

**The Bible (Unmuted) Transcript**  
**Episode 35**  
**Romans, Part 15 (Rom 9:14-33)**  
**October 3, 2023**

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**Episode Summary:**

In Romans 9:14-33, Paul talks about God's right to show mercy in the way he wants, with the same being said about divine hardening. To illustrate this, the apostle brings to the fore the story of Pharaoh, who God hardened. Matt connects this story, and the concept of hardening, back to Romans 1, which arguably sheds some light on how to understand what Paul means by "hardening." Matt also explains the metaphor of God as "the potter," who, according to Paul, fashions some for destruction and others for glory. Does this mean that salvation (and damnation) is not ultimately up to the individual? How does this relate to the question of human free will? Moreover, how does all this talk of "election" relate to the question of God's righteousness and the covenant--not least with respect to the Jews and Gentiles? Listen to find out!

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**Transcript:**

0:00 Hey friends. Welcome back to another episode of the Bible Unmuted. Super excited to be with you once again, as we continue our tour through the Book of Romans. We are going to be in verses 14 - 33 today. And I tell you, this was a tough episode because I was halfway tempted to divide it up into two sections, or two different episodes. The reason I didn't though is because we really need all of verses 14 - 33 to be connected with one another. It's because there's so much here that if we just listen to part of it and come back a week later, then some very important details could be missed or forgotten. And so I wanted to keep it all together today. And so this is one episode, verses 14 - 33 of Romans chapter 9. And in fact, I probably should have kept all of Romans 9 in one big episode. But that would be one big episode. And I'm kind of hesitant to do those. So although a couple weeks ago I did a pretty good job at making a really, really long episode (chuckling). But anyway, I *did* feel like that *was* necessary. On this section though, versus 14 – 33, it really is important to keep everything together as a whole.

Romans is like a jungle, right? I mean take the Amazon jungle for example. You can spend your entire existence down on the floor bed of the jungle. You could be looking at the bark of the trees, you could be looking at each tree, you can look at all the critters around the trees, and the soil in which the tree is planted, and everything like that. So you could spend a lot of time going from tree to tree in the Amazon forest. There's also beauty to behold by looking at the Amazon forest from above, like you know 50,000 feet, or even higher. Maybe from the space station or something. Then you could really see the richness of this big ecosystem called the Amazon

rainforest. I think Romans is a lot like that as well. Truth be told we could spend hours and hours and hours going from tree to tree to tree, verse to verse to verse. And as I said, I could split this episode into more than one episode. But at the same time I think one mistake that people make is that when it comes to reading Romans we can get so caught up in the trees or individual tree, that we forget the big story the big picture. And I think that the big picture just simply cannot be compromised. I think the big picture of Romans must be held intact. Because it's such an important story that Paul is telling throughout the whole book or the whole letter that it really helps us to think better about Christianity as a whole. To ask what is Christianity? What does it mean to be part of the family of God? I think that is part of that big picture and I think so many mistakes have been made by ignoring the big picture there. So I think you'll see what I mean when we get into this text today. I keep referring to other parts of Romans. So when we get into this passage today I'm constantly going to be pointing back to Romans 1 and Romans 2 and Romans 4, because I we have to keep the big picture to understand especially this section of Scripture. So, I hope it's enjoyable. I hope it's a good resource for you.

3:35 So I want to say a couple things before we dive in though. I know a number of you have emailed me this past month or maybe past two months, and I have been very, very slow to respond to emails. It's just been, as I've said before, it's been really, really busy. It's been a busy season so I apologize for that. If you have some time maybe shoot me another email just to jog my memory and I'll be happy to get back to you ASAP - as soon as possible. Again, sorry about that. It's been crazy. It's been super, super...a good season but it's just been busy.

4:15 So I've got an interview coming up with the one in the only Dr. Sandra Glahn. I think that this will be recorded at the end of October. It probably won't be released until the first part of November but it will be well worth the wait. So Dr. Glahn has written a book called, *Nobody's Mother: Artemis of the Ephesians in Antiquity and the New Testament*. This is going to be a great book to dialog with her about because she's done some incredible research on Artemis, the Greek goddess of antiquity. And actually that research has a lot of bearing upon how we understand parts of the New Testament. So I'm really looking forward to this conversation. I'm so incredibly excited. If you're not familiar with this book or if you've not heard any announcements about it yet, definitely go online preorder the book. It's actually not out yet, or I don't think it is. It might it might be coming out this week, the first week of October or maybe second week of October. I think it's October 10<sup>th</sup>. I don't know, anyway go check that out on Amazon.

5:18 Here's what the book is about. I'll read the description here. It says this...this is from the back blurb on the book. *"Some Christians think Paul's reference to "saved through childbearing" in 1 Timothy 2:15 means that women are slated primarily for delivering and raising children. Alternate readings, however, sometimes fail to build on the best historical and textual evidence. Sandra Glahn thinks that we have misunderstood Paul by misunderstanding the context to which he wrote. The key lies in getting to know a mysterious figure who haunts the letter: the goddess Artemis of the Ephesians. Based on groundbreaking research, Nobody's Mother demonstrates how better background information bolsters faithful interpretation. Combining spiritual autobiography with scholarly exploration, Glahn takes readers on a journey to ancient Ephesus and across early church history. Unveiling the cult of Artemis and how early Christians related to it clarifies the radical, countercultural fellowship the New Testament writers intended Christ's church to be. This book is for those who want to avoid sacrificing a high view of Scripture while working to reconcile conflicting models of God's view of women. Through the unexpected channel of Paul's advice to Timothy—and the surprising help of an ancient Greek myth—Nobody's Mother lays a biblical foundation for men and women serving side by side in the church."*

This is going to be a great book. I can't wait to dive into it myself. I'm going to start reading it this week, in fact, and then be ready to go to chat with her further at the end of the month. So be on the lookout for that. It's going to be a great book. Go ahead and preorder a copy of highly

recommended *Nobody's Mother*. It is bound to be a conversation starter. And it'll help us to come to these passages of the New Testament with maybe fresh eyes. So that's always good to do. Well, without further ado, let's jump into Romans. Chapter nine, verse 14 - 33.

**7:17** Last week, we left off at verse 14. We went through verses 1- 13 last week. If you haven't listened to that episode, you definitely have to listen to that one before you get to this one. Ok, well, let's start off by looking at Romans 9:14 -15. Paul says,

**Romans 9:14–15 (NRSV)**

**14 What then are we to say? 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."**

This is in response to the Jacob and Esau quotation. We talked a lot about that last week where he says, "*Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.*" That was a quotation from Malachi, chapter one. So this text I just read is a response to that. Is there injustice on God's part? And Paul says, "*By no means!*" Now, we remember that this was not about individual election but rather corporate election. I drew a lot of attention back to Romans 2 in the last episode. Romans 2 will be important for today's episode as well... and it's going to be important for how we understand this passage in particular. Recall that Romans 2 would have been controversial to Paul's Jewish critics. It would have been very controversial. The Jews of Paul's era believed very strongly in performing works of Torah - circumcision, for example, was the sign of the covenant. It was the sign of election. Well, in Romans 2, Paul makes the case that it is possible for uncircumcised Gentiles to be counted as members of the covenant—counted, that is, as "righteous" and thus as members of the elect community. Let's read again Romans 2:25–29 (NRSV)

**25 Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26 So, if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 27 Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you that have the written code and circumcision but break the law. 28 For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. 29 Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God.**

**9:58** That's a chunk of text there. Now, one response from a Jewish critic would be, "Okay, Paul, you say that God would grant covenant status to uncircumcised Gentiles? Well, how could God do that? On what basis could he welcome Gentiles into the covenant family without them also performing works of Torah (i.e., circumcision)? Wouldn't that mean God is unrighteous – that is, unfaithful to the covenant he has promised?" That question would definitely have been on the mind of many second temple Jewish people. And this is why Paul says what he does in 9:14-15. I'll read it again.

**14 What then are we to say? Is there injustice [ἀδικία] 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."**

Here "injustice" should be understood as "unrighteous" (that's the word in Greek - *adikia*). Is there unrighteousness on God's part? Is there injustice on God's part? And Paul says that, actually,

there is no unrighteousness on God's part for admitting Gentiles (of which the second-born Jacob served as a type and shadow). There's no unrighteousness on God's part for admitting Gentiles into the covenant. Why is there no unrighteousness on God's part? Well, Paul says, God can simply do whatever he wants – He's God, and he can therefore act freely with respect to his plan, which is based on grace. He can grant salvation to Gentiles—all by this incredible act of mercy—a mercy, by the way, that was operative in the election of the Jewish patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as we have already seen before in the last episode. This is where the quotation from Exodus 33:19 comes in. In that passage, Moses asks to be shown God's glory. In response, God says,

**19 ... "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The LORD'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. Exodus 33:19 (NRSV)**

12:20 The idea is that God's glory is his goodness, his grace, and his mercy. The word "glory" is *kabōd* (*kabōd*), and it means *heaviness*. God's *heaviness* or *weightiness* is epitomized by his goodness, grace, and mercy. The idea in the context of Romans is that God's glory is displayed in his willingness to include the nations into his covenant plan—a plan of which is executed by means of Israel. This is the Genesis 11-12 narrative on full display. So, in reality, what Paul is saying in Romans is, "Look, God can let the Gentiles in without respect to their works of Torah. After all, election is based on grace – not circumcision, i.e., a work of Torah." Moreover, here in Romans 9, we can't fail to see the christological element. This is so important. The basis of covenant faithfulness is Christ, not Torah. And if any Jewish interlocutor would object, Paul can remind them, again, that even Abraham was called and declared righteous before he was circumcised. He was declared righteous well before Torah was even given (Rom 4). And Isaac himself, yes he was circumcised, but his very existence, his birth, was a miracle—something based on a divine promise. It was not based on human effort — in other words, not based on the works or abilities of the elderly Abraham and Sarah. The same goes with Jacob. He was second-born himself and was, therefore, unqualified to be the inheritor of the covenant promises. But, as it turns out, even second-born children can be qualified to enter the covenant *if* they are qualified on the basis of God's own free grace. And indeed, that's exactly what happened for Jacob. And if *that* could happen for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — that is, if their election was based on grace—then why should a righteous Jew look down upon his younger brother, the Gentile? Should the righteous elder brother not welcome home the wayward younger brother who, even though he spent much of his time wallowing among unclean animals—should such a younger brother not be welcomed home if he repents and comes to the Father in total dependence on his mercy? Paul would say, absolutely. Even Gentiles can be welcomed home; even they can be counted righteous on the basis of grace—after all, that's how Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were welcomed into the covenant.

14:55 And that's what Paul says in the very next verse, v. 16:

**16 So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.**

Paul is not yet that explicit about the Gentile question, but it is very much present, even here. Like I said earlier, this was the working narrative, beginning in Romans 1, and especially got going in Romans 2. That Gentile question is still in view here. Paul will make it very explicit momentarily – at the very end of the chapter. But we will wait for that. To ground everything said thus far, he appeals to Scripture, namely Exodus 9. So let's read Romans 9:17-18, first. It says,

**17 For the scripture says to Pharaoh, "I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed**

***in all the earth.” 18 So then he has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses.***

This passage circles back around to where he began: God can do whatever he wants with his mercy. But for precise context, let's look closer at the original Exodus passage.

*Exodus 9:13–17 (NRSV):*

***13 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. 14 For this time I will send all my plagues upon you yourself, and upon your officials, and upon your people, so that you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. 15 For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. 16 But this is why I have let you live: to show you my power, and to make my name resound through all the earth. 17 You are still exalting yourself against my people, and will not let them go.***

16:50 The point in quoting part of this text in Romans 9 is that Paul wants to connect the entire discussion back to God's glory. So, Paul uses the Pharaoh text as an example of a time when God displayed his glory. But why *this* text? The reason is because this is a passage that shows God's glory *through deliverance, through salvation*. God shows his grace and goodness and mercy upon the entire nation of Israel by hardening Pharaoh's heart and thus delivering Israel out of his hands. This is relevant to Paul's discussion because, remember, Paul wants to show how inclusion into the covenant family of God ***“depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.”*** And if there was ever an event that displayed the weakness of people and the power of God, it would have been the Exodus event. It was there when Israel's situation was hopeless, and yet it was there when God officially called out Israel as his own. Just like God called Abraham to a vocation of election by grace, so also he is officially forming and shaping the nation of Israel by grace alone so they too can carry on the Abrahamic vocation. If God can save Israel by means of sheer mercy like this, can he not do the same for the Gentiles? And again, keep the larger picture in mind: (get a 50,000 or more-foot view of the situation). The whole point in this passage is to point to how election is based *on Christ* and how the Gentiles (the non-elect) can be included into the covenant by grace, and not works.

Let's also focus a bit on verse 18. That's the verse that says, ***“So then he has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses.”*** How do we make sense of this idea of hardening? Well, I don't think we need to be too confused by it. The reason is because Paul has already talked about it many chapters ago, namely, in Romans 1. I think in that chapter he tells us how hardening works. Let's re-read some of the relevant passages:

***Romans 1:18–26, 28 (NRSV)***

***18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; 21 for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools; 23 and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of***

**their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. [Paul then talks about the result of this being handed over to their sin in the following vv. 26-27...] 28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. [Paul then gives more examples of the result of this hardening in vv. 29-32...]**

20:25 In my opinion, what we see here is an example of how divine hardening works. Because the people in Romans 1 **“did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done”** (v. 28). When people do not acknowledge God’s godness, they by definition run away from the light and, in consequence to that, they embrace that which is evil and dark. God’s giving them up is simply granting them what they want. In many ways, God’s hardening of people is nothing more than honoring their free will. They have freely (in a libertarian sense) chosen to *continue resisting God* and, as a result, God has said, “Okay, if that’s what you want, then I will grant you your desire to live a life apart from me.” Here we have to remember Eleonore Stump’s conception of the human will, which she draws from Thomas Aquinas for that formulation. And you’ll need to go back a couple weeks ago to the episode on free will to get more of that as a reminder. But we have to keep all that in mind here. And as a brief look back at that basically the idea is that the will cannot come to God. The person, because of a tainted will, cannot come to God. God must draw each person to faith. But the will *can* choose to stop itself—it can go dormant and shut down. This is the act of quiescence. It cannot come to God, but it *can* stop resisting God’s calling. Let’s put it this way: A person cannot come to God. But he/she can choose either (a) to *continue* resisting God or (b) to *stop* resisting. That third option, you know, going to God; that’s not an option. Let’s just say that’s not an option. That would be my preference. But I’m still going to say that a person can either continue a freely libertarian, with a libertarian sense of free will, they can freely continue resisting God, or they can stop resisting God. Now in Romans 1, perhaps we have something similar going on. We have people who don’t freely choose to stop resisting. They spiral out of control and continue rebelling against the acknowledgement of the glory of God’s godness. And so, God continues to let them have what they want—namely, a life without God. If they don’t stop resisting God’s grace, then they will remain as they are. This remaining as they are is hardening.

23:07 When we think of the Pharaoh story, this is pretty much what we also see. God wants to make his name known in Egypt—he wants everyone to know that he alone is Yahweh, the true God. But Pharaoh fails to sincerely acknowledge God’s godness. Even if you don’t think Pharaoh has the capacity to freely come to God in repentance, then okay. You can still say logically that Pharaoh freely fails to put his resistance into dormancy and, instead of this, freely choose to continue in his rebellion. This preserves a libertarian view of free will, but it also gives a prime place to God’s grace along drawing the sinner to repentance. Monergism. Monergism just means it’s God’s work alone. And yet, a person still has libertarian free will. Again, this is the Eleanor Stump stuff in her wonderful chapter in the *Cambridge Companion to Augustine*. She’s got chapter there on free will. I talk a lot about that, about two episodes ago. So go back for a refresher if you’re interested. Okay. So yeah, back to Romans 9 here. We have to remember that this is all in the context of Paul’s lament about many in Israel *do not* believe in Jesus. It’s Israel’s hardening that is at the forefront of this discussion. The first part of Romans 9 records Paul’s anguish in this regard, and there’s no reason to think that *that* lament is not part of this discussion about divine hardening. It is part of it. In other words, this is not some philosophical discussion about divine predetermination and reprobation. This is about Israel’s specific failure to come to Christ. That is the context for Paul. Hardening, then, has to do with Israel’s refusal to accept God’s christological grace. That’s what this is all about. It’s not a Philosophical discussion about free will. I mean, if you want to go there, you can. I mean, we have categories, you know, Eleanor Stump has done

a beautiful job in giving us categories for how to think like that. It's just really important though, that we keep this in the theological context in which Paul has said it. So yeah, keep that in mind. So in in that vein, we have to keep in mind that, for Paul, "hardening" is not *necessarily* permanent. You don't get that impression when you read all of Romans 9-11. Paul does not think that *just because* the unbelievers in Israel are part of a mass hardening that this means they cannot come to faith. He seems to assume that some will, in fact, come to faith. It works the other way, too: He warns those believing Gentiles who are part of the elect to watch out for any arrogance that might creep in, for God could cut them out just as easily as he grafted them in. So, all of that has to be kept in mind. And we will get to it when we get into Rom 10-11.

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26:35 This brings us to vv.19-21:

**19 You will say to me then, "Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" 20 But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is molded say to the one who molds it, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use?**

Here Paul employs the metaphor of a potter of clay. Now, this metaphor can be found in Jeremiah 18 and Isaiah 29. I think we would do well to familiarize ourselves with these passages in order to broaden our understanding of how the metaphor is used specifically here in Romans. So, we're going to do that. But first, I should point out that many folks sincerely think that this metaphor of potter and clay is proof that God not only has the ability, but makes the actual practice of, shaping individual people such that they are either (a) predestined to hell or (b) predestined to heaven. That is, before they have the choice to make with regard to their eternal destination, God has already molded them in such a way that they will make the choice he ultimately wants them to have—some are shaped in order to choose to eternally rebel; others are shaped in order to choose salvation. And, under this interpretation, the order is important: Divine shaping comes first *then* human choice necessarily follows from that shaping. So the question before us today is, does this interpretation, does this order of events, fully capture the situation? Let's look at Isaiah 29:15-16 (LES):

**15 Woe to those who make deliberation deeply, and their deeds will be in darkness, and they will say, "Who has seen us, and who will know us or what we are doing?" 16 Will you not be reckoned as the clay of the potter? Surely the shape will say not to the one who shapes it, "You did not shape me." Or the thing made to the one who makes it, "You did not make me intelligently."**

So this is that that passage out of which Paul takes that line, you know, "**will the clay say to the potter? Why have you made me like this?**" This is where he gets that arguably. It's not exactly a quotation there, but, you know, some scholars like to point to it as such. Anyway, notice the point here about the potter and the clay is not used in the context of eternally predestining people to heaven and hell. It's actually used in the context of simply saying, "Look, God knows what you are doing in secret; you can't keep secrets from God—he's the potter, you're the clay." If indeed Paul is quoting from Isaiah 29, I think all Paul is doing is taking a section from a well-known prophet and using it in a similar way to say something like this: "Look, God's smarter than you. Don't question him." And *that* is consistent with my view about God's choice to pivot election around Christ and not, say, Torah. To the Jews who are adamant about law-keeping, Paul's concept of election is controversial perhaps. But what right does the clay have to question the potter? Now, a careful reader of Isaiah 29 might notice that there does seem to be a part in the

context where God is, in fact, hardening and blinding people. So, for example, let's read Isaiah 29:9-12 (LES)

**9 Be feeble and out of your senses! Be intoxicated, not from sikera or from wine. 10 Because the Lord has made you drunk with a wind of bewilderment; and he will close the eyes of them and their prophets and their leaders, those who see the secrets. 11 And all these sayings to you will be like the words of the sealed document, which if they give it to a person who understands letters and say, "Read these things!" he will say, "I am unable to read it, for it has been sealed." 12 And this document will be given into the hands of a person who does not understand letters, and he will say to him, "Read this!" and he will say, "I do not understand letters."**

32:15 Does this mean God is doing this *apart* from their sin? In other words, is this divine intoxication something that comes *before* Israel's sin so that they will continue eternally into sin? I don't think that's the best way to see it. In order to see that, let's read what follows, vv. 13-14:

**13 And the Lord said, "This people approaches me with their mouth, and with their lips they honor me, but their heart remains far from me. And they are pious to me to no avail, teaching human rules and instructions. 14 Because of this, Look! I will continue to change this people, and I will change them, and I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will hide the intelligence of the intelligent."**

I think the point here is something I've made before: God *will* harden people if they freely insist on resisting God ("their heart remains far from me"). God will give them what they freely want. When it says God "**will destroy the wisdom of the wise,**" the word "wise" is used as a reference to their pride. So, God's judgment is a response to pride. And too, when you read the rest of Isaiah 29, God's hardening will give way to restoration (e.g., Is 9:24 LXX). So, all this is quite consistent with what Paul is doing in Romans 9-11. And if Paul is quoting from Isaiah 29 in Rom 9:20, then the best option is to see him as continuing this same thought process. Now, let's turn to Jeremiah 18, where the potter metaphor is seen more clearly. And in fact, I think this will shed some incredible light on how Paul is using the metaphor, too. This is super important.

**Jeremiah 18:1–11 (NRSV)**

**1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 2 "Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." 3 So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. 4 The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him. 5 Then the word of the LORD came to me: 6 Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. 7 At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, 8 but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. 9 And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, 10 but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. 11 Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the LORD: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.**



35:25 The point seems to be rather clear, I think its crystal clear, in fact: Yes, God is the potter and he does shape people for destruction and for salvation. But, according to Jeremiah, that shaping is in response to a free decision on the part of people who stop resisting God's grace. This is not inconsistent with what we've said previously about free will. The main takeaway is this: If we think that *shaping* precedes any and all free decisions on the part of people, then we're not thinking like Jeremiah. And it doesn't appear that we'd be thinking like Paul, either. I mean, Paul's idea of hardening doesn't seem to be eternal (in Romans 11 we will see that). And in Romans 1, Paul's idea of hardening and reprobation seems to be used as a response to human unwillingness to stop resisting divine grace and to acknowledge God as God. The point in all this, I think (and I'm not the only scholar to think this), is that God has the right to judge people who do not stop resisting the divine grace found in Christ. That is the context of Romans 9. We have to keep the Jew-Gentile context in the conversation here. Most of the time its missed, but it is very much here. Many Jews were very critical of Paul for saying grace and election is based upon Christ. But for Paul, who are we to question God if that's the way God had long intended for grace to come? What right does anyone have to question God's Christological plan of salvation? What right does anyone have to question how God has established election upon the rock that is Christ? The answer, for Paul, is nobody has that right. We are just clay, after all; God is the maker of the plan of salvation. And that plan of salvation is centered around and pivots around Jesus the Messiah.

37:40 Okay, let's look at Romans 9:22-29

**22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction; 23 and what if he has done so in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory [ a quick note here: keep in mind all that we've said above about Isaiah and Jeremiah for vv. 22-23] — 24 including 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 shall be called children of the living God." 27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved; 28 for the Lord will execute his sentence on the earth quickly and decisively." 29 And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left survivors to us, we would have fared like Sodom and been made like Gomorrah."**

There's so much to say here. And I'm afraid that, if we get too much into the weeds, we'll miss the overall point. So, let's get straight to the big picture. (I have so many thoughts, I get distracted as I'm thinking them through here.) So here is the big picture: we have to once again remember that Paul still has in mind the Jew-Gentile question — who are the elect, and how are they identified as elect? Through works of Torah or through Christ? Are the elect those who keep Torah or those who pledge allegiance to Christ? Don't forget the continuing line of thought... Paul has been all along giving a lesson on how election works in the Old Testament. Earlier in Romans 9, Paul led his readers to see how Isaac and Jacob have been elected and how Ishmael and Esau have been rejected. Isaac and Jacob are counted among God's elect people, they are *his* people. But Ishmael and Esau are not part of God's elect people; they are *not his people*. But what is fascinating is how Christ reverses the plight of the Gentiles. Many uncircumcised Gentiles are part of the elect now. **"Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they shall be called children of the living God." (9:25-26).**

This is a reference to the Gentiles, as the context suggests. Now Paul is quoting Hosea here. Hosea originally was talking about the Israelites, but Paul is using it to refer to the Gentiles. There's a ton of things to say about that. We won't get in that. That's part of the weeds. It's important, but that's part of the trees. I want to keep a big picture. OK, if you want to know how I solve that dilemma, that intertextual dilemma, you can pick up my book, *Paul and the Meaning of Scripture*. But anyway, this text about God loving the "not loved" and calling the "not my people", "my people", here for Paul that's a reference to the Gentiles. That's the context. The point is that, surprisingly, the non-elect ("not my people") are part of the elect (the "my people"). This essentially reverses the plight of Esau and Ishmael (a point made, as I recall, by Ross Wagener says in his *Heralds of the Good News* book – a great book. You should pick it up). The idea is that even the unelected nations, even Esau and Ishmael – those two that were rejected. Remember how Paul was giving a lesson in election in earlier parts of Romans 9? He says, "**God is elected Jacob not Esau.**". Esau is not part of the "my people" there. Ishmael is not part of the group. He's not part of the elect. It's, Isaac. But now here all of that is reversed. It's a remarkable reversal. And the idea, the point is that even the unelected nations can be elected *if they are in Christ*. For Paul, in other words, the pivot point of election is christological. And for those who are unbelieving Jews, they are counted as the non-elect, among the hardened (of course, not every Jew is hardened... there is a remnant founded upon Christ). This is the stuff of Romans 2. This is why Paul is in anguish in the first part of Romans 9. To give us an idea where all this is going: Think again of the Genesis 11-12 narrative. Israel was elected to be the rescue plan for the world. Through Israel, in other words, the gentiles would be blessed and healed. But how has that plan worked out? Has that plan been derailed by Israel's unbelief in the Messiah? Well, in Romans 11, Paul will show that it has not been derailed. For it is through Israel's unbelief that that gospel of Jesus went to the Gentiles. And when the gospel went to the gentiles, and when they believed it, they become part of the "my people"-- the elect. And, as a part of the elect, the gentiles are now part of Abraham's family (remember Romans 4). And guess what? As part of Abraham's family, they are part of the rescue plan for the world. And that *world* includes other gentiles but also unbelieving Jews. And Paul says in Romans 11 that, it is through the Gentiles acceptance of the gospel that Israel will be driven to jealousy and, in turn, accept the Messiah. And that's how the plan works: Israel leads Gentiles to faith. And the Gentiles leads Israel to faith. And as Genesis 12 says, Abraham's family will be a blessing and will be blessed. And in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles can be blessed and be a blessing to one another, thus fulfilling the covenant promises. That's how election works.

44:25 So another piece of evidence that Paul has been all along talking about election in the context of the corporate (and not simply the individual) aspect is found in verses 30-33. In these verses, we also see that the pivot point of election is christology – we see that Paul advocates for a christological election. The whole point is to answer his critics as to *how* uncircumcised Gentiles can be in covenant with God (and how some Jews are not). His answer centers around his christology. He says this,

***30 What then are we to say? Gentiles, who did not strive for righteousness, have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith; 31 but Israel, who did strive for the righteousness that is based on the law, did not succeed in fulfilling that law. 32 Why not? Because they did not strive for it on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 as it is written, "See, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make people stumble, a rock that will make them fall, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."* (quoting Isaiah)**

The point, again, is this. Paul has two groups he's dealing with: Jews and Gentiles. Those unbelieving Jews who keep Torah do not end up fulfilling Torah; in other words, they do not end up keeping covenant and, hence, neither can they maintain their chosen, elect, vocational status

as God's people in this way. But those Gentiles who believe in Jesus, and yet don't keep Torah, are nevertheless fulfilling Torah. And hence, they are part of the group of the chosen, the elect, whose vocational status is that of God's people. The not-my-people, in Christ, are now called "my people." The non-elect, in Christ, are now called "the elect." And as the elect, these believers—whether Jew or Gentile—are participating in the vocation given to Abraham's family. Christians are to be a blessing to the nations. And as a redeemed people covered in the righteous status of God's Chosen One, Jesus the Messiah, they are not only called to take the blessing to the nations, they are also equipped by the Spirit to do so.

46:56 There is a ton more I want to say. But I'm so intent on getting this main point across, that I'm hesitant to get further into the weeds. I've said this before, but one of the big problems people have in reading Romans is that they forget the big picture. And as a result, there is little awareness as to how, say, Romans 2 should impact the way Romans 9 is read. There's little consideration given for how Romans 1 helps us to understand Romans 9 – 11; or how Romans 4 fits into the equation, or, you know, let's not forget Romans 8. Romans 8 tends to be forgotten too. And Romans 7, my goodness, definitely that. Sometimes we just have this temptation to segregate each individual part of Romans. And it kind of becomes its own little story without any real relation to the other parts. And I don't want to make that mistake. I just don't want to do that. I mean, the trees are super important, don't give me wrong; but we can't forget the forest, too. And the big picture must be kept in mind. If I could sum up Romans as a whole, I would do it in this way: Romans is Paul's way of showing how the Jewish story is unfolded in Christ. Romans is Paul's way of showing how the Jewish story and the story of Jewish election and righteousness, how all of that is unfolded in Jesus the Messiah.

48:22 That's the end of today's episode. And thanks again for listening to The Bible Unmuted. If you like this podcast, consider rating it on your podcast platform, subscribing to it, and sharing with your friends. You can also support the podcast by becoming a patreon member. Go to: <https://www.patreon.com/TheBibleUnmuted> - or simply find the link in the description of this episode. Thanks for listening. Until next time, friends.