

THE FREEDOM OF GOD IN MERCY AND JUDGEMENT

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The article here points out the various perspectives on the interpretation of Roman 9 -11, and in particular 9:6-29. On the face of many of the verses, there appears to be a deterministic predestination Calvinist theology. But Paul qualifies himself in other verses, using language which would be inconsistent to a rational explanation found in Calvinism.

For example “[i]n 9:30-10:21 Paul engages in an extended exploration of the reasons for Jewish unbelief. In 9:30-10:4 he attributes their unbelief to a commitment to the Mosaic Law as providing an adequate basis for salvation and, related to this, a wrong estimate of the place of works in ensuring personal salvation.”¹ It is not that God ordained Israel’s unbelief to elect the Gentiles, “...God forbid: but *rather* through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles...” Rom. 11:11. The key word is “through” or another word is “because”.

It must be remembered that God is not obligated to make Israel respond in faith to His initiative. It is clear Israel had a choice. “Well: because of unbelief they were broken off...” Rom. 11:20. If God is willing to extend His grace and mercy to a faithful and obedient people (Gentiles) is He not sovereign to do so. I believe this is Paul’s argument. In Rom 9:22, it is man who fits himself for destruction “in the Greek middle voice” and not God ordaining man for destruction. Therefore, man is free to accept or reject God’s means for salvation, and God is under no obligation to compel and free to have grace and mercy on a people (Gentiles) who accept His free gift. “...a Calvinist reading of ...[these verses] would appear to assume that God

¹ Shellrude, Glen, *The freedom of God in mercy and judgment: a libertarian reading of Romans 9:6-29*, pg. 307

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is ‘holding out his hand’ to Israel while simultaneously withholding the grace that would enable them to respond...”²

When Paul uses specific language in Romans 9:6-29, he is probably “...responding to a very specific challenge...which could be interpreted as an expression of theological determinism...”³ The challenge or objection by some in the Jewish community is “...if the scriptural promises concerning future salvation had found fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth, then in the process God had failed Israel...”⁴ The belief is that God should have acted in a way that Israel would “recognized” God’s redemptive plans. Therefore, Paul’s statements must be read in the contexts from the concerns which he was addressing.

Furthermore, “...It is significant that Paul does not say of the vessels of wrath that God ‘prepared them in advance for destruction’...”⁵ Hence Israel always had free will and choice whether to obey God. “...[B]ecause of unbelief[,] they [Israel] were broken off.” Rom. 11:20. Paul even let us know “... that those whom God has ‘prepared in advance for glory’ [because they obeyed] can be ‘cut off’ if they do not continue in his kindness.”⁶ Therefore, the notion that God is selecting a group of people to the exclusion of others on some random basis is utterly preposterous.

² *ibid.*, pg. 307

³ *ibid.*, pg. 309

⁴ *ibid.*, pg. 309

⁵ *ibid.*, pg. 315

⁶ *ibid.*, pg. 317

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Bibliography

Shellrude, Glen. "The freedom of God in mercy and judgement: a libertarian reading of Romans 9:6-9." *Evangelical Quarterly* 2009: 306-318.