies of Israel and Judah numbered over one million: an astounding 1,300,000 (2 Sam 24:9).

The outcome of the whole event was a judgement from God in which seventy thousand men died.

The Word of God provides three perspectives of this event – all of them are true. The first is that the idea originated with David himself, and thus he commanded that the count be made (1 Chron 21:2). The second is that *“Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel”* (2 Chron 21:1). The third accredits the whole matter to

Keep in mind that the point being established is not the mere ability of God to do these things. Only a fool would question such ability. The point is that God is RIGHTEOUS in shaping men according to His good pleasure.

God Himself. *“Again the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, ‘Go, number Israel and Judah’”* (2 Sam 24:1). **God is the Potter, men are the clay!**

One Source, Two Different Vessels
“... from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?” Keep in mind that the point being established is not the mere ability of God to do these things. Only a fool would question such ability. The point is that God is RIGHTEOUS in shaping men according to His good pleasure. Because flesh has questioned the rightness of such working, the Spirit is establishing there is absolutely no unrighteousness to be found in God. He is not doing so by elaborate arguments, but by affirming God does what He wills, and He is incapable of

desiring something wrong.

Here all men are said to come from the same *“lump”* of clay. This is reference to our common origin, Adam. As it is written, *“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings”*^{NKJV} (Acts 17:31). As history has proceeded, however, a vast difference can be seen in the offspring of Adam. Some are righteous, and some are unrighteous. Some are noble, and some are ignoble. **How do we account for this difference?** As asked in First Corinthians, *“For who makes you differ from another?”* (1 Cor 14:7). Our text provides the answer.

As the indisputable Potter, God has the right to make one vessel for honor, and another for dishonor. Observe the manner in which the Holy Spirit is speaking. The truth with which He is dealing is highly controversial to the flesh, yet He does not tone it down or soften it, as men are prone to do. Instead, He brings the truth to an even higher and stronger level. Men have been deliberately shaped, whether they are Pharaoh or Moses, Ishmael or Isaac, Jacob or Esau! Some men are made to fulfill dishonorable purposes that God may receive the glory. He has given us the specific example of Pharaoh, and has done so with unquestionable certitude.

A vessel of honor is one created for honorable uses—a person who, through holy and righteous involvements, will bring glory to the Lord. **A vessel of dishonor** is one that has been created for dishonorable purposes—a person who, through wickedness and opposition to God bring honor to God by showing He cannot be overthrown. Both are used by God, but the way in which they are used differs.

We must be willing to leave this matter where God has left it. If we do not understand it, that has nothing whatsoever to do with whether it is true or not. As will be developed later, this circumstance is intended to bolster our faith, not demolish it. **God is nowhere**

depicted as forming a vessel of dishonor out of someone who is tender toward Him and seeks His will. Such people must be willing to trust that God will do them good and bring them to glory.

Application to Israel

The application of this teaching to Israel is twofold. **First**, within the same nation God has formed both righteous and

unrighteous people. Some have been for honor, and some for dishonor. **Second**, there have been generations of this people that were shaped for blessing, and generations shaped for cursing. One generation, for example, fell in the wilderness, while another inherited the promised land.

This section of Scripture is showing us that Israel may presently be “*enemies for*

our sake” (11:28). God is able, however, to reshape them on the potters wheel, making a new vessel of them. He has the right to do so, and has pledged Himself to do it. None can charge Him with being unrighteous in the promise made, His tolerance with Israel in their unbelief, the leaving of a remnant, or turning them from their iniquity. From the same mass, vastly different vessels have been formed, with different purposes.

VESSELS OF WRATH AND VESSELS OF MERCY

“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?”

The unrelenting strength of this argument is staggering. It is as though the Spirit refuses to leave this point, hammering it into our conscience with great power. Here He reasons even further with us concerning the nature of God’s will, and the extent to which He has gone to make it known. He has objectives that are being served in history. There are things He wants men to see, and He has extended Himself to make them known. Now the Spirit unfolds something of that extent to us, in order that we might stand in awe of the wisdom of our God.

We are entering into an area of consideration that will challenge your mind. It may appear on the surface to be too weighty for you to consider, but you must not yield to such a thought. God’s people must come away from overly simplistic views of God, for they do not allow them to consider such passages. Rather than staggering at such lofty Divine utterances, press close to them, taking them into your mind, and pondering them under the administration

of your faith. Trust God that they are true, it only remains for you to see that truth. Make no effort to pit one statement of God against another. Get high enough in your spirit to see that the same God cannot say contradictory things. If

He has objectives that are being served in history. There are things He wants men to see, and He has extended Himself to make them known. Now the Spirit unfolds something of that extent to us, in order that we might stand in awe of the wisdom of our God.

fountains on earth cannot give both bitter and sweet water (James 3:11), much less can the fountain of Divine utterance do it.

WRATH MADE KNOWN

“What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known.” While it is true that God “*is not willing that any should perish*” (2 Pet 3:9), He **is** willing to make His wrath and power known. The reason for this is not simply that He wants men to know He DOES have both wrath and power. Rather, He desires for men to avoid His wrath, and experience His power for their good. Better to learn of God’s wrath in this

world than in the world to come.

The intent of this verse may be expressed this way: “*What if God WHILE willing to show His wrath and make His power known.*” The idea that will be developed is this: God’s intention was not just to make His wrath and power known. It was ultimately to make His glory known by showing mercy. It was to this end, for this purpose, that He displayed His wrath and great power. The example of this display has been given in Pharaoh and His overthrow.

ENDURING VESSELS OF WRATH

“ . . . endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.” “*Vessels of wrath*” are those that were fashioned “*unto dishonor,*” of which Pharaoh is an example. This explains why God does not immediately remove the wicked when they rise up against Him and His people. It explains why He endured the whole of mankind in the days of Noah, while He patiently waited for Noah to finish the ark. It explains why He endured the repeated insolence of Pharaoh, while His people were being readied for deliverance. And, it explains why Israel’s continued rejection of Christ is being tolerated with much longsuffering. It is in anticipation of their coming blessing.

There are people who are made to be destroyed. Men may balk at this, siting all manner of reasons why it cannot be true. The Spirit faces them squarely and speaks

of “the objects of His wrath--prepared for destruction?”^{NIV} Peter also says of false prophets, using words that jar the soul. “But these, like natural brute beasts **made to be caught and destroyed**, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime”^{NKJV} (2 Pet 2:12-13). Jude also says of such evil men, “For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago

make something out of a person, but to remove them, like God removed Pharaoh. The Lord’s glory, however, is intended to lift, bless, and transform. Thus Scripture speaks of “the riches of the glory of His inheritance” (Eph 1:18), being strengthened within by “the riches of His glory” (Eph 3:16), and all of our need being supplied by “His riches in glory” (Phil 4:19).

When It is realized. The riches of His glory are realized when God lifts up “His countenance” upon us (Num 6:26). It is known when He causes “His face to shine upon us,” looking upon us with favor (Psa 67:1; 31:16). It happens when He lifts up “the light of His countenance upon us” (Psa 4:6). The ultimate experience of this results in regeneration, as described in Second Corinthians 4:6. “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

what it says, and it is the Holy Spirit who said it. There are vessels God prepared for mercy BEFORE they actually received it. He has governed the affairs of this world with these vessels in mind, shaping both men and seasons for what He was going to do with them.

One might prefer that God did not say things this way. However, when it comes to His purpose, God has no regard for human preferences. It is true that the educational trends of our day, especially theological ones, has allowed men to be comfortable in bending the Word of God to suite their preconceptions. But that does not make it right. Higher criticism may stand on the doorstep of revelation and dare to question what God has said. But in the last analysis, it is man that will account for his words, not God.

This same truth is expressed elsewhere in Scripture. A few samples will suffice to show men are not to regard it as strange.

- ❑ “O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the intent of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and **fix their heart toward You**” (1 Chron 29:18).
- ❑ “And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to **make ready a people prepared for the Lord**” (Luke 1:17).
- ❑ “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, **Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved; and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus)**” (Eph 2:4-6).
- ❑ “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath **made us meet** to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12).
- ❑ “For God hath not **appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation** by our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:9).
- ❑ “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning **chosen you to salvation** through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2

God desired that men know what His wrath and power could do, so He raised up Pharaoh. Even more, He wants to show what the riches of His glory can do, so He abides the insolence of the wicked until such time as those riches will be seen.

were **marked out for this condemnation**”^{NKJV} (Jude 4).

There is no question about the existence of such people. Their presence is only for a time, and will contribute to the magnitude of God showing mercy upon His people. Rest assured, no one is a “vessel of wrath” who has a heart for God, has believed the Gospel, or is pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God. We must be willing to let the matter rest there.

MAKING HIS GLORY KNOWN

“... and that He might make known the riches of His glory.” The ultimate reason for God making His wrath and power known, is in order that He might make the riches of His glory known!

The riches of His glory. Because God’s glory is a rich repository of saving resources, the Spirit refers to “the riches of His glory.” The Lord does not refer to “the riches of His wrath,” because His wrath is destructive. It is not intended to

God desired that men know what His wrath and power could do, so He raised up Pharaoh. Even more, He wants to show what the riches of His glory can do, so He abides the insolence of the wicked until such time as those riches will be seen.

VESSELS OF MERCY

“... the vessels of mercy...” These are people fashioned to receive His mercy, not His wrath. They are the ones who will be transformed by that glory. In Christ, the Holy Spirit moves them from one stage of glory to another, conforming them to the image of God’s Son (2 Cor 3:18).

PREPARED BEFOREHAND

“... which He had prepared beforehand for glory.” The NIV reads, “whom he prepared in advance for glory.” The NAB reads, “which he has prepared previously for glory.” Whether this text is viewed linguistically or doctrinally, it still reads the same. There is no way to escape

Thess 2:13).

- ***“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”*** (1 Pet 1:2-3).
- ***“According as he hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”*** (Eph 1:4-5).

The point of the Spirit is that God has been righteous in all of this. In accomplishing this preparation of the vessels of mercy, none of His goodness has been suppressed. He has used means, such as the Gospel, the convincing work of the Holy Spirit, and the manipulation of circumstances. But the preparatory work was His, not man’s. HE prepared the vessels for mercy.

Samson, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Paul are expressly said to have been brought into the world to do God’s work

(Judges 13:5; Jer 1:5; Lk 1:13-15; Gal 1:15). Their presence, together with that of Isaac and Jacob, should enable us to receive this truth without hesitation. Esther’s uncle, Mordecai, knowing of the manner of God’s working, said to her, “who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esth 4:14). These are examples of vessels prepared beforehand for mercy. How God accomplished all of this may be difficult to comprehend, but that He DID it must be acknowledged.

EVEN US

“ . . . even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.” This is the conclusion of a lengthy question that began in verse twenty-two. The entirety of the thought reads this way in the New International Bible (NAB). *“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?”

Is it possible that history has been orchestrated for this “*day of salvation*” in which we live? Could it be that God has raised up holy men like Abraham, Moses, David, and John the Baptist in the prospect of the “*acceptable year of the Lord?*” Is it too difficult to believe that God has also raised up men like Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and Herod, bearing long with them, in the prospect of the day when men would become a new creation in Christ Jesus?

Indeed, this is exactly the point that is being made! Whether the men and their deeds have been good or evil, God has worked them all together for the good of those who love Him, and are the called according to His purpose. The godly prior to Jesus “*were not made perfect without us*” (Heb 11:40), and the wicked were endured with much longsuffering in prospect of those in Christ. God’s intent was to show mercy on chosen vessels, and He managed history so that would happen.

A CHANGE IN STATUS

²⁵ ***As He says also in Hosea: ‘I will call them My people, who were***

can refashion the clay, as well as originate it. Those who appeared to be

them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.” Peter also alludes to this text in his exposition of those who are in Christ Jesus. *“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy”* (1 Pet 2:9-10).

The Potter can refashion the clay, as well as originate it. Those who appeared to be unacceptable can be made acceptable. God is not only able to do this, He is righteous in the doing of it.

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.’***”

Now the Spirit will show us how marvelously God has worked. **The Potter**

unacceptable can be made acceptable. God is not only able to do this, He is righteous in the doing of it.

WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE

Verse 25 is taken from Hosea 2:23. ***“And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to***

Verse 26 is taken from Hosea 1:10. ***“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.”***

Hosea Was Speaking of Israel

In both of these texts (Hosea 1:10; 2:23), God is speaking about the Israelites. The first chapter of Hosea makes it quite clear that *“the children of Israel”* are the ones to whom it will be said, *“Ye are the sons of the living God.”* The second chapter deals extensively with wayward Israel. In it God declares He will remove them far from idols (2:15-17), make a covenant with them, and betroth them to Him forever (2:18-20). He will sow Israel for Himself in the land, and there (in the land) where He disavowed them, they will again be His people (v 23).

Yet, the Gentiles Are the Subject

Yet, in our text, the reference seems to apply to the Gentiles rather than the Jews: i.e., *“Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.”* In

my judgment, this text is not limited to the Gentiles, or to the Jews. Rather, the Spirit seems to have the real Jew and the true Israel in mind, as related earlier in Romans: *“But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly,”* and *“For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel”* (2:29; 9:6).

The acceptance of the Gentiles should not take men by surprise, even though they were alienated from the life of God. God had promised He would lift up His hand to the Gentiles (Isa 49:22), and that His glory would be declared among them (Isa 66:19).

The same God who promised to bring in the Gentiles has also promised to restore the Jews. In both cases, He gains great glory, and is shown to be the true

Potter. If we do not stumble at God causing us to be His people, why should we stumble at God turning His hand once more to the children of Israel?

The idea here is not that God changes His mind, but that He changes people! He is the Potter who can reshape the clay, making a new vessel out of it. *“But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. Then the word of the LORD came to me: ‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?’ declares the LORD. ‘Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.’”*^{NIV} (Jer 18:4-6). The very language should cause our hearts to bend low.

THE REMNANT WILL BE SAVED

“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.’”

The line of reasoning in this passage is remarkable. It is as though the Lord refuses to let us go until we see the marvels of His great salvation. Now the Spirit calls Isaiah to witness again. He is confirming to our hearts that Israel has not been repudiated by God, and that the light of hope still glows among them.

The passage quoted is found in 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.”^{NIV} Isaiah’s intention was to bring down the pride of Israel, for they tended to boast in their flesh. Thus he told them only a very small number would be saved, with the vast majority of them being cut off. That *“remnant”* is the means God uses to preserve the nation. From a practical point of view, they are why the nation has not been completely written off.

This *“remnant”* consists of vessels of mercy, which have been prepared to receive mercy. They are foreknown by God, and He has fashioned them for His glory.

God specializes in remnants. They are a means of showing the greatness of His power and His mercy. Ezra spoke of the remnant in this manner, *“And now for a little space grace hath been showed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage”* (Ezra 9:8). Their presence keeps the candle of hope glowing. It enables the humble of heart to revive. It moved Paul to have great heaviness and sorrow of heart for his brethren. This was not an expression of hopelessness, but one hope.

Because *“the remnant”* will be discussed later, I will move from the subject now. It is rich with God’s glory.

THE WORK WILL BE FINISHED

“²⁸ For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth.” Other versions read, **“FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD UPON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY,”**^{NASB} *“For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with **speed and finality,**”*^{NIV} *“for the Lord will execute his sentence on*

*the earth **quickly and decisively,**”*^{NRSV} *“for the Lord will execute His sentence upon the earth with **rigor and dispatch.**”*^{RSV} The point is, what God has determined will be completed righteously.

This verse is alluding to the latter part of Isaiah 10:22, and gives the sense of that text. *“A remnant of them will return; The destruction decreed shall **overflow with***

righteousness.” Isaiah’s meaning is that the judgment of God will appear to have devastated the nation, almost, as it were, eliminating them. Yet, a remnant will be saved, and that because God is righteous.

The meaning is that God’s work upon the earth is not a long and drawn out affair that finds Him reacting to the

intentions and works of men. He is not constantly adjusting His purpose, revising His plan, and doing the best He can to salvage some from among the sons of men. The work, by reason of time, may appear to have been very long. Yet, from the Divine point of view, it has been a “short work,” for only what was necessary has been done. There are no meaningless activities with God. Nor, indeed, does He engage in lengthy experiments.

The work is “short,” lasting only as

long as required, and terminating in absolute righteousness. Whether it is the flood, the overthrow Egypt, or the chastening of Israel, the work has been brief and righteous. Whether it has been the development of multitudinous seed from Abraham, the protection of the remnant during fierce judgments, or the regeneration of men in Christ Jesus, the work has been short and it has been righteous.

We must settle it in our minds that

when God begins to work, matters move swiftly, with dispatch and with righteousness. A nation like Babylon can be deposed in a night (Jer 51:31), or a spiritual nation can be born in a day (Isa 66:8). Whether it is a great awakening and rebirth as occurred on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-38), or a climactic judgment as the devastation occurring at the destruction of Jerusalem (Lk 21:20-22), “*He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth.*”

THE LORD LEFT A REMNANT

“²⁹ *And as Isaiah said before: “Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed [remnant], We would have become like Sodom, And we would have been made like Gomorrah.”*”

Here again, the Potter had power over the clay, leaving a remnant. The “remnant” did not exist because of human effort, but because the Lord “left” it, excluding it from the curse. The New Jerusalem Bible reads, “*Had the Lord Sabaoth not left us a few survivors, we should be like Sodom, we should be the same as Gomorrah.*”

THE LORD OF SABAOTH

The term “*Sabaoth*” means hosts, or armies. “*The Lord of Sabaoth*” is an expression denoting military power: i.e., “*the Lord of hosts,*” ^{NRSV} “*the Lord of armies,*” or “*the Lord Almighty .*” ^{NIV} James also refers to the Lord in the manner (James 5:4). The hosts of God are exceedingly large. On one occasion “*They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera*” (Judges 5:20). In another instance, God referred to the locust, the cankerworm, the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, as “*my great army which I sent among you*” (Joel 2:25). He called for lice, flies, frogs, and locusts in the plagues of Egypt (Ex 8:2,16,21). Angels have been summoned to fight against men, executing the judgments of the Lord (2 Sam 24:16; 2 Kgs 19:35). He has summoned the Assyrians or Chaldeans to fight for Him (Hab 1:6). Plagues and pestilence are in His arsenal (Gen 12:17; 1 Chron 21:14).

He can cause the sun to stand still so the battle may be won (Josh 10:12-13), or cause darkness to cover the earth (Ex 10:22). Fire and brimstone can fall from

Isaiah’s Word

The quotation is taken from Isaiah 1:9 where the “remnant” is described as “*very small.*” “*Except the LORD of hosts*

There is no hope of surviving the opposition of the Lord – that is, unless HE leaves a remnant! It is not possible for a person or a nation to in any sense survive unless the Lord allows them to do so. Further, as long as a remnant remains, there is hope, for there is no other reason for allowing a remnant to remain.

heaven (Lk 17:29), as well as hail (Ex 9:18) and torrential rain, as in the flood (Gen 7:11). “*Fire, and hail; snow, and vapors; stormy wind*” are said to fulfill His word (Psa 148:8). He can cause people’s defenses to depart from them (Num 14:9). Truly, He is “*the Lord of Sabaoth*” – “*the Lord of hosts!*”

There is no hope of surviving the opposition of the Lord – **that is, unless HE leaves a remnant!** It is not possible for a person or a nation to in any sense survive unless the Lord allows them to do so. Further, as long as a remnant remains, there is hope, for there is no other reason for allowing a remnant to remain. Remember, the Lord makes a short work upon the earth, terminating it in righteousness. There is no such thing as a remnant that is not meeting a Divine objective. The same Lord of hosts who brings devastation, also leaves a remnant!

had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.” The leaving of this “remnant” is what prompted Jeremiah to say, “*It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed*” (Lam 3:22).

Brief Summation

Because I have already dealt with this verse in our previous lesson (Rom 9:8), I will only restate some of those observations here, and make a few additional comments.

No remnant was left in Sodom or Gomorrah! God removed Lot and his family, then destroyed those ancient cities with “*everlasting fire*” (Jude 7). The reasoning here is powerful! The remnant that remained was not the result of mere human activity. The remnant was “LEFT” BY God Almighty! These were the faithful who were left like Noah. They remained after judgment, like Lot.

The scathing wrath of God did not touch them, any more than the fiery furnace touched the three Hebrew children.

Confirming that Israel's situation is the same since Christ's exaltation as it was in the days of Isaiah, the Spirit declares, "Even so then, at this

to remove the nation from the face of the earth. It also confirms the surety and effectiveness of the promise.

He never leaves a remnant unless there is a future work to be done with that remnant. Only when God has no further purpose for a people does He fail to leave a remnant, as with Sodom and Gomorrah.

The only reason for a leaving a seed is that future growth and fruitage are expected—and they are expected by God Himself. He never leaves a remnant unless there is a future work to be done with that remnant. Only when God has no further purpose for a people does He fail to leave a remnant, as with Sodom and Gomorrah.

The fact that God left "a very small remnant" substantiates that He did not remove the nation from the tablet of eternal purpose. He is not finished with it, as will be powerfully declared in the eleventh chapter.

present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom 11:6). The word of God, then, has not been ineffective, even though the larger part of Israel has not yet believed. The existence of the remnant justifies God in refusing

That "seed," or remnant, is "the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified" (Isa 61:3). And, indeed, He will be glorified through that remnant! Through faith, its existence causes hope to flourish!

CONCLUSION

The matters with which we have dealt have been very weighty. They are not commonly known among believers because they do not conform to the religious mind-set of our day. However, this is the manner in which the Holy Spirit reasons with us. When He speaks of righteousness, and of our need of it, He eventually speaks to us of the Jews. When flesh reasons that God has finished His work with the Jews, the Spirit speaks to us of the remnant. He tells us they have been "left" by God Himself, and that He will finish the work that He has started.

In all of His workings, God is

impeccably righteous. Nothing that He does is wrong, whether it is hardening Pharaoh's heart, or allowing Israel to continue. If He chooses to love Jacob and hate Esau, we need no further word on the matter than that it was His will to do so. His will is what makes it right, not its conformity to the judgments of men.

The point behind all of this is that we must be brought to trust in the Lord, not relying upon our own wisdom. If God knows how to preserve Israel, you can trust Him to preserve you. If He can thwart Pharaoh, bringing him down in utter frustration, He is surely able to deal

with your enemies.

It is never right to question God's demands or His works. It is never wrong to confess He is right in what He does. If His ways are difficult to comprehend now, you must believe the time will come when they will be made more clear to you. Many of us have heard Him say what Jesus said to Peter, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand" (John 13:7).

Now, go on your way rejoicing. Be glad that God has turned the reins of His kingdom over to Jesus, and not to you!

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 4/6/2001. Continuing in our overview of the book of Romans, we will be covering verses 30-33 of the ninth chapter. The theme will be, "ISRAEL'S PRESENT CONDITION AND ITS CAUSE." There is a Divine strategy that is being worked out among men. That purpose not only involves salvation, but our tutelage in the ways of God. The observations of this text lay the groundwork for the extensive reasoning of the next chapter. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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