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Romans

For the Scripture says to the 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." Romans 9:17

Once again, Paul turns directly to the Scriptures (Exodus 9:16) to justify the statements he is making. "For" is looking back on the previous thought of God showing mercy on whom He will show mercy apart from our will or work. And so he says, "For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh..."

He goes to the exodus account, one of the most noted in Scripture, and one which shows the power of God and the selection of Israel as His people. They are called the "least of all peoples" in Deuteronomy 7:7 indicating their size and strength, and yet they were saved from the massive powerhouse of the nations, Egypt.

And so, to demonstrate His power in effecting His purposes, He selected this small group of people on whom to lavish His care and affection. By doing so He would be glorified. To show that He is able to accomplish even the unimaginable, He raised up Pharaoh to be a part of this plan. As the account says, "For this purpose I have raised you up..." The intent is, "By my sovereign choice and for my own reasons, you as a leader of this great and powerful nation were placed, established, and carried to this moment."

The Greek word Paul uses for "raised up" is *exēgeira*. It is a word used only twice in the New Testament and so the context must be considered from those two passages. The second instance is in 1 Corinthians 6:14 -

"And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power."

In both instances, it is showing God's active role in the direction of people. The word means to "raise out completely" and it emphasizes its end-impact on the person God raises. In other words, God has raised up Pharaoh, has sustained him throughout his life, and has directed the events of his life to mold him in the exact way so that when his moment of destiny with the approaching exodus comes, he will respond in the manner which will bring God the anticipated glory for what occurs - "that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth."

Every particular of the Pharaoh, as well as every particular of Egypt, was determined by God for the moment. The amount of soldiers, for example, was pre-ordained. A smaller force may have led him to choose a different path. Every detail was orchestrated to bring Pharaoh to make the decisions that he made. But... he made them. God directed the events, but the choices were still made by the man. God in no way determined the evil choices Pharaoh made, but the choices came as a result of his makeup.

This is how such events work - both for "good and for evil" as was noted in the explanation of the twins, Jacob and Esau. And this is how the events work for us as well. We are a product of the things which make us the people we are, all selected by God to mold and form us. And yet, we are granted free will to choose the path we take. Just because God knows what those choices will be in no way changes the fact that we make them.

Life application: In the end, calling on Jesus is a choice of the will. When the choice is made, He seals us with the Spirit and sets us on a new and wonderful

course. This course will last for eternity in His presence. Such is the grace and mercy of God.

Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

Romans 9:18

This verse is as clear a statement as one can find concerning God's sovereignty. However, even in this verse debate arises as to what it exactly means. Some believe it means that God actively hardens some and actively saves others. This is known as double-predestination. In essence, God created some to be condemned and He created some to be saved. Apart from this truly unbiblical concept of double-predestination there are several other opinions about what actually occurs concerning God's election of people. This is all discussed in detail in the analysis of 8:29.

We know from James 1:13, 14, that God is not the one who leads others into committing evil. Those verses state, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed."

So how can Romans 9:18 be squared with this? The answer is that "hardens" is being tied to the preceding verse about Pharaoh. To "harden" is not the exertion of a positive influence, such as adding hardener to resin to make it a solid. Another good example would be the heart itself, but in a physical, not spiritual way. We could say God literally and actively hardened our heart, calcifying it and clogging up our arteries, or we could say that God passively hardened our hearts by allowing us to eat the wrong foods and live a lethargic and couch-potato type existence.

The second example is equivalent to what God did in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. God molded us as individuals, giving us predispositions to certain things as He saw fit. However, those predispositions don't in anyway negate our

responsibility as individuals. We may be predisposed to eating foods that taste good but which are not healthy. We may be predisposed to idleness because of our genetic makeup too. But ultimately, we are responsible to get up, live right, and eat a healthy diet.

Pharaoh was left to make his own decisions after he was molded and shaped into the time and the moment when the decision would be made. The choice was still His and by making his choices, his heart was hardened. We too have our hearts hardened as we reject God's intent for us.

Life application: Are you predisposed to a certain type of sin? Maybe drunkenness, homosexuality, or some other sin? If so, God has already shown you that these types of behavior are wrong. He does not force you to do these things. Rather, they are volitional acts of the will. Just because one has a predisposition to a particular sin doesn't mean they must act on it. However, in today's world, we are taught that acting on our impulses is ok. It is not and we will be held accountable for our actions. In judgment, we will have no right to question the decisions God renders.

You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” Romans 9:19

In the manner of anyone who wants to live their life in an unholy and self-centered way, Paul now proposes a question that would be fitting for such a soul. "Ok Paul, if everything you have said thus far is true, then why does God still find fault in me? Tell me then, If God works in a sovereign manner, apart from my decisions, then how can what I do be found as wrong? His will is going to come about, and if my actions only lead to the fulfillment of His will, then I am actually helping His plan come about... I'm not resisting Him at all."

This is actually a common sentiment which is proposed around the world every day by folks who revel living in sin. The first problem with such a thought is that

God is God. What we do doesn't change that. The same is true with the law.
Example:

The law says that horse thieves are to be killed. Someone steals Johnny's horses and he chases them and kills them. The law judges Johnny as a murderer and sentences him to death. Johnny says, "I was merely fulfilling the law. How can the law find fault?"

The problem with his logic is that the law requires a judge and jury to sentence and convict horse thieves, not Johnny. Johnny has taken the law into his own hands and worked apart from the law to bring about justice. Johnny has forfeited his right to ask such a question.

What we do may in fact be a part of God's plan, as Pharaoh's actions were, but Pharaoh didn't heed the word of the Creator in the execution of what he did (see Exodus 5:2 for one of many examples). He worked in a way contrary to the law, even though the end came out as God determined. God has no difficulty in securing His end, and He is doing it through the free-will of man.

When a person says, "I wasn't resisting His will" he is proposing an assumption that God's plans have somehow negated his own choices; an assumption that is both arrogant and one that thus attributes evil intent to God while looking for acquittal of their own wrong actions. It is an assumption that 1) cannot be proved, and 2) would indicate any crime or moral perversion must also be condoned.

When we hold up our puny little fist and shake it towards God, such an action is done in defiance of our Creator - willingly and with our own evil intent. God didn't create us to blaspheme His name, but when we do, it was known to Him before the world was created that we would do so. We will not be excused by manipulating words to defend ourselves. In the end, we will only be seen as the fools we are.

Life application: Free will has been granted to man. How much better to use it to bring glory to God than to bring shame upon ourselves. Call on Jesus, be restored to God, and be cleansed of the poor free-will choices you have made in the past.