

Romans (55) Election and Predestination (part 3)

Last Lord's Day we were examining the message of God's Word in Romans 9:14 through 29. We did not completely explain all of the details of these two paragraphs (vs. 14-18; vs. 19-29). Let us attempt to summarize what we have seen and then proceed onward.

In the passage before us we read of the sovereignty of God in the dispensing of His salvation. God saves the ones He had chosen from eternity according to His free will to be saved from their sins; He consigned all others to receive their just condemnation and punishment for their sins. In His dealings with both the elect and the reprobate, God has purposed to glorify Himself, that is, His purpose is to reveal who He is and what He is like to His creatures, all to the end that they would acknowledge Him and worship Him.

The apostle Paul anticipated objections from his readers, so he addressed their challenges rhetorically. In verse 14ff he spoke to those who would challenge his assertions on their perceptions of what the justice of God would say to these matters. Let us read again **Romans 9:14-29**.

¹⁴What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! ¹⁵For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth." ¹⁸So then He has mercy on whomever He wills, and He hardens whomever He wills.

¹⁹You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who can resist His will?" ²⁰But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" ²¹Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? ²²What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³in order to make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory-- ²⁴even us whom He has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵As indeed He says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" ²⁶And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" ²⁷And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, ²⁸for the Lord will carry out His sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." ²⁹And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah." (Rom. 9:14-29)

Paul declared that God is sovereign and free in the dispensing of His mercy to guilty sinners. He is also free and just to harden judicially people in their sin so that He might show forth His glory in His judgment upon them in their defeat and overthrow.

Last Lord's Day we addressed the matter of God hardening Pharaoh's heart as illustrative of the truth that God hardens the hearts of unbelievers that He has no intention to save from their sins but rather to condemn them in their sins. God has mercy on the ones He wills to have mercy and He hardens the ones whoever He wills to harden. We did not go into detail, however, as to the manner in which God judicially hardens the hearts of unbelievers. I think that it would be good to that at this time.

Now the Scriptures exhort people not to harden their hearts, that is, people are to resist becoming insensitive and indifferent to the commandments of God and the appeals of God. To harden one's heart is to sin against the light of the knowledge of God's Word, to refuse to obey God's Word that is clearly presented to us. For example, we read in Hebrews 3:

⁷Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

“Today, if you hear his voice,
⁸**do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,**
on the day of testing in the wilderness,
⁹where your fathers put Me to the test
and saw My works for forty years.
¹⁰Therefore I was provoked with that generation,
and said, **‘They always go astray in their heart;**
they have not known my ways.’
¹¹As I swore in my wrath,
‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

¹²**Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart,** leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” **that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.** ¹⁴For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. ¹⁵As it is said,

“Today, if you hear His voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” (Heb 3:1 ESV)

Here we see that to harden one’s heart toward God is “rebellion”; it is to “go astray” in one’s heart. A hardened heart is an “evil, unbelieving heart.” The hardening of one’s heart is the result of the “the deceitfulness of sin.” Therefore, for you or I to harden our hearts is sin, rebellion, and a manifestation of culpable unbelief. The temptation that we may have to harden our hearts toward God is temptation to sin.

But this then, is a “problem” in our understanding of God’s dealings. ***If it is sinful for us to harden our hearts how is it that God can harden our hearts, or even tempt us to harden our hearts in sin toward Him?*** How can God lead people to be tempted to sin against Him or for Him to cause people to sin through hardening them? For this is contrary to our understanding of the nature of God. The Scriptures declare,

¹³**Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one.** ¹⁴But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:13-15)

Since we know that this true about the nature of God, how is it that we can read that God hardens whomsoever He wills? Is this not contradictory to the teaching of our God in James 1 and elsewhere? **Jonathan Edwards** acknowledged this theological difficulty in his sermon on Romans 9:18, which was entitled, “God’s Sovereignty in the Salvation of Men.”¹

When God is here spoken of as hardening some of the children of men, it is not to be understood that God by any positive² efficiency hardens any man’s heart. There is no positive act in God, as though he put forth

¹ Edwards, Jonathan, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Banner of Truth, 1974), vol. 2, pp. 849-54.

² Edwards used the word “positively” to describe how God does not directly cause men to sin. This seems to me to reveal the great attention and carefulness by which Edwards expressed himself. We might be quick to say that God does not **actively** lead people to sin. But this would not be a precisely correct statement. For when the Scriptures say that God “hardens” whom He wills, “harden” is a verb with an *active voice*; i.e. God is actively hardening the hearts of the reprobate. But He is not “positively” doing so, that is, directly doing so, for God does not tempt or cause people to sin. In all of God’s sovereign actions in His control of a fallen world, God is not the chargeable author of sin. Consider the statement of our confession: “The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in his providence, that his determinate counsel extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sinful actions both of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, which also he most wisely and powerfully boundeth, and otherwise ordereth and governeth, in a manifold dispensation to his most holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness of their acts proceedeth only from the creatures, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.”

any power to harden the heart. To suppose any such thing would be to make God the immediate author of sin.³

The answer to this problem is found in an understanding the manner in which God judicially hardens the hearts of sinful and unrepentant people. It must be the case that God does not directly harden the heart, but rather through His sovereign control over all things, *God uses means other than His direct action that results in His will to harden the hearts of the ones He purposes to damn*. He does this in one of two ways. *First*, God hardens the hearts of the ones He intends to damn in their sins *by withholding the gracious working of the Holy Spirit* who alone can soften the hearts of sinners, enabling them to be receptive and responsive to God's Word. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit people cannot and will not "see and hear" the things of God. He alone can give understanding to a darkened mind and He alone can incline the heart and will to be favorably responsive to the Word of God. And so, God hardens sinners by withholding the only influence that can enable sinners to be responsive to His Word. And so, in this way, when God hardens the hearts of sinners, He is essentially leaving them to hardness.

The *second* manner in which God hardens sinners toward Him is by *ordering events in people's lives through His providence, that through their sinfulness, they grow more hardened toward God and His ways*. For example, the events that fall out in the lives of God's elect are used by God to bring them to repentance, leading them to humble themselves, acknowledge their sin, and turn to Him in faith and repentance. But those same kinds of events that occur in the lives of the reprobate result in their hardening their hearts toward God. In spite of what happened to Job, and that happened all in one day, we read of his reaction: "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly. (Job 1:22). But there are other occasions when we read of people who respond to God's dark provinces in an opposite manner. We read in Revelation 16:10f, "The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds."

One of the chief ways that God hardens the hearts of the reprobate is a combination of these two ways of God's dealings. In His providence He sends forth *His word of salvation* to people, *but by withholding the influences of the Holy Spirit from the hearer, His Word effectually hardens people in their sin*. God had told Isaiah at his initial commissioning as God's prophet that this was to be the nature of his prophetic ministry in bringing the Word of God to the professing people of God. We read in Isaiah 6 God's description of Isaiah's prophetic ministry of the Word.

Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying,

"Whom shall I send?
And who will go for Us?"

Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

⁹And He said, "Go, and tell this people:

'Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'
¹⁰"Make the heart of this people dull,
And their ears heavy,
And shut their eyes;
Lest they see with their eyes,
And hear with their ears,
And understand with their heart,
And return and be healed."

(Romans 11:32-34; 2 Samuel 24:1, 1 Chronicles 21:1; 2 Kings 19:28; Psalms 76:10; Genesis 1:20; Isaiah 10:6, 7, 12; Psalms 1:21; 1 John 2:16) [*The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, Art. 5, par. 4]

³ Ibid, p. 849.

¹¹Then I said, “Lord, how long?”
And He answered:

“Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant,
The houses are without a man,
The land is utterly desolate,
¹²The LORD has removed men far away,
And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.
¹³But yet a tenth will be in it,
And will return and be for consuming,
As a terebinth tree or as an oak,
Whose stump remains when it is cut down.
So the holy seed shall be its stump.” (Isa. 6:8-13)

Here we see that God’s purposes for Isaiah to proclaim His Word was to prepare the people to encounter God’s judgment. God saw to it that His Word would be proclaimed to the people, but without His work of mercy and grace, His Word would lead to their greater accountability and culpability before God.

The apostle Paul also spoke of the dual result of the ministry of the gospel. He wrote in 2 Corinthians 2 about the proclamation of the gospel and the contrasting results.

¹⁴But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and *through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.* ¹⁵*For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing,* ¹⁶*to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.* Who is sufficient for these things? ¹⁷For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ. (2 Cor. 2:12-17)

If the Word of God is proclaimed faithfully and God blesses that proclamation, two reactions will be commonly seen. Some will see the beauty and the truthfulness of the matter and will be drawn to God; others will be turned off and away by the same message. To them the promises of God’s Word are deadening. They want nothing to do with it.

And so, when we read of God causing people to be hardened in their sin, or when we read that God has caused them to sin more fully so that God would have an occasion to judge them, we must recognize that God does so through His sovereign action of using intermediary agents, in that He allows them to do evil by His withholding grace from them, not by directly causing them to sin, which God could never do because of His holy nature. And yet there are occasions when the Scriptures do not describe these intermediary actions that separate God from positively affecting people to sin. For in those instances we should assume that God is directly and judicially dealing with people, but He does so through intermediary means, so that God is never the chargeable author of sin.

Allow me to provide one more example. We read in the Old Testament that King David sinned greatly against God when he moved to number the children of Israel. Apparently David was doing so out of sinful pride and fleshly ambition. But we read of God in His sovereignty having moved David to commit this act of sin. **2 Samuel 24:1ff** read,

Again the anger of *the LORD* was aroused against Israel, and *He moved David against them to say, “Go, number Israel and Judah.”*

²So the king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him, “Now go throughout all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and count the people, that I may know the number of the people.”

³And Joab said to the king, “Now may the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times more than there are, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king desire this thing?” ⁴Nevertheless the king’s word prevailed against Joab and against the captains of the army.

Therefore Joab and the captains of the army went out from the presence of the king to count the people of Israel...

¹⁰And David's heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, ***"I have sinned greatly in what I have done;*** but now, I pray, O LORD, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly."

¹¹Now when David arose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, ¹²"Go and tell David, 'Thus says the LORD: "I offer you three things; choose one of them for yourself, that I may do it to you.'"" ¹³So Gad came to David and told him; and he said to him, "Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? Or shall you flee three months before your enemies, while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' plague in your land? Now consider and see what answer I should take back to Him who sent me." (2 Sam 24:1-4; 10-13)

Here is the problem. We know from Scripture that when we sin, we cannot say that God caused us to sin, for James 1:13 teaches us, ***"Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one."*** But is that not exactly what 2 Samuel 24 tells us that God did? The answer for us for this paradox is that here in 2 Samuel 24 God did not record all that He did to bring about this event in the life of David and Israel. We do have it recorded for us in the parallel account in 1 Chronicles

Now ***Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.*** ²So David said to Joab and to the leaders of the people, "Go, number Israel from Beersheba to Dan, and bring the number of them to me that I may know it." (1 Chron. 21:1-2)⁴

We see, therefore, that God had not positively moved David to sin, but rather God removed his restraining hand from Satan, allowing Satan to tempt David to sin. But let us recognize that God has not always recorded for us the intermediary agents that God uses in his judicial dealings with people. Therefore, there are occasions when it appears from the limited perspective of the immediate record that God is directly causing people to sin, but we know that this must not be the entire description of the process by which God accomplished his purposes. **Jonathan Edwards** made reference to several of these instances recorded in Scripture.

As God is said here to harden men, so He is said to put a lying spirit in the mouth of false prophets. 2 Chronicles 18:22. That is, He suffered (i.e. allowed) a lying spirit to enter them. And thus He is said to have bid Shimei to curse David. 2 Samuel 16:10. Not that He properly commanded him, for it is contrary to His commands. God expressly forbids cursing the ruler of the people. Exodus 22:28. But He suffered (i.e. allowed) corruption at that time so to work in Shimei, and ordered that occasion of stirring it up, as a manifestation of His displeasure against David.⁵

Returning to our Romans passage ***let us for a moment consider the mercy that God extends through His Word and the hardening effects that God also manifests through His Word.*** If we are privileged to hear the Word of God proclaimed in our midst, one of two results is taking place within us. (1) God is either extending His mercy to us in revealing His will to us so that we might grow in our knowledge and to become more like our Savior when we believe the Word and apply the Word to our lives. (2) But if the Word of God is not improving us, then we may be reaping the chastening effects of the Word upon those whom God has purposed to harden in their sins. If the Word of God is of little value to you, if the truth of God's Word has no impact upon your emotions or your actions, if you have little interest to read or learn of the teaching of God's Word, then you have good reason to be concerned for your soul. May the Lord enable each of us to have a right view and appreciation for the written Word of God. May He be merciful to us as He illuminates our minds to its truth, stir our hearts to its spiritual value, and move our wills to comply with its precepts. Our relationship and experience

⁴ 1 Chronicles was written perhaps 100 to 150 years after the 2 Samuel passage. Apparently the writer of 1 Chronicles also saw the "problem" of describing God as positively causing David to sin. He, therefore (moved by the Holy Spirit of course), attributed the direct cause to the devil rather than to God.

⁵ Edwards, *Works*, vol. 2, p. 849.

of the Holy Scriptures should be that of the two disciples who traveled with our Lord on the road to Emmaus the night of His resurrection. They spoke about Christ in the Scriptures, even when they did not know that it was the risen Lord Jesus who was walking and talking with them.

²⁵Then He (Jesus) said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” ²⁷And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

²⁸Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. ²⁹But they constrained Him, saying, “Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.” And He went in to stay with them.

³⁰Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.

³²And they said to one another, ***“Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”*** (Luke 24:25-27)

Let us pray and strive to be in God’s Word, seeking Jesus Christ to be illuminated to us through its pages, until our hearts burn within us of devotion and commitment to Him and His service.

We may return now to Romans 9:19, which reads, ***“You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who can resist His will?”*** Here Paul addressed the expected false charge from objectors to his teaching—the accusation that if God were sovereign in dispensing salvation to whom He willed, then He would be unjust to damn those He refused to save. **John Calvin** wrote of the foolish response of wicked men who would charge God with injustice when they hear of His sovereign dealings among mankind.

Here indeed the flesh especially storms, that is, when it hears that they who perish have been destined by the will of God to destruction. Hence the Apostle adopts again the words of an opponent; for he saw that the mouths of the ungodly could not be restrained from boldly clamoring against the righteousness of God: and he very fitly expresses their mind; for being not content with defending themselves, they make God guilty instead of themselves; and then, after having devolved on him the blame of their own condemnation, they become indignant against his great power. They are indeed constrained to yield; but they storm, because they cannot resist; and ascribing dominion to him, they in a manner charge him with tyranny. In the same manner the Sophists in their schools foolishly dispute on what they call his absolute justice, as though forgetful of his own righteousness, he would try the power of his authority by throwing all things into confusion. Thus then speak the ungodly in this passage, — “What cause has he to be angry with us? Since he has formed us such as we are, since he leads us at his will where he pleases, what else does he in destroying us but punish his own work in us? For it is not in our power to contend with him; how much soever we may resist, he will yet have the upper hand. Then unjust will be his judgment, if he condemns us; and unrestrainable is the power which he now employs towards us.” What does Paul say to these things? (John Calvin)

Paul’s response to such a charge is one of great objection that one would even dare to lay a charge of unrighteousness upon God because of His sovereign dealings among fallen and condemned sinners. **Verses 20 through 24 read:**

***²⁰But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” ²¹Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? ²²What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³in order to make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory-
- ²⁴even us whom He has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?***

Paul reasons that since God is our Creator, He is free to employ us, His creatures, in any manner that He chooses. He is not answerable to us. Nor can we justly accuse Him of mismanaging the world. Just as a potter has the authority to determine what kind of vessel he will make from the clay that is his and at his disposal, so God equally has the same right over humanity.

The main idea that Paul is putting across is this: If even a potter has the right out of the same lump or mass of clay to make one vessel for honor, and another for dishonor, then certainly God, our Maker, has the right, out of the same mass of human beings who by their own guilt have plunged themselves into the pit of misery, to elect some to everlasting life, and to allow others to remain in the abyss of wretchedness.⁶

When God first created Adam from the dust of the ground and formed him into human body into which He infused life, it was as God were a potter, fashioning from the dust His vessel for His use. So it is with all humanity that comes forth through Adam. God is free to use us as He deems necessary.

Here are the words of the English puritan commentator, **Matthew Henry**, on the justice of God in dealing with sinners:

Whatever God does, must be just. Wherein the holy, happy people of God differ from others, God's grace alone makes them differ. In this preventing, effectual, distinguishing grace, He acts as a benefactor, whose grace is His own. None have deserved it; so that those who are saved, must thank God only; and those who perish, must blame themselves only, Hos. 13:9. God is bound no further than He has been pleased to bind Himself by His own covenant and promise, which is His revealed will. And this is, that He will receive, and not cast out, those that come to Christ; but the drawing of souls in order to that coming, is an anticipating, distinguishing favour to whom He will. Why does He yet find fault? This is not an objection to be made by the creature against his Creator, by man against God. The truth, as it is in Jesus, abases man as nothing, as less than nothing, and advances God as sovereign Lord of all. Who art thou that art so foolish, so feeble, so unable to judge the Divine counsels? It becomes us to submit to Him, not to reply against Him. Would not men allow the infinite God the same sovereign right to manage the affairs of the creation, as the potter exercises in disposing of his clay, when of the same lump he makes one vessel to a more honorable, and one to a meaner use? God could do no wrong, however it might appear to men. God will make it appear that He hates sin. Also, He formed vessels filled with mercy. Sanctification is the preparation of the soul for glory. This is God's work. Sinners fit themselves for hell, but it is God who prepares saints for heaven; and all whom God designs for heaven hereafter, He fits for heaven now. Would we know who these vessels of mercy are? Those whom God has called; and these not of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles. Surely there can be no unrighteousness in any of these Divine dispensations. Nor in God's exercising long-suffering, patience, and forbearance towards sinners under increasing guilt, before He brings utter destruction upon them. The fault is in the hardened sinner himself. As to all who love and fear God, however such truths appear beyond their reason to fathom, yet they should keep silence before Him. It is the Lord alone who made us to differ; we should adore His pardoning mercy and new-creating grace, and give diligence to make our calling and election sure. (Matthew Henry on Romans 9:14-24)

In verses 23 and 24 the apostle wrote of God's elect as "vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory." He then described those vessels of mercy as ones that He called, but then he includes these words, "***not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?***" Here Paul begins to relate God's decree to make vessels of mercy out of more than just those from the Jewish people. He begins to cite the Scriptures to show that it was indeed God's plan and purpose. The first quotation is from **Hosea 2:23**, which is found in **Romans 9:25**, which reads, "***As indeed He says in Hosea, 'Those who were not My people I will call "my people," and her who was not beloved I will call "beloved."***" It is clear from Paul's usage of this verse in this context, "Those who were not My people" is a reference to Gentiles who became believers in Jesus Christ. Paul declares, therefore, that God has designated believing Gentiles as "My people", in other words, God's covenantal people. And then in parallel with that phrase He designates Gentile believers as being His bride, or wife, which was a common metaphor in the Old Testament of Israel's relationship with her God.

⁶ William Hendriksen, *Romans*. New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1980, 1981), p. 327.

By the way, take note of the first clause of verse 25, which reads, *“As indeed He says in Hosea.”* Here we see the very high view of Scripture as God’s Word set before us. Paul did not simply write, “Just as we read in Hosea”, or even, “Just as God had once spoken through Hosea”, but rather, “As indeed He says in Hosea”; in other words, Paul regarded as God speaking presently through the words that were penned by Hosea over 750 years before. God was speaking to the ones that Paul was writing to in the first century. In the same manner God is speaking to us today. He does so through His abiding, authoritative Word, the Bible.

We read in verse 26 that Paul quotes **Hosea 1:10**, *“And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”* Again, Paul applies these ones Hosea identified Gentiles believers in Jesus Christ as the ones who had formerly not been God’s people, but had become known as “the children of God.” This description of the people as being called “the children of God” is quite unique to the Old Testament Scriptures. God had regarded Israel the nation as a whole to be as His son. Also God had regarded the kings of Israel who were King David’s heirs to have been His (adopted) sons. But to speak of individuals who are in covenant relationship with God as a Father to His children, although a common image of the New Testament, may be (nearly) unique to the Old Testament here in Hosea 1:10.⁷

Now let us turn to Hosea to consider the message of this prophet to ancient Israel. Hosea was one of the earliest of the writing prophets, having prophesied before the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel and the destruction of its capital city, Samaria, which occurred in 722 BC. God had called Hosea to proclaim His impending judgment upon the Northern kingdom. The initial message of God through Hosea came through the birth of his three children. Hosea had been married to an unfaithful woman, even a harlot, just as God had been “married” to unfaithful Israel, who had gone whoring after other gods. Hosea and his wife, Gomer, had three children. God named his children, with each child’s name conveying a message of God to His people regarding their impending judgment.

The word of the LORD that came to Hosea the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

²When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea:

“Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry
And children of harlotry,
For the land has committed great harlotry
By departing from the LORD.”

³So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. ⁴Then the LORD said to him:

“Call his name Jezreel,
For in a little while
I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu,
And bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.

⁵It shall come to pass in that day
That I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.”

⁶And she conceived again and bore a daughter. Then God said to him:

“Call her name Lo-Ruhamah,

⁷ The exception to this is a debated interpretation of the Genesis 6 passage in which it records the “sons of God” intermingling with “the daughters of men.” I believe that “the sons of God” are not angelic beings as some have proposed, but are the godly seed of Seth, the people of God. They had become corrupted through intermarrying with the ungodly people of the lineage of Cain, thereby forsaking their former lives of faith and fellowship with God. The result was a corrupt world that would need washed clean by the world-wide flood in Noah’s day.

For I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel,
But I will utterly take them away.
⁷Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah,
Will save them by the LORD their God,
And will not save them by bow,
Nor by sword or battle,
By horses or horsemen.”

⁸Now when she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. ⁹Then God said:

“Call his name Lo-Ammi,
For you are not My people,
And I will not be your God.

¹⁰“Yet the number of the children of Israel
Shall be as the sand of the sea,
Which cannot be measured or numbered.
***And it shall come to pass
In the place where it was said to them,
'You are not My people,'
There it shall be said to them,
'You are sons of the living God.'***

¹¹Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel
Shall be gathered together,
And appoint for themselves one head;
And they shall come up out of the land,
For great will be the day of Jezreel! (Hos. 1:1-11)

As we read Hosea 1 we read of God’s judgment upon the northern Kingdom of Israel in which God rejects them as no longer to be regarded as numbered among the people of God. The naming of Hosea’s children conveys this message. Nevertheless, God had promised that He would be merciful to a remnant of Judah (v. 7), which He would save by His grace. And even though this would be but a remnant, its destiny will be is glorious. For God purposed that “the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured and numbered” (v.10). What is the cause of this great increase to the remnant of Judah? It was the inclusion of those who were formerly alienated from God whom God declares to have become the children of God.

Now this passage of Hosea 1 and its use by Paul in Romans 9 serves as a good illustration of a great difference of opinion that has existed in evangelicalism regarding the interpretation of Scripture for well over 100 years. This difference in the method of interpretation, that is, in the principle of hermeneutics, lies in how to interpret the Old Testament Scriptures. Those who are dispensational in their theology (particularly classical dispensationalists) argue that the Old Testament is to be interpreted “literally”, as it reads plainly and would have been understood by its original readers. They would argue that we should read and interpret the Old Testament believing that “God meant what He said.” They would argue that the New Testament must be read and understood in a manner that does not conflict with or counter what the Old Testament writers had recorded. In contrast to that position, however, historic protestants, in other words those who are reformed or covenantal in their theology, would agree that of the Old Testament books we should believe that “God meant what He said,” but when they come to the New Testament, they do not believe that the New Testament should be interpreted in the light of the Old Testament, but rather, the Old Testament should be read and interpreted in light of the inspired apostolic writers of the New Testament. In other words, we would argue, “Yes, in the Old Testament God meant what He said, but in the New Testament God has said what he meant.” In other words, the Old Testament should be read and understood according to the fuller revelation of Jesus Christ and what God has done in history.

Now this passage of Hosea 1 serves to illustrate this matter. If you read Hosea 1 in context, you might never recognize that God through His inspired prophet was recording a prophecy of Gentiles coming to faith in Jesus Christ in this church age. But with the apostle Paul's inspired interpretation of Hosea 1 (and 2, as we shall see), we see clearly that God had foretold of the gospel going forth and being embraced by the Gentile world.

This difference in interpretation may be seen when comparing the comments regarding these verses in Hosea 1 and its parallel in Romans 9. For example, Charles Ryrie, a classical dispensationalist, records in the **Ryrie Study Bible** these comments on Hosea 1:10 and 11:

Having predicted judgment, Hosea assured the people of their ultimate restoration, numerically and spiritually. Jezreel, a place of judgment in verse 4, is viewed in verse 11 as a place where God will bless Israel during the kingdom age.⁸

What he is saying is that the prophecy is strictly for Israel, that is, ethnic Jews only, and that this prophecy will be fulfilled in a future 1,000 year Jewish millennium. Interestingly, although he included a cross reference in the margin, not his footnote, to the quotation of verse 10 in Romans 9:28, he makes no mention of Paul's use of the verse. Furthermore, when one examines Ryrie's notes in Romans 9:28 which is a quotation from Hosea 1:10, he includes no comment in his footnotes, although he does list Hosea 1:10 as a cross reference in the margin, but with no comment. In other words, for Ryrie the meaning of Hosea 1 is not to be determined by the inspired interpretation of that passage by the apostle Paul, but by a literalistic reading that disregards the Bible's own comments on the passage.

Now in contrast to Ryrie's treatment of the passage, the footnote of **The Reformation Study Bible** rightly, in our opinion, brings in the teaching of the apostle Paul on this passage. Its note on Hosea 10 reads this way:

You are My people. The promise of restoration to these people was fulfilled at least in part when remnants of the north were joined with the south during the reign of Hezekiah (2 Chr. 30:11, 18) and after the Exile (1 Chr. 9:3; Ezra 8:35). The New Testament applies this promise to the church, the true Israel, comprised both of Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 9:24-26; 1 Pet. 2:9, 10). For the apostles, the remnant of ethnic Israel was evidently a model for the remnant of the nations: what applied to the former applied to the latter.

Sons of the living God. This unique expression suggests the kind of intimate relationship God desires with Israel, in which God gives life (as opposed to the lifeless relationship Israel had with Baal). In Isaiah 40:18-20; 44:9-20; 46:5-11, dead idols are contrasted with the living God. The living relationship is now provided in Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:16; Rom. 9:26).⁹

As we work through these next three chapters of Romans, 9 through 11, we will see many examples of differences of interpretation, because of two different models of interpretation. May our Lord grant us grace to understand rightly these matters as we proceed in this study of God's Word.

⁸ Charles Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Version* (Moody Press, 1986, 1994), p. 1328.

⁹ R. C. Sproul, gen. ed., *The Reformation Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 1360.