

"He has mercy on whom He wills..."

(by Bob Pulliam)

*For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "Even for this same purpose I have raised you up, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be declared in all the earth."
Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. (Rom 9:17f)*

The quotation above, with some of its context, is used by many to teach that each individual can only be saved by the direct intervention of God. Nothing man can do or say will change whether or not he is saved. The bottom line is: If God did not choose you, you have no hope.

We cover other aspects of this error elsewhere (see [Election of God](#)). In this article we want to focus on Romans 9, which is used by many as a proof-text for this doctrine.

As always, purpose and context must be thoroughly examined to accurately understand the scriptures. Anyone can pull out a passage to foster a false doctrine. It takes an honest person to work through to the truth, however. Romans 9 deals with the salvation of Israel. Many of the Israelites were not saved because they refused to obey Jesus. Their problem stemmed from the belief that God was going to save them simply because they were children of Abraham (children of promise). The Jews believed salvation to be a national concept, rather than an individual concept. If you were an Israelite you were automatically saved. In their minds, if the entire nation wasn't saved, then the promise of God ("word of God") had taken no effect (v6). To them, one of two things were true: either God hadn't kept His promise; or salvation was not of Christ.

The Children of Promise...

Paul points out the fallacy of this thinking by reminding his readers that not all of Abraham's descendants received this promise (v7); and that not all of Jacob's (Israel's) descendants were Israel (nation of promise)(v6b). He notes that the "children of the flesh" (physical Israel) were not the children of the promise. God would not be saving a nation to the exclusion of others!

Abraham's son (Isaac) fathered two children, but only one was chosen for God's purpose of saving the world. Note that Paul is *not* saying that one was chosen to be saved, and the other lost. Paul *is* reminding the Jews of the choice that gave them the national distinction they loved and in which they gloried. Was God unjust in that choice? No, His choice was correct. And His will cannot be resisted without the promise of destruction, which is now proven in the case of Pharaoh (vv 15 - 18).

Pharaoh and God's Mercy...

God said to Pharaoh, "let my people go". God determined that He would have mercy on the Israelites, whether Pharaoh liked it or not. Not because the Israelites were necessarily a wonderful people; but because it was His choice. God chose them and made them something special. The Israelites had nothing to do with this election by God (v16). God simply willed such to be so.

Pharaoh willed that the people stay in Egypt; but God's will could not be thwarted (see The Hardened Heart (coming soon)). God has mercy on whom He wills. Note that such is not a question of individual salvation. It is God's choice of a people who will bring the Savior into the world! We see then that God calls the shots. His will supercedes all. And the matter is as clay in the hands of a potter.

The Potter and the Clay...

Paul's illustration of the potter and the clay is grossly misrepresented. The principle was well known to the Israelites, but fully foreign to most today. Such can be understood by reading Jeremiah 18:1 - 10. The potter determines the type of vessel by the clay he works with. If the clay is inferior, he makes an inferior vessel. If it is a superior clay, he makes a beautiful vessel of honor. God is the potter and man is the clay. The standard for the clay is set by Him. God determines which clay is inferior and which is superior. How would he do this with people. He would set a standard. Would the standard be whether or not a person is an Israelite? No! The Savior He brought into the world would be the standard.

Pursuing the Standard of God...

Rom 9:30 - 33 clearly shows that God set a standard for man to meet. The Jews were trying to reach salvation by keeping the law perfectly. They were pursuing a law that was based on self-righteousness (v31). The Gentiles, on the other hand, had believed on Jesus. They pursued the standard set by God, and for that had attained righteousness (v30). Why were the Gentiles being saved and the Israelites being lost? Because God arbitrarily chose some and not others? No; verse 32 gives us the answer. They were not meeting the standard set by God. God placed Christ as the stumbling stone of prophecy, and faith in Him determines the salvation of souls.

Conclusion...

God has elected the saved. All who will follow His Son will be saved. If one does not follow, it isn't God's fault. Yes, He is the potter and we are the clay; but we determine whether or not we meet the standard God has set for salvation. Such a free and universally available gift!... Salvation in Jesus Christ. If you are lost, you have no one to blame but yourself!