

How can God work
all things together
for good?



Human
Freedom

and



Divine
Sovereignty

American cultural values

Individual entitlement
to the good life

A sense of independence

A sense of choice

A sense of achievement



Romans 9

God's Kingdom challenges
these values.

*The Empathy
of Love*

**The Sovereignty
of God**

*The Cross
of Christ*



Romans 9

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 So then **it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.** ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.” ¹⁸ So then **He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.** ¹⁹ You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” ²⁰ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it?”

Predestination in Romans 9

Instrumental
in the drama
of God's plan

OR

Determinative
in who is
redeemed

Israel
Christ

Individuals
Christians

Redemptive
plan

Redeemed
people

**Could it be
that ch.9 illustrates
the truth of Romans 8:28?**

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

Romans 9

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; ⁷ neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: *"through Isaac your descendants will be named."* ⁸ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants."

- **"True Israel"** - not ethnic or national but the people of faith (to whom God's promises apply).
- The **"descendants (seed) of Abraham"** - Christ and those who have faith in him.

(Galatians 3:13-16, 26-29)

Galatians 3:16 "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many; but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is Christ."

⁹ For this is a word of promise: *"At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son."* ¹⁰ And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; ¹¹ for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, ¹² it was said to her, *"The older will serve the younger."* (**Gen.25:23**) ¹³ Just as it is written, *"Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."* (**Mal.1:2-4**)

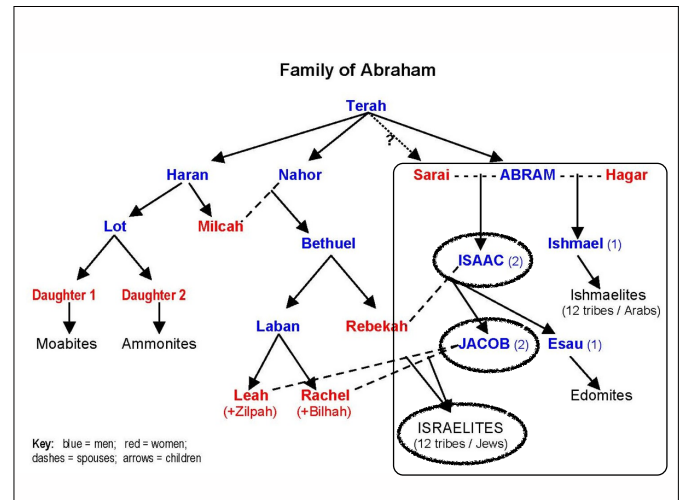
- In the O.T. Isaac, Jacob, Jerusalem, Zion, etc are often **symbolic** of the nation Israel.
- **"love and hate"** are hyperbolic meaning to **choose** as in Luke 14:26.

Illustration

Malachi 1

¹ The oracle of the word of the Lord **to Israel** through Malachi. ² "I have loved you." says the Lord. But you say, "How have You loved **us**?" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. **"Yet I have loved Jacob; 3 but I have hated Esau,** and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness." ⁴ Though **Edom** says, "We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins"; thus says the Lord of hosts, **"They** may build, but I will tear down; and men will call them the wicked territory, and **the people** toward whom the Lord is indignant forever."

**Two nations Israel & Edom
(not individuals) are in view.**



¹⁴ What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! 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."* (**Ex.33:19**) ¹⁶ So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, *"For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth."* (**Ex.9:16**) ¹⁸ So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires."

- Pharaoh hardened his own heart (**Ex.8:15**) in keeping with God's promise to harden it at the time where it would serve God's purpose (**Ex.4:21**).
- The issue is not personal salvation but the **role** in history that one plays in God's plan of redemption.

Romans 9:17

"For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, *"For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth."*

Exodus 9:16

"But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth."

- Paul inserts an interpretive (midrash) emphasis that is not in the LXX or the Hebrew text.
- This may reveal the nature of Divine predestination - God allows human nature and individual decisions that He then uses to fulfill His purposes.

"¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" ²⁰ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to **(debate with)** God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? ²¹ Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use? ²² What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? ²³ And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴ even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles."

- It is the unbelieving Jews who are the vessels of wrath (for a time) so that Gentiles might be shown mercy. vs.22-24
- The illusion to the potter comes from **Jeremiah 18:19-21** where the issue is the nation Israel.

Jeremiah 18

"¹ The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, ² "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will announce My words to you." ³ Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. ⁴ But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make."

"⁵ Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, ⁶ "**Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?**" declares the Lord. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel. ⁷ At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; ⁸ **if** that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, **I will relent** concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. ⁹ Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; ¹⁰ **if** it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then **I will think better** of the good with which I had promised to bless it."

"¹¹ So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, 'Thus says the Lord, "Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds."' ¹² But they will say, 'It's hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.'"

Conclusion #1

History like the cosmos shows signs of intelligent design.

Hebrew 11:3

"By faith we understand that the **worlds** (ages) were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible."



Romans 11:28

"From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake,

- **With respect to the Gospel** - Israel has failed to fulfill God's will and as a result the Gentiles are blessed.

but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;"

- **With respect to God's plan** - Israel is used by God in fulfilling His promise to the Patriarchs - that in the end God's blessing will be open to the Gentiles.
- **The issue is Israel's instrumental role** - in bringing about God's plan.

Paraphrase

“God’s redemptive plan is fulfilled as He directs injustice with the Fathers, disobedience in Israel, & the hard heart of Pharaoh, to bring blessing to the Gentiles.”

Other examples

- ✓ Joseph’s slavery in Egypt.
- ✓ Paul’s thorn in the flesh.
- ✓ The crucifixion of Jesus.

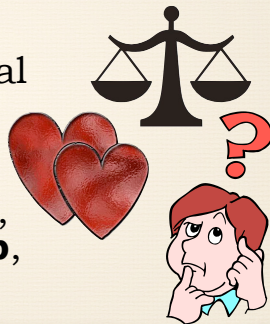
Philippians 2

“¹² So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation with fear and trembling;** ¹³ **for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.**”

Conclusion #2

Saving faith is most often pictured in Scripture as a free human response.

If there is no real freedom can there be any real meaning to **justice, love, ethics, worship, etc?**



Romans 9:18

“So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.”

- If we see “hardening” as God dictating a person’s moral choices, we have a big ethical conundrum.
- Hardening may simply be the removal of God’s common grace from a person and leaving them to their true fallen nature.
- Is it possible that only by God’s common grace can any human choose to display God’s image?

Peter Kreeft



“It is the Godfather, not God the Father, who makes you an offer you can’t refuse.”

Conversion in Lutheran theology (Melancthon’s synthesis)

**The Word
of God.**



**The Will
of man.**

Repentance

**The Work
of the Holy Spirit.**

Conclusion #3

A full explanation of God's decrees and our choices lies above our spiritual pay-grade.

Deuteronomy 29:29

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law."



Some general rules in dealing with theological difficulties.

- ✓ There are many more wrong answers than right answers.
- ✓ We will always fail to see some things clearly in this life.
- ✓ It is wiser to live with a paradox than to remove it with an erroneous view.
- ✓ Certainty on difficult issues is to be approached with humility, and caution.
- ✓ Respect for the complexity of an issue and those who honestly differ is a gracious virtue.

Some mistakes we make in resolving difficulties.

- ✓ Blindly following tradition and culture.
- ✓ Demonizing all who disagree with us.
- ✓ Dogmatically defending our opinions on all issues.
- ✓ Dramatizing every issue as a "major."
- ✓ Demanding that our interpretation be clear, certain, and canonized.
- ✓ Expecting that God will give us special revelation knowledge through prayer.
- ✓ Refusing to be open to change by personalizing all convictions.

What are we to learn from this?

1. History is not all about us.
2. God works all things for His purposes - even our failures - in ways that may be beyond our understanding.
3. We, like the nation Israel may play a role in God's plan that is not always honorable - like a pot that is prepared for common use.
4. We cannot will or work in ways that thwart God's ultimate plan or purpose.

"Calvinism emphasizes divine sovereignty and free grace; Arminianism emphasizes human responsibility. The one restricts the saving grace to the elect; the other extends it to all men on the condition of faith. Both are right in what they assert; both are wrong in what they deny. If one important truth is pressed to the exclusion of another truth of equal importance, it becomes an error, and loses its hold upon the conscience. The Bible gives us a theology which is more human than Calvinism, and more divine than Arminianism, and more Christian than either of them."

Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, vo. VIII:815-6

Conclusion #4

**God's Grace should inspire awe and worship
not passivity and fatalism
or pride and fear.**

Romans 11:33

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"

