

## **“IS GOD UNJUST?”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

**March 2, 2025, 10:30 AM**

**Scripture Texts: Romans 9:13-24**

### **Introduction.**

You can tell by the questions asked and objections raised these words were a stumbling block to the Christians in Rome. And they have been for Christians all the way to today. Frankly we are kind of embarrassed by these words. They don't seem helpful to us especially when we want to witness to unbelievers. We like to skip over this chapter.

Have you ever asked why this chapter is in the Bible? Is this really necessary? Why do you think God put these hard truths in Scripture? This is in Scripture because God thinks we need it. He wants us to know this about Him.

God knows our tendency to want to make Him in our own image. We want to create our own designer God, and the God we would design would not say things like this. You have heard people say, “Well my God would never be angry or have wrath or be unfair. My God would never say, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. My God would save everyone. That's my God.”

God is not embarrassed about Himself, and He wants us to know Him as He truly is and to see the glory of His character and nature and ways.

We are in the middle of Romans 9, a chapter in which the Apostle Paul is explaining how in the world God could break His promise to His covenant children, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and turn his back on them and instead give the fulfillment of His promise to the unpromised, uncircumcised, uncovenanted dirty Gentiles. This is scandalous, how could God break His Word? But as it turns out Paul's answer is even more scandalous. Not all Israel is Israel.

### **9:14-18 Is God Unjust?**

As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

Those are harsh sounding words. And it would be bad enough if Paul was the one who said those words, but those aren't just Paul's words, they are a direct quote from the OT.

I am reminded of the preacher who was waxing eloquent one time and said, "These are just my words, there are the words of someone who knows what he is talking about." Ouch.

"Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" is the declaration of God long ago. God's sovereign choosing has been around for a really long time. The Jews must have known that, but somehow they skipped over it or read past it or just neglected to really think about God's Word and how it applies to them.

Reading their minds Paul asks the question they are thinking and perhaps we are thinking. God has to be fair the way we define fairness. He has to think and act the way we expect Him too. He has to uphold fairness, justice, equality,

**Romans 9:14-16** What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!

Is there injustice or unfairness with God? Did God say all the Jews were the children of Abraham, and then cut them off?

How does Paul answer the charge of injustice? When the question arises out of moral and spiritual rebelliousness and arrogance, Paul doesn't dignify the question with a long, complicated academic, theological discourse on the relationship between the authority of God and the freedom of man.

The Apostle Paul, answers this rebellious attack upon Almighty God with a most unscholarly, authoritative declaration; or more accurately, condemnation:

May it never be! The theological equivalent to "Because I say so—that's why."

Once again, he doesn't give his words, he quotes God's Word.

**Exodus 33:18-19** Moses said, "Please show me your glory." 19 And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

“Choosing whom to show mercy to, and whom not to show mercy to, is my very character. My very Being. My very Name.” “Choice is Who I Am, and in My choice I owe nothing to no one—never.” This is the very essence of what it means to be God.

Since God is pleased to rest on His own authority to do whatever it is in His pleasure and prerogative to do, Paul feels no need to justify God’s way, or explain them, or make them more palatable to our human sensitivities. God is God, let God be God.

Paul then turns to the OT yet again, making his case. The choice of Pharaoh is a brilliant move. If you read through the ten plagues you will notice that through the first five it is Pharaoh who hardens his heart against God and God’s people. He resists God again and again. God hardened Pharaoh’s heart after Pharaoh had already done so. He is to blame.

Pharaoh’s hardening of his own heart, and God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart are two sides of the same coin. Pharaoh is both responsible and guilty for hardening his own heart.

It is important to remember that when God hardens someone, He is not changing them from innocent or even neutral to guilty. They are already guilty, He is simply handing them over to the consequences of their own sin. No one is lost who desires to be saved.

God’s saving compassion is abundant. But he holds accountable those who reject it.

What is the definition of mercy? Receiving something we don’t deserve. If we deserved it, it wouldn’t be mercy, it would be justice. Does God owe anyone salvation? No. So if God doesn’t owe anyone mercy, then He cannot be charged with injustice if He doesn’t give. God being God has three choices, give mercy to no one, give mercy to some, or give mercy to all. It’s God’s choice and there is no injustice in any of His choices. The only basis for God’s dealings with us is His free choice to give mercy.

No one in hell will ever question God’s justice. They know they got what they deserved. The miracle here is that God has any mercy for some at all, when none deserved it. When God rescues someone in His mercy, He is changing them from guilty to innocent.

16 So then, it does not depend on human will or effort but on God who shows mercy.

## **9:19-21 Can Man still be held Accountable?**

So God is not unjust. But we aren't out of the woods yet. There is still another big question.

**Romans 9:19** You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?"

You can know Paul is teaching the sovereignty of God over the human will, because he addresses that most logical question that is asked in light of what he teaches.

If it is God who hardens, then how can Pharaoh be blamed for being hardened? If he can't resist God's will then he can't help it. That's the question, a questions people have been asking for thousands of years. It is one of the most asked theological questions in all history.

If God hardens some and has mercy on others, where does He get off blaming us for being hard? Yeah, what about that, Paul? Paul gives two responses.

*First*, the absolute right of God to be God.

**Romans 9:19-20** You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" 20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?"

Paul gives a strong response that cuts through all the philosophy and theology and argument about free will and the problem of evil.

He goes straight to the Bible and quotes Isaiah 29

**Isaiah 29:16** Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, "He did not make me"; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"?

It is like calling God to the stand to put Him on trial and make Him answer for how and why He does what He does.

Don't approach God with arrogance or pride or self-righteousness.

Paul is saying God is God, and God has the right to do whatever He pleases and wills with His creation and His creatures. It is arrogance to call God into question or to rebuke God. God can make whatever He wants out of clay, even vessels for mercy and vessels for wrath. And there can only be one reason for why He does either, for the sake of His glory.

What can we say to God? We are finite and flesh, we are creatures of the creator, we exist only at the pleasure of His will.

Doesn't God have the right to use you however He wants. And when He does, aren't His ways, reasons, thoughts far higher than ours.

*Second*, we have real, genuine moral responsibility. The point of the illustration is to show there is a relationship between the creator and the created.

Again and again we find in Scripture that God does, in fact, hold man responsible for his choices—every last one of them.

God calls man to obedience. God calls man to repentance for disobedience. God commands man to keep His law. God faults man for failure to obey His law. God commands man to choose between life and death, pleading with him to choose life so he and his children may live. God instructs man in the path he should go. In all of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation we are taught we are free moral agents with real choices and real responsibility for that choice.

It is significant that Paul offers no 'logical' explanation for the compatibility of God's sovereignty with the equally biblical teaching that God is scrupulously fair and that human beings are justifiably blameworthy for their actions. We must affirm the truth of these great biblical doctrines recognizing the mystery of it. We are responsible for our actions, and God is sovereign over all.

Ask any true believer in Jesus how they came to be saved and they will tell you it was the grace of God, not their own doing. And as for those who don't believe they know it's because of their own sin and that they loved something else more than God; that is why they didn't believe.

So it is that those who go to hell have no one to blame but themselves. Those who go to heaven have no one to praise but Jesus Christ. Thus we see that salvation is all of grace from its beginning to its end.

These verses in Romans 9 are difficult for us because we are profoundly convinced we are at the center of the universe, not God. We are the masters of our fate and captains of our souls, that we control our lives and destiny. We can't cope with the idea that we might be bit players in someone else's drama, rather than the star of our own story.

### **9:22-24 Why Does God Delay in Showing His Wrath?**

The surprising purposes of God. For Paul the surprising thing is not why does God reject some, but why is God so patient and slow to judge and act?

One reason is it reveals God's great power to overcome evil and to save His people. The main focus is on those whom God has prepared in advance for glory, objects of the warmth of His mercy.

In a world without sin, what would we never know about God? Some of His greatest attributes would never be known and the fulness of His glory would be missed. In a world without sin and evil we would never know God's fierce wrath and His great power. And we would never see the greatness of His mercy and grace. In order for us to know the magnitude of God's great forgiveness, we must first have sins to be forgiven.

Think of all the places in Scripture where God's attributes of wrath and power and justice and mercy are revealed.

- **The Flood and Noah's Ark (Genesis 6-9)** – God's justice was shown in the judgment of the world through the flood, but His mercy was displayed in preserving Noah and his family to continue His redemptive plan.
- **David's Sin and Forgiveness (2 Samuel 12; Psalm 51)** – David faced consequences for his sin with Bathsheba, but God mercifully forgave him when he repented, showing both justice and grace.
- **Jonah and Nineveh (Jonah 3-4)** – God warned Nineveh of impending judgment, but when they repented, He showed mercy.
- **The Thief on the Cross (Luke 23:39-43)** – One thief received justice for his crimes, while the other received undeserved mercy through faith in Jesus.
- **The Cross of Christ (Romans 3:23-26)** – God's justice against sin required the penalty for sin, but His mercy provided Jesus as the atoning sacrifice. Through the cross, God remains just while also mercifully justifying sinners who have faith in Jesus.

## **Implications and application.**

*Whatever you may not fully understand about the way God works in our world, be clear about this from verse 23.* God's ultimate purpose in all His wrath and power and mercy is this: "to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory."

If you are a Christian today, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then this is what you are: a vessel of mercy prepared before the creation of the world to know the riches of the glory of God.

The ultimate purpose of your existence is to know, to taste and see the unsurpassing splendor of the riches of the glory of God.

Paul said these riches are *unimaginable*: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined . . . God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). He said these riches are *immeasurable*: "In the coming ages he [will] show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

"Our knowledge of the riches of the glory of God will increase forever and ever, world without end, so will our joy. His mercies will be new every morning. And there will be not one boring day in heaven. You were made to know the riches of the glory of God" (John Piper).

Is there someone here who thinks, "I am not chosen, I am not elect. God didn't pick me." Don't ever say that.

God sent His Son to appeal to you to repent and turn to Him, to surrender and humble yourself to God. What does His Son say to you, come to me.

**John 6:35-40** Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. 36 . . . and *whoever comes to me I will never cast out.* . . . 40 For this is the will of my Father, that *everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*"

**Romans 10:13** "*everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*"