

The Chosen and the Hardened
Romans 9:1-23
By David Feddes

If I had to say what was one of the most unpopular passages in the Bible, I would say Romans 9. And if I had to say what is the most unpopular doctrine in the Bible, it might be the doctrines of election and reprobation, doctrines that are contained in Romans 9. But just because they are unpopular doctrines does not mean they are not true. The Bible is God's revelation, and Romans 9 is a revelation from God. And so I want to talk with you today about the chosen and the hardened.

A Missionary's Burden

Romans 9 begins with the apostle Paul saying, "I speak the truth in Christ. I am not lying. My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit. I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel" (Romans 9:1-3). Paul is agonizing because he is feeling the burden of a missionary who is seeing people who do not respond to the gospel message, in this case many, many of his own people, the people of Israel.

I want you to notice two things here. One is Paul's **conviction** that without faith in Christ, the people of Israel will be lost. How else could you possibly explain Paul's willingness to be himself cursed and cut off from Christ unless he thought that the people of Israel who were rejecting Christ were not going to be saved? At the beginning of Romans 10, Paul actually says, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer for Israel is that they may be saved" (Romans 10:1). So he is clearly believing and convicted that they are not saved if they are not responding to Christ. The basis of his burden is in part his deep conviction that because they do not accept Christ by faith, they are not saved.

The other aspect that brings him grief is his **compassion**, because he cares about these people. They are his people. They are his kinsmen, his relatives. Many of them are perishing. He does not try to make himself feel better by saying, "Maybe they will not perish even if they do not accept Christ." No, he believes that if they do not accept Christ, they will perish, and he agonizes over them.

And we too, whatever we may think of certain doctrinal aspects, need to understand that salvation comes only through Jesus Christ. And we should say that with a heavy heart when we are saying it to people who are rejecting Christ. You are not ready to be an ambassador for Jesus, a missionary, or a pastor if you do not have a heart that grieves when people turn away and reject the gospel. And you are not ready to bring the gospel if you think that there are lots of other ways to save people besides Jesus.

Some people, even some claiming to be evangelicals, say that everybody is going to make it to heaven in the end. I guarantee you that somebody who thought that way would never have written these first few verses of Romans 9. Paul is in anguish because he loves these people, and at the same time he senses that unless they turn to Christ, they will be lost. That is his burden.

A blessed heritage

It is an even bigger burden because these are the people you would have expected to receive the gospel. They had so many advantages. “Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.” (Romans 9:4-5) Paul says, “These people have had so many advantages, and God has lavished his blessings on the chosen nation of Israel, and yet many members of that chosen nation have turned away from Christ.”

I can feel just a little bit of what Paul feels, and maybe you can too, when you look at your own people. Even if you are not Jewish, some of us who come from a Western European background or who are in North America think of the great heritage, some of the great Christians who came before us in Europe (Luther, Calvin, Knox) or in America (Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield and others who were mighty preachers of God in this nation). And when you see many, many who are in these nations that had so many advantages rejecting the gospel, it is heartbreaking.

And when you see some of that going on, you may say, “Well, is the gospel really true? Is God’s word really powerful to save?” If people who you expect to accept it do not accept it, that was a very pressing problem for Paul.

Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. It awkward that the Jewish Messiah was rejected by most Jews. And so it is a problem for Paul’s heart because he loves them and he wants them to come to Christ. It is a problem for the mind because many are saying, “Well, if the Jews do not accept Jesus as their Messiah, that is not very good evidence that he really is their Messiah,” or at least it is not very good evidence that God’s word is powerful to save. Even in our own time, people say, “Europe and America are becoming so secularized, and churches have fewer people in them, and fewer people believe in Christ. This just goes to show you that Christianity does not have much in its favor. It may not be true.”

Has God’s gospel failed?

How did Paul deal with that? His response gives us a hint of how we might deal with similar questions we might have. Has God’s gospel failed? Paul’s answer is no, not all in the chosen family are chosen individuals. “It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned’” (Romans 9:6–7).

Paul is saying God’s word has not failed because it has never been the case that all are saved. It has always been the case that God’s word saves his chosen. There is a chosen nation, but that does not mean all the individuals within that chosen nation were chosen by God for salvation.

Not only that, but now, since the coming of the gospel, many who are not physical descendants of Abraham are nonetheless children of Abraham by faith. They are reckoned as God’s chosen.

And so the gospel has not failed. It is still saving all those whom God chose and to whom it is directed. "In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: 'At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son'" (Romans 9:8-9).

Abraham had a number of children. He became old and had not been able to have any yet. So his wife Sarah's maid, Hagar, was given to him. He slept with her, and she became pregnant and had a child named Ishmael. But that was not the child who would give birth to the rest of the chosen race. Later, after Sarah died, Abraham had a wife named Keturah and several children by her, and they too were not the children of the promise. The child of the promise was Isaac, the promised son of Sarah, who had been infertile and unable to have a child. And it was through Isaac that Abraham's offspring would be named. Paul is saying it has always been the case that there has been one chosen and others not, and it is not just whether they were natural children, but whether it was based on the promise.

Unconditional election

Somebody might say, "Well, yeah, but God was choosing based on who the princess was, who the special wife was, and the choice of Isaac was based on Sarah being the woman who was his mother. Hagar and Keturah were not the main wives, and that was the basis of the choice." But Paul goes on to look at another choice that was made.

He says, "Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose in election might stand, not by works but by him who calls, she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written: 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated'" (Romans 9:10-13).

Now take a closer look at that. In the case of Abraham and Sarah, you had a child chosen who was the child of the two of them, and the other women who had been with Abraham, their children were not chosen. But in this case, you have the same father, Isaac. You have the same mother, Rebekah. You have the same pregnancy: they are twins. So you have all these things that are exactly the same. And if there is one little advantage that would tilt to one over the other, it is that Esau is the firstborn. So if there is any advantage at all between these two twins who are about to be born, the advantage goes to Esau. Who is the chosen? "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." The older, Esau, will serve the younger. That was God's decision before they were born, before either of them had done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose in election might stand.

This is what theologians call unconditional election. God does not base it on any qualification. And then it works its way out. Isaac has these two sons, and in some ways Esau is the more likable one. Jacob is sneaky. He does not mind ripping others off. Sometimes he is kind of a chicken. Esau is a man's man and likable in some respects. But nonetheless, what happens? God has made that decision.

And then as you read how their lives play out, God appears to Jacob in a dream and helps Jacob to come to know him. Later on, he comes to Jacob and wrestles with him and declares his name

not to be Jacob but Israel, the one who wrestles with God and man and wins. God keeps working with Jacob despite all of Jacob's problems and faults and makes him a man of God. Meanwhile, Esau is a man who despises his own birthright and sells it for a pot of stew. He is a man who marries pagan wives and does what he feels like. The New Testament says, "Do not be godless like Esau" (Hebrews 12:16). That is how Esau's life unfolded. And his descendants, the nation of Edom, also lived far from God.

The fact is that before Jacob and Esau were ever born, God had chosen Jacob. You do not have to like it. We may not want to accept the explanation, but there it is. It is God's purpose in election and not by the works of Jacob or Esau, not by qualifications, because it was the same father, the same mother, the same pregnancy, and Esau even had a slight advantage. And God chooses the one who does not have even that slight advantage as the one who is going to be God's man and through whom the promise is going to come. So Paul is showing from this that God has always based his decision to deal with people on his own electing love and not simply on people's deserving.

Is God unfair?

This raises the question, is God unfair? "What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all. For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Romans 9:14–16). It is all about God's mercy, not our desire or effort. And if you want to say, "That is not fair," you do not want to go there. If you want to start arguing with God on the basis of what is fair and just, then keep in mind these words from Shakespeare: "Though justice be thy plea, consider this, that in the course of justice none of us should see salvation."

Do you want to go to God on the basis of justice? On the basis of justice, we can come only as people who are guilty sinners before the face of God and who deserve only damnation. The only fair thing, if fairness is what we demand, is for all humans to be damned to hell. Nobody would be saved if God simply gave each of us what we deserve.

Now in his electing love, God has decided to treat some of us in mercy rather than in strict justice. He is still just because he takes our sins and lays them on Jesus and pays for them. He pays for the sins of his elect, but not for all sins. He saves his elect and treats them with mercy. But he does not save all people. And we cannot say that God is unjust for doing it that way, because it is only his mercy and his free gift and his decision in Christ that saves anybody whatsoever.

I like the story of a wealthy but not very pretty woman who wanted her portrait painted by a great painter. She was quite vain and quite proud of her looks, so she posed for the portrait. The painter worked on it for many days, and finally he was finished. She was eager to see it. but when she looked at it for the first time, her face fell. "Sir," she said, "that painting does not do me justice." The painter responded, "Madam, you do not need justice. You need mercy." That is what God says to us. You do not need justice. You need mercy.

So you cannot even start talking about whether God is just or fair, because he is always just and fair. Justice means damnation for all. Mercy means salvation for some. And God gives mercy through Jesus Christ. That is Paul's explanation. He says it does not depend on how hard we try or how much we want it. "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Romans 9:16). And that is what he told Moses long ago: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (Exodus 33:19).

Hardening

Paul goes on, "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' Therefore, God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden (Romans 9:17-18).

Those words, "He has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden," are very hard to swallow. Theologian Michael Horton says that when he was a young man he was reading the Bible and he came to that verse, "He has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden," and he slammed his Bible shut and threw it against the wall. As he thought about it and pondered it, he thought he began to get God's message. And the message was this: "I'm God. You're not. Deal with it."

God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy. He hardens whom he wants to harden. He is God. You are not. You had better learn to live with that. In the case of Pharaoh, God told Moses before Moses ever went to Egypt that he was going to raise up Pharaoh and display his power. Again and again we read that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. We also read that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, and he was fully responsible for that. But God hardened his heart too. He made Pharaoh stern and strong beyond all human endurance as those plagues came upon him because God had his own purpose in doing that, and God had the right to use Pharaoh and to harden him in that manner. God could use Pharaoh that way.

Think of Judas. Judas was a man whom God used. God allowed Satan to enter into the heart of Judas and to betray Jesus Christ and to offer Jesus Christ up as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. But Judas himself was possessed by Satan, committed suicide, and went to hell. Judas was a man who was bypassed. Jesus chose many to be his disciples. He chose Judas to be among their number, but for a different purpose. Judas began to show his true colors when he stole from the disciples' treasury and when he criticized someone who spent a lot of money doing something kind for Jesus. Judas became worse and more hardened. Finally, he was ripe for Satan to come in, and God could still use Judas for his own purpose.

Think of it this way. If you were a police chief and you found out that one of your officers was crooked, you could let him go on, and you might choose to do that. That would not necessarily mean you were bad. You might think, "Well, if I let him keep on going and getting even worse, I am going to find out who some of the other bad guys are. I will find out what crime bosses this crooked cop is dealing with. I will find out what other crooked cops he is associating with. And after I have used him for my own purposes, then I will bring him in and punish him."

The Bible says God can use Pharaoh or Judas or anybody else for his own purposes. He can have mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, but he can also harden whom he wants to harden and glorify himself even through their judgment. And in the case of Israel at the time of Jesus, he could harden some of them, and he could use that hardening for the purpose of bringing the salvation in Jesus to more and more Gentiles. God has his own purposes, whether they are the purposes of mercy or the purposes of hardening.

How can God blame us?

Paul says, "One of you will say to me: 'Why then does God still blame us? For who resists his will?' But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" (Romans 9:19–21).

I want you to notice the question that is being asked. Why does God still blame us if he is so sovereign in all of this? Let me ask you this. Does the gospel you believe and teach ever make anybody ask this question? If it does not, you probably are not preaching the gospel the way Paul preached it. When Paul preached the gospel that we are saved by faith in God's grace and not by our own works, some people objected and said, "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may abound?" Paul had to deal with questions like that in his epistles because that was the kind of question people would ask when they heard him preach salvation by faith in Christ alone and not by their own works. And if nobody ever asks you the question, "Does that mean we can just get away with sin?" then you probably have not preached grace and faith in Christ as freely as it should be preached.

Once the question is asked, you still have to deal with it. But my point here is this. If you have preached about election in a manner that says, "God looks ahead in time and sees what we are going to do and then he responds to us accordingly," nobody would raise this objection. They would raise it only if they are told, "He has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy and he hardens whom he wants to harden," and that God is the complete authority. Only then do they ask the question, "How can God still blame us? For who resists his will?"

The apostle has been willing to take various questions and address them. It is not always wrong to ask tough questions. But there does come a point when the questions have to end, especially when you start to judge God. And so Paul says, "Who are you, O man, to talk back to God?" He is the one who is in charge. God is the creator, and the first word belongs to God the creator. Before the foundations of the world, God made his decisions and he had the first word. God is the judge, and at the end of the world God gets the final word. We need to get used to that. God is God. I am not. He is the creator. I am the clay. He is the judge of me and of you. I am not his judge.

Whatever is hard for us to understand and whatever is even harder for us to accept or like, the fact remains that God is supreme and he cannot be blamed for the things that he does. He is perfectly good, and we are responsible when we resist his will. We may not understand how that works, but the Bible teaches the absolute sovereignty of God and the total responsibility of humans when we resist his will.

Wrath and mercy

Paul asks, “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?” (Romans 9:22–24).

Paul is not saying, “I know the explanation for sure, and this is it.” He is saying, “Here is one possible thing to consider. What if God wanted to make his wrath known?” Some theologians want to be too nice and want to say God does not have any wrath against sin. But what if God wants to make his wrath and power known? Maybe he has some sinners that he chooses not to save simply in order to display his power and his wrath against sin. He puts up with them and has his own purposes for them. And what if the reason they were brought into existence in the first place was to display something about God? And what if he wanted to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, not just Jews but Gentiles too? So God displays his wrath and his mercy, and he does that out of his electing love and also out of his hardening wrath in dealing with the objects of his wrath.

Straight answers

This is a difficult passage. We have to be careful not to draw the wrong conclusions from it. But we also need to accept God’s revelation as it is, not as we would like to make it. It gives us straight answers to some hard questions.

Does the unbelief of some in Israel, or in the modern case the unbelief of people also in many parts of Western Europe or America, mean that God’s gospel has failed? No. The gospel saves those whom God has chosen. It is that simple. The chosen, the elect, are being saved. They are responding to the gospel.

Is God unfair? No. Under God’s law, we sinners are all doomed. God freely chooses to show either wrath or mercy. But either choice, whether he chooses to show a sinner wrath or chooses to show mercy in Christ crucified, is fair. It is just. God is not violating justice by giving sinners punishment, and he is not violating justice by giving sinners salvation if the punishment has been laid on Jesus Christ. So God is not unfair.

Can God blame the hardened? Yes, he can. He is the creator. He is supreme. We are not. He is the judge. He judges us for our choices. We cannot judge him for his choices.

One modern approach to God, as C. S. Lewis explained, is that people put themselves as the judges and make God the defendant. We think we are going to judge God. What a disastrous mistake! God is the judge. We are not. And we need to learn to deal with that.

Fuller picture (Romans 10-11)

Having said all that from Romans 9, I do not want to leave it there. Let us look at a fuller picture from Romans 10 and 11. In Romans 10 and 11 we learn some other things that God reveals.

One is that we are responsible to accept the gospel. If you understand what the Bible says about God's election and his hardening, you might say, "Well, then whatever happens happens." But that is not how the Bible deals with it. In the course of explaining all of this, God makes it very clear that the gospel comes near to us and we are responsible to respond in faith. In Romans 10 it says, "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming, "that if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved," and, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:8–10, 13). So we have this responsibility to respond to the word with our heart and with our mouth, and we must not let any understanding of the doctrine of election or predestination or hardening take away that responsibility.

Another thing is that we are responsible as Christians to spread the gospel. Again in Romans 10 Paul says, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:14–15). So Paul very clearly shows the responsibility to spread the gospel.

Paul himself believed powerfully in the doctrines of election and of hardening, and Paul preached the gospel more vigorously to more places than any missionary who ever lived. Since then, there have been people who understood these doctrines of God's sovereignty and nonetheless were mighty missionaries. I should not even say nonetheless, because of belief in God's sovereignty they were mighty missionaries. On one occasion Paul was in a city and he was not getting any results, and the Lord came to him one night and said, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9–10). They were not responding yet, but God had them there. They were chosen, and God was going to move them to respond to Paul's message. So Paul stayed there and kept on going.

William Carey, who is often called the father of modern missions, was having a discussion with some ministers when he was a young man. They were wondering what they should talk about that day, and Carey said, "Let us talk about the duty to bring the gospel to the heathen." One of the older ministers, a man who believed strongly in the doctrine of God's sovereignty but did not listen to the responsibility to accept or spread the gospel, said, "If God wants to save the heathen, then God will do it." He took that to mean that we did not even have to talk about missions or sending people to other nations to tell them about Jesus. William Carey was not a hyper-Calvinist in that sense. He believed in God's election. He was what they called a Particular Baptist. He believed the doctrine of election as I have been describing it, but he also believed that God was calling him to bring the gospel, because "how are they going to believe in the one they have never heard of?" And so he served in India for years without anybody responding positively to the gospel, in the conviction that eventually some would. And they did. This belief in God's sovereignty is what keeps us going. When our human efforts have not won anybody over, when we have preached the gospel and witnessed to somebody and done our best, God may just be getting started to use what we have been bringing. So we have this responsibility first to accept the gospel and then to spread the gospel.

Another thing to keep in mind is that Israel is not totally rejected. This whole discussion in Romans 9-11 started with the problem of Israel and its widespread unbelief. But Paul says, "Not all Jews have rejected the gospel. There is a Jewish remnant chosen by grace. I am one of them." There are others too who are Jewish and who are walking with Jesus and accept him as Messiah. In every age there have been people from the Jewish nation who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. So there has never been a total casting off of Israel.

There is also something else going on. This is an era of Gentile conversion. During this time when most of Israel is hardened, there is a great expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles. If I could draw an analogy in our own time, as many in Europe and America have become more secularized, we nonetheless find that while some are being hardened, God is having mercy in areas that previously were not as reached by the gospel, with millions upon millions in Africa and various parts of Asia coming to faith in Jesus Christ in places where previously Christianity was hardly known at all. God can use this partial rejection and hardening of one people to bring many from another people in. Paul says this is what God was doing in that era and through later centuries as well. Even though many Jewish people were not accepting Christ, many from the Gentile nations were coming to faith.

A final thing Paul points out in Romans 11, inspired and revealed by God, is that there is going to be a vast future conversion of Jewish people, and so all Israel will be saved.

So we can put what Paul says into its wider context. Israel is not totally rejected. There is a remnant that is chosen. Even the hardening of Israel is being used for great purposes in saving many Gentiles. And there is going to be a great inpouring of Jewish people into the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul also says no group can claim superiority over another group. It is only through humble faith that we are saved. He knew that some Gentiles were going to say, "Jewish people were broken off of the vine so that we could be grafted in. Aren't we great?" Paul replies, "Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God" (Romans 11:22). God is kind to you, but he can also be stern if you become boastful or think it is because of your qualifications and not because of his mercy.

Finally, in all of this, when we have tried to understand as much as we can, we must be willing to live with some loose ends, things that we cannot explain. There is a great mystery. The Bible says, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever" (Deuteronomy 29:29). There are things that are revealed, and we must be careful in this whole area of the chosen and the hardened not to draw conclusions beyond exactly what the Bible itself says. We must leave many things as a mystery and be able to live with loose ends until God reveals more when he comes again.

In all of that, as we honor God's mystery and admit our own limited knowledge, we must also adore the majesty of God. This is how Paul ends that whole section in Romans 9 through 11: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen." (Romans 11:33-36)

The Chosen and the Hardened
Romans 9:1-23
By David Feddes

A Missionary's Burden

Romans 9:1 I speak the truth in Christ--I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit-- 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, 4 the people of Israel.

- **Conviction:** salvation only in Christ
- **Compassion:** grief over perishing people

A blessed heritage

Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. 5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

Has God's gospel failed?
No, not all in the chosen family are chosen.

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."

Children of the promise

8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. 9 For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

Unconditional election

10 Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. 11 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad--in order that God's purpose in election might stand: 12 not by works but by him who calls--she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Is God unfair?

14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

- "Though justice be thy plea, consider this, that in the course of justice, none of us should see salvation." (Shakespeare)

Hardening

17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

How can God blame us?

19 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" 20 But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" 21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

- The first word belongs to God the Creator.
- The final word belongs to God the Judge.

Wrath and mercy

22 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? 23 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— 24 even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

Straight answers

- **Does the unbelief of some mean that God's gospel failed?** No, the gospel saves those whom God has chosen.
- **Is God unfair?** No, under law we are all doomed. God freely chooses to show either wrath or mercy; either choice is fair.

• **Can God blame the hardened?** Yes, the Creator is supreme; we're not. God judges us for our choices; we can't judge Him for His choices.

Fuller picture (Romans 10-11)

- Responsible to accept the gospel
- Responsible to spread the gospel
- Israel is not totally rejected
- A Jewish remnant chosen by grace
- An era of Gentile conversion
- A vast future conversion of Jews
- No group can claim superiority: only through humble faith are we saved
- Adore God's mystery and majesty

Mystery and majesty

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)