Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Is Israel's Unbelief Inconsistent with God's Plan? Part 3
Scripture: Romans 9:19-24
Code: 45-73

We open our Bibles at this time to the ninth chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans. Romans chapter 9. We're in the midst of a very special, very thrilling study of this great epistle. We've been moving phrase by phrase and verse by verse and paragraph by paragraph, chapter by chapter through these great truths. We find ourselves now in the ninth chapter of Romans. And we're dealing with the subject of the sovereign righteousness of God.

Now for our message tonight we're really looking at a very large passage, verses 6 through 33, and considering a smaller segment of that passage. We'll be examining particularly verses 14 through 24. But before we look at the text specifically, let me just give you a brief introduction.

The Bible teaches very clearly that God is sovereign and that God's sovereignty, that is His absolute freedom to do whatever He wants, is particularly obvious in the matter of salvation. God is sovereign in salvation. Scripture is profoundly clear on that subject.

In Jonah chapter 2 verse 9 it says, "Salvation is of the Lord." In 1 Corinthians 15:10 the Apostle Paul gave testimony when he said, "I am what I am by the grace of God." The statement of Philippians chapter 2 verse 13 puts it rather simply, "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His own good pleasure." In Acts 13:48 it says, "And as many as were ordained unto eternal life, believed." Titus 1:1 talks about the faith of God's elect. And in John 15:16 Jesus looked at His own Apostles and said, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you."

Those are just some samples of the tremendous affirmations of the sovereignty of God in salvation. In Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 3 we read that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings because we have been chosen in Him before the foundation of the world...because we have been predestinated to the adoption of sons. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 13 Paul writes, "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." In 2 Timothy 1:9 it says, "God has saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." And in 1 Peter 1:2 it says we are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

And we've been learning in Romans chapter 8 verse 29 that He foreknew us, He predestinated us, He called us, He justified us and He waits to glorify us. So the Scripture is very clear on the matter of the sovereignty of God in salvation. Paul is presenting this classic truth here in our text in Romans 9. And perhaps Romans 9 is the broadest widest section of teaching on this theme. It really demands our careful attention.

Now keep in mind that the thrust of Romans is to teach justification by grace through faith. And in teaching this great doctrine of justification by grace through faith, faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, he is covering all of the dimensions of salvation. He has been telling us the full richness of the gospel. First, he described the sinful state of man. Then beginning in chapter 3 verse 21 he began to tell us how man could be delivered from his sin. And he began to unfold for us in chapters 3 and 4 salvation in its essence. And then beginning in chapter 5 and running all the way through chapter 8 he began to talk about the results of salvation. And we learn that salvation has a myriad of results and blessings and benedictions, peace with God, standing in grace, hope of glory, love of God, reconciliation to God, freedom from condemnation, union with Christ, victory over sin, deliverance from law, actually fulfilling the law, Romans 8 says...the indwelling Spirit, adoption as sons of God, the role of heirs of God. And then the close of chapter 8, the great doctrine of eternal security. And so Paul has literally swept us into the very heart of God to unfold for us the benefits of salvation. What a list. What a catalog of all that belongs to the redeemed, taken from the helplessness, the hopelessness of sin, brought through the reality of salvation to the treasure house of blessedness.

And so, as we came to the close of chapter 8 we were soaring into the heavens as we touched the realities of our great and glorious eternal inheritance. And Paul closed out chapter 8 by saying we're secure forever, nothing can separate us from this.

Now that poses a question. And the question that Paul knows it poses is this question, what about the Jews? What about the Jews? They too knew the blessing of God. They too knew the salvation of God. They too knew God as their God. And now what about them? They're in unbelief. And Jesus Himself said, "Because you don't believe, we'll take this message to a nation of people who will believe and bring forth the fruits of it." What about the Jews? I mean, how secure can we be if they once were God's people and no longer are?

It's a fair question. If they enjoyed all of the blessings that God could give His special people and now they have been set aside, just how secure are these blessings for us? I mean, if God set aside the Jews because of their sinfulness, do we have any guarantee that He won't set us aside also? And how about this question, if all of this is true, if all of this new covenant is true, if all of this New Testament gospel is true, if this new message in Jesus Christ is true, then why did not the people of God, the Jews, believe it? Why did they not believe it? Weren't they God's people? Weren't they ones who held the Scriptures? Weren't they the ones who knew God better than anyone else? If it's

true, why did they reject it? And if God rejected them, how secure can we be?

Now these are the questions that are posed in the mind of an objector. And in chapters 9, 10 and 11 Paul answers these questions. In chapters 9 and 10 he answers the question: how is it that Israel doesn't believe if this is the truth? And in chapter 11 he answers the question: if God set aside the Jew, how do we know He won't set us aside also? So when people look at 9, 10 and 11, they very often think it's some isolated truth dropped into the middle of this, but it is not. It is in the very flow of the argument. For if Paul is to be believed as to the reality of the new covenant of justification by faith in Jesus Christ, if he is to be believed in that presentation, then it is essential for him to answer: what about the Jews? Why don't they believe, on the one hand, and how could they possibly be set aside?

In the light of such questions, he writes the masterful ninth, tenth and eleventh chapter. Now first of all, in chapter 9 as we've been learning, Paul demonstrates that Israel's unbelief does not violate God's integrity. It does not violate God's character. It does not alter God's Word. It does not negate God's promises. You see, they're going to say, are the objectors, the carnal mind is going to say, the earthly thought, the reason and logic of man is going to say: well, if God made all these promises to Israel and God gave all these blessings to Israel, and Jesus Himself said salvation is of the Jews, and now if Israel is set aside hasn't God violated His own nature? Isn't God not to be trusted? Isn't God more like men who can't keep their word either, or don't?

And so, Israel's unbelief must be dealt with. And it is in chapter 9. The unbelief of Israel is not inconsistent, says Paul in this chapter, with God's promise...that's verses 6 to 13; it is not inconsistent with God's person...verses 14 to 24; it is not inconsistent with God's prophets...verses 25 to 29; and it is not inconsistent with God's prerequisite...verses 30 to 33. Chapter 9 then is in a sense defending God against the accusation of unfairness, violated promises, lost of integrity, violated prophecies and having changed His rules in midstream. So Paul writes chapter 9 to demonstrate that even though Israel is in unbelief, and even though Israel rejects the Messiah and even though Israel is set aside, this in no way violates God's promise, God's person, God's prophets, or God's prerequisite.

Now first of all, remember we looked at verses 6 through 13 and I just want to refer to it very very briefly. Verse 6 says, "Not as thought the Word of God hath taken no effect." In other words, he says the unbelief of Israel is not inconsistent with God's promise. Because Israel doesn't believe doesn't mean that God's Word doesn't fulfill its promise, doesn't mean that God's Word is rendered ineffective. And then he goes on to explain how this is so. And he shows that Israel's national unbelief doesn't mean God has broken His promise. Why? Because never promised to save all the physical seed of Abraham anyway, right? That's his argument. "For they are not Israel who are of Israel."

In other words, God never intended that every one who proceeded out of the loins of Abraham would by racial heritage be redeemed. He never promised salvation to the natural seed of Abraham. It was

always only a believing remnant. And he illustrates it two ways. First of all, Isaac verses 7 to 9. God had brought providentially out of the loins Abraham Ishmael, miraculously Isaac. And God chose Isaac. And Paul is saying, "You see, right at the very beginning Abraham had two sons and God chose one and not the other."

And then the illustration in verses 10 and following is the illustration of Jacob. Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. And God didn't choose both, He chose Jacob. In other words, Paul is saying don't accuse God of not keeping His promise because the nation of Israel rejects. God never intended that the whole nation, the whole progeny of the loins of Abraham would believe. So it is no violation of God's promise at all for it was always a remnant that God selected. It was always a selective process. This is reiterated in chapter 11 when he talks about the remnant of those 7,000 men who did not bow the knee to Baal.

So the thought is very clear. We should expect no more than a remnant at any time in Israel's history who are the elect, the true Israel within the natural Israel.

Now the second point comes in verses 14 to 24 and here he shows that the unbelief of Israel is not inconsistent with God's person...with God's person. Because immediately the thought here relates to God's character. If God selects and if God elects and if God chooses, verse 14 says, isn't God then unrighteous? Isn't that unfair? Isn't that unjust? I mean, if God just chooses some and not others, is not God being unfair? And his answer is, "No, no, no, no," me ginitoin the Greek, the strongest negative possible...no, no, no, God forbid. That may, by the way, have literally been what was said when Aramaic was spoken, we don't know for sure. No, no, God is not unrighteous. God cannot do wrong. God's character is not impugned by the unbelief of the majority of Jews. And somebody might say, "Prove it."

And I suppose if he were living in our contemporary culture he would prove it by logic, he would prove it by reason. But he doesn't. He quotes two passages out of the Old Testament. And they are his proof. Passage number one is Exodus 33:19 and it's quoted in verse 15, "For He...that's God...said to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." You can go all the way back to the Pentateuch, you can go all the way back to God's initial revelation to Moses and when God revealed Himself then He revealed Himself as a God who was selective, as a God who was elective. So this is no change in God's nature. This is no alteration of God's character. He has always been the God who has mercy on whomever He chooses to have mercy, and shows compassion to whomever He chooses to show compassion. And who said that? Who said that? God said that. That's His own testimony as to His own nature. So the verse is saying that God has been revealed to be a God who chooses to be merciful to the sinner. That's His choice. That's the kind of God we have. We have a merciful God who chooses to whom He grants mercy.

It is His character to be gracious. It is His character to be compassionate. It is His character to be merciful. It is His character to demonstrate loving kindness. Psalm 145:8 says, "The Lord is gracious, full of compassion, slow to anger and of great mercy." And the prophet Micah says, "Who is a God like Thee who pardons iniquity and passes by the transgression of His people? Who is a God like Thee?" The Bible presents Him as a merciful God, as a gracious God but His mercy and His grace He gives to whomever He will. He's always been that way. He's always been that way.

So the Lord has not violated His purpose. He's not violated His own person. There's no loss of integrity here. Scripture said from the very start He was that kind of God and He is that kind of God who sovereignly gives mercy to those whom He desires. In fact, you could make an argument is unrighteous if He gives anybody mercy, right? Because what does righteousness require from sinners? Death. I mean, if you're going to say that God is unrighteous, speaking of His mercy is not the way to say that. If you want to talk about God being unfair or unjust, then you'd probably be on safer ground if you accused Him of unjustice for saving anybody because justice would damn us all, wouldn't it?

But that's not the point. The point is here that God cannot be accused of being unfair because God has always been revealed to have been a God of great grace, a God of great mercy who shows mercy, compassion and grace to undeserving sinners, all of whom deserve to be damned. And He has always revealed Himself as one who chooses whom He will redeem.

So it follows from this Scripture the truth of verse 16, "So then it is not of him that wills nor of him that runs but of God that chose mercy." It's always been that way. If a person is redeemed it isn't because they wanted it, it isn't because they pursued it, it is because God gave it. It is not their will, it is not their effort, it is the good pleasure of God. It's very clear.

And then Paul as if to sort of double his argument adds another Scripture and quotes from Exodus 9:16. Only this time it's a little different. "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh," and again he goes back into the Pentateuch, again he goes back into the primary books of the Old Testament, the books of Moses and he quotes, "Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up that I might show My power in thee and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth."

You see, God from the very beginning raised up Pharaoh on the stage of human history as a means to demonstrate God's saving redeeming power. And again the only reason Pharaoh got where he got and the reason Pharaoh did what he did was the good pleasure of God. Therefore, says verse 18, "Hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy and whom He will He...what?...He hardens." And what does it tell us in the book of Exodus about Pharaoh? "God hardened Pharaoh's...what?...heart."

And so, the Apostle Paul has a most amazing response to the question: is God unjust if He's selective in the salvation process? If God chooses certain people to be saved, is that unfair? He says that is no violation of God's righteous character at all. That is no violation of God's integrity at all, for God revealed Himself from the very start to be a God who chooses whom He will have mercy on and who chooses whom He will harden. And that is the God who God is revealed to be and there's no change. He chooses to be merciful, He chooses to harden because He's God and He's free to do whatever He chooses.

This is reiterated in Romans 11 verse 7, notice it for a moment. "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh, Israel has not obtained which he seeketh," why? Because it doesn't belong to the one who wills or the one who runs. "But the election hath obtained it and the rest were...what?...blinded." The rest were blinded, another way to say hardened. For verse 8 says, "God has given them the spirit of slumber." God hardens. God gives mercy.

Now you may say, "Boy, this isn't what I learned in my church or this isn't..." I'm just telling you what the Bible says, that's all. I just want you to see what Scripture says. This is Paul talking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Now all of that prompts a question...prompts a question in my mind and I'm sure it prompts one in yours. You say, O man, if God saves whom He will and hardens whom He will...what's the obvious question...verse 19...Thou wilt say then unto me, this is what you'll say, "Why doth He yet find fault for who hath resisted His will?" What's the question? If God chooses whom He will save and chooses whom He will harden, how can He find fault with me? Right? If I had nothing to do with it anyway, that's the question.

Again the carnal mind response, again the human reason response. And it says if we're nothing puppets, if we're nothing but victims of a divine choice, how can God blame us for anything? If God hardens me, how can He send me to eternal hell when He hardened me? How can He blame me? How can He condemn me? I mean, if I'm the way I am by divine decree, for who hath resisted His will? I mean, if God wills that I should be hardened, if God wills that I should be saved, who can resist that? If it is His will alone that is determinate, and if His will is irresistible, relative to who is saved and who is lost, then how can I be responsible? How can God blame the victim of His sovereignty?

Now listen, that's a blasphemous question. I hated to even speak it. It's a blasphemous question. You say, "Well, what's the answer? Even if it is a blasphemous question, I need the answer." The answer is an appeal to silence, this is very important, an appeal to silence. Notice verse 20, "Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? How dare you ask that question? O man, answering this way to God." By the way, if this were a false assumption, Paul would have corrected it. But it is not a false assumption. God does choose who will be saved, God does choose those to be hardened. If that were a false assumption, he would have corrected it, but he doesn't correct it. He

says, "Shut your mouth, don't ask that question. Don't you impugn the character of God."

It is true that God chooses. It is undeniable that that is a difficult question, believe me it is a difficult question. It is a very difficult...I mean, I've asked that question. How can God send people to an eternal hell when He's the one that chose the saved? It's a hard question. And you know what the answer is? Shut up. You don't ask that question. You don't ask that question.

"Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" The contrast here, underline it in your Bible, is Man/God. O man, who art thou that repliest against God? You with your little infinitesimal, puny, pusillanimous, pea-brain...who are you to stand up and say, "Well, God, this doesn't seem fair." Who are you with your little tiny thimble full of information against the vastness of an eternal mind as big as the endless universe? Who are you that answereth God? Just because you can't figure it out and it appears to you to be unfair, who are you to reply against God with such blasphemy to accuse God of being unrighteous and unfair? Close your mouth. Close your mouth and realize that you know very little...very little. And if you don't understand how this is resolved in the mind of our compassionate merciful loving and gracious God, then it isn't that God's character should be mistrusted, it is that you don't have enough information. And if you want to know the truth, the information is beyond your ability to comprehend and that's why you don't get it, because there are hopeless, hopeless antinomies in Scripture that could never be resolved in the human mind.

Instead of that question, let me ask you a question, who are you to ask such a thing of God? Oh, absurdity. You have limited power to know. You have great power to forget. You have limited understanding. You have limited reason. Do you question God?

Genesis 18:25 says this, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do...what?...right?" We live by faith, see, not by logic, not by reason. Reason will take us so far and then it stops and we're out of the game. God is not answerable to finite sinful creatures. To entertain such a question is to establish man as a higher standard than God and say to God, "Look, God, You're not living up to my standard." It seems to me that you're off base here. That's absurd and yet we do that. It's arrogance of the worse kind, it's gross presumption to call God to account..."All right, God, I'm calling You to account." Oh....blasphemy.

Paul picks up an Old Testament analogy, "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" That basically comes out of...that's an absurdity, it comes out of Isaiah 64:6 through 8, let me read it to you. "But we are all as an unclean thing and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags and we all do fade as a leaf and our iniquities like the wind have taken us away, and there is none that calleth upon Thy name that stireth up himself to take hold of Thee, for Thou hast hid Thy face from us and hast consumed us because of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, Thou art our Father, we are the clay and Thou are potter, and we all are the work of Thy hand."

It's the picture of a potter and the clay. "And does the clay rise up and say, Why hast Thou made me thus?" It's an absurdity. Clay is as far from comprehending...rather I should say man is as far from comprehending the infinite mind of God as clay is from comprehending the mind of the potter. Be satisfied to let God be God. Be satisfied that God is righteous, God is holy, God is just, God is loving, compassionate, merciful. And don't bring God to trial at your court and act like the prosecution and the judge. Realize the limits of your computer. And if you start thinking about this, you'll blow your circuits. It's beyond you.

Luther said to Erasmus(?), "Mere human reason can never comprehend how God is good and merciful and therefore you make to yourself a God of your own fancy who hardens nobody, condemns nobody and pities everybody. You cannot comprehend how a just God can condemn those who are born in sin and cannot help themselves but must by a necessity of their natural constitution continue in sin and remain children of wrath. The answer is God is incomprehensible throughout and therefore His justice as well as His other attributes must be incomprehensible. It is on this very ground that St. Paul exclaims, `O the depth of the riches of the knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways...listen...passed finding out.'" Then Luther said, "Now, His judgments would not be passed finding out if we could always perceive them to be just," end quote. That's profound. If we could always figure it out it wouldn't be passed finding out, would it?

So Paul draws from the analogy of the thing formed and the one who formed it. Look for a moment with me at Jeremiah chapter 18...Jeremiah 18 verse 3, "Then I went down to the potter's house and behold he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter so he made it again, another vessel and as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter, saith the Lord. Behold as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in Mine hand, O house of Israel." Now you can go back to Romans.

Now this is not an unfamiliar analogy. Not an unfamiliar analogy at all. He, I believe, has alluded already to a passage in Isaiah 64 and it alludes also to this Jeremiah passage. "Hath not the potter power over the clay," says verse 21, "of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor?" The analogy is obvious. A potter makes choices. Clay has no part in it. He has the power to do whatever he wants. He has the right to do whatever he wants. So it's a question of right and it's a question of ability. So does God. He has the right to do whatever He wants, He has the ability to do whatever He wants. He's like the potter and the clay. And He makes vessels as He chooses. A potter could make a beautiful dish or a trash barrel...it would be his choice.

You will notice verse 21, "He has power," that's exousia, authority, that's the right to do something. Now I don't believe, and you must listen carefully to this, this is going to unfold in marvelous terms, I do not believe that God claims the right to create sinful damnable creatures in order to punish them. I

do not believe that the Bible teaches that God creates occupants for hell. I believe the Bible very clearly says out of the Lord Himself that hell was created for the devil and his angels. God is not claiming the right to create damnable creatures in order to damn them, but He is claiming His right to deal with creatures who are sinful already as He wills. He pardons or punishes as He sees fit. He doesn't make men sinners but He chooses to disposition of men who are sinners. God is not responsible that men are sinners. Scripture makes that very clear. And if you have forgotten, you need to reread James 1:13, "Let no man say when he's tempted, I'm tempted of God. For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man."

God doesn't create evil. "God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, cannot look upon iniquity." When God made everything, He made everything, looked at it and said, "It is...what?...it's good." But God reserves the right to do with already sinful creatures that which His own will desires.

Now Paul then concludes with three verses to apply this analogy. Follow very carefully, very very strategic portion. Verse 22 through 24, listen to it, "What if God willing to show His wrath and to make His power known endured with much long suffering 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 hath before prepared unto glory, even us whom He hath called, not of the Jews only but also of the Gentiles?"

So many have misunderstood this. I want you to understand it. What if God...what if God exercising His divine choice in sovereign authority makes some vessels of mercy while others are made vessels of wrath? What if? It's like saying, "So what if God did that." What right do you have? By the way, it isn't even a sentence, it's an unfinished sentence in the Greek. What if? It's an open-ended question. Well what if God wanted to make some unto salvation, some unto wrath...what if? God's God. God's God. You don't have any right to question God. Does God have a right to display His wrath? Does He? Does God have a right to display His holy justice? Does that bring Him glory? Is God's glory on display when He reacts in anger? Yes. Is God's glory on display when He reacts in wrath? Yes. Is God's glory on display when He reacts in holy judgment? Yes. Because that's as much an element of God's character as the other element. Is God's glory on display when He demonstrates His mercy? Yes. When He demonstrates His grace? Yes. When He demonstrates His compassion? Yes. Is He any less God on either side? No. And if He is fully God then He will be revealed as God and to be revealed as God there must be some wherein His grace is revealed and some wherein His judgment is revealed.

So, He has the right to display His gracious mercy and His holy justice. What if? Look back at verse 22...what if? Now watch this, "God willing to show His wrath," and by willing he means, not what we thing, "Well, I'm willing to do it." No, wishing to do it, wanting strongly to do it, greatly desiring to do it. God wants to show His wrath. Now mark this, people, this will answer an awful lot of questions for you. God wants to display His wrath. Why? Because He wants to reveal Himself and that is part of Himself. The entrance of sin, now listen carefully, into the world...and here's a theological answer for

you to a lot of questions...the entrance of sin into the world was necessary so that God could manifest His wrath and His judgment and His holy anger and His vengeance and His justice. Because that is as much an element of God's nature as any other thing in His nature.

People say, "Why did God allow sin? Why did God allow sin?" God allowed sin in order that He might display His holy wrath, no sin, no wrath, no wrath, no revelation of the fullness of the glory of God. True? So when you wonder why God allowed sin, I believe it's answered in that verse.

Now I understand what this teaches. I'm not fully going to confess to you that I'm real comfortable with all of this in my human mind, but I'm sure clear what it says. And the rest I hold by faith. What if God willing to show His wrath...what a statement. Whew! Had there been no sin, He couldn't have displayed His wrath against sin and we wouldn't have known that element of Him. And He wouldn't have put Himself on display and there would have been a part of God lost to the display. So God allowed and endured sin for the purpose of revealing His holy wrath in its judgment and its punishment. And it had to be for God to be God fully revealed as God. And He couldn't have attributes that didn't have function.

And, to make His power known...to make His power known. You know why God allowed sin secondly? First of all, so that He could show His wrath, secondly, so that He could show His...what? His power. How does God show His power in sin? First of all, in judging sin. We see the wrath of God in His judgment on sin. And if you have any question about that, all you need to do is read the closing chapters of the book of Revelation and you will see the power of God. You will see the break up of the world. You will see the devastating plagues that He sends on the earth. You will see the great fiery judgments that He brings upon men. You will see all of the curses that sweep their way through that marvelous apocalypse of John. And you will see the great final conquering Jesus Christ coming on a white horse out of heaven and carrying a sword, blood-splattered garments as He comes to take the earth for His own possession and establishes eternal and glorious Kingdom, and you will see Him defeat the armies of the world. And God displays His power in judgment, doesn't He? And we see them all collected at the Great White Throne and God has the power to bring them out of the graves and to bring them before His tribunal and send them into the Lake of Fire forever, that's power...that's power.

And so, sin exists in order that God may demonstrate that part of His nature which is holy and against sin, reacts in violent wrath. And God has allowed sin in order that He might demonstrate His tremendous power as well as His vengeance and His power is seen in its ability to conquer all that attempts to conquer Him. Sin comes into the world attempting to conquer God, God conquers it and we see His power, we see His power no greater way than in His conquering sin in judgment and in the other hand, in salvation. Does God conquer sin through salvation? Oh yes...oh yes. On the cross did Jesus win a victory? Oh yes. Did He bruise the serpent's head? Oh yes. Did He finish the work of redemption? Oh yes. Sin has provided God a way to be displayed. His holy wrath is

displayed, His tremendous power is displayed two ways, as He demonstrates His ability to judge evil and His ability to redeem from evil. So sin provides a means for God to be glorified. And isn't that the reason for everything? Isn't it? Isn't that it? Is there any other reason for anything than for God to be glorified? See, we think the reason for everything is for us to be happy. That's not the reason.

So, what if...because He desired to show His wrath and He desired to make His power known, what if He endured with long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction? What if God endured sin in the world? What if God endured sinners in the world so that He might display His glory? What if? That's His prerogative, He's God. What if God chose to let His beautiful universe suffer the stains of the Fall, what if? If it gave Him opportunity to display His power, His holiness, what if? What if God is patient with sin? What if? If that allows Him to display Himself. What if, verse 22, He allowed vessels of wrath to be fitted to destruction? Oh what a statement...what a statement. Fearful...I..I hurt inside when I studied this. I just...my heart aches in this. Vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. Vessels of wrath so called because they will receive the anger of holy God. Vessels of wrath so called because they are objects of God's fiery judgment, they are fitted to destruction, passive participle. They are prepared...katartizois a Greek word, it means to prepare. They're prepared for that.

Now the agent who prepared them is unnamed. It's passive. The vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. But the agent must be God because that's the whole context. It isn't that God made them sinners. It's that they're sinners, God to display His holy wrath fits them for destruction. God is not seen specifically as preordaining the destruction there, it's passive as I say, but it can be no other than God in the context.

And then verse 23, the other side, "And what if that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy which He...and now it's active...He had before prepared unto glory?" It's almost as if God says, "Yes, I prepared them unto glory." But he wants to back away and say, "They were fitted for destruction." He wants to be the agent in the preparation for glory. He wants not to be in them being fitted for destruction. It is He that brings them to destruction but He didn't make them that way. He left them that way, if you will.

What if? What if God wanted to display the riches of His glory? And so verse 23 says, "Made vessels of mercy prepared for glory." Why did God save you? He saved me because I'm...I'm special. No. Why did God save you? He saved me because I...I...I...I...I sought it. No. Well He saved me because I wanted it. No. No He saved you and He saved me because He wanted to display His...what?...His what?...His glory and part of His glory is His mercy and His grace because when Moses said to Him in Exodus 33, "Show me Your glory...show me Your glory...show me Your glory," He says, "Okay, I'll let My mercy and My grace pass before you." And the reason people are saved is so that God may display His glory. His glory seen in His grace, His glory seen in His mercy, His glory seen in His compassion. And the reason that people are damned is that God may display

His glory, the glory of His holiness, the glory of His wrath, the glory of His judgment, the glory of His justice, the glory of His power.

So what if He wanted to make vessels of mercy? Verse 24, "Even us." O blessed thought, is that a blessed thought? Is that a blessed thought? "Even us whom He hath called not of the Jews only but also of the Gentiles." Even us, O blessed thought. Listen, when we learn about the sovereignty of God we just can't ask questions, folks. Because we can only go so far and then we're at the point where we start to question God and that is to bring God to our court as if we're the judge and that's a blasphemous thing.

This doctrine is not given to confuse us. This doctrine is not given to make us question God. This doctrine is not given to upset us. You know what this doctrine is given for? To make us...what?...what does it make you?...thankful...thankful. Do you fall on your face before God and say, "O God, have mercy that You should have chosen me...that You should have chosen me, that You should desire through me to display Your glory in mercy and grace rather than in vengeance and wrath." And He has called us. And that is an effectual call, that is an internal saving call as always in Romans and in Paul's epistles. And it comes not only to the Jews but also the Gentiles. Jew and Gentile He's called.

So Israel's unbelief doesn't violate God's person. He's always kept His Word. He's always chosen some to mercy and some to judgment. Given mercy to some, and hardened others, it's not anything different.

You say, "John, this is hard." Yes, it's hard. It's what Peter was talking about when he said, "Paul writes things hard to be understood." It's hard. You say, "What about all the passages that say, Whosoever will may come? What about all the places where Jesus says, You will not come to Me that you might have life? What about all those invitations? What about all...the parable this morning where the king sent his servants and said, Call everybody everywhere to the festival, to the celebration, get them all in here? What about all that?" Oh, that's another sermon...that's another sermon. You see, that's not in here. Thank God it's elsewhere.

You know what I also believe, having said all this? I believe anybody who wants to any time can come to Jesus Christ and receive Him as Savior. You say, "Now wait a minute, that doesn't...how does that fit together?" I haven't got the slightest. I don't know. But I know that there are passages that I can preach with all the passion in my heart that call people to Jesus Christ. And I know that I can preach from the depths of my heart, God is not willing that any should perish. And that God says in Ezekiel, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Mysteriously incomprehensibly beyond searching out, beyond our understanding, beyond our ability to tap, there is also a truth in the Word of God that says that all of us whose hearts are turned to the Savior may come and that if we refuse Him the guilt is on us. And how God resolves that with these things, I'll never know until some day I

know as I am known, but in the meantime I will never impugn God. In the mean time I will thank Him with every fiber of my being that He has redeemed me and chosen to display His grace and glory through me and not His wrath and glory.

The balance is there. Jesus said, John 6:37, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me." And that sounds like Romans 8, Romans 9. And then He said, "But him that comes to Me I will in no wise...what?...cast out." Humph...

So we conclude with the song of Moses. And they sing the song of Moses, Revelation 15:3 and 4, "The servant of God and the song of the Lamb saying, Great and marvelous are Thy works, Lord God almighty. Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints. Who shall not fear Thee and glorify Thy name for Thou art holy." Say it again. "Great and marvelous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are Thy ways."

Is the unbelief of Israel a blow against God's promises? No. God never promised to redeem every Jew, always a remnant. Is the unbelief of Israel a blow against God's character and person? No, He's always been revealed as a God who displays His glory on the one hand through mercy, on the other hand through wrath. Nothing is changed.

John 3:27 put it this way, "A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven." Our salvation comes from God. That's what this teaches because God has chosen to give it to us. The mystery of it is beyond me. But as I've said to you before, what is mystery to my intellect is sunshine in my heart. Let's bow in prayer.

Now I realize that as we listen to things like this we find them hard to understand. We have grown up with an understanding of God strongly leaning toward His love and compassion because that's what we so desperately need. But we must also understand that God is a God of sovereignty, God is a God who is glorified in His judgment as in His grace. And when we look at us and say I'm saved, I have been prepared as a vessel of mercy, prepared before the world began, the awesomeness of that calling, the awesomeness of that choice should fill us with gratitude and wonder and empty us of pride, self-righteousness. But on the other hand, God is not willing that any should perish. Jesus looking over the city of Jerusalem burst into tears and wept and wept. And by the grave of Lazarus when He saw the results of sin, He was so troubled in His heart and He wept again, He sobbed. It's mystery...mystery that He's not willing that we perish, it's not His choice. And yet it is His choice. Is that paradoxical? Apparently it is to us, perfectly resolved in God's infinite mind with absolute justice. And anyone who questions God, anyone who questions God shows the folly of his own pride.

May I say to you as well, that you need to do two things tonight. One is to thank God for your salvation. Two, if you do not know Jesus Christ, if you have not received His mercy and grace, believed in His death and resurrection and embraced Him as Lord and Savior, you must respond in

your heart for the Scripture says, "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." And if God is drawing your heart and drawing your soul, you must respond. For an invitation can be refused, we saw that this morning. Don't refuse it. These profound things put us in awe of our God. Humble us, make us realize that we know so little. But what we do know of God's revelation should be our greatest pursuit, our happiest privilege.

Thank You, Father, for this wonderful day. We pray that as we go we might do so with our hearts filled, with new commitments out of thanksgiving for what You've done for us. And we give You praise in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2013 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).