



Romans 9:14-29 (ESV)

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! 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 depends not on human will or exertion,^[a] but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" ²⁰ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" ²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? ²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea,

"Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,'
and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'"

²⁶ "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,'
there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"

²⁷ And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel^[b] be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, ²⁸ for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." ²⁹ And as Isaiah predicted,

"If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,
we would have been like Sodom
and become like Gomorrah."

Romans 9:14-29 (HCSB)

God's Selection Is Just

¹⁴ What should we say then? Is there injustice with God? Absolutely not! ¹⁵ For He tells Moses:

I will show mercy
to whom I will show mercy,
and I will have compassion
on whom I will have compassion.^[a]

¹⁶ So then it does not depend on human will or effort^[b] but on God who shows mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture tells Pharaoh:

I raised you up for this reason
so that I may display My power in you
and that My name may be proclaimed in all the earth.^[c]

¹⁸ So then, He shows mercy to those He wants to, and He hardens those He wants to harden.

¹⁹ You will say to me, therefore, “Why then does He still find fault? For who can resist His will?” ²⁰ But who are you, a mere man, to talk back to God? Will what is formed say to the one who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?” ²¹ Or has the potter no right over the clay, to make from the same lump one piece of pottery for honor and another for dishonor? ²² And what if God, desiring to display His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience objects of wrath ready for destruction? ²³ And what if He did this to make known the riches of His glory on objects of mercy that He prepared beforehand for glory— ²⁴ on us, the ones He also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As He also says in Hosea:

I will call Not My People, My People,
and she who is Unloved, Beloved.^[d]
²⁶ And it will be in the place where they were told,
you are not My people,
there they will be called sons of the living God.^[e]

²⁷ But Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

Though the number of Israel's sons
is like the sand of the sea,
only the remnant will be saved;
²⁸ for the Lord will execute His sentence
completely and decisively on the earth.^{[f][g]}

²⁹ And just as Isaiah predicted:

If the Lord of Hosts^[h] had not left us offspring,
we would have become like Sodom,
and we would have been made like Gomorrah.^[i]

English Standard Version Bible - *Study Bible*¹

Romans 9:14-29

9:14-15 Since God chose Jacob instead of Esau before they were born, without regard to how good or bad either of them would be, the question naturally arises: Is God just in choosing one over the other? God is just because no one deserves to be saved (cf. [3:23](#)), and the salvation of anyone at all is due to God's **mercy** alone, as the citation of [Ex. 33:19](#) affirms.

9:16 Salvation, then, is not ultimately based on **human free will** or effort but depends entirely on God's merciful will.

9:17 For this very purpose. Paul quotes [Ex. 9:16](#) to show that God is sovereign over evil as well. Even the wrath of man praises God ([Ps. 76:10](#)), for God installed **Pharaoh** as ruler and hardened his heart so that his own saving power and glorious name would be spread throughout the whole world.

9:19 who can resist his will? If salvation ultimately depends upon God, and he has mercy and hardens whomever he pleases, then how can he find anyone guilty? How can he charge anyone with guilt since his will is irresistible?

9:20-21 Some of Paul's readers might expect him to appeal to human free will to resolve the problem posed in [v. 19](#). Instead, he insists that finite human beings may not rebelliously question God's ways, that God as a **potter** (cf. [Jer. 18:1-6](#)) has the right to do what he wishes with his creation. The **honorable** and **dishonorable** vessels in this context represent those who are saved and unsaved. Paul affirms that humans are guilty for their sin, and he offers no philosophical resolution as to how this fits with divine sovereignty. He does insist that God ordains all that happens (cf. [Eph. 1:11](#)), even though God himself does not sin and is not morally responsible for sin.

9:22-23 God created a world in which both his **wrath** and his **mercy** would be displayed. Indeed, his mercy shines against the backdrop of his just wrath, showing thereby that the salvation of any person is due to the marvelous grace and love of God. If this is difficult to understand, it is because people mistakenly think God owes them salvation!

9:24 In his grace and mercy God **has called** people to himself from both **the Jews** and **the Gentiles**.

9:25-26 Paul quotes [Hos. 2:23](#) and [1:10](#) to illustrate the stunning grace of God—that those who **are not my people... will be called "sons of the living God."** In calling the Gentiles to salvation, God calls a sinful people to himself, just as in saving Israel he showed mercy to the undeserving. No one can presume on God's grace. In calling anyone to salvation, he shows undeserved mercy to those who were not his people.

9:27-29 The fact that only some of Israel would be saved was prophesied in [Isa. 10:22-23](#). Most of **Israel** was judged, and only **a remnant** experienced salvation. Indeed, as [Isa. 1:9](#) says, Israel deserved to be wiped out like Sodom and Gomorrah, but God had mercy and spared some.

1. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Romans 9".

Holman Christian Standard Bible - Study Bible²

Romans 9:14-29

9:14-15 **Is there injustice with God?** is a rhetorical question, inspired by the fact that it is difficult to grasp the fact that God does not need to treat all sinners the same in order to be just. Jesus taught the same truth in the parable of the vineyard workers ([Mt 20:1-15](#): "Don't I have the right to do what I want with my business?"). In His first sermon in Nazareth, Jesus pointed out that God gave grace to a widow in Sidon and healed only Naaman the Syrian when there were many needy people in Israel ([Lk 4:24-27](#)). His comments enraged the audience, but careful consideration reveals that a just God is perfectly free to make such choices. If you gave money to one beggar but not to another, or if you forgave one debtor but not another, would you be unjust? Of course not. You chose to be gracious to one where you could have justly chosen to be gracious to none. God does not owe **mercy** to anyone. Paul quoted [Ex 33:19](#) to this effect.

9:16 Salvation does not depend on **human will or effort**. Salvation is based on God's mercy. The situation is not that people want to be saved but cannot be ([2Tim 2:25-26](#)), or that they are running after God but cannot find Him. Apart from God's drawing them, none are seeking the one true God—not a single one ([Rm 3:11-12](#)).

9:17 God raised up **Pharaoh** as ruler of Egypt and used him as a foil to reveal His name (Yahweh) and His power so the one true God would be known. Pharaoh believed himself to be the epitome of Ra the sun god. He hardened his heart and rejected God's revelation ([Ex 7:3](#); [8:15](#)).

9:18 God hardened Pharaoh in his stubbornness as he progressively rejected the plagues that revealed "the finger of God" ([Ex 8:19](#)). Exodus points out that Pharaoh hardened his heart many times before God punished him by hardening him.

9:19 Paul declared that the Judge of the earth is always just. "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him?" ([Job 40:2](#)). Man cannot judge God.

9:20-22 *Adam* (man) is from the *adama* (ground) ([Gen 2:7](#)). In pronouncing punishment for Adam and Eve's sin, God said, "For you are dust, and you will return to dust" ([Gen 3:19](#)). The image of the village **potter** is common in the OT ([Isa 41:25](#); [45:9](#); [Jer 18:1-12](#)) and is used to illustrate different lessons. Here the clay represents fallen humanity. Much as a potter, God works this material into shapes that fulfill His desires ([Isa 64:6-9](#)). Some pots He chooses to be for **honor**; others He patiently endures until He displays His justified **wrath** against sin.

9:23-24 God desires to display His grace on **objects of mercy**, the ones on whom He has set His redeeming love. These come from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds.

9:25-26 Drawing from Hosea's marriage, Paul compares Gentile salvation to mercy bestowed on an undeserving adulterous wife (see the book of Hosea).

9:27-29 Paul also cited the words of **Isaiah** to show that God will save a remnant of Israel that He "calls." Unless God had been gracious to the remnant, the whole nation would have been justly wiped out like ancient **Sodom** and **Gomorrah**.

2. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., HCSB Study Bible, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Romans 9".

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

Romans 9:14-29

9:16 The fallacy of gaining salvation by human effort remains as strong as ever—people still think good intentions are the key to unlock the door to eternal life. By the time they get to try the lock, they will find that their key does not fit. Others imagine that their efforts are building an invisible ladder to heaven made up of service, family, position, reputation, good work, and desire, although none of these rungs will support a feather. People are so busy trying to reach God that they completely miss the truth that God has already reached down to them. We cannot earn God's mercy—if we could, it would not be mercy.

Warning Signs of Developing Hardness

Hardening is like a callus or like the tough bone fibers that bridge a fracture. Spiritual hardening begins with self-sufficiency, security in one's self, and self-satisfaction. The real danger is that at some point, repeated resistance to God will yield an actual inability to respond, which the Bible describes as a hardened heart. Insensitivity indicates advanced hardening. Here are some of the warning signs:

<i>Warning Sign</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Disobeying—Pharaoh's willful disobedience led to his hardened heart.	Exodus 4:21
Having wealth and prosperity—Taking God's blessings for granted can cause us to feel as if they were owed to us.	Deuteronomy 8:6-14
Rebelling and being discontented—Suffering or discomfort can create an attitude that blames God.	Psalm 95:8
Rejecting a deserved rebuke—Rejecting God's gift makes our neck stiff and our heart hard.	Proverbs 29:1
Refusing to listen—Refusing to listen leads to a loss of spiritual hearing.	Zechariah 7:11-13
Failing to respond—Listening to God with no intention of obeying produces an inability to obey.	Matthew 13:11-15

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1910-1912.

[9:17, 18](#) Paul quotes from [Exodus 9:16](#), where God foretold how Pharaoh would be used to declare God's power. Paul uses this argument to show that salvation was God's work, not people's. God's judgment on Pharaoh's choice to resist God was to confirm that sin and harden his heart. The consequences of Pharaoh's rebellion would be his own punishment.

[9:21](#) With this illustration, Paul is not saying that some of us are worth more than others but that the Creator has control over the created object. The created object, therefore, has no right to demand anything from its Creator—its very existence depends on him. Keeping this perspective removes any temptation to have pride in personal achievement.

[9:25, 26](#) About seven hundred years before Jesus' birth, Hosea told of God's intention to restore his people. Paul applies Hosea's message to God's intention to bring Gentiles into his family after the Jews rejected his plan. [Verse 25](#) is a quotation from [Hosea 2:23](#) and [verse 26](#) is from [Hosea 1:10](#).

[9:27-29](#) Isaiah prophesied that only a small number of God's original people, the Jews, would be saved. Paul saw this happening in every city where he preached. Even though he went to the Jews first, relatively few ever accepted the message. [Verses 27](#) and [28](#) are based on [Isaiah 10:22, 23](#); and [9:29](#) is from [Isaiah 1:9](#).

Life Application Concise New Testament Commentary⁴

Romans 9:14-29

[9:14-16](#) God chose Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau, not because of their character or their actions, but simply because that was his choice. “Was **God being unfair?**” we might ask. “Surely those Jews who are working so hard to follow all of God’s laws should be chosen. Isn’t it rather arbitrary of God to just choose some and reject others?”

Paul’s wording of the question in Greek expects a negative answer, which he emphatically supplies: **Of course not!** If God gave anyone exactly what they deserved the results would be disastrous! Both Isaac and Jacob were scoundrels. God demonstrated unexpected grace when he chose these men in spite of their weaknesses and failures. God is absolutely sovereign. He had explained to Moses, “**I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose**” (see [Exodus 33:19](#)). We might still be tempted to say, “Doesn’t that seem a bit unfair?” But by asking such a question we are claiming a higher understanding of fairness than God himself. We must remember that God has no obligation to show mercy or compassion to any of us—not one of us deserves his slightest concern. For God to even choose anyone is evidence of his great mercy. These words of God reveal that he does show mercy and compassion, but they are by his sovereign choice.

We tend to read God’s statement to Moses (which was a response to Moses’ request to see God’s glory) as if it were an expression of God’s withholding mercy rather than a statement of his merciful generosity. In the context of this statement in Exodus, God was not justifying himself, but saying in effect, “I will have mercy on people you would not expect, and I will have compassion in ways that will surprise you, especially when I am compassionate with you!” No one can know the heart of a person in

4. Barton B. Bruce et al., *Life Application New Testament Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 612-614.

the way that God knows. No individual, court of law, or group can perfectly assess the righteousness of a person. So we must leave the choosing and judging to God.

9:17-18 For a third illustration of God’s sovereign choices, Paul recalls **Pharaoh**. God had purposely placed that particular Pharaoh in that particular position at that particular time in history so God’s great **power** would be displayed (through the miracles witnessed in Egypt and by the incredible release of the Hebrew slaves), and so God’s **fame** would be **spread throughout the earth**. God put up with Pharaoh’s fickleness and defiance for quite some time, but all for the same purposes. Pharaoh became mired in his own rebelliousness. In fact, part of God’s judgment on Egypt was the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. Eventually, those nations who heard what God had done for his people in Egypt greatly feared the Israelites and their God (see [Joshua 2:10-11](#); [9:9](#); [1 Samuel 4:8](#)).

Again, someone might ask, “Doesn’t it seem a bit unfair that God would just use somebody to glorify himself?” But Paul answers the implicit question as before: God has mercy on whomever he chooses; and conversely, **he chooses to make some people refuse to listen**. God’s judgment on Pharaoh’s great sinfulness was to “harden” his heart, to confirm his disobedience so that the consequences of his rebellion would be his own punishment. “Hardening” occurs when a person has a track record of disobedience and rebellion. From the human perspective, it is difficult to know exactly at what point God confirms our own resistance as hardness. Paul’s implicit warning is to avoid attitudes that lead to hardness of heart (see [1 Corinthians 10:6](#); [Hebrews 3:8](#)).

Everything comes from God’s sovereign choices. Israel, as God’s chosen people, had made a grave mistake in acting with superiority over others who were not of God’s “chosen” nation. It was that pride that made them misunderstand their own Scriptures that said that God would offer salvation beyond Israel, to people from all nations.

9:19 Paul probably had countless discussions with fellow Jews about these issues. So he can anticipate their questions. If God simply chooses those on whom he will have mercy and those whom he will harden, **why does God blame people for not listening? Haven’t they simply done what he made them do?** Occasionally these questions are asked by those who are genuinely seeking to understand God and his ways with people. Usually, however, they are used to excuse certain behavior—“It’s not my fault, God; it’s your fault!” In either case, as Paul explains, the answer is the same. We ourselves are to blame because we are guilty of trying to reject or resist God.

9:20 Paul has little patience for such questions, and he supposes that God doesn’t either. When it comes down to it, **a mere human being cannot criticize God**. He is absolutely sovereign. We are extremely privileged to have any relationship with him at all. His dealings with all the world are not to be judged by us. Quoting from Scripture, Paul illustrates the absurdity of such questions. This passage was taken from [Isaiah 29:16](#) and/or [Isaiah 45:9](#); in context it expresses God’s response to his rebellious people.

While God welcomes our sincere questions and concerns (see for example, John the Baptist in [Matthew 11:1-6](#), and Thomas in [John 20:24-29](#)) and patiently answers us, he will not allow sinners to question his sovereignty. The **thing that was created** has no right to sit in judgment on the Creator.

9:21 To further illustrate God’s sovereignty, Paul compares God to a **potter** (a very common and necessary vocation in ancient times, since most cooking and storage was done in various types of clay pots). The potter has every **right** to take one large lump of clay and use part of it to make a **jar for decoration** and another part of it to make a **garbage** can. Neither item has any right to complain and ask why the potter did what he did. The lesson of the potter points to equal worth among lumps of clay, while the artist’s purpose and design may differ. The proper attitude for clay is to be pliable rather than stiff, receptive rather than rebellious, and grateful for the potter’s touch rather than resentful of the potter’s purpose for us.

9:22 The **objects of his judgment** are nonbelievers, and especially, in context, Jewish nonbelievers (**1:18**). God has been **patient** with their antagonism, rebellion, blasphemy, and hatred because he is giving them time to repent (**2 Peter 3:9**). But those who refuse to repent are **fit only for destruction**. Their doom is coming. They have rebelled and refused to turn to God for salvation, and thus have taken responsibility for their own destruction. **God has every right to exercise his judgment and his power**. Without God’s mercy and great patience, shown to us completely apart from our performance, we would have no hope at all. If God did not do this for his own purposes, we would be instantly destroyed.

9:23-24 In contrast, **the objects of his mercy** are believers, both **Jews** and **Gentiles**. To these he will **pour out the riches of his glory**. This is God’s sovereign choosing when he works with “pots” prepared for destruction (**9:22**) or with “pots” prepared for glory. The key point to remember is that all this has been in God’s plan from the beginning. When God’s dealings with his creation have been summed up, there will not be a shred of doubt about his wrath, power, and glory. God did not change his plans just because his people were disobedient. Instead, God knew all that would happen to both Jews and Gentiles, and God does everything to display his great mercy.

Believers still may wonder why they would be chosen while others were rejected. Paul’s point is that God is sovereign and that no one has any claim on his mercy. He prepared us in advance by his gift of salvation, and he will reveal his glory when we are finally with him for eternity. Instead of focusing on God choosing some and rejecting others, we should stand in awe at God’s offer of grace to any of us. Thus, no one can demand that God explain why he does what he does. He makes all the rules. But he loves to show mercy to us—what an amazing God he is!

9:25-26 To back up the statement that God also calls the **Gentiles**, Paul quoted two verses from the prophet **Hosea**. Several hundred years before Jesus’ birth, Hosea told of God’s intention to bring Gentiles into his family after the Jews would reject his plan. God was not surprised by Israel’s rejection. Israel thought that they alone were God’s chosen because of their lineage and their laws. But God’s plan never was to save only the Jews. His call was for people from all nations. **Verse 25** is a quotation from **Hosea 2:23**, and **verse 26** is from **Hosea 1:10**.

Hosea’s situation and his children’s names pictured God’s attitude toward Israel—they had turned away from him and were no longer called his people or his loved ones. But God would not let this situation remain forever; one day he would call Israel back to himself. God would also turn to the Gentiles, those who are outside his chosen nation. Some day, many Gentiles would be considered God’s people, his loved ones, his children. Paul saw that while God’s plan had always made room for the

Gentiles, with the advent of Christ, the doors to the Kingdom were opened wide. Those not known as God's people were becoming his people by God's mercy and grace, shown through Christ.

[9:27-29](#) But the Jews (here called **Israel**) will not be forgotten. God's sovereign choice always includes some Jews, but his promises were not a blanket guarantee for all Israel. Isaiah prophesied that **only a small number** of God's original people **will be saved**. Paul saw this happening in every city where he preached. Even though he went first to the Jews, relatively few ever accepted the gospel message. Continuing the quote from Isaiah ([Isaiah 10:23](#)), God will punish his people for turning away from him. In the captivity and the exile, much punishment had been meted out. If God had **not spared** a small number of faithful believers, all of Israel would have been destroyed. But God always saved some. Having chosen Israel, God remained faithful to her. If he had not, Israel **would have been wiped out as completely as Sodom and Gomorrah**, the ancient cities that were completely destroyed by God for their horrible wickedness (see [Genesis 19:24-29](#); [Isaiah 1:9](#)). Nothing was left of Sodom and Gomorrah. But God never completely destroyed his people.

Today the Gentiles are the majority in the church, but one day, many Jews too will come to their Savior. There is a final judgment to come, and God will carry it out. There is no time to delay. A few will be saved—who of God's people, the Jews, will become part of that small number? Paul explores this further in [chapter 11](#).

Study and Discussion Questions

For Sept 19 – 26 (3 weeks)



God's Sovereign Choice - [Romans 9:1-29](#)

Topics: [Blessing](#), [Burdens](#), [Justice](#), [Opportunities](#), [Rejection](#), [Sovereignty](#)

Open It

1. When have you felt that you were judged unfairly in a contest?
2. *How do you react when someone brags that God is on his or her side?

Explore It

3. What strong emotion was Paul feeling? ([9:2](#))
4. What situation made Paul feel sad and anguished? ([9:2-3](#))
5. How far was Paul willing to go for his fellow Jews? ([9:3](#))
6. What gifts and opportunities had God given to the Jewish people? ([9:4-5](#))
7. How did Paul explain the difference between Jews who believe and Jews who do not believe? ([9:6-8](#))
8. Whom did God bless as the parents of the nation of Israel? ([9:7-9](#))
9. *What did Paul say to people who claim to be children of God merely because they are descendants of Abraham? ([9:8-9](#))
10. Who were the children of Isaac and Rebekah? ([9:10-13](#))
11. What decision did God make about Jacob and Esau before they were born? ([9:12-13](#))
12. *How did Paul defend the accusation that God is unjust in His treatment of people? ([9:14-15](#))
13. *What determines how God bestows favor on people? ([9:16](#))
14. What examples from history did Paul use to demonstrate God's choice of blessing? ([9:17-18](#))
15. What right do we have to question God? ([9:19-21](#))
16. Why does God show great patience with us even though we deserve His wrath? ([9:22-24](#))
17. What did the prophets Isaiah and Hosea tell us about God's patience and justice? ([9:25-29](#))

Get It

18. What burdens do you carry for friends or relatives who do not know Christ?
19. *How could a person come from a very religious background and still not have a personal faith in God?
20. In what ways do people depend on a religious heritage for their salvation?
21. What's wrong with depending on a religious background or heritage for favor with God?
22. What sacrifices would you be willing to make to give others a chance to know Christ?
23. Why do we tend to question God's actions toward us or anyone else?
24. According to this passage, why are Jewish people often resistant to the message of peace with God through Jesus Christ?
25. What does this passage teach us about God's character?
26. What implications does Paul's burden for Israel have for our lives today?
27. *On what basis does God choose people to inherit His promises?
28. How have you experienced God's mercy and patience in your life?

Apply It

29. *What sacrifices or efforts can you make this week to help a friend come to faith in Christ?
30. When can you take time this week to thank God for His acts of mercy and love to you?