

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

THE ELECTION OF GOD **(PART 5)**

In **Lesson 12** of our study of **The Doctrines of Grace**, we commenced an examination of **Romans 9:6-24**. This particular passage is arguably the most direct and compelling in the Bible as it relates to the great doctrines of predestination and election, as well as the sovereignty of God. In this Lesson, we will continue our examination of this portion of God's Word, endeavouring as we do so, to be as open and honest with the text as we can possibly be.

As persons who desire to be serious students of the Bible, it must be our work to carefully study the text, regardless of how closely or not it may agree with our own belief system. We should never attempt to manipulate the scriptures in order to accommodate the theology of a particular denomination, nor should we strive to make our study reach a pre-conceived or pre-determined goal. Instead, we should accept each statement of scripture for what it teaches and align our theology with the Word of God. We are not to try to make the Bible say what we think it should say, rather we are to go to the Bible and bring ourselves and our theology into harmony with it.

It is my settled conviction that Biblical truth needs no other foundation than honest investigation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a willingness to follow truth when it is revealed, wherever it may lead. Genuine truth should have nothing to fear from thorough scriptural investigation! The individual who is honestly investigating a Biblical doctrine must be willing to give serious consideration to all the available evidence, even the evidence that does not fit his or her belief system. We must also be willing, if necessary, to humbly dismantle our system of belief and reassemble it again to fit the biblical evidence. My own personal experience has taught me that this is a very difficult thing to do, but the Christian who sincerely desires to please God has no other alternative.

As we go forward in our study of God's Word, let us, the members of **The Grace Workshop Ministries**, seek to exemplify the attitude of Paul outlined in **2 Corinthians 4:2**: "*We reject all shameful deeds and underhanded methods. We don't try to trick anyone or distort the word of God. We tell the truth before God, and all who are honest know this*" (**New Living Translation**).

Let us read again, the complete text that we are studying before we address ourselves more directly to verses **17-18**.

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 our previous Lesson we considered verses **14-16**, where the apostle writes, *“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. 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. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.”*

There may be persons who are disturbed by the apparent disregard for human choice and responsibility that these verses so clearly imply. Their disturbance is usually related to a false assumption that Paul’s argument concerning God’s predestining, electing choice must meet the standards set by their own human measurements and principles. They are either ignorant of, or have forgotten, what the Almighty God revealed about Himself in **Isaiah 55:8-9**: *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”* They have never read, or do not remember, His statement in **Psalm 50:21**: *“Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.”*

Paul’s approach is quite different. He is not seeking to satisfy human standards of reasoning and logic. He considers his defence of God’s righteousness and justice to be successful as long as it is in harmony with God’s revelation of Himself in Scripture. In other words, the standard by which God must be judged is nothing less and nothing more than God Himself! That is why Paul supports his argument with a reference to God’s word to Moses which we have already examined, and His word to Pharaoh which we will now scrutinize.

Brothers and sisters, we must understand that whenever God reveals His predestining, electing choice in His Word, He insists upon His sovereign right to have mercy on whom He will have mercy and to have compassion on whom He will have compassion. **Paul establishes God’s righteousness and justice not in the light of human standards - which would be an extremely low standard indeed - but rather in the light of God’s revelation of Himself. There is no higher standard to which the apostle could appeal.**

In verses **17-18** Paul writes the following: *“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. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.”*

The **New Living Translation** renders the verses in the following way: *“For the Scriptures say that God told Pharaoh, ‘I have appointed you for the very purpose of displaying my power in you and to spread my fame throughout the earth.’ So you see, God chooses to show mercy to some, and he chooses to harden the hearts of others so they refuse to listen.”*

In previous verses, Paul had explained to his readers how God dealt in sovereign grace with His own people Israel. God had proclaimed that the seed of His people should be called in Isaac. He had further announced that one of the unborn twins in the womb of their mother would be His beloved Jacob, whom He would call Israel, a prince with God. In verses **17-18**, Paul informs us of God dealing with Pharaoh, a Gentile monarch.

The truth contained in these verses has troubled many persons. Human beings, even some who are Christians, do not want God to be sovereign! They want to have ultimate control over their own lives. But beloved ones, God has decreed differently and He will ultimately bring to naught any power which attempts to exalt ability, to claim power, or to parade pride. Many of the difficulties which we have with the revelation of God in the story of Pharaoh disappear when we discover what the Bible really teaches.

The quotation is taken from **Exodus 9**. Verses **13-16** read as follows: *“And the Lord said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me. For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth. For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.”*

It is important for us to note what God had said to Moses before this, concerning Pharaoh’s response to the request to let the children of Israel go. In **Exodus 4:19-21**, we read the following: *“And the Lord said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life. And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand. And the Lord said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: **but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.**”* These words were spoken to Moses while he was still in the land of Midian.

Then, when he arrived in Egypt, God spoke to him again regarding the same situation in **Exodus 7:1-5**: *“And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he send the children of Israel out of his land. And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt. **But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, and my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them.**”*

In **Romans 9:17**, Paul explains to us that God had raised up Pharaoh in order to show His power in dealing with him so that God’s name might be proclaimed throughout the world. Paul is implying that just as God hardened the heart of Pharaoh in the time of the Exodus, so now He was hardening the hearts of the Jewish nation. He uses this as an example of God’s sovereign choice to show mercy on some and harden others.

There is no injustice with God. He has the right to have mercy on whomever He wants to have mercy, and to harden whomever He wants to harden in order to achieve His own purpose.

Paul reinforces this point in **Romans 11:7-8** *“What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.”* In verse **25** he explains, *“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.”*

If God had intervened and performed a miracle of grace upon Pharaoh, as he had done upon Isaac, Jacob, Moses and the children of Israel who were spared, his heart would have been softened, and he would have obeyed God. Why then did God not do so? We cannot be sure of all the reasons, but Paul does give us one reason when he says, *“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.”* We may say that it more suited the purpose of God to make Pharaoh a recipient of justice rather than a recipient of grace and mercy.

What are we to make of Paul’s declaration in verse **18**, *“Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth?”* How, exactly, are we to understand the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart? Our initial reaction to this statement is likely to be comparable to that of the Jews in **John 6:60**: *“This is an hard saying; who can hear it?”* We are reminded of a similarly difficult statement that we encountered in verse **13**, *“As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”* What does Paul mean when he says that God hated Esau? When we use the word “hate” we associate with it a spirit of ill-will, resentment, detestation and loathing. But Christians are forbidden to hate anyone, in fact we are commanded to love our enemies. So how are we to understand God’s hatred of Esau?

It is critical that we bear in mind the context in which these words were uttered. The context is the predestining, electing choice of God that is hidden in the bosom of His sovereignty. In this context, all that God’s hatred of Esau means is that God’s sovereign, predestining, electing favour was withheld from him. It does not mean that God harboured ill-will, malice, resentment or any such feeling toward Esau. Jacob was given a gift that Esau did not receive. The Hebrew way of expressing this fact is to say that Jacob was loved but Esau was hated.

As it relates to the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, we are not to understand that God arbitrarily and directly forced upon Pharaoh an obstinate and stubborn resistance to Himself. We must be very careful never to lay evil, in the sense of sin, at the door of God. In **James 1:13-14** we read, *“And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, ‘God is tempting me.’ God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away”* (**New Living Translation**).

How could a God who is just and righteous create evil in the heart of Pharaoh, force him to sin and then punish him for sinning? If, in fact, God were to do that, He would become the author of sin! That is a preposterous idea! When we do wrong, that wrong comes from our own totally depraved nature. Therefore, when Pharaoh acted in stubborn rebellion against God, all of that rebellion came as a result of his own depravity, none of it came directly from God. When God is said to harden Pharaoh’s heart, what it means is that God merely removed His hand of restraint and allowed Pharaoh to do what His sinful nature dictated for him to do. By demanding the release of Israel, God confronted Pharaoh with an issue which he did not wish to meet.

We must bear in mind the fact that Pharaoh like every other human being was a sinner. But all of us have our inclination to sin restrained by God to some extent. If this were not the case, humanity would have already been totally annihilated from the planet. The only thing that kept Pharaoh from exterminating the Israelites was the restraining power of God.

If God desires to harden Pharaoh's heart or the heart of any individual for that matter, He does not have to create fresh evil in their hearts. All He has to do is take away His hand of restraint and give to Pharaoh or any other individual the leeway to do what they want to do. This is what is meant by God's hardening the heart of persons. In the Exodus drama what happened in reality was that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. All God did was to remove His restraining hand.

Brothers and sisters, the truth is that God intrudes into the lives of those who are the objects of His special predestining, electing favour and sovereignly creates faith in their hearts. 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. This is in itself a righteous act of God's justice. This is the effect that the preaching of the gospel has in the lives of people today. The more they hear the gospel and freely reject it, the more their hearts become hardened. They like Pharaoh are responsible for the hardening of their own hearts.

Beloved ones, in our last Lesson we noted that whenever God elects any person, He always does so in light of the fall. He has to choose fallen, unregenerate sinners for salvation because these are the only persons that exist! There are no righteous persons for Him to choose. Paul emphasizes this truth in **Romans 4:4-5**: "*Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*" Did you hear that brothers and sisters? Paul explicitly states that God justifies the ungodly! He does so because there are no godly persons for Him to justify!

The truth is that if God had not intruded in our lives - if He had not intervened in our sinful course, we would have been hardened to the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ and we would be still alienated from His life. It is our election by God and that alone that has made the difference! Listen again to the gospel according to **Ephesians 2:1-10** from the **New Living Translation**.

- 1 Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins.*
- 2 You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil — the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God.*
- 3 All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.*
- 4 But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much,*
- 5 that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)*
- 6 For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.*
- 7 So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.*
- 8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.*
- 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.*
- 10 For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

Brothers and sisters, we must never take our salvation for granted. We must always be grateful to God for loving us, for not hardening our hearts and for making us the objects of His special, sovereign, gracious favour.