

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE **(LESSON SIXTEEN)**

THE ELECTION OF GOD **(PART SEVEN)**

When we commenced our examination of the Doctrine of Election in **Lesson 10**, we noted that the aspect of God's sovereignty that has provoked the most controversy is the one that deals with His plan of salvation, particularly as it concerns the decree of election. In our attempt to explore this doctrine more fully, we embarked on a study of **Romans 9:6-24** in **Lesson 12**. We stated in that Lesson that **Romans 9:6-24** was perhaps the most forceful passage of scripture in the entire Word of God relative to the doctrines of predestination and election, as well as the sovereignty of God. In this Lesson, we will conclude our examination of this fascinating and revealing portion of God's Word. We do so recognizing that it is vital for those of us who profess to base our faith entirely on the Bible, to be always willing to use the Bible to re-evaluate our faith. We must not be afraid to "search the scriptures" in order to assess whether or not what we have been taught and believed is indeed the truth. We must ensure that we heed the exhortation of the apostle Paul to Timothy in **2 Timothy 2:15**: "*Make every effort to present yourself before God as a proven worker who does not need to be ashamed, teaching the message of truth accurately*" (**New English Translation**).

Let us read the text again, before looking at verses **22-24** in greater detail.

ROMANS 9:6-24

6 *Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:*

7 *Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.*

8 *That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.*

9 *For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son.*

10 *And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac;*

11 *(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)*

12 *It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.*

13 *As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.*

14 *What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.*

15 *For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*

16 *So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.*

17 *For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.*

18 *Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.*

19 *Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?*

20 *Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?*

21 *Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?*

22 *What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:*

23 *And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,*

24 *Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?*

In the previous Lesson, we had examined verses **19-21**. *“Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?”*

From the opening verses of **Romans 9**, Paul had argued intentionally and unrelentingly that the determining factor in human affairs, including salvation, is the sovereign will of God and not the will of man. The question that he anticipated in verse **19** was based on his recognition that by insisting so strongly that it is the exercise of God’s sovereignty that determines the destiny of humans, he had opened the door for persons to question the justice of God. The difficulty that Paul anticipated his readers would have with his argument was this: “If salvation results from God’s sovereign, predestining, electing favour, then why does God find fault with those who are not the recipients of His favour?”

Paul responded to the objection in a very forceful manner. He rebuked the objector for being so arrogant, rude and foolish to even think of opposing God. What Paul argued in effect was this: If a potter has the right to make out of the same lump of clay, one vessel for honour and another for dishonour, then certainly God, has the right, out of the same mass of sinful humanity, to have mercy and compassion on some, electing them to everlasting life, and to pass over others, thus allowing them to be hardened and to ultimately receive the just recompense for their sins.

In verses **22-24**, Paul continues to insist that God has the right of an absolute sovereign and creator to exercise His prerogative in determining human destiny in respect of those prepared for destruction and those prepared for glory. He writes, *“What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”*

The **New Living Translation** renders the passage as follows: *“In the same way, even though God has the right to show his anger and his power, he is very patient with those on whom his anger falls, who were made for destruction. He does this to make the riches of his glory shine even brighter on those to whom he shows mercy, who were prepared in advance for glory. And we are among those whom he selected, both from the Jews and from the Gentiles.”*

It must be admitted that Verse **22** is not an easy one to interpret. It appears as though Paul is still addressing a hypothetical objector. He challenges the objector to state his or her reason for rejecting his insistence that it is God’s right to demonstrate His wrath towards the vessels prepared for destruction. Paul is expecting that the objector will eventually concede that God does indeed have the right to act in this way. *“But what if God, willing to demonstrate his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath prepared for destruction?”* (**New English Translation**)

In the present context, Paul seems to be giving a causal meaning to the word “*willing*.” He is asking in effect, “But what if God endured with much patience the objects of His wrath, prepared for destruction, **because** He chose to demonstrate His wrath and make His power known?” Earlier Paul had likened God to a potter. He now applies this illustration to God’s sovereign purpose for two different sets of people. He states the two alternatives as conditional clauses (What if...?) and he leaves the obvious common conclusion unstated. The obvious conclusion is of course “Does not God have that right?”

The first alternative is that God bore with great patience the objects of His wrath, prepared for destruction. Paul does not explicitly identify who the objects of God’s wrath are but since he identifies the objects of His mercy in verse **23** as “*us whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?*” we may infer confidently that the objects of God’s wrath are those who are not called.

The word “*prepared*” is in a construction in the Greek which describes a past action having present results. The thought is that the objects of God’s wrath have been and are in a state of readiness or ripeness to receive God’s wrath. God has patiently endured their antagonism to Him but their judgment is coming. Those who oppose Him and refuse to turn to Him are then “*prepared*” by Him for condemnation. The objects of wrath are prepared by God for eternal judgment not because He delights to do so, but because of their sin. In view of their sin, which makes them “ripe” for destruction, God is willing to exhibit His wrath, and He will do so at the proper time.

The other alternative relates to God’s dealings with the objects of His mercy. God chose them as such in order to make the riches of His glory known and He prepared them in advance for glory. The words “*afore prepared*” are the translation of a Greek word which means “ready beforehand.” In this verse, Paul appears to be challenging the same hypothetical objector to produce evidence to explain his or her reason for rejecting his declaration that it is God’s right to make known the riches of His glory towards those prepared for glory. Again, it is Paul’s expectation that the objector will eventually concede God’s right to do so.

Those whom God has prepared for glory are described by Paul as those whom God has “*called*” both Jews and Gentiles. What do we know about those whom God has called? “*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*” (**Romans 8:28**). It is a God-thing brothers and sisters, not a man-thing.

When we read through the Bible, we are confronted with the evidence of God’s long-suffering and patient endurance, not only with persons whom we know to be objects of His predestining, electing favour, but also with those who we know have acted as His enemies to the very end. There are instances when God was so patient with the wicked that He seemed to be condoning sin.

Beloved ones, it is important for us to understand that the long-suffering of God must not be considered as indifference to sin. Rather, we must come to appreciate that the history of all nations clearly indicates that God not only loves righteousness and hates iniquity but that He is always “*slow to anger and plenteous in mercy*” (**Psalms 86:15**). Now, it must be said that the patient endurance of God does not necessarily effect a beneficial change in the hearts of sinners. Indeed, the record of History reveals that His patience toward sinners, instead of curing their hatred of Him and their disobedience of His commandments, rather incited them the more to hate and oppose Him.

This is so *“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Romans 8:7-8).*

Brothers and sisters, we say again that in order for an individual to be saved, God must intrude into the life of that person and sovereignly create faith in his or her heart. God operates in this manner in the lives of those who are the objects of His special predestining, electing favour. In the case of those who are not the objects of His special predestining, electing favour, He simply leaves them to themselves. He does not actively create evil or unbelief in their hearts, but He passes them over and leaves them to their own sinful ways. God demonstrates long-suffering and patient endurance to the persons in both categories but the effects on the individuals themselves are vastly different. The elect are saved, while those who are not are hardened.

Let us return for a moment to Pharaoh who is Paul's example of those who are hardened. Let us ask “What if God, choosing to show His wrath and make His power known, bore with great patience Pharaoh, the object of His wrath prepared for destruction? What if He did this to make the riches of His glory known to Moses and the Israelites, the objects of His mercy, whom He prepared in advance for glory?” If God had so desired, He could have cut off Pharaoh on the first occasion of his refusal to release the children of Israel. He could have done so after each of Pharaoh's refusals. But God did not desire to do so. It was not His will to do so. It was His will to be patient with the King of Egypt, to exercise forbearance toward him, and to give him space for repentance until he had filled up the measure of his iniquities and was ripe for the judgments that had been pronounced against him.

In the same manner, God could have wiped out the nation of Israel when they broke the covenant that He had made with them and worshipped the golden calf. If it was His will, God could have destroyed every single Israelite instantly and raised up another people for Moses to lead. And He would have been entirely just if He had done so. But instead, He chose to exercise mercy and compassion to the great majority of them and in doing so, He did not act unjustly. He demonstrated His long-suffering toward them throughout all their provocations in the wilderness during the space of forty years, and throughout all their backslidings from Him in the Promised Land for fifteen hundred years. He was patient with them until, by the crucifixion of Jesus their Messiah, they had filled up the measure of their own and their fathers' iniquities (see **Matthew 23:32**). God's foreknowledge of how much they would abuse His long-suffering did not prevent Him from demonstrating His patience toward them. In doing so God's tremendous mercy was displayed and their continued stubbornness and wicked rebellion was clearly highlighted. Because of this, God's wrath against sin and His power to avenge it were more plainly revealed and appreciated. The longer God bears patiently with the sinfulness and rebellion of human beings, the more just He appears to be when He finally unleashes His wrath against them.

Brothers and sisters, God may pursue a similar course in respect of the vessels of mercy, in order ultimately to manifestly demonstrate the riches of His glory toward them. Take Abraham for example. God was not forced to reveal Himself to Abraham and bring him out from his family and his country, lead him to the land of Canaan and make of him a nation. God could have passed over him and left him to continue worshipping the idols that his fathers had worshipped. When He called Abraham from out of darkness into His marvellous light, God was under no obligation to call any other Gentile. He was at liberty to leave them to their own ways until the time of the Messiah in order to show more fully that *“In the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God” (1 Corinthians 1:21)*, and that, if left to themselves, nothing but universal ruin would follow.

When we consider the life of Paul, we have the same truth illustrated. Paul tells us in **Galatians 1:15** that God had separated him as a chosen vessel even from his mother's womb. Yet, in spite of this, God left him for many years to go his own way, even to the committing of murder. Was God unjust in allowing Paul to do so? Was there any obligation binding God to save Paul earlier than He did? Was not God free to allow Paul to go on, deceived and deceiving others, until the terrible nature of his conduct could provide a more solid contrast to the grace of God which becomes more amazing when we see it exercised in such a way, on such a man, and at such a time? Listen to Paul's own testimony in **1 Timothy 1:12-17**:

"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen."

The **Message** translates the passage as follows: *"I'm so grateful to Christ Jesus for making me adequate to do this work. He went out on a limb, you know, in trusting me with this ministry. The only credentials I brought to it were invective and witch hunts and arrogance. But I was treated mercifully because I didn't know what I was doing — didn't know Who I was doing it against! Grace mixed with faith and love poured over me and into me. And all because of Jesus. Here's a word you can take to heart and depend on: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. I'm proof — Public Sinner Number One — of someone who could never have made it apart from sheer mercy. And now he shows me off — evidence of his endless patience — to those who are right on the edge of trusting him forever. Deep honor and bright glory to the King of All Time — One God, Immortal, Invisible, ever and always. Oh, yes!"*

In acting as He acted, God was not unjust to Abraham and Paul to whom He exercised His sovereign electing favour, nor was He unjust to those who were not the recipients of His sovereign electing favour. They were already in the provision for which they had fitted themselves. If God had not saved Abraham or Paul, He would certainly not have done them any injustice, for they did not deserve to be saved or to receive any favour whatsoever from Him.

God allowed sin, misery and death to proceed on their terrible way in order that when He acted to deliver someone from them, His own grace and power might shine forth all the more brightly. Our Lord had the power to heal Lazarus from where he was when He received the news of his illness. But instead, He allowed him to die. He allowed his body to be corrupted. He did this on purpose so that His own power might be the more abundantly visible and glorious.

Beloved ones, those of us who are saved are "*vessels of mercy*" prepared beforehand for glory by God. If we had received justice instead of mercy, we would have been "*vessels of wrath fitted to destruction*." Therefore, we can take none of the credit for anything that we have received from God! In our salvation, we have become the objects of a new creation (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). The potter has taken clay from the lump and has made us into vessels of honour. Our sinfulness and wretchedness did not frustrate God. In His own time and in His own way, He made us alive in Christ.

At first, those who looked at us could only see the fragments of the old Adamic nature, which did not appear to be different from the fragments in any other human being. Little by little however, the transforming presence and power of the God began to make itself manifest. We are being changed from glory to glory by the Holy Spirit (**2 Corinthians 3:18**). From the moment we are saved, we look forward to the future, rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God (**Romans 5:2**). The righteousness and the glory of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ is transferred to our account. While we live on the earth, we are looking forward to the glory that shall be revealed in us, understanding that the sufferings of this present time are nothing in comparison to that which lies before us (**Romans 8:18**).

A seminary professor once said to one of his students, "Try to explain election, and you may lose your mind; but explain it away and you will lose your soul!" While we will never be able to explain the Doctrine of Election in such a manner as to satisfy all the queries that arise in the minds of all those who grapple with it, we may humbly, but confidently make the following statements:

The Doctrine of Election teaches that the choosing of an individual to salvation in no way hinges upon foreseen merit in that individual. The Election of one as opposed to the by-passing of another, rests entirely with God, and is according to His own good pleasure. Moreover, this choice was made before the foundation of the world (**Ephesians 1:4**). It is a sovereign act, predetermined without respect to the merit or demerit of the individual either before or after regeneration.

Our salvation is entirely in the hands of God. The basis of His choice of any one individual over against another being unrelated to the worthiness or unworthiness of that individual. All whom He has chosen as gifts to His Son will be called, will hear the call, and will respond to the call. And only those will do so.

Whosoever wills to come, may do so because none wills to come who is not already marked out as part of the Father's gift to the Son. The change that is wrought, to free a person's will from its bondage to sin and death, enabling them to turn and seek his face instead of fleeing from Him is an inward change. As many as are ordained to eternal life believe (**Acts 13:48**).

Those who are not ordained to eternal life are not condemned to unbelief but merely permitted to continue in their own way, being left where by nature they wish to be. They are hardened and freely go only in the direction that corresponds to the fallen nature of man.