

Not By The Will of Man

Exodus 9:8-17/Romans 9:17-18

Evangelism only seems difficult or impossible in certain situations if we think the will of man plays some role in salvation.

- Church attendance is down
- Conversions are down
- Baptisms are down
- It's more difficult to do the work of the gospel that it has ever been

... these are difficult days and if salvation is only possible with the individual's cooperation ... then that would make evangelism more difficult.

However, if God is sovereign over salvation, then the fields are just as ripe for the harvest as they have ever been.

... they are just as ripe for the harvest as they were when Jesus stood at the well talking with the Samaritan woman.

... pause ...

The problem with our thinking is that we do not really understand what God is like.

... listen, it is time to move away from human opinion.

What seems reasonable to you and me means nothing ...

... What God's Word says, means everything.

A great deal of what I believe about God, I have come to **reluctantly**.

... and the reason for this reluctance is my sinful nature

... I tend to think too little of God, and too much of myself

... I like to feel as if I have played some role in my salvation because that feeds myself righteousness.

... However, at as some point, we must trust God's Word more than we trust our cherished opinions.

If we hope to find our way forward, then it is essential that we know who God is

... because if God is real (AND HE IS) then nothing matters more than He does.

... (Let me be clear.) God is absolute and we are utterly dependent upon Him!

This reality prompted the Apostle Paul to write:

But the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Cor. 2:10-14)

So, how do we know God...

... we know Him by how He has chosen to reveal Himself in the person of His son Jesus Christ.

First, Jesus told the disciples, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father."

Then ... Jesus told them He would send the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth.

... **lastly**, the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostles and other New Testament writers to record what they had learned about Jesus Christ and then preserved that written word for thousands of years.

... just as He has preserved the Old Testament.

And what the NT writers understood and wrote about who Christ was, what Christ did, and what Christ taught did not occur in a vacuum.

Everything they wrote and preached about was deeply rooting in their understanding of what God had done BEFORE as recorded in the Old Testament.

The writer of Hebrews said it this way: *God spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways (Heb. 1:1)*

... what they knew and understood about Christ was firmly rooted in the Old Testament.

This is important for us because we need to see that the writing of the New Testament writers IS NOT contradictory to what we read in the Old Testament.

1. The New Testament **BUILDS** upon and **ILLUMINATES** everything we read in the Old Testament.

Today we will be looking at the interaction that occurs between Moses and Pharaoh,

... but to fully understand it we are going to begin in Romans where Paul quotes from Exodus.

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." 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. (Rom. 9:14-18)

Here is what we are looking at.

Here in Romans 9 Paul is quoting from Exodus 9 to show us that the Word of God is singular.

- The God of Exodus **IS** the God of Romans.
- The God who dealt with Pharaoh **IS THE SAME** God who deals with us.

Paul wants us to know that his teaching and understanding of the sovereignty of God and the will of man is rooted in the Old Testament.

- God has compassion on whom He desires
- God has mercy on whom He desires
- God hardens whom He desires
- ... and in all this there is no injustice with God!

I'm not making this up ... it is exactly what the text says.

God is sovereign and He can do whatever He wants and in all that He does it is always just.

... God's activity is not based (or dependent) upon our behavior.

... God's actions are not in response to ours.

Now, I know we don't like that because it takes the power away from us but ...

God alone is God ...

Charles Spurgeon put it this way, *God decides who will rebel in the hardness of their unbelief they will deservingly be condemned. The hardening of God does not make their fault impossible; it makes their fault certain.*

Although God hardens, those whom He hardens are still guilty.

They still have real fault.

Therefore, they deserve the judgement they will receive.

- God hardens whomever He wills, and that person is accountable.
- God's hardening does not remove guilt, it renders it certain.

You say, *"But how can they have fault and be guilty if God puts them in that condition?"*

Honestly, I have no human explanation that will satisfy the human ego ...

... I am simply declaring what is in the Word of God.

How can I believe this?

- *The words in this scripture are clear, simple, and plain. "God hardens whom he desires."*

Yes, as sinners our will does rebel against God (Romans 1 tells us this) but God's greatest judgment is to turn sinners over and give them what they want.

I believe this because this is what the text said but also ...

- *The paralleling of mercy with hardening illustrates that the works of God are both unconditional and just.*

Thirdly ...

- *Paul foresees our natural objection to God having absolute control over both mercy and hardening and therefore challenges us with **God breathed** logic.*

... 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? 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? (Rom. 9:20-21)

... to make out of the same lump [that the key phrase!]

Paul makes his point crystal clear.

It is not the nature of the clay that determines what God will do with it ... it was the free, wise, glorious, and sovereign will of the potter.

... and God is the potter.

You may say, "Nathan, I just don't believe this" and I would respond with the words of Paul himself:

who are you, O man, who answers back to God?

I will admit **it is a mystery** ... but is a mystery I am willing to trust God with.

2. Nowhere Does the Bible Say God Hardens Anyone Who Had Not First Hardened Themselves.

This 2nd point does not remove the mystery of the first.

God hardens unconditionally and those who are hardened are truly guilty and truly at fault in their hard and rebellious hearts.

On the other hand, anyone who comes to Christ comes through God's initiative.

There is no other way to say it, but that this is a mystery.

It's just like the garden of Eden.

How did rebellion and sin arise in the perfect and good heart of Adam and Eve?

I think it is OK to admit there are just some things beyond our understanding ... there is a mystery to God that is beyond our grasp.

... He is infinite, we are not.

But here is what I do know:

... Anyone who goes to hell has no one to blame but themselves, and anyone who goes to heaven has no one to give credit to, but God.

Now ... where did Paul get this idea that God hardens the human heart?

... He got it from the story in Exodus where God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

God has sent Moses and Aaron to command Pharaoh to let the Jews go.

... over and over Pharaoh refuses as God performs miracles in sending 10 plagues and ultimately parting the Red Sea.

... repeatedly God proves that He is God and Pharaoh is nothing

... and this is no better illustrated than in the hardness of Pharaoh's heart.

18 times in Exodus Moses refers to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

Look at the condition of Pharaoh before the first plague.

¹⁰ So Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, and thus they did just as the LORD had commanded; and Aaron threw his staff down before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. ¹¹ Then Pharaoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same with their secret arts. ¹² For each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. ¹³ Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. ¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go. (Exod. 7:10-14)

Then after the first plague: ***and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. (Exod. 7:22)***

After the 2nd plague: ***But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. (Exod. 8:15)***

After the 3rd plague: ***But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. (Exod. 8:19)***

And this or something similar is said over and over until after the 6th plague when it says this:

And the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses. (Exod. 9:12)

God **hardens and shows mercy as He desires**, and God is not acting in response to our actions but according to His sovereign will.

But make no mistake about it:

... When God hardened Pharaoh's heart it was a judicial act

... God was abandoning Pharaoh to his own stubbornness.

Every time you harden your heart against God it is one more step toward eternal judgment.

Here is how the Apostle Paul says it in Romans 1:

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, (Rom. 1:28)

... This is why there is such evil and wickedness in the world.

... As humanity hardens its heart against God sin abounds ... even now are there many antichrists.

But we must not forget ... regardless of how dark and evil the days may become ...

... Nothing changes the irrefutable fact that God is sovereign over salvation, therefore the fields are just as ripe for the harvest as ever.

3. God's Glory & Name Calls Us To Evangelism

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." (Rom. 9:17)

... God's glory and God's name is at the core of everything He does!

... whether it is judgment or mercy.

... how God deals with Judas or John the beloved disciple ... at the heart of **all of it** is God's glory and God's Name.

... All that God does is so that His Name will be proclaimed throughout the whole earth!

And that is where we have gone wrong in evangelism.

For far too long we have misunderstood what evangelism is.

We think evangelism is what happens to people ...

... “That is an evangelistic church, they have baptized 200 people this year.”

NO! Evangelism isn't the effect ... evangelism is delivering the message!!!

... Certainly, we want people to be saved!

... Our aim is to see people converted!

... What a thrill it would be to baptize 200 people this year!

But evangelism isn't getting measurable results, evangelism is sowing the seed of the gospel!

Regardless ... Listen to what Paul wrote ...

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, (1 Cor. 1:17)

No matter how “DOWN” baptisms were that was not what made Paul an evangelist!

What made Paul and evangelist was proclaiming God's name ... preaching the gospel.

In fact, evangelism isn't even about clever strategies or effective methodologies.

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. ² For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. (1 Cor. 2:1-2)

“Oh, you should hear ‘so and so’ they are a tremendous evangelist!”

People may talk better, have better programs in their church and have a better preacher ...

... but no one, NO ONE has a better gospel that we do!

... evangelism is not about how clever or eloquent you are ...

... evangelism is simply declaring the gospel and the gospel is:

The message of **God's Righteousness and Man's Sin**—Who God is and what we are.

The message of **Christ's redemptive work**—The death, burial and resurrection of the sinless lamb.

The call to faith and repentance—faith in Christ demands repentance of sin.

Our **aim** is to communicate the message of salvation to every person we can ... that is our part

Our **prayer** is that they will hear and believe ... that is God's part

Today I want to end by inviting you to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior ...

... not because I am hopeful that I have spoken well enough to convince you to follow Christ

... I know I haven't

... I am inviting you to come to Christ today because I am hopeful that God has broken down your stubborn will and is drawing you unto himself ...

... and if He has then you will bow before our holy God, repent of your sins, and believe on Christ.

I am inviting you because today is the day of salvation.

I am inviting you today because God Himself has invited you.

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. (Rev. 22:17)