



## *When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do*

*"Know Mercy"*

Romans 9:14-18

Has anyone ever broken a promise they made to you? *Of course they have!*

Ha God ever broken a promise He has made to you? *Of course He hasn't!*

It seemed, however, to the first century Jews in Rome and throughout the empire that God had indeed broken His promise, specifically His promise to Abraham. That promise, called the Abrahamic Covenant, is really a set of promises. Among other things it promises, unconditionally, that Israel will continue as a nation, bless all the other nations of the world, and possess the land God promised her forever.

Instead of those things the Jews Paul was addressing saw God setting the nation of Israel aside in favor of the Gentiles. They cried "Foul!"

Actually, they cried "Unrighteous!" They accused God of unrighteousness.

Romans 9:14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!

God is righteous so it is just not possible for God to act unrighteously. "The righteousness of God is evident in the way He consistently acts in accord with His own character. His every action is consistent with His character. God is always consistently "Godly." God is not defined by the term "righteous," as much as the term "righteous" is defined by God. God is not measured by the standard of righteousness; God sets the standard of righteousness."

Paul sometimes simply told people they were wrong in the way they thought about God. You certainly must defend what you believe from Scripture, but don't overlook the nature and character of God in your thinking. If your study of the Word, or some system of theology, comes to a conclusion that demeans the nature or character of God, it's just wrong.

In the case before us we would say it is just not possible for God to break His unconditional covenant with Abraham.

By the way, all Christians agree with this. The disagreement is with whether God still intends to keep His unconditional covenant with the *physical* descendants of Abraham or if He has transeferred it to only the *spiritual* descendants of Abraham.

While we certainly understand that New Testament believers are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, that in no way cancels-out God's promises to the physical descendants of Abraham. The spiritual descendants of Abraham, like you and I, inherit the parts of the Abrahamic Covenant that apply to us as Gentiles. God will still keep His promises to the Jews. *He must keep them!*

Paul is giving the Jews Scriptural precedents for God's present dealings with His chosen people. He wasn't being unrighteous. He was acting just as He had always acted without breaking any promises to them at all.

Romans 9:15 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."

This quote from Exodus comes after the Jews had sinned by worshipping the Golden Calf. The Law had scarcely been given to Moses when he returned from Mount Sinai and heard the sound of partying in the camp. It was a drunken perverse orgy fueled by idolatry as they danced around a golden calf that Aaron had fashioned for the occasion.

Moses smashed the tablets of stone upon which the finger of God had written the Ten Commandments. It was fitting since the people had broken the Law.

Afterwards Moses went to God to plead for the Jews. God responded by pardoning His sinning nation.

Do you see the connection? The Gentiles were drunken, perverse idolaters upon whom God now in mercy was showering His love. **He was only doing for the Gentiles what He had long ago done for the Jews. He was showing them His mercy, undeserved and unearned.**

To accuse God of acting unrighteously in extending His mercy beyond Israel to the Gentiles was to deny His faithfulness to oft unfaithful Israel.

Romans 9:16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

What do “wills” and “runs” mean in this verse?

- *Running* would refer to exerting effort to win the race.
- *Willing*, therefore, would refer to the understanding that you were definitely a contestant in the race.

I think the one “who wills” and “who runs” is the Jew. From birth he “willed,” believing he was in the running to receive God’s blessing by virtue of his ethnicity. Thus he ran towards the goal by observing the Law. The practical result of this was a belief that because you were a Jew God **must** shower His blessings upon you while simultaneously withholding them from all non-Jews.

But God’s mercy is not reserved for those who think they deserve it and who work for it. No, God can extend His mercy to anyone - *and He does!*

This is so interesting to me. Some people read this verse and somehow conclude God restricts His mercy - showing it to a very select group. **That is what the Jews thought - and they were wrong!**

It clearly indicates a broader application, does it not? Paul was telling the Jews God’s mercy was *never* restricted to them because it can’t be willed or worked for.

No, God's mercy is for "whomever." God's compassion is for "whomever." "Whomever" is a big word, a broad word, an inclusive word. We would say mercy and compassion are available to "whosoever believes in Him."

All this talk from the Book of Exodus reminded Paul of the Egyptian Pharaoh.

Romans 9:17 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."

Pharaoh was a Gentile who persecuted God's people, the Jews. He held a privileged position but hardened his heart resulting in God being glorified in delivering His people.

Centuries later, it was the nonbelieving Jews who were persecuting God's people, the church. They held a privileged position but hardened their hearts at the preaching of the gospel. God was being glorified in delivering His people, the church, comprised mostly of Gentiles.

You read in Romans 11:25, in the NIV,

"...Israel has experienced a **hardening** in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in."

**The Jews were acting and reacting to the mercy of God upon Gentiles exactly as Pharaoh had acted and reacted when God wanted to show mercy to His enslaved people in Egypt.**

Paul was really laying it on them. Earlier in the chapter he had told them they were acting like Ishmael rather than Isaac, and like Esau rather than Jacob. Now they were acting like Pharaoh rather than Moses!

Romans 9:18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

What does it mean "whom He wills He hardens?"

We usually choose one of two positions regarding God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart:

1. God hardened Pharaoh's heart to reveal His glory and Pharaoh had no real, personal, free-will choice about it.
2. God confirmed what He foreknew Pharaoh would do. He simply stood back and watched Pharaoh harden his heart.

Those aren't the only alternatives. Alfred Edersheim has done an extensive study of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. He points out that the phrase is used of Pharaoh twenty times. Of the twenty passages, exactly ten are ascribed to Pharaoh himself and exactly ten are ascribed to God.

The Scripture, then, is careful, even balanced, to ascribe just as much responsibility to Pharaoh for the hardening of his heart as it does to God. **The hardening is simultaneous on the part of God and Pharaoh.**

We don't generally like simultaneous truths. They're not very neat. They don't fit neatly into our systems of theology.

But the Bible says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart **AND** that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Why can't we accept it as it is written? We want God to be sovereign to the exclusion of man's free will, or we exalt free will to the point where God's sovereignty seems to be in question.

We just saw that God's mercy is for "whomever." In verse eighteen "whom He wills He hardens" is presented as the flip-side of God having mercy on whomever. If you aren't a recipient of God's mercy, then you will be a recipient of hardening. You will harden your heart and God will simultaneously harden your heart.

It's either/or, one thing or the other. But whichever it is, it isn't predetermined. Mercy is definitely available to "whomever" until it's too late.

I don't see in these verses *any* revelation of God limiting His mercy. **Quite the opposite.** The confusion the Jews were having was because God's mercy was being extended beyond them to the Gentiles. The Gospel remains a "whosoever will" call to receive God's mercy.

There is no unrighteousness in God's dealings with Israel as a nation. He will keep His unconditional promises to Abraham's physical descendants.

In the mean time, His mercy is extended to all, and whosoever will believe is of the spiritual seed of Abraham.