

# **THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE** **(LESSON FIFTEEN)**

## **THE ELECTION OF GOD** **(PART 6)**

Brothers and sisters, in this Lesson we will continue our examination of **Romans 9:6-24**, a portion of God's Word which is essential to our understanding of the sovereignty of God and the doctrines of predestination and election. Before we do so, however, I desire to make a few observations which I believe are important as it relates to our study of these doctrines and of our study of the Bible in general.

It is ironic but true nevertheless, that a highly developed and institutionalized system of belief may be the greatest hindrance to a person receiving scriptural truth. When we are confronted with the idea that our own long held system of belief maybe wrong, we are likely to experience considerable insecurity and even trauma. Even when we are convicted by the weight of biblical evidence and the inner voice of conscience, it is extremely difficult for us to accept that some of the beliefs and convictions with which we have been indoctrinated may not be in harmony with God's Word.

I know by personal experience that it is extremely difficult for those who have been persuaded concerning a certain position as it relates to the scriptures, to admit or even imagine the possibility that they could be wrong. The instinctive reaction is to adamantly resist anything that remotely challenges our doctrinal beliefs and organizational standards. To think it possible that we could be mistaken after so many years is grievous.

We may react by going to great lengths to defend our system of belief in order to safely preserve what we consider to be truth, even to the point of defending the indefensible. We often react in this manner in order to protect ourselves from the stress and upheaval that accompanies the shock of realizing that what we have long accepted as truth may not, in fact, be correct. When some persons are confronted with something that does not fit their theological paradigm, they may respond by charging the individual who challenges their position with apostasy. There is a regrettable tendency for Christians to inflict cruelty on other Christians who may not share their particular "truth" paradigm. We, the members of **The Grace Workshop Ministries** must ask the Lord Jesus Christ to help us never to be guilty of such un-Christian behaviour.

We must acknowledge the truth that none of us approaches our study of God's Word without presuppositions or biases that have been set in place by many complex factors, some of which we may not even be aware. In order to be as objective as possible, students of the Bible must, therefore, be careful to identify and admit these biases. When we deliberately identify and acknowledge our biases, they have less chance to dominate our interpretation of the text. In the search for Scriptural truth, we must decide what will serve as our final and ultimate authority. In the case of the genuine truth-seeker, that final and ultimate authority must be the Bible and the Bible only.

In order for the serious Bible student to be convinced of and embrace a particular doctrinal position, he or she must be convinced by the weight of scriptural evidence and that only. Time-honoured tradition and the personal ideas and convictions of men and women, even "great spiritual" men and women, are not sufficient enough weight for us to support precious doctrinal truths upon. We must ever heed the words of our Lord recorded in **Mark 7:6-9**: *"This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."*

*For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men... Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition."*

As we begin to study the Bible with an attitude of child-like dependency on God and seek to discover what it says, without looking at it through the filter of our own belief system, we begin to see a new beauty and harmony in the Word that we never recognized before. The Bible becomes a new book.

No longer is it necessary for us to try to make our study reach a preconceived or predetermined goal. We begin to open our minds and spirits to the inspiration of Scripture and relegate the doctrine of men to the background. It is with this attitude of total reliance on the Holy Ghost that we enter into our study at this time.

I believe we will be benefited greatly by reading our text in full prior to applying ourselves to a study of verses **19-21**.

### **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 **17-18**. These verses have a particular reference to Pharaoh and the hardening of his heart by God.

We noted that in these verses, the apostle Paul informs us that God raised up Pharaoh in order to demonstrate His power in dealing with him so that God's name might be proclaimed throughout the world. Paul uses Pharaoh as an example of God's sovereign choice to show mercy on some and harden others.

We observed that when Paul refers to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, he does not mean to convey the idea that God arbitrarily and directly forced upon Pharaoh an obstinate and stubborn resistance to Himself. 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.

We made the point that if God desires to harden the heart of an individual He does not have to create fresh evil or unbelief in the individual's heart. All He has to do is take away His hand of restraint and give to that individual, the freedom to do what they want to do. In reality, the individual hardens his or her own heart. All God does is remove His restraining hand. This is exactly what occurred in Pharaoh's case.

We explained that God intervenes in 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 favour, He simply leaves them to themselves. He passes them over and leaves them to their own sinful ways.

It is clear that Paul anticipated an objection to his teaching regarding the sovereignty of God as it relates to predestination and election, for in verse **19** he writes, *"Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?"* or as the **New Living Translation** renders it, *"Well then, you might say, 'Why does God blame people for not responding? Haven't they simply done what he makes them do?'"*

The **Message** offers an interesting translation: *"Are you going to object, 'So how can God blame us for anything since he's in charge of everything? If the big decisions are already made, what say do we have in it?'"*

This is the second time in this passage that we are made aware of the apostle anticipating a difficulty with his teaching in respect of God's sovereignty in the areas of predestination and election. You will recall that in **verses 10-13** he had explained to his readers that God had made choice of Jacob over Esau before they were born and therefore before either of them had done any good or evil. God's choice had not been dependent on what they had or had not done. Paul had emphasized the point that God's choice was dependent on His sovereignty alone. We know that he expected some of his readers to find this argument problematic at best and offensive at worst, because of the question he asked in verse **14**, a question that he anticipated they would ask: *"Is there unrighteousness with God?"* or to put it another way, "Is God being fair?" Now, in verse **19**, Paul anticipates that his readers will, once again, be tempted to charge God with unrighteousness and injustice. *"Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?"*

Again, we argue that if Paul is teaching that in eternity past, God looked down through the corridors of time and saw that persons would either accept or reject Him, and that based on this prior knowledge, He elected those persons who would accept Him in the future and rejected those who would reject Him in the future, there would be no reason for him to anticipate that anyone would have found such a doctrine problematic? They would all have understood him to be saying that God demonstrates mercy and compassion to those whom He knows will accept Him in the future and He hardens the hearts of those whom He knows will reject Him in the future. Surely, that would not have seemed unfair to them! And just in case there was any doubt in their minds, Paul once again has a glorious opportunity to clarify his position.

But, alas for those who believe and teach this view of predestination and election, Paul once again does not resort to such an explanation. And once again, we say that Paul does not resort to such an explanation because that is not what he is teaching!

Once again beloved ones, I confess that I am reassured and consoled by the fact that the questions that are raised concerning my view of predestination and election are the same ones that the great apostle Paul had to deal with! Again, I am minded to believe that this is so because the great apostle believed and taught the same doctrine of predestination and election that we are presenting in these studies!

Brothers and sisters, we are not left in doubt as to what impression the teaching of Paul made on his opponents. The questions that they raised show the effect of his teaching on them. The question that Paul anticipates his readers asking in verse **19** is based on his recognition that by insisting so strongly that it is the sovereign will of God and not the will of human beings that is the determining factor in human affairs, he has opened the door once again for someone to question the fairness of God. Why does God blame people for their lack of response if their lack of response is determined by His will?

The studies that we have pursued in the preceding fourteen Lessons have clearly indicated that human beings are in a lost condition and that not even one of them could have been saved if God had not moved to save them by His sovereign, predestining, electing grace. The difficulty that Paul anticipated his readers would have with his argument was understandable to some extent: "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? If He had been pleased to intervene in their lives and create faith in their hearts as He had done for the elect, and had not passed them over, they would have been saved! Surely God would be unfair to blame those whose hearts are hardened if He Himself hardened them, for no one can ultimately withstand God! Paul, in his usual manner, takes the question that they have formed, boldly states it, and boldly answers it.

The apostle's response in verses **20-21** is as forceful as the anticipated question. Paul issues a rebuke to those who would be bold enough to ask "*Why does God blame people for not responding? Haven't they simply done what he makes them do?*" His response is "*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?*"

The **New Living Translation** renders the verses as follows: "*No, don't say that. Who are you, a mere human being, to argue with God? Should the thing that was created say to the one who created it, 'Why have you made me like this?' When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn't he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into?*"

Paul, at the beginning of his response, highlights the impertinence and the stupidity of his objectors, who are mere human beings, in even thinking to oppose God. In the original Greek, the sentence begins with the words “O man.” In the Greek, Paul’s initial answer is “O man, nay, surely, as for you, who are you who contradicts God?” Paul intentionally sets the phrase “O man” over against “God.” The objectors are reminded emphatically of what they are, and of the being whom they are objecting to. Paul says in effect, “It is not for a mere mortal to adopt this tone toward Almighty God.” *“Should the thing that was created say to the one who created it, ‘Why have you made me like this? When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn’t he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into?’”* If a potter has the right to use the same lump of clay to make one vessel for an honourable purpose and another for a dishonourable purpose, then surely the creator of the universe has the same right! Those, therefore, who would dare to question the justice and righteousness of God as it relates to His prerogative to have mercy on whom He chooses to have mercy and to harden those whom He chooses to harden, are rude and arrogant as well as stupid.

In his rebuke, Paul reflects sentiments found in the Old Testament:

### **ISAIAH 29:16**

*“How foolish can you be? He is the Potter, and he is certainly greater than you, the clay! Should the created thing say of the one who made it, ‘He didn’t make me’? Does a jar ever say, ‘The potter who made me is stupid’?”* (New Living Translation)

### **ISAIAH 45:9**

*“What sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator. Does a clay pot argue with its maker? Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it, saying, ‘Stop, you’re doing it wrong!’ Does the pot exclaim, ‘How clumsy can you be?’”* (New Living Translation).

### **JEREMIAH 18:1-6**

*“The Lord gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, ‘Go down to the potter’s shop, and I will speak to you there.’ So I did as he told me and found the potter working at his wheel. But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so he crushed it into a lump of clay again and started over. Then the Lord gave me this message: ‘O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand’”* (New Living Translation).

We must bear in mind that the Jewish Christians in Rome who read Paul’s letter to the church, would have been familiar with these Old Testament passages and if they were honest, they would have recognized that Paul’s teaching in respect of God’s right to do whatever He wanted to do with His own creation was nothing new. It was, in fact, an integral part of their scriptural tradition. They would realize that the main idea that Paul was expressing was this: If an earthly, mortal potter has the right to make out of the same mass of clay, one vessel for honour and another for dishonour, then certainly God, our maker, has the right, out of the same mass of sinful, unregenerate, hell-bound 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.

Brothers and sisters, there are some things with regards to the operations of our heavenly Father that we do not understand at the present time. Our lack of understanding, however, does not give us the right to argue with God. Surely, we must see that it is God who determines whether a man will be an Isaac or an Esau, a Moses or a Pharaoh, a David or a Saul.

Neither Moses, nor Pharaoh, nor anyone else, could choose his parents, his genetic structure, or his time and place of birth, and they cannot choose whether the divine potter will make of them a vessel of honour or a vessel of dishonour. We have to believe that these matters are in the hands of God and say with Paul *“Oh, how great are God’s riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways! For who can know the Lord’s thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice? And who has given him so much that he needs to pay it back? For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen”* (**Romans 11:33-36 New Living Translation**).