

spoken of in this context is rooted in covenant language, as is the word “hate.” Simply put, the prophet is declaring that God chose to make the covenant with Jacob and He chose to bypass Esau—not to include him as a covenant member.

Cranfield gives us his summary of Paul's argument in vv. 6-13:

According to Scripture, God distinguished, in the working out of His purpose, between Isaac and Ishmael and between Jacob and Esau. But this was a distinguishing inside the general area of election, since, although they were not Israelites, offspring of Jacob, Ishmael was a son of Abraham, ‘the friend of God,’ with whom the covenant had been established, and Esau was one of the twin sons of Isaac, that son of Abraham in whom Abraham's seed was to be reckoned. Therefore, the fact that at the present time a large number of Jews, members of the elect nation, stand outside the circle of the Israel within Israel, that is, of those who actually stand in a positive relationship to God's purpose, does not mean that God's purpose has failed. On the contrary, it may even be said to confirm it, since it conforms to the pattern of the working of that purpose right from the beginning. (*Romans*, 2.481)

14 What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!

Seven times Paul introduces a new section in this epistle with the question “What shall we say” (τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν): 3:5; 4:1; 6:1; 7:1; 8:31; 9:30. Three times, besides the present text, (3:5; 6:1; 7:1) the question is followed by the strong “may it never be” (μὴ γένοιτο).

Paul uses this formula at a point where he recognizes that a false conclusion could be drawn, instead of the true one, from what he has just been saying: in these passages his method is to indicate and reject the possible false conclusion before stating his own conclusion.²⁶³

Indeed, the false conclusion which Paul anticipates may be in the minds of some of his readers, is stated outright via the second question: “There is not injustice with God, is there?” If, as Paul has shown, the current manner in which God is dealing with Israel is in concert with His methods from the beginning when He chose her as His treasured people, is it possible that He has acted unjustly all along? If His distinguishing between persons depends, not on their works but simply upon His choosing, does this not appear to be unjust?

Of course, Paul rejects such a notion out of hand, but he does so, not merely on the basis of some dogmatism, but based squarely upon Scripture. His understanding of who God is does not come from his own longings and desires, but from the word of God. What is more, Paul had come through the arduous experience of retrofitting his own picture of God. His view of God, based as it was on long-standing tradition, had been redrawn from reading the Tanach with eyes enlightened by the Spirit. Yet even the rabbinic view of God could never have sustained the idea that God was unjust. Still, the idea that He chooses those He blesses *apart from their works* could lead in that direction, for it makes Him appear to be a respecter of persons.

To overcome this false conclusion, Paul moves to examples from the Tanach that support His case.

15–16 For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

Paul first appeals to the word of God to Moses found in Ex 33:19—

| Exodus 33:19 MT | Exodus 33:19 Lxx |
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| וְהִנַּחֵתִי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֶחָךְ וְרַחֲמֵתִי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם | καὶ ἐλεήσω ὃν ἄν ἐλεῶ καὶ οἰκτιρήσω ὃν ἄν οἰκτίρω |
| And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will be compassionate with whom I will be compassionate | and I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful, and I will show pity to whom I will show pity |

Some have suggested that the phraseology here mimics the “I will be what I will be” of Ex 3:14 (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה), and that therefore at the very heart of the meaning of the Name (derived from or in some way connected to this phrase) is the sovereign ability to be entirely self-determined. By this is meant that God is not defined by anything outside of Himself, nor is He in any way coerced into action by forces outside of His being. He is, in every way, self-determined and self-defined.

But it is important that we see the emphasis here that Paul primarily intends, and while he may have had in mind this aspect of God's self-determined nature, he seems rather to find in the text from Exodus an emphasis upon God's willingness to show mercy. We may extrapolate theologically that God's willingness to limit His mercy to those He chooses presupposes an equal willingness to display wrath—that for all those to whom He shows mercy, there are others from whom He withholds His kindnesses. But this is theological, not Scriptural, for the constant theme of the text that Paul quotes is that God is free in His ability to show mercy—that this kindness flows inevitably from the greatness of His heart. It is His freedom in the exercise of His mercy that Paul finds supportive of his present argument, for being absolutely free in the exercise of His mercy, it is clear that no one deserves it, nor can anyone earn it.

In v. 16, then, Paul derives this conclusion from his quote of Ex 33:19, namely, that “it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.” The subject has to be supplied (the NASB opts for “it”). Other suggestions have been “the choice,” “mercy,” “the matter generally.” Surely God's mercy is the matter at hand, and it would seem best to understand Paul's argument to be “God's mercy does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.”

It is difficult for us to fathom the utter independence of God, but this is an essential attribute of His character. For we are drawn to show mercy to those who have some connection to our own experience, or who naturally draw some measure of pity from our own conscience. All too often, our showing of mercy is bound up with our own emotions. But God's mercy is self-directed, for it comes, not in reaction to man's woes, but as the means of accomplishing God's purposes.

on the man who wills or the man who runs – “Wills” speaks of the issues of the soul in belief vs. unbelief, while “runs” points to the actions—one's deeds. Thus, neither the inner thoughts and intents, nor the outward actions are the catalyst for attracting God's mercy.

17–18 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.” So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

The opening “For” (*γὰρ, gar*) could either refer to the verse immediately prior (as giving support for the conclusion there) or refer back to v. 14 as giving yet a second example from the Tanach in support of the primary premise that God is free in the matter of His mercy.

Pharaoh and the manner in which he became the foil to display the power and sovereignty of God becomes Paul's second example and support for His premise that there is no injustice