

Romans (9:13-18)

Hard-Hearted & Hated

Part 41 - July 10, 2005

SAY WHAT?!

Jewish leaders (in Paul's day) argued that the Jewish nation's rejection of Jesus *proved* he wasn't the Messiah; God can't fail. A good argument! But Paul demonstrated that God's promises have always been for his true *remnant*, not the entire Jewish nation.

Not all Abraham's descendants are Abraham's children. (9:7) Isaac (a "child of promise") was chosen by God over Ishmael (a child of desire and effort) to forward God's plan of redemption. And Jacob was chosen to rule over his older twin, Esau before the two "were born or had done anything good or bad". (9:11)

Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. - Romans 9:13-18 NIV

Q: Does God *hate* little babies before they are even born?

Q: And harden people's hearts just so he can conquer 'em?

Q: And toss his compassion and mercy around, willy-nilly?

Remember, Paul is speaking to the Jews. And he's speaking their language ... Old Testament. Let's highlight all of the OT quotes:

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We can only appreciate what Paul is saying to the degree that we understand the context of these quotes he's using.

ESAU I HATED

Let's start with: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated". Paul is quoting Malachi (1:2-3) who wrote this about 1300 years *after* Jacob and Esau, when their names referred to their nations: the Israelites

and the Edomites. And this is precisely who Malachi is talking to. In fact, in the very next verse he goes on about “Esau”, saying:

Edom will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the Lord. - Malachi 1:4 NIV

SIDEBAR: As far as the “God hating” thing goes, it’s a prophetic style for describing God’s actions not his emotions: “Jacob’s Israel I have *chosen*, but Esau’s Edom I have *rejected*.”

Q: The real question is: why is Paul quoting Malachi?

A: To remind the Jews that God’s plan may seem backward at the moment, but it will be proven out in the long run.

And so when Paul asks, “Is God unjust” he doesn’t mean, “*Was he fair* to baby Esau.” He means: “*Is God inconsistent in his character? Or, does he ever violate his own nature?*” And Paul’s answer with an exclamation point: “Not at all!”

[And then his next quote] For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” - Romans 9:15 NIV

Q: Can God do *anything* he wants? ... **ANYTHING** he wants?

A: Yes! Absolutely. But being sin-corrupted, we tend hear: “Can God be as *inappropriate* as he wants?” But, God will *never* WANT to do anything that violates his sinless nature.

[This quote is from when God revealed himself to Moses] And the Lord said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. - Exodus 33:19 NIV

God’s mercy and compassion will always be in alignment and agreement with his “goodness” and his good “name”.

A BIT OF REDEMPTIVE HISTORY

It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. - Romans 9:16 NIV

The “It” Paul is referring to, is *who* God chooses to carry out his plan of redemption. And *it* is not determined or decided by a vote; nor is it earned or achieved by exertion. It is *only* found in God’s mercy.

[Now Paul quotes Exodus 9:16] For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” - Romans 9:17 NIV

To understand the context of this quote, we need to look back at how and why God used Pharaoh in redemptive history.

First, God raised Joseph to power in Egypt so he'd relocate his father Jacob's/Israel's tribe of 75. If they hadn't moved, they would've blended into their Semitic pagan neighbors. But, the Egyptians had a different look and language. So Egypt became an *incubator* for Israel (it kept them separate, untainted, and allowed them to grow into a nation).

430 years later there're over 3,000,000! (*Num 1:44-46; 2:32-33*) Now, God needs to bring them out "cleanly" and separate them from their surrogate nation.

Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites. - Exodus 7:4 NIV

There are two reasons God employs "mighty acts of judgment". The Israelites had been surrounded by Egyptian false gods and idols for 430 years. And they were still ignorant about God. He had to show them he was mightier than the Egyptian's gods:

... I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. - Exodus 12:12 NIV

Many theologians believe that each plague was designed to mock a particular Egyptian god, goddess, or pagan power. They worshipped the Nile as a giver of life; so it became blood and everything in it died. They worshipped the sun god, Ra (the most powerful of the gods), so darkness enveloped the land. Medical shamans, weather shamans, and agricultural shamans, were powerless against hail, boils, lice, flies, frogs & locust.

[And as Moses' father-in-law, a Midian priest named Jethro, said] Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods ... - Exodus 18:11 NIV

So, God showed the Israelites he was supreme; but he also used his "mighty acts" to enlist the *assistance* of Pharaoh. Have you ever wondered why God didn't just wipe out the Egyptians? Ten different plagues seem a bit accommodating; why not just start off with the plague of hammers on the head and be done?!

If God had wiped out the Egyptians, the Israelites would've *stayed* in Egypt. Following an unknown leader, through the desert, to an unknown land, wasn't so appealing. God had to get them to Mount Sinai so they could receive an assignment that could *only* be fulfilled in the Promised Land ... but that's all next week!

God didn't want Pharaoh to simply *release* his people; he needed Pharaoh to *remove* them:

Now the Lord had said to Moses ... [Pharaoh] will let you go from here, and when he does, he will drive you out completely. - Exodus 11:1 NIV

And so Pharaoh, *against* his desires and efforts, was chosen by God's mercy a part of God's redemptive plan.

Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. - Romans 9:18 NIV

Q: Why?

A: We just read the answer in verse 17:

... that I might display my power ... that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. -
Romans 9:17 NIV

God has an unwavering allegiance to “display” and “proclaim” the infinite value of his name “in all the earth” and it will never be compromised by man’s “desire” or “effort”.

HOW GOD HARDENS

Look at that last line: “he hardens whom he wants to harden”. People can get all crazy about this statement, like God wires up certain souls to be rebellious and evil. But there are five different scriptures that say things like:

But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief [the plague subsided], **he** hardened his heart
... - *Exodus 8:15 NIV*

Q: So, who hardened Pharaoh’s heart, God or Pharaoh?

A: Both. Remember that “police sting” analogy?

- A. God *placed* Pharaoh (raised him up) with the foreknowledge that he’d react exactly as he did, given the circumstances.
- B. Pharaoh *chose* (of his own free will) to rebel against God.

God hardened Pharaoh by threatening his god-like status (as son of Ra) and by challenging his authority, supremacy, and rule.

But there’s a bigger truth here. Like Isaac & Ishmael, and Jacob & Esau, Moses and Pharaoh were most likely brothers. Both were even murderers – so, similar in temperament.

Q: How did God express his mercy and compassion to Moses?

A: By revealing himself to Moses.

Q: How did God harden Pharaoh’s heart?

A: By revealing himself to Pharaoh.

- The same sun that melts the wax, hardens the clay

It’s the condition of the heart that determines the effect of God’s revealed authority.

- If I desire God’s love, I’ll *submit* to his authority.
- If I desire my own authority, I will *reject* his love.

Jesus likened it to seed that falls on either hard, rocky soil, or good “growable” soil.

And mature believers realize that God’s authority *is* an expression of mercy; because everything he demands (e.g. worship, humility, avoiding sin) serves our best interest.