

While the Bible speaks often about election, predestination, and related topics, perhaps the best, extended argument or apology given on behalf of election is found in the book of Romans. Chapters 1-2 of Romans present the depravity of mankind; of Gentile and of Jew. The first conclusion is reached in chapter 3 – none are righteous. Chapters 4-5 make the point that salvation has always been by God’s grace through faith. Both New Testament and Old Testament believers are saved in the same manner. Chapters 6-7 show how the believer is redeemed from sin and freed from condemnation under the Law. Chapter 8 praises God for His everlasting love that He should save us by grace; we who were dead in sin.

By the time his readers reach chapter 9, Paul anticipates that a nagging question is growing in their minds. If all people are dead in sin as stated in chapter 3, if none seek after God and thus all require God’s intervening grace, why wouldn’t God save all of Israel? Wouldn’t they, as God’s people, more deserve His election than the Gentiles?

That is what chapters 9-11 answer. The immediate context of God’s election is Israel, but the point Paul makes is meant to support his overall argument in chapters 1-11 that God elects both Gentile and Jew according to His grace. That’s why, before we ever get to the specific application of Election to Israel, Paul writes in 8:28-36: “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. *For whom He foreknew, He also predestined* to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? *Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?* It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”

The principles, then, of chapters 9-11 are applicable to all people (specifically those whom God foreknew and elected), even though the illustrations concern Israel. With this context in mind, one can now examine chapter 9 in greater detail and see why it is such a positive chapter and so strongly speaks of God’s sovereign election.

The key to understanding Romans chapter 9 is remembering that in chapter 1 Paul said that all men and women are without excuse. He takes a very aggressive stance toward humanity, saying that it isn’t that we exist in ignorance about God - that’s not the point. A lost person doesn’t just wander in ignorance, waiting for someone to share with him or her the Four Spiritual Laws. Rather, the Bible says that the evidence of God already exists in the creation and in our conscience. Surprisingly, Paul asserts that every single human being clearly sees the attributes of God displayed in the Creation. Why doesn’t every person then worship God? Chapter 1 says that mankind suppresses the truth that is clearly seen in God’s handiwork. Our rebellion is *active*, not passive - we *choose* to reject God. We suppress the truth, and we exchange in its place a lie, exalting ourselves and other created things over God.

That is why we are all without excuse. Every lost person from birth actively rebels against God who then condemns him. No person goes to Hell because God is unfair. God, who is perfectly holy, cannot, and will not, tolerate the presence of sin. People are sent to Hell because they have rebelled against the holy God.

The result of rebellion is to become what the Bible calls being “dead in sin,” where Sin is our master and we are its slaves. We are said in our lost condition to be motivated only by self-centeredness and self-exaltation. That’s why Paul writes in Rom 3:10-12 that “there is none who seeks after God; all have turned aside. Every one of their actions is unprofitable.” Those are drastic, absolute statements. Not a single person seeks after God? Paul says “not one.” When we were each slaves to sin, not one of our actions was profitable; everything that we did was for our own glory.

Romans 9:1 reads: “I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.”

As mentioned earlier, Paul acknowledges the natural expectation that Israel ought to be chosen by God for salvation. After all, God had previously chosen Israel to be His sanctified nation. Israel had received the law and covenants through Abraham and Moses, God had protected Her, and the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others had all been Israelites. Even Christ was an Israelite. But all of these blessings did not guarantee salvation. Paul says that Israelites are not saved by the Law and they are not saved by their descent from Abraham. Thus, they possess no inherent right to be heirs of God. Worse, they rejected Paul’s witness and treated his words as foolishness. So Paul writes that he has “continual grief in his heart” wishing that he himself were “accursed from Christ” instead of his own countrymen. That attitude, by the way, should be our attitude as well with regard to our lost neighbors. Our hearts should break, too, over the plight of the lost.

But hadn’t God promised to be the God of Israel? Had He gone back on His word? You see, that would have been a natural question. God, after all, called Abraham out of Mesopotamia and established, through Abraham's descendents, the nation of Israel, When Israel became captive to Egypt, God rescued her in the Exodus. When Israel was taken into exile by Babylon, God ultimately brought her back under Ezra. So why not now? Why shouldn’t God rescue Israel from exile under Rome, particularly when the stakes weren’t just exile under a foreign nation, but rather eternal exile from God due to sin? Wasn’t Israel still God’s chosen nation?

Rom 9:6-7 provide Paul’s answer: “It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children.” This repeats Paul’s earlier comments in verses 1-5, but we find an addition in verse 7. “Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.” At first, this seems odd until we realize that there is something unique about Israel that makes her “Israel.”

Yes, there is a physical nation Israel. But there is also a spiritual nation Israel, comprised of those people who are called by God and redeemed by His hand. They include Jews *and* Gentiles. Thus, here's an important place where we can see that chapters 9-11 are really just fitting into Paul's overall argument that started in chapter 1. Our citizenship in the Kingdom of God is not an inherited right.

If people do not become citizens of this spiritual Israel, this Kingdom of God, by physical birth, how then do they gain their citizenship? Paul will say in just a moment that it is by the elective purpose of God.

To "elect" something is to choose something. Consider Abraham. He was born in Ur, a port city in Mesopotamia, in what is now southern Iraq just above the Persian Gulf. Abraham's family worshipped idols and the pagan gods of that region. Joshua writes this about Abraham in Josh 24:2: "And Joshua said to all the people, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods.'"

Out of Mesopotamia, God called Abraham, for no reason other than He elected or chose to do so. We're not told the reasons, but we are told that there was nothing inherently good in Abraham that forced God to choose Him. In fact, we're told in Acts that Abraham's family worshiped the gods of Mesopotamia. Even if there was something good about Abraham in contrast to other men and women in Ur, that still wouldn't change the fact that *God* chose Abraham. Abraham did not choose God; he simply was obedient to God's command to leave Mesopotamia.

Paul assumes that everyone will acknowledge that Abraham was chosen. But what about Abraham's descendants? What about Isaac and Jacob? What about us? In verse 7 of Romans 9, we read about Abraham's son Isaac. Abraham had two sons. The first son, Ishmael, was the child of Abraham and Sarah's maidservant Hagar. God had promised that a son of Abraham would be the Messiah, but because Sarah was unable to bear children, she and Abraham tried to fulfill God's promise in their own power. Ishmael was thirteen years old when Isaac, Abraham's second son, was born.

Ishmael was Abraham's son, but Ishmael was not chosen by God. Verse 8: "In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: 'At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.'"

Paul's point is that the difference between Isaac and Ishmael is not merely that God elected Isaac and passed over Ishmael, though that was obvious. The more important point is that God's choice of Isaac involved a supernatural intervention in the case of Isaac's conception. Abraham, by his choice and actions, tried to fulfill God's promise. Ishmael was born of Abraham's natural abilities, and for all intents and purposes was a perfectly viable candidate for Abraham's inheritance. He was a healthy, strong, and honoring child. *Abraham even prayed that God would accept Ishmael as his heir.*

So why didn't God accept Ishmael? Because it was important that God receive the glory in Isaac's conception. God is sovereign. It was His promise, His intervention, His plan. According to that purpose, Isaac was conceived when Abraham and Sarah were unable naturally to have children.

When Abraham and Sarah had no hope for a child, when they couldn't possibly reproduce on their own, God said, "*I can do it. I can produce new birth where there is death in the womb.*" The Scriptures say that all of the examples that we read in the Old Testament are meant for our instruction. What is illustrated in Isaac's conception? Isaac's birth illustrates what takes place in our own spiritual conception and new birth. Our spiritual conception, which is the outworking of God's elective choice, is supernatural, just like Isaac's birth, and it is the product of His promise, His intervention, and His plan. As a result God gets the glory. In order for us to become spiritually alive, God must work a miracle, which is exactly what He does when He regenerates a heart back to life that was dead in sin and in active, aggressive rebellion against Him.

Despite this point, Paul's opponents could still have argued that Ishmael was not a pure-blooded Jew. "It is true," they might have responded, "that Ishmael was the son of Abraham. Yet he was not the son of Sarah. He was the son of Hagar, and Hagar was only an Egyptian and Sarah's servant. That is why Ishmael was not chosen."

In order to answer this point, Paul proceeds to the next generation of Election, to the case of Rebekah's twin children, the sons Jacob and Esau. The words, "not only that," show that Paul is continuing his argument; he's just getting warmed up. "Not only that," Paul says, "but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad, in order that *God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by Him who calls, she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.'*"

This is a remarkably effective example, because it proves everything that Paul needs to make in his point. First, Jacob and Esau were born of the same Jewish parents. There's no Ishmael/Isaac issue in this case. There is no better ancestry, no difference in parentage. Second, the choice of Jacob rather than Esau goes against the normal Israelite rules of the firstborn. The first and oldest son was to receive the inheritance of the family. And, in the case of twins, like Esau and Jacob, the first child born was regarded as the oldest. Despite all of this, God chose Jacob instead of Esau.

Why? Was it something good in Jacob? You certainly wouldn't think so based upon the story of Genesis. Jacob, like many of his ancestors, has a life story filled with both shining and dark moments. Look again at verses 11 and 12. "Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by Him who calls, she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.'" This means that God made His choice before the birth of either Jacob or Isaac; before they had even done anything to possibly sway His choice.

This passage is so important. First, the word "Election" is mentioned. Second, we learn that Election is the working out of God's purpose. Third, God's purposes do not depend upon worthiness or outside circumstances; they are *His* purposes. We are told that God's choice had

nothing to do with anything Jacob or Esau did. Last, we are told that the election took place before Jacob and Esau were even born. These few verses are proof of what Paul later says in verse 18: "God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy."

Even though Paul speaks of the Patriarchs, it is clear that he speaks of the Elect. Chapter 8 already established that the "Elect" are all whom God will call, both Jew and Gentile; i.e. spiritual Israel.

Of course there are many other passages in Scripture outside of Romans 9-11 that talk about God's Election:

Acts 13:48-49: "Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And *as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.*"

1 Peter 1:1-2: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, *elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.*"

John 15:16: "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you* and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit."

Ephesians 1:11-12: "In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, *being predestined according to the purpose of Him* who works all things according to the counsel of His will."

There are many, many more, similar passages, and the existence of numerous texts like these means that every Christian has to believe in some kind of Election. Ultimately, we are driven to one of two possibilities: either God elects those whom *He* chooses, or He elects those whom He knows through foreknowledge will choose Him. The first alternative emphasizes God's sovereignty and man's depravity, and the second alternative emphasizes man's independence and free agency. The whole purpose of Romans 1-9 is meant to make us choose the first alternative.

The question as to who does the electing is vitally important. If men and women are the choice-makers, then they are the ones who have elected, not God. God becomes a bystander who responds to their faith. He may even be actively involved in trying to persuade people to believe in Him, trying to woo them from outside, but the simple fact is that if men and women choose, then it is they who have elected, not God.

Whenever we see the word "foreknow" or "foreknowledge" in Scripture it is always tied to another word: "purpose." God's foreknowledge is but an outworking of His purpose. The course of all history is under God's providential control and is but an execution of His all-encompassing plan. Furthermore, the word "foreknow" is a word which in the original language conveys an intimate knowledge. It is not just that God objectively "knows" who will choose Him, like a massive statistical program; He *knows* with an intimate, relational knowledge those whom *He* will choose. Revelation says that our names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world – before God ever created the earth!

If God elects according to His purpose and not according to our choice, then a natural question is this: “How can we say that a loving God elects some to salvation before the creation of the world and lets the rest perish? Aren’t we saying that He predestines the rest to Hell? But Scripture says that God does not delight in the death of the wicked.”

First, we must remember that men and women are without excuse. All men and women actively suppress the truth of God, they exchange the reality of the Creator with their own created idols, and they are at war with God. They deserve to be separated from God for eternity.

Second, *because* Paul anticipates this very question about God’s fairness, it tells me that we are on the right track. Why would there be a question of unrighteousness or unfairness if God elected people on the basis of *their* choice? From a human perspective that would seem entirely fair. Rather, we are driven to ask if God is unfair when we are told that it is God, Himself, that elects.

Paul writes in verses 14-19: “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?” There’s the question! “Certainly not!” says Paul, “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.’” That statement only makes sense if God is making the choice outside of any other factors such as physical birth or human choice.

God has compassion on those whom He chooses to have compassion. And so Paul says, “So then it is *not of him who wills*, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.” This is a summary of John 1:12-13. It is not by physical birth, not by desire, not by works, not even by the will of man. You can’t will yourself into citizenship of spiritual Israel, nor can you work yourself into citizenship. You can’t pray the right prayer, attend church 90% of the time, or read the whole Bible three times in order to get into the Kingdom of God.

Does that seem harsh? Listen to what Paul says in the next verse: “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.’ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.” Regardless of whether we like it or not, or whether we think that Election is harsh or not, it is impossible to minimize what Paul says in these six verses. Which is worse – to change our perspective about how God calls, regenerates and saves people or to throw our or ignore this chapter of Romans?

As we read the Bible, one thing of which we must be convinced is that God is eminently fair. People who end up in Hell are not there because of some prejudice or harshness in God. They are there because they have rejected and rebelled against God. However, that does not prevent God from being merciful to some, nor does that make God unfair for being merciful to some; it makes Him gracious that He saves anyone. God’s election of some to salvation is not unfairness or prejudice, it is gracious and merciful. The Bible teaches that God passes by some persons, allowing them to continue to their destruction rather than intervene in their lives and save them.

Perhaps a more difficult question than whether God is fair, is this question: “How can God hold anyone accountable?” How can God say it’s my fault if He doesn’t elect me to salvation and I

can't possibly choose Him because of my sin nature? The answer is found in verses 19-24. Paul writes: "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?'" Isn't Paul great? He knows exactly what his readers are going to say. And don't forget that his readers were the saints at Rome – Jew and Gentile. He knows that they want to say: "That's not fair!"

Listen to Paul's response: "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?' Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? 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, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?"

Paul really just reminds us that God is God. We want to second-guess God, we want to impose upon Him our own standards and ways; we want God to be on our level. But God is God. As the clay, who are we to question the Potter? Again, that too may seem harsh, but those are Paul's words. The choices God makes are according to His own purposes.

So...people go to Hell because of their choice to rebel against God, not because at birth God had a line that led to Hell and placed people upon it. *Every person* was once condemned to Hell for transgressing God's perfect standards in Adam and in their own personal lives. All, every person, has sinned, and the wages of sin is death. What Romans 9 says is that God, in His mercy, elected to remove a chosen people from the penalty of sin by bearing the penalty for them.

Let me give you a few reasons why we should see Romans 9, not as a depressing chapter, but as a glorious one.

1) Election assures us that God's purposes will not fail. Paul writes Romans 9, not to terrify, depress, and distance us, but to comfort us. God's purposes will not fail! Since God elects some before the foundation of the world, His Word will never fail. If we have heard God's promises and believed His Word, we can be sure that as His Elect, He will be faithful to us.

2) Election helps us understand those who leave the church. We all know people who have professed to believe at one time but left the church and perhaps denounced the faith. Does it mean God has failed them? No. It only means that if they continue in their unbelieving state, they were never one of God's Elect in the first place - their profession was false and motivated by any number of factors: emotion, conformity, pride, and so on.

3) Election glorifies God. As soon as we begin to think that God owes us something or that God *must* do something, we limit and diminish His glory. Election protects God's glory, for it reminds us that God is absolutely free and sovereign. God does whatever He wants in His universe. Election forces us to cry, "Jesus, have mercy on me!" As long as we believe that we are in control of our own destiny, we will never assume a posture of complete helplessness and dependence. But when we understand that we are in the hands of a just, holy and wrathful God, and that we are personally without hope of salvation apart from His free and utterly sovereign

intervention, then we, like the tax-collector, will call for mercy, which is the only possible and right response.

But what about verses like "God so loved the world" and God does not desire "that any should perish." Col 1:19-20 is good too: "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." These passages suggest a God with open arms to the whole world, not just to some.

God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. After all, that is what the Bible says. But it must glorify God to elect only some. While Scripture says that God doesn't delight in the death of the wicked, it also clearly says that God isn't depressed because He's helpless to motivate some to choose Him; He is wrathful against active and willful rebellion. As Romans 9:22 says: "God bears with great patience the objects of His wrath."

Probably a better question that might be asked is: "Why doesn't God show mercy to everyone? That way He wouldn't have to be saddened by the death of the wicked."

That is a valid question. Paul says in many places that God makes the decisions He makes from the secret counsel of His will. There is at least one revealed answer, although very few people like it. Remember Paul's statement in verse 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.' Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens."

At least one reason God passes over some persons is to display His power and judgment so that His sovereign name may be proclaimed throughout the earth. In other words, God considers it important that we should know that He is all-powerful, especially in overcoming and judging those who stand against Him like the Pharaoh.

God's creation of man was "very good." There was no flaw in His work. But that creation fell, and as a result the Bible says that every thought of man's heart is "continually wicked, all the time." The Bible says that God's very good creation began to suppress the truth of God's existence and replaced the Creator with the created, that it condoned wicked and sinful behavior, and was filled with a reprobate mind. The Bible says that God is at war with those who sin. Those statements must guide us in our understanding of other Scripture.

Perhaps we still haven't dealt to full satisfaction with the seemingly all-inclusive passages like John 3:16, John 12:32, and Col. 1:19. Probably the best answer is this: the word "all" does not always mean "all." That may sound like a poor answer, but let's see this proven from Scripture.

First, if we were true to the plain meaning of "all" in every verse that the word occurs, then a passage like John 12:32 (where Jesus says: "If I am lifted up from the earth I will draw *all* people to myself") would teach universal salvation. And yet we know that the Scriptures don't teach that. So "all" must sometimes be used in a generic sense or in reference to a limited class of



things (i.e. “all” who would receive Him which may not mean all people, but rather all the Elect).

Second, for every passage that speaks of God’s desire that “all” be reconciled, saved, or “none” should perish, there is another that speaks of God specifically *blinding some, hardening some, and condemning some*. For example, Rom 11:7-8 says this: “What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the Elect have obtained it, and the rest *were blinded*. Just as it is written: ‘God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.’” Mark 4:12 says: “Seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them.”

An example of God hardening some is found in Ex 4:21: “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.’” And then, a passage where God condemns some is 2 Thess 2:11-12: “And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

Does God desire to save *all*, as in every single human being? No He does not. God actually sends a deluding influence on some people and hardens the hearts of others. This is both challenging and fascinating. Why would God do such a thing? The answer lies in Scripture.

God is in control of all things and is bringing history to the prophetically determined destiny to which He has aimed it. He hardens some and softens others. He arranges things so that battles occur, people are destroyed, lives are changed, nations moved, and people saved. All of this is done in accordance with His divine plan. In fact, it is done because He *has* a divine plan. Consider the following from Acts 2:23: “This Man, delivered up by the *predetermined plan* and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.” Acts 4:27-28: “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, *to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.*”

God did not cause the people who crucified Jesus to sin. But, He did use their sin and He predestined all of it to occur. He used the natural inclinations and acts of Herod and Pilate along with the Gentiles to do His divine will. In fact, the Bible says that God *anointed* them to do what they did. Why? To carry out His purpose and His plan to bring His Son to the cross, to save sinners, and to bring glory to Himself. Some may object and say that God only knew what the evil people were going to do and simply used the results. But, that is not what the Scripture says. Besides, God has the ability to change the hearts of people. After all, Proverbs 21:1 says: “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.”

Then again, some may say that God must not violate people's freedom and will let them sin. But in response, consider Genesis 20:6 where God keeps Abimelech from sinning with Abraham's wife: “Then God said to him in the dream, ‘Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch

her.” God prevented Abimelech from sinning. God can and does control people's hearts and actions when that will accomplish His purpose. He does this sovereignly and He does it without causing people to sin.

He can even make someone's heart hard for the purpose of carrying out His plan. Deuteronomy 2:30 reads: “But Sihon king of Heshbon was not willing for us to pass through his land; for the Lord your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, in order to deliver him into your hand, as he is today.” Joshua 11:20 reads: “For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, to meet Israel in battle in order that he might utterly destroy them, that they might receive no mercy, but that he might destroy them, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.”

In Deuteronomy 2, the Lord told Moses to tell Sihon King of Heshbon to let the Israelites pass. But, we see that God deliberately hardened King Sihon's heart so that they could be delivered into Israel's hands and destroyed. We see in Joshua, that it was "of God" to harden the Canaanites so that they might be destroyed. Why? Because God had a greater plan and purpose than showing them mercy. What is that plan? God was arranging history to lead to the ultimate goal of Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and return, along with the redemption of God's people. This is the divine plan that God has ordained. God is in control and He has a purpose that He has revealed in Scripture.

Rev. 17:16-17 reads: “And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God should be fulfilled.” God put it into the hearts of people to rebel so that His prophetic word could be fulfilled. God was, is, and will continue to control events in order to accomplish His divine plan. He is bringing these people to a place of being destroyed and it isn't simply because they are rebellious. It is because "God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose . . . until the words of God should be fulfilled"!

Some will claim that God cannot put such things in people's hearts -- in spite of the verses shown above. They will quote Scripture where God says He does not desire the death of the wicked and, therefore, could not be purposely do such a thing. We clearly see that God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked. Yet, they do die and to further complicate things, as we have seen in the Scriptures above, He even hardens them, deludes them, and puts it into their hearts to rebel. And if that weren't enough, read Deuteronomy 28:63: “And it shall come about that as the Lord delighted over you to prosper you, and multiply you, so the *Lord will delight over you to make you perish and destroy you.*” 1 Samuel 2:25 is good too: ““If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?” But they would not listen to the voice of their father, *for the Lord desired to put them to death.*”

God delights to destroy? Yes, sometimes, just as much as He doesn't delight that the wicked should perish. Is this a contradiction? No. But it does demonstrate that it isn't so easy to just pick and choose passages outside of the context of Scripture. It isn't a contradiction because God has a purpose and a plan. He has the sovereign right to accomplish His will in those who are perishing (again, because they *chose* to rebel in the Fall). On one hand, He doesn't want people to suffer and die, yet on the other hand, He is delighted to carry out His divine plan which

necessarily includes the death of the wicked because it is in accordance with the Law which He Himself has given us. His divine plan will be accomplished and He will be glorified.

So what do we make of this difficult issue that God can desire one thing and yet arrange circumstances, influence hearts, and govern people to the contrary? It is because there is something greater than God not delighting in the death of the wicked; namely that God's divine plan will be carried out for His glory and the salvation of the Elect. Love and kindness are not the only aspects of God's glorious being. He is also holy and righteous and has brought history through its course in order to reflect His great wisdom and justice as well as His love and mercy. Though God hates sin, He permits it for the greater glory of Himself and His plan. He doesn't delight in the perishing of the wicked, but He has ordained that they be allowed to perish because according to His own character He must punish sinners.

God has worked all things after the counsel of His will and has engineered history to bring not only the cross as the means of redemption, but also the culmination of all things for the declaration of His own glory, righteousness, holiness, and character. Sin will be shown to be utterly sinful and horrible. Some will be judged and thus display the glory of God's wrath and justice. And at the same time, the cross will demonstrate God's righteousness and grace, thus displaying the glory of His mercy.

Election and God's sovereignty are wonderful news. They humble us to remember that there is no ground for pride in our lives. We were saved by grace through faith, and even that faith wasn't of ourselves; that faith was a gift of God, not of our own works. We will never be able to boast, not even that we made the right decision at some point and prayed the "sinner's prayer."

Election encourages us to love God. Because our salvation was entirely dependent upon His mercy, our love and debt to Him is boundless.

Election enriches our worship. Who can admire a God who is frustrated by the rebellious will of His creation? No, we admire a God who works all things out to His purposes, who guarantees that nothing can frustrate Him.

Election encourages us in our evangelism. It has often been said that seeing God sovereign in Election means that evangelism has no purpose. If God elects people then they will be saved regardless of what we do. But the truth is that God has appointed our proclaiming the Gospel to be the means by which He saves the Elect. Yes, God will save whomever He has elected to save, but...He has said in His Word that He uses evangelism by the Gospel to be the means of that salvation. We have been commanded to preach the Good News. Because God commanded it, we must obey. If we don't evangelize, we are disobedient. Thus, we must proclaim His Word to every man and woman so that the Holy Spirit may work through His Word to save His people. We don't know who the Elect are; and we shouldn't even try to figure it out. We can't. We simply treat everyone as possibly God's Elect and pray that the Holy Spirit will use us to accomplish His purposes as we tell them the Gospel.

Now here is the great news regarding evangelism: because God is in control, we don't have to be eloquent speakers. We don't have to have all the right words. We don't have to keep going back

day after day pleading, begging, persuading people to accept Jesus Christ. Because of God's election, we don't just have a hope, we have a rock-solid conviction that if God is drawing a particular individual to Himself, His Spirit will work through the Gospel to accomplish His purpose. Of course, that is no ground for laziness or complacency - God also says in His Word that He will discipline us if we start to get lazy. But it is great comfort to know that evangelism is not about persuasion, but about God's sovereignty. All we have to do is talk about Jesus Christ, His life, His work, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, His intercession, and His glory and call people to the obedience of the Gospel. That's it. That's what we see Paul doing, Peter doing, Stephen doing, everyone doing in Scripture.

Last, Election gives us the assurance that our salvation is secure. Because our salvation is based upon God's choice and not mine, any fickle attitudes or occasional doubts won't undermine the work that God began. After all, He is faithful and just, says Scripture, to finish what He began. To finish *what He began*. The verses that talk about God being the *Author* of our faith make sense, all of a sudden. He is the Author, Perfector, and Completer of our salvation. He is the One that Scripture says works in us both *to will* and to do His good pleasure. What greater confidence could we have that we will one day see Him in spite of our failure to fully obey Him even after He has saved us?

Now...aren't you glad that God elects His people to salvation?