

Chosen by God—Predestination, Election, and Reprobation by: John Calvin

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NKJ Romans 9:1 "I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service *of God*, and the promises; 5 of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen. 6 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel, 7 nor *are they* all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." 8 That is, those who *are* the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. 9 For this *is* the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son." 10 And not only *this*, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, *even* by our father Isaac 11 (for *the children* not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), 12 it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." 13 As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." 14 What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." 16 So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. 19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" 20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed *it*, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? 22 *What* if God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 *even* us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? 25 As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved." 26 "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, '*You are* not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God." 27 Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved. 28 For He will finish the work and cut *it* short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth." 29 And as Isaiah said before: "Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, And we would have been made like Gomorrah." 30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 32 Why? Because *they did* not *seek it* by faith, but as it

were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. 33 As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

Romans 9:1 "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, **2.** That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. **3.** For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: **4.** Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; **5.** Whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."

In this chapter the apostle Paul begins to remove the offences which might have diverted the minds of men from Christ: for the Jews, for whom he was appointed according to the covenant of the law, not only rejected him, but regarded him with contempt, and for the most part hated him. Hence one of two things seemed to follow—either that there was no truth in the Divine promise—or that Jesus, whom Paul preached, was not the Lord's anointed, who had been especially promised to the Jews. This twofold knot Paul fully unties in what follows.

He, however, so handles this subject, as to abstain from all bitterness against the Jews, that he might not exasperate their minds; and yet he concedes to them nothing to the injury of the gospel; for he allows to them their privileges in such a way, as not to detract anything from Christ. But he passes, as it were abruptly, to the mention of this subject, so that there appears to be no connection in the discourse. He, however, so enters on this new subject, as though he had before referred to it. It so happened in this way—Having finished the doctrine he discussed, he turned his attention to the Jews, and being astonished at their unbelief as at something monstrous, he burst forth into this sudden protestation, in the same way as though it was a subject which he had previously handled; for there was no one to whom this thought would not of itself immediately *occur*—"If this be the doctrine of the law and the Prophets, how is it that the Jews so pertinaciously reject it?" And further, it was everywhere known, that all that he had up until now spoken of the law of Moses, and of the grace of Christ, was more disliked by the Jews, than that the faith of the Gentiles should be assisted by their consent. It was therefore necessary to remove this obstacle, lest it should impede the course of the gospel.

1. *The truth I say in Christ*, etc. As it was an opinion entertained by most that Paul was, as it were, a sworn enemy to his own nation, and as it was suspected somewhat even by the household of faith, as though he had taught them to forsake Moses, he adopts a preface to prepare the minds of his readers, before he proceeds to his subject, and in this preface he frees himself from the false suspicion of evil will towards the Jews. And as the matter was not unworthy of an oath, and as he perceived that his affirmation would hardly be otherwise believed against a prejudice already entertained, he declares by an oath that he speaks the truth. By this example and the like (as I reminded you in the first chapter) we ought to learn that oaths are lawful, that is, when they render that truth credible which is necessary to be known, and which would not be otherwise believed.

The expression, *In Christ*, means "according to Christ." By adding *I do not lie*, he signifies that he speaks without fiction or disguise. *My conscience testifying to me*, etc. By these words he calls his own conscience before the tribunal of God, for he brings in the Spirit as a witness to his feeling. He adduced the Spirit for this end, that he might more fully testify that he was free and pure from an evil disposition, and that he pleaded the cause of Christ under

the guidance and direction of the Spirit of God. It often happens that a person, blinded by the passions of the flesh (though not purposing to deceive) knowingly and willfully obscures the light of truth. But to swear by the name of God, in a proper sense of the word, is to call Him as a witness for the purpose of confirming what is doubtful, and at the same time to bind ourselves over to His judgment, in case we say what is false.

2. *That I have great sorrow*, etc. He dexterously manages so to cut short his sentence as not yet to express what he was going to say; for it was not as yet seasonable openly to mention the destruction of the Jewish nation. It may be added, that he thus evidences a greater measure of sorrow, as imperfect sentences are for the most part full of pathos [feeling]. But he will presently express the cause of his sorrow, after having more fully testified his sincerity.

But the perdition of the Jews caused very great anguish to Paul, though he knew that it happened through the will and providence of God. We hence learn that the obedience we render to God's providence does not prevent us from grieving at the destruction of lost men, though we know that they are thus doomed by the just judgment of God; for the same mind is capable of being influenced by these two feelings: that when it looks to God it can willingly bear the ruin of those whom He has decreed to destroy; and that when it turns its thoughts to men, it condoles with their evils. They are then much deceived, who say that godly men ought to have apathy and insensibility, lest they should resist the decree of God.

3. *For I could wish*, etc. He could not have expressed a greater ardor of love than by what he testifies here; for that is surely perfect love which does not refuse to die for the salvation of a friend. But there is another word added, *anathema*, which proves that he speaks not only of temporal but of eternal death; and he explains its meaning when he says, *from Christ*, for it signifies a separation. And what is to be separated from Christ, but to be excluded from the hope of salvation?

It was then a proof of the most ardent love, that Paul. hesitated not to wish for himself that condemnation which he saw impending over the Jews, in order that he might deliver them. It is no objection that he knew that his salvation was based on the election of God, which could by no means fail; for as those ardent feelings hurry us on impetuously, so they see and regard nothing but the object in view. So Paul did not connect God's election with his wish, but the remembrance of that being passed by, he was wholly intent on the salvation of the Jews.

Many indeed doubt whether this was a lawful desire; but this doubt may be thus removed: the settled boundary of love is, that it proceeds as far as conscience permits; if then we love in God and not without God's authority, our love can never be too much. And such was the love of Paul; for seeing his own nation endued with so many of God's benefits, he loved God's gifts in them, and them on account of God's gifts; and he deemed it a great evil that those gifts should perish, hence it was that his mind being overwhelmed, he burst forth into this extreme wish. Thus I consent not to the opinion of those who think that Paul spoke these words from regard to God only, and not to men; nor do I agree with others, who say, that without any thought of God, he was influenced, only by love to men: but I connect the love of men with a zeal for God's glory.

I have not, however, as yet explained that which is the chief thing—that the Jews are here regarded as they were adorned with those singular tokens, by which they were distinguished from the rest of mankind. For God had by His covenant so highly exalted them, that by their

fall, the faithfulness and truth of God Himself seemed also to fail in the world: for that covenant would have thus become void, the stability of which was promised to be perpetual, as long as the sun and moon should shine in heaven (Psalm 72:7). So that the abolition of this would have been more strange, than the sad and ruinous confusion of the whole world. It was not therefore a simple and exclusive regard for men: for though it is better that one member should perish than the whole body; it was yet for this reason that Paul had such a high regard for the Jews, because he viewed them as bearing the character, and, as they commonly say, the quality of an elect people; and this will appear more evident, as we shall soon see, from what follows.

The words, *my kinsmen according to the flesh*, though they contain nothing new, do yet serve much for amplification. For first, lest any one should think that he willingly, or of his own accord, sought cause of quarrel with the *Jews*, he intimates, that he had not put off the feeling of kindred, so as not to be affected with the destruction of his own flesh. And secondly, since it was necessary that the gospel, of which he was the teacher, should go forth from Zion, he does not in vain pronounce an eulogy in so many words on his own kindred. For the qualifying expression, *according to the flesh*, is not in my view added for the sake of extenuation, as in other places, but, on the contrary, for the sake of expressing his faith: for though the Jews had disowned Paul, he yet did not conceal the fact, that he had sprung from that nation, the election of whom was still strong in the root, though the branches had withered. What *Budoeus* says of the word *anathema*, is inconsistent with the opinion of *Chrysostom*, who makes *ανᾶθεμα* and *αζυᾶθημα*, to be the same.

4. Who are Israelites, etc. Here the reason is now more plainly given, why the destruction of that people caused him so much anguish, that he was prepared to redeem them by his own death, namely because they were Israelites; for the relative pronoun is put here instead of a causative adverb. In like manner this anxiety took hold on Moses, when he desired that he should be blotted out of the book of life, rather than that the holy and chosen race of Abraham should be reduced to nothing (Exodus 32:32). Then in addition to his kind feeling, he mentions also other reasons, and those of a higher kind, which made him to favor the Jews, even because the Lord had, as it were, by a kind of privilege, so raised them, that they were separated from the common order of men: and these titles of dignity were testimonies of love; for we are not accustomed to speak thus favorably, but of those whom we love. And though by their ingratitude they rendered themselves unworthy to be esteemed on account of these gifts of God, yet Paul continued justly to respect them, that he might teach us that the ungodly cannot so contaminate the good endowments of God, but that they always deserve to be praised and admired: at the same time, those who abuse them acquire thereby nothing but a greater obloquy [shame]. But as we are not to act in such a manner as to contemn, through a detestation of the ungodly, the gifts of God in them; so, on the other hand, we must use prudence, lest by our kind esteem and regard for them we make them proud, and especially lest our praises bear the appearance of flattery. But let us imitate Paul, who conceded to the Jews their privileges in such a manner, that he afterwards declared that they were all of no worth without Christ.

But it was not in vain that he mentioned this as one of their praises—that they were *Israelites*; for Jacob prayed for this as a great favor, that they should be called by his name. (Genesis 48:16).

Whose are the adoption, etc. The whole drift of Paul's discourse is to this purpose—that though the Jews by their defection had produced an ungodly divorce between God and

themselves, yet the light of God's favor was not wholly extinguished, according to what he had also said in Romans 3:3. They had indeed become unbelievers and had broken His covenant; but still their perfidy had not rendered void the faithfulness of God; for He had not only reserved for Himself some remnant seed from the whole multitude, but had as yet continued, according to their hereditary right, the name of a Church among them.

But though they had already stripped themselves of these ornaments, so that it availed them nothing to be called the children of Abraham, yet as there was a danger, lest through their fault the majesty of the gospel should be depreciated among the Gentiles, Paul does not regard what they deserved, but covers their baseness and disgraceful conduct by throwing veils over them, until the Gentiles were fully persuaded, that the gospel had flowed to them from the celestial fountain, from the sanctuary of God, from an elect nation. For the Lord, passing by other nations, had selected them as a people peculiar to Himself, and had adopted them as His children, as He often testifies by Moses and the prophets; and not content simply to give them the name of children, He calls them sometimes His first-begotten, and sometimes His beloved. So the Lord says in Exodus 4:22—"My first-begotten son is Israel; let My son go, that he may serve Me."

In Jeremiah 31:9, it is said, "I have become a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first-begotten" and again, "Is not My son Ephraim precious to Me? Is he not a delightful child? Hence troubled for him are My bowels, and I will yet pity him." By these words he means, not only to set forth His kindness towards the people of Israel, but rather to exhibit the *efficacy* of adoption, through which the promise of the celestial inheritance is conveyed.

Glory means the excellency into which the Lord had raised up that people above all other nations, and that in many and various ways, and especially by dwelling in the midst of them; for besides many other tokens of his presence, He exhibited a singular proof of it in the ark, where He gave responses, and also heard His people, that He might show forth His power in helping them: and for this reason it was called "the glory of God" (1 Samuel 4:22).

The difference between covenants and promises.

As he has distinguished here between *covenants* and *promises*, we may observe this difference—that a **covenant is that which is expressed in distinct and accustomed words, and contains a mutual stipulation, as that which was made with Abraham**; but **promises are what we meet with everywhere in Scripture**; for when God had once made a covenant with His ancient people, He continued to offer, often by new promises, His favor to them. It hence follows, that promises are to be traced up to the covenant as to their true source; in the same manner as the special helps of God, by which He testifies His love towards the faithful, may be said to flow from the true fountain of election.

The law of Moses (Mosaic Covenant) was a renewal of the Abrahamic Covenant.

And as the law was nothing more than a renewal of the covenant, and more fully sanctioned the remembrance of it, *legislation*, or the giving of the law, seems to be here peculiarly applied to the things which the law decreed: for it was no common honor conferred on the Jewish people, that they had God as their lawgiver. For if some gloried in their Solons and Lycurguses, how much more reason was there to glory in the Lord? of this you have an account in Deuteronomy 4:32.

True versus false worship differentiated.

By **worship** he understands that part of the law in which the legitimate manner of worshipping God is prescribed, such as rites and ceremonies. These ought to have been deemed lawful on account of God's appointment; without which, whatever men devise is nothing but a profanation of religion.

5. Whose are the fathers, etc. It is indeed of some importance to be descended from saints and men beloved of God, since God promised to the godly fathers mercy with regard to their children, even to a thousand generations, and especially in the words addressed to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as we find in Genesis 17:4, and in other passages. It matters not, that this by itself, when separated from the fear of God and holiness of life, is vain and useless: for we find the same to have been the case as to *worship* and *glory*, as it is evident everywhere in the prophets, especially in Isaiah 1:11; Isaiah 60:1; and also in Jeremiah 7:4.

But, as God dignified these things, when joined with attention to godliness, with some degree of honor, He justly enumerated them among the privileges of the Jews. They are indeed said to be the heirs of the promises for this very reason—because they descended from the fathers (Acts 3:25).

From whom, is Christ, etc. They who apply this to the fathers, as though Paul meant only to say that Christ had *descended* from the fathers, have no reason to allege: for his object was to close his account of the preeminence of the Jews by this encomium [praise]—that Christ proceeded from them; for it was not a thing to be lightly esteemed, to have been united by a natural relationship with the Redeemer of the world; for if He had honored the whole human race, in joining Himself to us by a community of nature, much more did He honor them, with whom He had a closer bond of union. It must at the same time be always maintained, that when this favor of being allied by kindred is unconnected with godliness, it is so far from being an advantage, that on the contrary it leads to a greater condemnation.

Christ's two natures distinguished.

But we have here a remarkable passage—that in Christ two natures are in such a manner distinguished, that they are at the same time united in the very person of Christ: for by saying that Christ had descended from the Jews, he declared His real humanity. The words *according to the flesh*, which are added, imply that He had something superior to flesh; and here seems to be an evident distinction made between humanity and divinity. But he at last connects both together, where he says, that the Christ, who had descended from the Jews according to the flesh, is God blessed for ever.

We must further observe, that this ascription of praise belongs to none but only to the true and eternal God; for he declares in another place (1 Timothy 1:17) that it is the true God alone to whom honor and glory are due. They who break off this clause from the previous context, that they may take away from Christ so clear a testimony to His divinity, most presumptuously attempt, to introduce darkness in the midst of the clearest light; for the words most evidently mean this—*Christ, who is from the Jews according to the flesh, is God blessed for ever.* And I doubt not, but that Paul, who had to contend hard with a reproach levied against him, did designedly raise up his own mind to the contemplation of the eternal glory of Christ; nor did he do this so much for his own sake individually, as for the purpose of encouraging others by his example to raise up their thoughts.

ROMANS 9:6-9

“6. Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel which are of Israel: 7. Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called; 8. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. 9. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son.”

They are not all [the true, elect] Israel who are of [the chosen nation of] Israel.

6. *Not however, etc.* Paul had been carried away by the ardor of his wish, as it were, into an excess of feeling, but now, returning to discharge his office as a teacher, he adds what may be viewed as somewhat qualifying what he had said, as though he would restrain moderate grief. And inasmuch as by deploring the ruin of his own nation, this inconsistency seems to follow, that the covenant made by God with the seed of Abraham had failed (for the favor of God could not have been lacking to the Israelites without the covenant being abolished), he reasonably anticipates this inconsistency, and shows, that notwithstanding the great blindness of the Jews, the favor of God continued still to that people, so that the truth of the covenant remained firm.

Some read, “But it is not possible,” etc., as though it were in Greek οἶον τε but as I find this reading in no copy, I adopt the common reading, *Not however that it had failed, etc.*, and according to this sense, “That I deplore the destruction of my nation is not because I think the promise, given formerly by God to Abraham, is now void or abolished.” *For not all, etc.* The statement is—that the promise was so given to Abraham and to his seed, that the inheritance did not belong to every seed without distinction; it hence follows that the defection of some does not prove that the covenant does not remain firm and valid. But that it may be more evident on what condition the Lord adopted the descendants of Abraham as a peculiar people to Himself, two things are to be here considered.

The first is, That the promise of salvation given to Abraham belongs to all who can trace their natural descent to him; for it is offered to all without exception, and for this reason they are rightly called the heirs of the covenant made with Abraham; and in this respect they are his successors, or, as Scripture calls them, the children of the promise. For since it was the Lord’s will that His covenant should be sealed, no less in Ishmael and Esau, than in Isaac and Jacob, it appears that they were not wholly alienated from Him; except, it may be, you make no account of the circumcision, which was conferred on them by God’s command; but it cannot be so regarded without dishonor to God. But this belonged to them, according to what the Apostle had said before, “whose are the covenants,” though they were unbelieving; and in Acts 3:25, they are called by Peter, the children of the covenants, because they were the descendants of the Prophets.

The second point to be considered is, that the children of the promise are strictly those in whom its power and effect are found. On this account Paul denies here that all the children of Abraham were the children of God, though a covenant had been made with them by the Lord, for few continued in the faith of the covenant; and yet God Himself testifies, in the sixth chapter of Ezekiel, that they were all regarded by Him as children. In short, **when a whole people are called the heritage and the peculiar people of God, what is meant is, that they have been chosen by the Lord**, the promise of salvation having been offered them and confirmed by the symbol of circumcision; **but as many by their ingratitude reject this adoption**, and thus enjoy in no degree its benefits, **there arises among them another difference with regard to the fulfilment of the promise.** That it might not then appear

strange to any one, that this fulfilment of the promise was not evident in many of the Jews, **Paul denies that they were included in the true election of God.**

Some may prefer such a statement as this—“The general election of the people of Israel is no hindrance, that God should not from them choose by His hidden counsel those whom He pleases.” It is indeed an illustrious example of **gratuitous mercy**, when God condescends to make a covenant of life with a nation: but His hidden favor appears more evident in that second election, which is confined to a part only. But when he says, that *all who are of Israel are not Israelites*, and that *all who are of the seed of Abraham are not children*, it is a kind of change in the meaning of words, for **in the first clause he includes the whole race, in the second he refers only to true sons**, who had not become degenerated.

7. *But, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called.”* Paul mentions this, to show that the hidden election of God overrules the outward calling, and that it is yet by no means inconsistent with it, but, on the contrary, that it tends to its confirmation and completion. That he might then in due order prove both, he in the first place assumes, **that the election of God is not tied to the natural descendants of Abraham**, and that it is not a thing that is included in the conditions of the covenant: and this is what he now confirms by a most suitable example. For if there ought to have been any natural progeny, which did not fall away from the covenant; this ought to have been especially the case with those who obtained the privilege at first: but when we find, that of the first sons of Abraham, while he was yet alive, and the promise new, one of them was separated as the seed, how much more might the same thing have taken place in his distant descendants? Now this testimony is taken from Genesis 17:20, where the Lord gives an answer to Abraham, that He had heard his prayer for Ishmael, but that there would be another on whom the promised blessing would rest. It hence follows, **that some men are by special privilege elected out of the chosen people** [i.e., the nation of Israel or the visible Church], **in whom the common adoption becomes efficacious and valid.**

Election further explained—Isaac and Ishmael.

8. *That is, They are not, etc.* He now gathers from God’s answer a proposition, which includes the whole of what he had in view. For if Isaac, and not Ishmael, was the seed, though the one as well as the other was Abraham’s son, it must be that all natural sons are not to be regarded as the seed, but that the promise is specially fulfilled only in some, and that it does not belong commonly and equally to all. He calls those *the children of the flesh*, who have nothing superior to a natural descent; as they are the *children of the promise*, who are peculiarly selected by the Lord.

9. *For the word of promise is this, etc.* He adds another divine testimony; and we see, by the application made of it, with what care and skill he explains Scripture. When he says, the Lord said that He would come, and that a son would be born to Abraham of Sarah, he implied that His blessing was not yet *conferred*, but that it was as yet suspended. But Ishmael was already born when this was said: then God’s blessing had no regard to Ishmael. We may also observe, by the way, the great caution with which he proceeds here, lest he should exasperate the Jews. The cause being passed over, he first simply states the fact; he will hereafter open the fountain.

ROMANS 9:10-13

“10. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac, 11. (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good nor evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth) 12. It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. 13. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”

Election further explained—Jacob and Esau.

10. *And not only, etc.* There are in this chapter some broken *sentences*, such as this is—*But Rebecca also, who had conceived by one, our father Isaac*; for he leaves off in the middle, before he comes to the principal verb. The meaning, however, is, that the difference as to the possession of the promise may not only be seen in the children of Abraham, but that there is a much more evident example in Jacob and Esau: for in the former instance some might allege that their condition was unequal, the one being the son of an handmaid [Hagar]; but these [Jacob and Esau] were of the same mother, and were even twins: yet one was rejected, and the other was chosen by the Lord. It is hence clear, that the fulfilment of the promise does not take place in all the children of the flesh indiscriminately.

And as Paul refers to the persons to whom God made known His purpose, I prefer to regard a masculine pronoun to be understood, rather than a neuter, as *Erasmus* has done: for the meaning is, that God’s special election had not been revealed only to Abraham, but also to *Rebecca*, when she brought forth her twins.

11. *For when the children, etc.* He now begins to ascend higher, even to show **the cause of this difference, which he teaches us is nowhere else to be found except in the election of God**. He had indeed before briefly noticed, that there was a difference between the natural children of Abraham, that **though all were adopted by circumcision into a participation of the covenant, yet the grace of God was not effectual in them all**; and hence that they, who enjoy the favor of God, are the children of the promise [given to Abraham in the everlasting Abrahamic Covenant, which finds its fulfillment in Christ].

But how it thus happened, he has been either silent or has obscurely hinted. Now indeed he openly ascribes the whole cause to the election of God, and that gratuitous, and in no way depending on men; so that **in the salvation of the godly** nothing higher (*nihil superius*) must be sought than **the goodness of God**, and nothing higher **in the perdition of the reprobate** than **His just severity**.

Then **the first proposition** is—“As the blessing of the covenant separates the Israelite nation from all other people, so the election of God makes a distinction between men in that nation, **while He predestinates some to salvation, and others to eternal condemnation.**”

The second proposition is—“**There is no other basis for this election than the goodness of God alone, and** also since the fall of Adam, **His mercy**; which embraces whom He pleases, without any regard whatever to their works.”

The third proposition is—“The Lord in His gratuitous election is free and exempt from the necessity of imparting equally the same grace to all; but, on the contrary, He passes by whom He wills, and whom He wills He chooses.”

Election is not according to works or foreseen faith.

All these things Paul briefly includes in one sentence: he then goes on to other things. Moreover, by these words, *When the children had not yet been born, nor had done any good or evil, he shows, that God in making a difference could not have had any regard to works, for they were not yet done.* Now they who argue on the other side, and say, that this is no reason why the election of God should not make a difference between men according to the merits of works, for God foresees who those are who by future works would be worthy or unworthy of His grace, are not more clear-sighted than Paul, but stumble at a principle in theology, which ought to be well known to all Christians, namely, that **God can see nothing in the corrupt nature of man, such as was in Esau and Jacob, to induce Him to manifest His favor.** When therefore he says, that neither of them had then done any good or evil, what he took as granted must also be added—that they were both the children of Adam, by nature sinful, and endued with no particle of righteousness.

I do not dwell thus long on explaining these things, because the meaning of the Apostle is obscure; but as the Sophists, being not content with his plain sense, endeavor to evade it by frivolous distinctions, I have wished to show, that Paul was by no means ignorant of those things which they allege.

It may further be said, that though that corruption alone, which is diffused through the whole race of man, is sufficient, before it breaks out, as they say, into action, for condemnation, and hence it follows, that **Esau was justly rejected, for he was naturally a child of wrath,** it was yet necessary, lest any doubt should remain, as though his condition became worse through any vice or fault, that sins no less than virtues should be excluded. It is indeed true, that **the proximate cause of reprobation is the curse we all inherit from Adam;** yet, that we may learn to acquiesce in the bare and simple good pleasure of God, Paul withdraws us from this view, until he has established this doctrine—**That God has a sufficiently just reason for electing and for reprobating, in His own will.**

Chosen not by works but by the grace, goodness, and sovereign plan of God alone.

That the purpose of God according to election, etc. He speaks of the gratuitous election of God almost in every instance. If works had any place, he ought to have said—“That his reward might stand through works”; but he mentions the purpose of God, which is included, so to speak, in His own good pleasure alone. And that no ground of dispute might remain on the subject, he has removed all doubt by adding another clause, *according to election,* and then a third, ***not through works, but through Him who calls.***

Let us now then apply our minds more closely to this passage: Since the purpose of God according to election is established in this way—**that before the brothers were born, and had done either good or evil, one was rejected and the other chosen;** it hence follows, that when any one ascribes the cause of the difference to their works, he thereby subverts the purpose of God. Now, by adding, *not through works, but through Him who calls,* he means, not on account of works, but of the calling only; **for he wishes to exclude works altogether. We have then the whole stability of our election enclosed in the purpose of God alone: here merits avail nothing, as they issue in nothing but death; no worthiness is regarded, for there is none; but the goodness of God reigns alone.** False then is the dogma, and contrary to God’s word—that God elects or rejects, as He foresees each to be worthy or unworthy of His favor.

12. *The elder shall serve the younger.* See how the Lord makes a difference between the sons of Isaac, while they were as yet in their mother's womb; for this was the heavenly answer, by which it appeared that God designed to show to the younger peculiar favor, which He denied to the elder. Though this indeed had reference to the right of primogeniture [birthright], yet in this, as the symbol of something greater, was manifested the will of God: and that this was the case we may easily perceive, when we consider what little benefit, according to the flesh, Jacob derived from his primogeniture [birthright]. For he was, on its account, exposed to great danger; and to avoid this danger, he was obliged to flee his home and his country, and was unkindly treated in his exile: when he returned, he tremblingly, and in doubt of his life, prostrated himself at the feet of his brother, humbly asked forgiveness for his offence, and lived through the indulgence shown to him. Where was his dominion over his brother, from whom he was constrained to seek by entreaty his life? There was then something greater than the primogeniture promised in the answer given by the Lord.

The testimony of Malachi—Malachi 1:1-3ff

"1 The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. 2 " I have loved you," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Says the LORD. "Yet Jacob I have loved; 3 But Esau I have hated, And laid waste his mountains and his heritage For the jackals of the wilderness."

13. *As it is written, Jacob I loved, etc.* He confirms, by a still stronger testimony, how much the heavenly answer, given to Rebecca, availed to his present purpose, that is, that the spiritual condition of both was shown forth by the dominion of Jacob and servitude of Esau, and also that Jacob obtained this favor through the kindness of God, and not through his own merit. Then this testimony of the prophet shows the reason why the Lord conferred on Jacob the primogeniture [birthright]: and it is taken from **the first, chapter of Malachi**, where the Lord, reproaching the Jews for their ingratitude, mentions His former kindness to them—"I have loved you," He says; and then He refers to the origin of His love—"Was not Esau the brother of Jacob?" as though He said—"What privilege had he, that I should prefer him to his brother? None whatever. It was indeed an equal right, except that by the law of nature the younger ought to have served the elder; **I yet chose the one, and rejected the other; and I was thus led by My mercy alone, and by no worthiness as to works. I therefore chose you for My people, that I might show the same kindness to the seed of Jacob; but I rejected the Edomites, the progeny of Esau.** You are then so much the worse, inasmuch as the remembrance of so great a favor cannot stimulate you to adore My majesty." Now, though earthly blessings are there recorded, which God had conferred on the Israelites, it is not yet right to view them but as symbols of His benevolence: for where the wrath of God is, there death follows; but where His love is, there is life.

ROMANS 9:14-18

"**14.** What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. **15.** For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. **16.** So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. **17.** For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. **18.** Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He wills He hardeneth."

The testimony of Moses and the example of the Egyptian Pharaoh. Calvin further responds to critics of the Biblical doctrine of election, which are many.

14. *What then shall we say?* etc. The flesh cannot hear of this wisdom of God without being instantly disturbed by numberless questions, and without attempting in a manner to call God to an account. We hence find that the Apostle, whenever he treats of some high mystery, obviates the many absurdities by which he knew the minds of men would be otherwise possessed; for **when men hear anything of what Scripture teaches respecting predestination, they are especially entangled with very many impediments.**

The predestination of God is indeed in reality a labyrinth [maze], from which the mind of man can by no means extricate itself: but so unreasonable is the curiosity of man, that the more perilous the examination of a subject is, the more boldly he proceeds; so that when predestination is discussed, as he cannot restrain himself within due limits, he immediately, through his rashness, plunges himself, as it were, into the depth of the sea.

Should Christian avoid the “divisive” doctrine of predestination and “Calvinism”? Absolutely not! The Christian is to live by every word of God (Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4). The Christian wants to understand rightly “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16), not worldly wisdom.

What remedy then is there for the godly? Must they avoid every thought of predestination? By no means! For as the Holy Spirit has taught us nothing but what it behooves us to know, the knowledge of this would no doubt be useful, provided it be confined to the word of God.

Calvinism and Calvin’s teaching on predestination is nothing more and nothing less than what Scripture teaches!

Let this then be our sacred rule, to seek to know nothing concerning it, except what Scripture teaches us: when the Lord closes His holy mouth, let us also stop at that very point, that we may not go farther. But as we are men, to whom foolish questions naturally occur, let us hear from Paul how they are to be met.

Objection against God—“If predestination is true, then God is unrighteous.”

Is there unrighteousness with God? Monstrous surely is the madness of the human mind, that it is more disposed to charge God with unrighteousness than to blame itself for blindness. Paul indeed had no wish to go out of his way to find out things by which he might confound his readers; but he took up as it were from what was common the wicked suggestion, which immediately enters the minds of many, when they hear that God determines respecting every individual according to His own will. It is indeed, as the flesh imagines, a kind of injustice, that God should pass by one and show regard to another.

In order to remove this difficulty, Paul divides his subject into two parts; in the former of which he speaks of the elect, and in the latter of the reprobate; and in the one he would have us to contemplate the mercy of God, and in the other to acknowledge His righteous judgment.

His first reply is, that the thought that there is injustice with God deserves to be abhorred, and then he shows that with regard to the two parties, there can be none. But before we proceed further, we may observe that this very objection clearly proves, that inasmuch as God elects some and passes by others, the cause is not to be found in anything else but in His own purpose; for if the difference had been based on works, Paul would have to no purpose mentioned this question respecting the unrighteousness of God, no suspicion could have been entertained concerning it if God dealt with every one according to his merit.

It may also, in the second place, be noticed, that though he saw that this doctrine could not be touched without exciting instant clamors and dreadful blasphemies, he yet freely and openly brought it forward; no, he does not conceal how much occasion for murmuring and clamor is given to us, when we hear that before men are born their lot is assigned to each by the secret will of God; and yet, notwithstanding all this, he proceeds, and without any subterfuges, declares what he had learned from the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of predestination is hated by many; yet, it is clearly the truth of God.

It hence follows, that their fancies are by no means to be endured, who aim to appear wiser than the Holy Spirit, in removing and pacifying offences. That they may not incriminate God, they ought honestly to confess that the salvation or the perdition of men depends on His free election. Were they to restrain their minds from unholy curiosity and to bridle their tongues from immoderate liberty, their modesty and sobriety would be deserving of approbation [approval]; but to put a restraint on the Holy Spirit and on Paul, what audacity it is! Let then such magnanimity ever prevail in the Church of God, as that godly teachers may not be ashamed to make an honest profession of the true doctrine, however hated it may be, and also to refute whatever calumnies [slanders] the ungodly may bring forward.

Paul defends God's righteousness.

15. *For He saith to Moses, etc.* With regard to the elect, God cannot be charged with any unrighteousness; for according to His good pleasure He favors them with mercy: and yet even in this case the flesh finds reasons for murmuring, for it cannot concede to God the right of showing favor to one and not to another, except the cause be made evident. As then it seems unreasonable that some should without merit be preferred to others, the petulance of men quarrels with God, as though He deferred to persons more than what is right. Let us now see how Paul defends the righteousness of God.

In the first place, he does by no means conceal or hide what he saw would be disliked, but proceeds to maintain it with inflexible firmness. And in the second place, he labors not to seek out reasons to soften its asperity [harshness], but considers it enough to check vile barkings by the testimonies of Scripture.

It may indeed appear a frigid defense that **God is not unjust, because He is merciful to whom He pleases**; but as God regards His own authority alone as abundantly sufficient, so that He needs the defense of none, Paul thought it enough to appoint Him the vindicator of His own right. Now Paul brings forward here the answer which **Moses** received from the Lord, when he prayed for the salvation of the whole people, "I will show mercy," was God's answer, "on whom I will show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" [Exodus 33:19]. By this oracle the Lord declared that He is a debtor to none of mankind, and that whatever He gives is a gratuitous [unearned, freely-bestowed] benefit, and then that His kindness is free, so that He can confer it on whom He pleases; and lastly, that no cause higher than His own will can be thought of, why He does good and shows favor to some men but not to all.

The words indeed mean as much as though he had said, "From him to whom I have once purposed to show mercy, I will never take it away; and with perpetual kindness will I follow him to whom I have determined to be kind." And thus He assigns the highest reason for

imparting grace, even His own voluntary purpose, and also suggests that He has designed His mercy peculiarly for some; for it is a way of speaking which excludes all outward causes, as when we claim to ourselves the free power of acting, we say, "I will do what I mean to do."

The relative pronoun also expressly suggests, that **mercy is not to all indiscriminately**. His freedom is taken away from God, when His election is bound to external causes. The only true cause of salvation is expressed in the two words used by Moses. The first is *chenen*, which means to favor or to show kindness freely and bountifully; the other is *rechem*, which is to be treated with mercy. Thus is confirmed what Paul intended—that the mercy of God, being gratuitous, is under no restraint, but turns wherever it pleases.

16. *It is not then of him who wills, etc.* From the testimony adduced he draws this inference, that **beyond all controversy our election is not to be ascribed to our diligence, nor to our striving, nor to our efforts, but that it is wholly to be referred to the counsel of God**. That none of you may think that they who are elected are elected because they are deserving, or because they had in any way procured for themselves the favor of God, or, in short, because they had in them a particle of worthiness by which God might be moved, take, simply this view of the matter, that **it is neither by our will nor efforts (for he has put running for striving or endeavor) that we are counted among the elect, but that it wholly depends on the divine goodness**, which of itself chooses those who neither will, nor strive, nor even think of such a thing.

And they who reason from this passage, that there is in us some power to strive, but that it effects [brings about] nothing of itself unless assisted by God's mercy, maintain what is absurd; for the Apostle shows not what is in us, but excludes all our efforts. It is therefore a mere sophistry to say that we will and run, because Paul denies that it is of him who wills or runs, since he meant nothing else than that neither willing nor running can do anything.

The doctrine of predestination is not a license to be spiritually lazy.

They are, however, to be condemned who remain secure and idle on the pretense of giving place to the grace of God; for though nothing is done by their own striving, yet that effort which is influenced by God is not ineffectual. These things, then, are not said that we may quench the Spirit of God, while kindling sparks within us, by our waywardness and sloth [laziness]; but that we may understand that everything we have is from Him, and **that we may hence learn to ask all things of Him, to hope for all things from Him, and to ascribe all things to Him**, while we are prosecuting the work of our salvation with fear and trembling.

Pelagius versus Augustine—Man-centered religion versus Scriptural predestination

Pelagius has attempted by another sophistical and worthless cavil to evade this declaration of Paul, that it is not only of him who wills and runs, because the mercy of God assists. But *Augustine*, not less solidly than acutely, thus refuted him, "If the will of man is denied to be the cause of election, because it is not the sole cause, but only in part; so also we may say that it is not of mercy but of him who wills and runs, for where there is a mutual co-operation, there ought to be a reciprocal commendation: but unquestionably the latter sentiment falls through its own absurdity."

Let us then feel assured that the salvation of those whom God is pleased to save, is thus ascribed to His mercy, that nothing may remain to the contrivance of man.¹ Nor is there much more color for what some advance, who think that these things are said in the person of the ungodly; for how can it be right to turn passages of Scripture in which the justice of God is asserted, for the purpose of reproaching Him with tyranny? and then is it probable that Paul, when the refutation was at hand and easy, would have suffered the Scripture to be treated with gross mockery? But such subterfuges have they laid hold on, who absurdly measured this incomparable mystery of God by their own judgment. To their delicate and tender ears this doctrine was more grating [harsh] than that they could think it worthy of an Apostle. But they ought rather to have bent their own stubbornness to the obedience of the Spirit, that they might not surrender themselves up to their gross inventions.

17. For the Scripture saith, etc. He comes now to the second part, the rejection of the ungodly, and as there seems to be something more unreasonable in this, he endeavors to make it more fully evident, how God, in rejecting whom He wills, is not only irreprehensible, but also wonderful in His wisdom and justice. He then takes his proof from **Exodus 9:16**, where the Lord declares that it was He who raised up Pharaoh for this end, that while he obstinately strove to resist the power of God, he might, by being overcome and subdued, afford a proof how invincible the arm of God is; to bear which, much less to resist it, no human power is able. See then the example which the Lord designed to exhibit in Pharaoh!

There are here two things to be considered—the **predestination of Pharaoh to ruin**, which is to be referred to the past and yet the hidden counsel of God—and then, **the design of this, which was to make known the name of God**; and on this does Paul primarily dwell: for if this hardening was of such a kind, that on its account the name of God deserved to be made known, it is an impious thing, according to evidence derived from the contrary effect, to charge Him with any unrighteousness.

But as many interpreters, striving to modify this passage, pervert it, we must first observe, that for the word, “I have raised,” or stirred up, (*excitavi*) the Hebrew is, “I have appointed,” (*constituent*), by which it appears, that God, designing to show, that the contumacy of Pharaoh would not prevent God from delivering His people, not only affirms, that his fury had

¹ The terms “willing” and “running” are evidently derived from the circumstances connected with the history of Esau. “In vain” says *Turretin*, “did Esau seek the blessing. In vain did Isaac hasten to grant it, and in vain did Esau run to procure venison for his father; neither the father’s willingness nor the running of the son availed anything; God’s favor overruled the whole.” But the subject handled is God’s sovereignty in the manifestation of His favor and grace. **Esau was but a type of the unbelieving Jews**, when the gospel was proclaimed, and of thousands of such as are in name Christians. There is some sort of “willing,” and a great deal of “running,” and yet the blessing is not attained. There was much of apparent willing and running in the strict formality and zeal of Pharisaism, and there is much of the same kind still in the austerities and mechanical worship of superstition, and also in the toils and devotions of self-righteousness. The word or the revealed will of God is in all these instances misunderstood and neglected.

Isaac’s “willingness” to give the blessing to Esau, notwithstanding the announcement made at his birth, and Rebecca’s conduct in securing it to Jacob, are singular instances of man’s imperfections, and of the overruling power of God. Isaac acted as though he had forgotten what God has expressed as His will; and Rebecca acted as though God could not effect His purpose without her interference, and an interference, too, in a way highly improper and sinful. It was the trial of faith, and the faith of both halted exceedingly; yet the purpose of God was still fulfilled, but the improper manner in which it was fulfilled was afterwards visited with God’s displeasure. Editor--Rev. John Owen

been foreseen by Him, and that He had prepared means for restraining it, but that He had also thus designedly ordained it, and indeed for this end—that He might exhibit a more illustrious evidence of His own power.

Absurdly then do some render this passage—that Pharaoh was *preserved* for a time; for his beginning is what is spoken of here. For, seeing many things from various quarters happen to men, which retard their purposes and impede the course of their actions, God says, that Pharaoh proceeded from Him, and that his condition was by Himself assigned to him: and with this view agrees the verb, *I have raised up*. But that no one may imagine, that Pharaoh was moved from above by some kind of common and indiscriminate impulse, to rush headlong into that madness the special cause, or end, is mentioned; as though it had been said—**that God not only knew what Pharaoh would do, but also designedly ordained him for this purpose**. It hence follows, that it is in vain to contend with Him, as though He were bound to give a reason; for He of Himself comes forth before us, and anticipates the objection, by declaring, that **the reprobate, through whom He designs His name to be made known, proceed from the hidden fountain of His providence**.

18. *To whom He wills then He showeth mercy, etc.* Here follows the conclusion of both parts; which can by no means be understood as being the language of any other but of the Apostle Paul; for he immediately addresses an opponent, and adduces what might have been objected by an opposite party. There is therefore no doubt but that Paul, as we have already reminded you, speaks these things in his own person, namely, **that God, according to His own will, favors with mercy them whom He pleases, and unsheathes the severity of His judgment against whomsoever it seems good to Him**.

That our mind may be satisfied with the difference which exists between the elect and the reprobate, and may not inquire for any cause higher than the divine will, his purpose was to convince us of this—**that it seems good to God to illuminate some that they may be saved, and to blind others that they may perish**: for we ought particularly to notice these words, *to whom He wills*, and, *whom He wills*: beyond this He allows us not to proceed.

What does it mean that God “hardens” Pharaoh’s heart? Arminians refuted.

But the word *hardens*, when applied to God in Scripture, means not only permission (as some washy moderators would have it) but also the operation of the wrath of God: for all those external things, which lead to the blinding of the reprobate, are the instruments of His wrath; and Satan himself, who works inwardly with great power, is so far his minister, that he acts not, but by His command. Then that frivolous evasion, which the [Roman Catholic] schoolmen have recourse to respecting foreknowledge, falls to the ground: for **Paul teaches us, that the ruin of the wicked is not only foreseen by the Lord, but also ordained by His counsel and His will**; and Solomon teaches us the same thing—that not only the destruction of the wicked is foreknown, but that the wicked themselves have been created for this very end — that they may perish (Proverbs 16:4): “The LORD has made all for Himself, Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.”

ROMANS 9:19-21

19. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will?

20. Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus? **21.** Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?

Objection: “If predestination is true, then God is unjust.”

19. *Thou wilt then say, etc.* Here indeed the flesh especially storms, that is, when it hears that they who perish have been destined by the will of God to destruction. Hence the Apostle adopts again the words of an opponent; for he saw that the mouths of the ungodly could not be restrained from boldly clamoring against the righteousness of God: and he very fitly expresses their mind; for being not content with defending themselves, they make God guilty instead of themselves; and then, after having devolved on Him the blame of their own condemnation, they become indignant against His great power. They are indeed constrained to yield; but they storm, because they cannot resist; and ascribing dominion to Him, they in a manner charge Him with tyranny.

In the same manner the Sophists in their schools foolishly dispute on what they call His absolute justice, as though forgetful of His own righteousness, He would try the power of His authority by throwing all things into confusion. Thus then speak the ungodly in this passage, —“What cause has He to be angry with us? Since He has formed us such as we are, since He leads us at His will where He pleases, what else does He in destroying us but punish His own work in us? For it is not in our power to contend with Him; how much soever we may resist, He will yet have the upper hand. Then unjust will be His judgment, if He condemns us; and unrestrainable is the power which He now employs towards us.” What does Paul say to these things?

20. *But, O man! who art thou? etc.* As it is a participle in Greek, we may read what follows in the present tense, *who disputest*, or contendest, or strivest in opposition to God; for it is expressed in Greek according to this meaning—“Who are you who enter into a dispute with God?” But there is not much difference in the sense? In this first answer, he does nothing else but beat down impious blasphemy by an argument taken from the condition of man: he will presently subjoin another, by which he will clear the righteousness of God from all blame.

It is indeed evident that no cause is adduced higher than the will of God. Since there was a ready answer, that the difference depends on just reasons, why did not Paul adopt such a brief reply? But he placed the will of God in the highest rank for this reason—that it alone may suffice us for all other causes. No doubt, if the objection had been false, that God according to His own will rejects those whom He honors not with His favor, and chooses those whom He gratuitously loves, a refutation would not have been neglected by Paul.

The ungodly object and say, that men are exempted from blame, if the will of God holds the first place in their salvation, or in their perdition. Does Paul deny this? No, by his answer he confirms it, that is, **that God determines concerning men, as it seems good to Him, and that, men in vain and madly rise up to contend with God; for He assigns, by His own right, whatever lot He pleases to what He forms.**

But they who say that Paul, lacking reason, had recourse to reproof, cast a grievous calumny [slander] on the Holy Spirit: for the things calculated to vindicate God’s justice, and ready at hand, he was at first unwilling to adduce, for they could not have been comprehended; yes, he so modifies his second reason, that he does not undertake a full defense, but in such a manner as to give a sufficient demonstration of God’s justice, if it be considered by us with devout humility and reverence. He reminds man of what is especially fitting for him to remember, that is, of his own condition; as though he had said—“Since you are man, you know yourself to be dust and ashes; why then do you contend with the Lord about that which you are not able to understand?” In a word, the Apostle did not bring forward what might have been said, but what is suitable to our ignorance.

The doctrine of predestination calls for great humility on the part of man.

Proud men clamor, because Paul, admitting that men are rejected or chosen by the secret counsel of God, alleges no cause; as though the Spirit of God were silent for lack of reason, and not rather, that by His silence He reminds us, that a mystery which our minds cannot comprehend ought to be reverently adored, and that He thus checks the wantonness [sinfulness] of human curiosity. Let us then know, that God does for no other reason refrain from speaking, but that He sees that we cannot contain His immense wisdom in our small measure; and thus regarding our weakness, He leads us to moderation and sobriety.

Does what is formed? etc. We see that Paul dwells continually on this—that **the will of God, though its reason is hidden from us, is to be counted just**; for He shows that He is deprived of His right, if He is not at liberty to determine what He sees fitting concerning His creatures.

This seems unpleasant to the ears of many. There are also those who pretend that God is exposed to great reproach were such a power ascribed to Him, as though they in their fastidiousness were better divines [wiser] than **Paul, who has laid down this as the rule of humility to the faithful, that they are to admire the sovereignty of God, and not to estimate it by their own judgment.** But he represses this arrogance of contending with God by a most apt similitude, in which he seems to have alluded to **Isaiah 45:9**, rather than to Jeremiah 18:6; for nothing else is taught us by Jeremiah, than that Israel was in the hand of the Lord, so that He could for his sins wholly break him in pieces, as a potter the earthen vessel. But Isaiah ascends higher, “Woe to him,” he says, “who speaks against his maker;” that is, the pot that contends with the former of the clay; “shall the clay say to its former, what doest thou?” etc. And surely there is no reason for a mortal man to think himself better than earthen vessel, when he compares himself with God. We are not however to be over-particular in applying this testimony to our present subject, since Paul only meant to allude to the words of the Prophet, in order that the similitude might have more weight.

21. *Has not the worker of the clay? etc.* The reason why what is formed ought not to contend with its former, is, that the former does nothing but what he has a right to do. By the word *power*, he means not that the maker has strength to do according to his will, but that this privilege rightly and justly belongs to him. For he intends not to claim for God any arbitrary power but what ought to be justly ascribed to Him. And further, bear this in mind—that as the potter takes away nothing from the clay, whatever form he may give it; so God takes away nothing from man, in whatever condition He may create him. Only this is to be remembered, that God is deprived of a portion of His honor, except such an authority over men be conceded to Him as to constitute Him the arbitrator of life and death.²

² Not only Calvin, but many others, have deduced from this metaphor [the potter and the clay] what is not consistent with what the next verse contains, which gives the necessary explanation. By the “mass” or the lump of clay, is not meant mankind, contemplated as creatures, but as fallen creatures; or, as Augustine and Pareus call them, “*massa damnata*—the condemned mass;” for they are called in the next verse *vessels of wrath*, that is, the objects of wrath; and such are all by nature, according to what Paul says in Ephesians 2:3: “we were,” he says, “by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”

“The words, ‘I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,’ imply that all deserved wrath; so that the lump of clay in the hands of the potter must refer to men already existing in God’s foreknowledge as fallen creatures.”—*Scott*.

ROMANS 9:22-23

“**22.** What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: **23.** And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had before prepared unto glory...”

22. *And what, etc.* A second answer, by which he briefly shows, that though the counsel of God is in fact incomprehensible, yet His unblamable justice shines forth no less in the perdition of the reprobate than in the salvation of the elect. He does not indeed give a reason for divine election, so as to assign a cause why this man is chosen and that man rejected; for **it was not fitting that the things contained in the secret counsel of God should be subjected to the judgment of men; and, besides, this mystery is inexplicable.** He therefore keeps us from curiously examining those things which exceed human comprehension.

He yet shows, that **as far as God’s predestination manifests itself, it appears perfectly just.** The particles used by Paul, I take to mean, *And what if?* so that the whole sentence is a question; and thus the sense will be more evident: and there is here an ellipsis, when we are to consider this as being understood—“Who then can charge Him with unrighteousness, or arraign Him?” for here appears nothing but the most perfect course of justice.

But if we wish fully to understand Paul, almost every word must be examined. He then argues thus—here are **vessels prepared for destruction**, that is, given up and appointed to destruction: they are also **vessels of wrath**, that is, made and formed for this end, **that they may be examples of God’s vengeance and displeasure.** If the Lord bears patiently for a time with these, not destroying them at the first moment, but deferring the judgment prepared for them, and this in order to set forth the decisions of His severity, that others may be terrified by so dreadful examples, and also to make known His power, to exhibit which He makes them in various ways to serve; and, further, that the amplitude of His mercy towards the elect may hence be more fully known and more brightly shine forth—what is there worthy of being reprehended in this dispensation?

But that He is silent as to the reason, why they are vessels appointed to destruction, is no matter of wonder. He indeed takes it as granted, according to what has been already said, that **the reason is hidden in the secret and inexorable counsel of God; whose justice it behooves us rather to adore than to scrutinize.** And he has mentioned *vessels*, as commonly signifying instruments; for whatever is done by all creatures, is, as it were, the ministration of divine power. For the best reason then are we, the faithful, called the vessels of mercy, whom the Lord uses as instruments for the manifestation of His mercy; and the reprobate are the vessels of wrath, because they serve to show forth the judgments of God.

22. *That He might also make known the riches of His glory, etc.* I doubt not but the two particles are an instance of a construction, where the first word is put last and that this clause may better unite with the former, I have rendered it, *That He might also make known, etc. (Ut notas quoque faceret, etc.)* It is **the second reason which manifests the glory of God in**

In all the instances in which this metaphor is used by Isaiah and Jeremiah, it is applied to the Jews in *their state of degeneracy*, and very pointedly in Isaiah 64:8, where it is preceded, in the 6th verse, by that remarkable passage, “We are all as an unclean thing,” etc. The clay then, or the mass, is the mass of mankind as corrupted and depraved.—Editor John Owen.

the destruction of the reprobate, because the greatness of divine *mercy* towards the elect is hereby more clearly made known; for how do they differ from them except that they are delivered by the Lord from the same gulf of destruction? and this by no merit of their own, but through His gratuitous kindness. It cannot then be but that the infinite mercy of God towards the elect must appear increasingly worthy of praise, when we see how miserable are all they who escape not His wrath.

The word *glory*, which is here twice mentioned, I consider to have been used for God's mercy, a metonymy of effect for the cause; for His chief praise or glory is in acts of kindness. So in **Ephesians 1:13**, after having taught us, that we have been adopted to the praise of the glory of His grace, he adds, that we are sealed by the Spirit of promise unto the praise of His glory, the word grace being left out. **He wished then to show, that the elect are instruments or vessels through whom God exercises His mercy, that through them He may glorify His name.**

Though in the second clause he asserts more expressly. that it is God who prepares the elect for glory, as he had simply said before that the reprobate are vessels prepared for destruction; there is yet no doubt but that the preparation of both is connected with the secret counsel of God. Paul might have otherwise said, that the reprobate give up or cast themselves into destruction; but he intimates here, that before they are born they are destined to their lot.

ROMANS 9:24-29

"**24.** Even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? **25.** As he saith also in Hosea, I will call them My people, which were not My people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. **26.** And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God. **27.** Isaiah also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: **28.** For He will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness; because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth. **29.** And as Isaiah said before, Except the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become as Sodom, and been made like Gomorrah."

24. *Whom He also called, etc.* From the reasoning which he has been up until now carrying on respecting the freedom of divine election, two things follow—that **the grace of God is not so confined to the Jewish people that it does not also flow to other nations, and diffuse itself through the whole world**—and then, that **it is not even so tied to the Jews that it comes without exception to all the children of Abraham according to the flesh;** for if God's election is based on His own good pleasure alone, wherever His will turns itself, there His election exists. Election being then established, the way is now in a manner prepared for Him to proceed to those things which He designed to say respecting the calling of the Gentiles, and also respecting the rejection of the Jews; the first of which seemed strange for its novelty, and the other wholly unbecoming.

As, however, the last [the rejection of the Jews] had more in it to offend, he speaks in the first place of that which was less disliked. He says then, that the vessels of God's mercy, whom He selects for the glory of His name, are taken from every people, from the Gentiles no less than from the Jews.

But though in the relative *whom* the rule of grammar is not fully observed by Paul, yet his object was, by making as it were a transition, to subjoin that we are the vessels of God's

glory, who have been taken in part from the Jews and in part from the Gentiles; and **he proves from the calling of God, that there is no difference between nations made in election.** For if to be descended from the Gentiles was no hindrance that God should not call us, it is evident that the Gentiles are by no means to be excluded from the kingdom of God and the covenant of eternal salvation.

25. *As he says in Hosea, etc.* He proves now that the calling of the Gentiles ought not to have been deemed a new thing, as it had long before been testified by the prediction of the prophet [Hosea]. The meaning is evident; but there is some difficulty in the application of this testimony; for no one can deny that the prophet in that passage speaks of the Israelites. For the Lord, having been offended with their wickedness, declared that they should be no longer His people. He afterwards subjoined a consolation, and said, that of those who were not beloved He would make some beloved, and from those who were not a people He would make a people.

But Paul applies to the Gentiles what was expressly spoken to the Israelites. They who have up until now been most successful in untying this knot have supposed that Paul meant to adopt this kind of reasoning—“What may seem to be an hindrance to the Gentiles to become partakers of salvation did also exist as to the Jewish nation: as then God did formerly receive into favor the Jews, whom He had cast away and exterminated, so also now He exercises the same kindness towards the Gentiles.” But as this interpretation, though it may be supported, yet seems to me to be somewhat strained, let the readers consider this, — Whether it would not be a more suitable view to regard the consolation given by the prophet, as intended, not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles: for it was not a new or an unusual thing with the prophets, after having pronounced on the Jews God’s vengeance on account of their sins, to turn themselves to the kingdom of Christ, which was to be propagated through the whole world.

And this they did, not without reason; for since the Jews so provoked God’s wrath by their sins, that they deserved to be rejected by Him, no hope of salvation remained, except they turned to Christ, through whom the covenant of grace was to be restored: and as it was based on Him, so it was then renewed, when He interposed. And doubtless, as Christ was the only refuge in great extremities, no solid comfort could have been brought to miserable sinners, and such as saw God’s wrath impending over them, except by setting Christ before their eyes.

All Christians, Jew and Gentile, are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church of Christ.

Yes, it was usual with the prophets, as we have reminded you, after having humbled the people by pronouncing on them divine vengeance, to call their attention to Christ, as the only true asylum of those in despair. **And where the kingdom of Christ is erected there also is raised up that celestial Jerusalem, into which citizens from all parts of the world assemble.** And this is what is chiefly included in the present prophecy: for when the Jews were banished from God’s family, they were thus reduced to a common class, and put on a level with the Gentiles. **The difference being taken away, God’s mercy is now indiscriminately extended to all the Gentiles.** We hence see that the prophet’s prediction is fitly applied to the present subject; in which **God declares, that after having equalized the Jews and the Gentiles, He would gather a Church for Himself from aliens [non-ethnic-Jews], so that they who were not a people would begin to be so.**

I will call them My people which are not a people. This is said with respect to the divorce, which God had already made with the people, by depriving them of all honor, so that they did not excel other nations. Though they indeed, whom God in His eternal counsel has destined as sons to Himself, are perpetually His sons, yet Scripture in many parts counts none to be God's children but those, the election of whom has been proved by their calling: and hence he teaches us not to judge, much less to decide, respecting God's election, except as far as it manifests itself by its own evidences.

Thus Paul, after having shown to the Ephesians that their election and adoption had been determined by God before the creation of the world, shortly after declares, that they were once alienated from God (**Ephesians 2:12**), that is, during that time when the Lord had not manifested His love towards them; though He had embraced them in His eternal mercy. Hence, in this passage, they are said not to be beloved, to whom God declares wrath rather than love: for until adoption reconciles men to God, we know that His wrath abides on them.

The feminine gender of the participle depends on the context of the prophet; for he had said, that a daughter had been born to him, to whom he gave this name, *Not beloved*, in order that the people might know that they were hated by God. Now as rejection was the reason for hatred, so the beginning of love, as the prophet teaches, is, when God adopts those who had been for a time strangers.

27. And Isaiah exclaims, etc. He proceeds now to **the second part**, with which he was unwilling to begin, lest He should too much exasperate their minds. And it is not without a wise contrivance, that he adduces Isaiah as exclaiming, not, speaking, in order that he might excite more attention.

But the words of the Prophet were evidently intended to keep the Jews from glorying too much in the flesh: for **it was a thing dreadful to be heard, that of so large a multitude, a small number only would obtain salvation.** For though the Prophet, after having described the devastation of the people, lest the faithful should think that the covenant of God was wholly abolished, gave some remaining hope of favor; yet he confined it to a few. But as the Prophet predicted of his own time, let us see how Paul could rightly apply this to his purpose. It must be in this sense—When the Lord resolved to deliver His people from the Babylonian captivity, his purpose was, that this benefit of deliverance should come only to a very few of that vast multitude; which might have been said to be the remnant of that destruction, when compared with the great number which He suffered to perish in exile. Now that temporal restoration was typical of the real renovation of the Church of God; yes, it was only its commencement. What therefore happened then, is to be now much more completely fulfilled as the very progress and completion of that deliverance.

28. For I will finish and shorten the matter, etc. Omitting various interpretations, I will state what appears to me to be the real meaning: The Lord will so cut short, and cut off His people, that the residue may seem as it were a consumption, that is, may have the appearance and the vestige of a very great ruin. However, **the few who shall remain from the consumption shall be a proof of the work of God's righteousness**, or, what I prefer, **shall serve to testify the righteousness of God throughout the world.** As *word* often in Scripture means a thing, the consummated word is put for consumption. Many interpreters have here been grossly mistaken, who have attempted to philosophize with too much refinement; for they have imagined, that the doctrine of the gospel is thus called, because it is, when the ceremonies are cut off, a brief compendium of the law; though the word means on the contrary a consumption. And not only here is an error committed by the translator, but also

in Isaiah 10:22, 23; Isaiah 28:22; and in Ezekiel 11:13; where it is said, "Ah! ah! Lord God! Will You make a completion of the remnant of Israel?" But the Prophets meant to say, "Will You destroy the very remnant with utter destruction?" And this has happened through the ambiguity of the Hebrew word. For as the word, כלה, *cale*, means to finish and to perfect, as well as to consume, this difference has not been sufficiently observed according to the passages in which it occurs. But Isaiah has not in this instance adopted one word only, but has put down two words, *consumption*, and *termination*, or cutting off; so that the affectation of Hebraism in the Greek translator was singularly unseasonable; for to what purpose was it to involve a sentence, in itself clear, in an obscure and figurative language? It may be further added, that Isaiah speaks here hyperbolically; for by consumption he means diminution, such as is accustomed to be after a remarkable slaughter.

29. *And as Isaiah had before said, etc.* He brings another testimony from the first chapter, where the Prophet deplores the devastation of Israel in his time. And as this had happened once, it was no new thing. The people of Israel had indeed no pre-eminence, except what they had derived from their ancestors; who had yet been in such a manner treated, that the Prophet complained that they had been so afflicted, that they were not far from having been destroyed, as Sodom and Gomorrah had been. There was, however, this difference, that a few were preserved for a seed, to raise up the name, that they might not wholly perish, and be consigned to eternal oblivion. For it behooved God to be ever mindful of His promise, so as to manifest His mercy in the midst of the severest judgments.

ROMANS 9:30-33

"**30.** What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith: **31.** But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. **32.** Why? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone: **33.** As it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed."

30. *What then, etc.* That he might, cut off from the Jews every occasion of murmuring against God, he now begins to show those causes, which may be comprehended by human minds, why the Jewish nation had been rejected. But they do what is absurd and invert all order, who strive to assign and set up causes above **the secret predestination of God**, which he has previously taught us **is to be counted as the first cause**. But as this is superior to all other causes, so the corruption and wickedness of the ungodly afford a reason and an occasion for the judgments of God. And as he was engaged on a difficult point, he introduced a question, and, as though he were in doubt, asked what might be said on the subject.

That the Gentiles who did not pursue, etc. Nothing appeared more unreasonable, or less; befitting, than that the Gentiles, who, having no concern for righteousness, rolled themselves in the lasciviousness of their flesh, should be called to partake of salvation, and to obtain righteousness; and that, on the other hand, the Jews, who assiduously labored in the works of the law, should be excluded from the reward of righteousness. Paul brings forward this, which was so singular a paradox, in such a manner, that by adding a reason he softens whatever asperity [harshness] there might be in it; for he says, that the righteousness which the Gentiles attained was by faith; and that it hence depends on the Lord's mercy, and not on man's own worthiness; and that a zeal for the law, by which the Jews were actuated, was absurd; for they sought to be justified by works, and thus labored for what no man could

attain to; and still further, they stumbled at Christ, through whom alone a way is open to the attainment of righteousness.

But in the first clause it was the Apostle's object to exalt the grace of God alone, that no other reason might be sought for in the calling of the Gentiles but this—that He condescended to embrace them when unworthy of His favor.

He speaks expressly of righteousness, without which there can be no salvation: but by saying that the righteousness of the Gentiles proceeded from faith, he intimates [suggests], that it was based on a gratuitous reconciliation; for if any one imagines that they were justified, because they had by faith obtained the Spirit of regeneration, he departs far from the meaning of Paul; it would not indeed have been true, that they had attained what they did not seek, except God had freely embraced them while they were straying and wandering, and had offered them righteousness, for which, being unknown, they could have had no desire. It must also be observed, that **the Gentiles could not have obtained righteousness by faith, except God had anticipated their faith by His grace**; for they followed it when they first by faith aspired to righteousness; and so faith itself is a portion of His favor.

31. *But Israel, by pursuing, etc.* Paul openly states what seemed incredible—that it was no wonder that the Jews gained nothing by sedulously [zealously] following after righteousness; for by running out of the way, they wearied themselves in vain. But in the first place it seems to me that the law of righteousness is here an instance of transposition, and means the righteousness of the law; and then, that when repeated in the second clause, it is to be taken in another sense, as signifying the model or the rule of righteousness. The meaning then is, —“That Israel, depending on the righteousness of the law, even that which is prescribed in the law, did not understand the true method of justification.” But there is a striking contrast in the expression, when he teaches us that the legal righteousness was the cause that they had fallen away from the law of righteousness.

We are justified by faith alone, apart from the works of the law.

32. *Not by faith, but as it were by works, etc.* As false zeal seems commonly to be justly excused, **Paul shows that they are deservedly rejected, who attempt to attain salvation by trusting in their own works**; for they, as far as they can, abolish faith, without which no salvation can be expected. Hence, were they to gain their object, such a success would be the annihilation of true righteousness. You farther **see how faith and the merits of works are contrasted, as things altogether contrary to each other**. As then trust in works is the chief hindrance, by which our way to obtain righteousness is closed up, it is necessary that we should wholly renounce it, in order that we may depend on God's goodness alone.

This example of the Jews ought indeed justly to terrify all those who strive to obtain the kingdom of God by works. Nor does he understand by the works of the law, ceremonial observances, as it has been before shown, but the merits of those works to which faith is opposed, which looks, as I may say, with both eyes on the mercy of God alone, without casting one glance on any worthiness of its own.

For they have stumbled at the stone, etc. He confirms by a strong reason the preceding sentence. There is indeed nothing more inconsistent than that they should obtain righteousness who strive to destroy it.

Christ has been given to us for righteousness; whosoever obtrudes on God the righteousness of works, attempts to rob Him of His own office. And hence it appears that whenever men, under the empty pretense of being zealous for righteousness, put confidence in their works, they do in their furious madness carry on war with God Himself.

But how they stumble at Christ, who trust in their works, it is not difficult to understand; for except we own ourselves to be sinners, void and destitute of any righteousness of our own, we obscure the dignity of Christ, which consists in this, that to us all He is light, life, resurrection, righteousness, and healing. But how is He all these things, except that He illuminates the blind, restores the lost, quickens the dead, raises up those who are reduced to nothing, cleanses those who are full of filth, cures and heals those infected with diseases? No, when we claim for ourselves any righteousness we in a manner contend with the power of Christ; for **His office is no less to beat down all the pride of the flesh, than to relieve and comfort those who labor and are wearied under their burden.**

The quotation is rightly made; for God in that passage declares that He would be to the people of Judah and of Israel for a rock of offence, at which they should stumble and fall. Since Christ is that God who spoke by the Prophets, it is no wonder that this also should be fulfilled in Him. And by calling Christ the *stone of stumbling*, he reminds us that it is not to be wondered at if they made no progress in the way of righteousness, who through their wilful stubbornness stumbled at the rock of offence, when God had showed to them the way so plainly. But we must observe, that this stumbling does not properly belong to Christ viewed in Himself; but, on the contrary, it is what happens through the wickedness of men, according to what immediately follows.

33. *And every one who believes in Him shall not be ashamed.* He subjoins this testimony from another part for the consolation of the godly; as though he had said, "Because Christ is called the stone of stumbling, there is no reason that we should dread Him, or entertain fear instead of confidence; for He is appointed for ruin to the unbelieving, but for life and resurrection to the godly." As then the former prophecy, concerning the stumbling and offense, is fulfilled in the rebellious and unbelieving, so there is another which is intended for the godly, and that is, that He is a firm stone, precious, a corner-stone, most firmly fixed, and whoever builds on it shall never fall. By putting *shall not be ashamed* instead of *shall not hasten* or fall, he has followed the Greek Translator. It is indeed certain that the Lord in that passage intended to strengthen the hope of His people: and when the Lord bids us to entertain good hope, it hence follows that we cannot be ashamed. See a passage like this in 1 Peter 2:10.

1 Peter 2:9-10: "But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy."