

Double Predestination (Who to Blame?)

Romans 9:1-20

Romans (no. 24 in the series)

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Video and audio versions available online:

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/double-predestination-who-to-blame/>

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This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!

Prayer

Lord God, we confess that we have been prejudiced against you; we've pre-judged you. Lord God, I pray that you would open our hearts to your judgment—that we would hear you, that we would see you, that we would know you because you have known us. Father, I pray that you would help us to preach. And Lord, this is our 24th sermon in Romans and so, I pray for those who maybe pop in, who haven't heard the other parts. I pray that your Spirit would connect all the dots in all of our hearts and that we would see that Jesus is the meaning, he's the plot, and he is good. It's in his name that we pray, Amen.

Last week we ended our message at Romans 9:18.

Romans 9:18:

So then [God] has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

This obviously means that God's will is stronger than our will and clearly implies that only one will is a truly free will and that's God's Will.

Romans 18-19:

So then [God] has mercy on whomever he wills [*thelo*], and he hardens whomever he wills [*thelo* (v.), *thelema* (n.): will, wish].ⁱ

¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will [*boulema* (n.): will, plan]?"

"Who can resist his will?" is such a mind-numbing question because God wills reality into existence with his Word. Right? He says, "Let there be" and "there is" and it's "Good and 'it is finished.'" And yet it seems that we can say "let there not be good, and truth, and love"—it seems that we can sin—and that's not good; that's evil. And so, it all implies that when we sin, we're trapped in an illusion, that seems real, but ultimately, is not real, at least not in the way the Good is real.

When you have a dream that turns into a nightmare, you're trapped in an illusion that seems real but ultimately is not real. Your consciousness (the "I" that observes your "me") is conscious of an illusion, that you don't know is an illusion, until you awaken. I once had a horrid dream that I was a Nazi Guard gunning down inmates in a prison but in my dream, I remember thinking, "This isn't me. I'm a Christian. Jesus doesn't do this." And I woke up. When I awoke, I was still "I" but with the memory of an "evil me" that didn't actually exist except as knowledge of what I am not, which made me grateful for who I am. Well, there certainly is such a thing as sin and evil, at least in this world; I just wonder if we'll think of it very differently in the waking world?

Romans 19-21a:

You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will [beulema]?"²⁰ But who are you, O man, to answer back to [or "argue with"] God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?"²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay... ?

Who are you, O man to argue with God? Sin is violating God's will. And even if it's only a bad dream, he must will that we would have that bad dream. And I would think "arguing with God" is a form of resisting God's will. And so, he must will, that we would dream our self-centered dreams and even resist his Word when it entered our dreams to wake us. When you're wakened from a nightmare by a Word of Love, you can resist that Word and, perhaps, even crucify that word. You know, there is a Word that descends into every nightmare. And in the waking world, there are still scars on his hands and feet. So, even if the dream is an illusion, his Love is real.

In Romans 13:11 Paul will write: "The hour has come for you to wake from sleep... The night is far gone the day is at hand." So anyway, the question "who can resist his will?" will blow your mind. But now let's ask Paul's first question (one we've probably asked quite a lot): "God if you're in control of everything, why do you blame me for anything? Why do you find fault?" I think most people find a way to say, "Well he's not actually in control of everything, because we're ultimately in control of ourselves." But I think Paul just argued, "Well God is at least in control of everything good, and must therefore, at least, allow for everything evil."

- God is Light and allows for dark.
- God is I am and at least allows for the illusion of I am not.
- God is Good and makes space for the not good, which is evil.

So why does God find fault? "Find Fault" is one word in Greek—it's the Greek verb "*Memphomai*." It's translated as "find fault" or "blame." And I guess this is what really fascinates me about Jesus and God the Father. They definitely find fault, but I don't know that I can think of any place in Scripture, or in my experience, where they blame as we blame— As if someone should've, could've, and would've done something differently if they'd only tried a little harder, willed a little more intently, and exerted a little more effort.

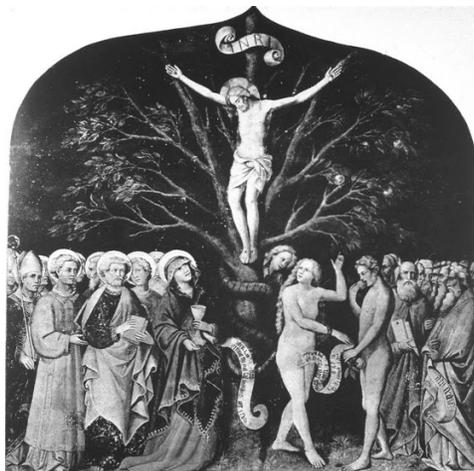
Remember when the Pharisees threw the woman caught in adultery at the feet of Jesus in John 8? He didn't say, "Hey Samantha, I'm really disappointed in you; I expected more from you and frankly, I also expected more from those that brought you to me. Next time, let's all try just a little harder." Instead, he said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." And by doing so he found the fault in everyone. Then, he said to the woman, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

In John 9, it's even weirder. Jesus and his disciples see a man born blind and the disciples say, "Who sinned this man or his parents?" And Jesus said, "It's not that he sinned or that his parents sinned but that the works of God might be revealed in him. He was born blind, so that, having been blind, he could see, and we all could see, the works of God in him. Jesus says, "For Judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." Some Pharisees overhear this and say, "Are we blind also?" And Jesus says, "If you were blind, you would have no sin, but now that you say, 'we see,' your sin remains." I think he's saying, "You say that you see, but are blind to your own blindness; sin is choosing not to see; sin is choosing the absence of the Light; sin is a lack of faith in the Light; sin is blindness of the heart." And yet, Jesus doesn't seem to blame them as if they could have chosen any differently.

In John 12, just after Jesus says, "[Trust] in the light, that you may become sons of light," John writes "Therefore they could not believe, for again Isaiah said, 'he has blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.'" These are God's words to Isaiah in Isaiah chapter six, when God tells Isaiah to preach Israel down to a stump, and the stump is the Holy Seed. You know if the Pharisees hadn't been blind, they wouldn't have crucified the Light. And we wouldn't have seen (and they wouldn't have seen) the light shining in the darkness—the Light is eternal, and darkness is a bad dream. Do you see, their blindness prepared all of us to see the Light. But my point, right now, is that we don't normally yell at blind people. I mean blindness is a fault; it's something not right but wrong, but we don't yell at blind people as if it was their own fault, as if they chose it. And this all means that a lot of what passes for evangelism is just yelling at blind people, and deaf people, and dead people. It's yelling at sinners, for we don't have compassion on sinners, and are often jealous of sinners, which means we're pretty blind to our own blindness. Well Isaiah and Jesus preached the Pharisees into a deeper blindness, that they would one day see their own blindness, in the brilliance of the Light. Jesus had compassion for sinners, in particular, Pharisees.

See Jesus definitely finds fault, but he doesn't blame as if we should've, could've, and would've known better. As they took his life on the tree in the garden, he lifted his head and said, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." I used to think he messed up his lines; I thought, "Come on Jesus, they have knowledge of Good and evil." And they did know about Good and evil; they knew the law. But they did not know the Good, for they just nailed him to a tree. Jesus didn't mess up his lines—he found fault, but he didn't blame anyone, or anything, as if everything was not proceeding precisely according to plan.

See? God definitely finds fault, but he doesn't blame as if it were our fault, as if he had expected us to do differently. You know, whenever I feel ashamed and want to hide, I must be listening to a voice that whispers, "God expected more from you; He must be terribly disappointed in you; he didn't see that one coming; you need to hide." Remember when he found Adam and Eve hiding in the trees in the Garden? He didn't say what we would expect him to say. He didn't say, "Oh wow, I'm so disappointed in the two of you. I expected so much more from you and you've really let me down. You should've accessed your knowledge of good and evil and tried a little harder; willed a little more and exerted a little more effort to make yourself in my image so that when I found you, I'd be impressed. You should've known better." He didn't say that, because that is exactly the point; Adam didn't have the knowledge of Good and evil, and making himself in the image of God is NOT God's expectation, but Satan's temptation. God is the Good, and evil is not trusting his Word, but how can Adam trust his Word when he doesn't know the Word, or that the Word is Good?



"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

You see: Adam was born blind to his own blindness. God made Adam and Adam couldn't find his Helper, his *Ezer*, who was right there with him. He was blind to Love. And God said, "It's not good that the Adam (humanity) is alone." Everything is Good on the seventh day, so this is still the sixth day. So, on that day, God put humanity into a deep sleep—a *tardemah*. Then, God separated Adam into Adam and Eve. He caused a disunion that there might be a freely chosen communion. But Eve is not Adam's helper, and Adam is not Eve's helper. Scripture makes it clear that only God is Humanity's *ezer*. God alone is our helper, our husband, our Lord. So, God made Adam and Eve, and God had planted a tree in the middle of the Garden, a tree that could kill and make alive. And he left them, apparently alone, with an evil talking snake. Why?

Well because Adam (humanity) was blind to our own blindness. There was a fault in Adam, even before the fall, and Adam couldn't see the fault. Adam was in the presence of God; Love himself was standing next to Adam and Adam couldn't find his helper. In Him he lived and moved and had his being and Adam was unaware, can you imagine? He couldn't know God, for he couldn't see who I Am is. He is not the evil, He is the Good and the Good is Life that's freely given. You can't freely choose the Good if you can't see him.

When God found Adam and Eve hiding in the trees, after they took knowledge from the tree, he found fault, although they tried to hide the fault; they knew about the good, but they still didn't know the Good. He found fault, but he didn't blame them as if they could've done differently—yet he did send them into deeper darkness until that day that they were ready to surrender to the Light, who is the Good, and the Life, and our Helper. We don't know the Good, until the Good knows us; we come back to the tree, watch him deliver up his spirit and cry "it is finished."

My point is that God finds our faults, but he doesn't blame as we blame. So why does he find fault? A fault is something that's broken or inadequate. We pay doctors to find faults—it's actually good news when they say, "I've discovered why you're not sleeping." It could be what we would call my fault, like drinking too much caffeine, or not my fault, like some sort of hormone in balance—a fault in my body. But I didn't create my body and I actually didn't create my own desire for caffeine I'm just saying: Doctors find faults, not to blame, but to heal.

Teachers find faults: they help a student know what they don't know, so they would know something that they didn't know. But it's a pretty poor teacher that would blame a student for being five years old. I'm just saying: Teachers find faults, not to blame but to teach.

Makers find faults. Anyone who makes anything, in the process of making that thing, looks for faults—that is places that still needs to be made. A carpenter, potter, or artist finds fault, not to blame but to finish his own creation, his masterpiece. Well, imagine if that masterpiece were self-conscious, what would it think?

My point is that God finds faults, but he doesn't blame as we blame. And yet we do blame but aren't very good at finding faults—that is, who it is that is actually to blame for the faults we find. We talked about this last week: We all love to draw the line between Good and evil, and I suspect we do that so we can find just who it is that is to blame.



I was going to show you this picture last week, but we ran out of time. Where do you draw the line between Good and evil in this picture? There is fault, but who's to blame? Who's fault is it?

This is a picture of the first convicted war criminal in Ukraine. You know I've been so angry at the evil perpetrated in the Ukraine at the hands of Russian soldiers but when I saw this picture of Vadim Shishimarin, it took my breath away. There's no doubt that great evil was committed at his hands, as he pulled the trigger and shot an unarmed Ukrainian on a bicycle. But you know, we're all desperate for a Scapegoat and Vadim Shishimarin is the best that we can get our hands on, right now. And yet, I look at Vadim and I see my son Coleman in Highschool, when he got busted for smoking pot—I mean they almost look exactly the same.



Coleman isn't perfect, not yet, but he is like my masterpiece, my artwork, my student, my patient—I'd literally die to make him well. I look at Coleman and I see me. So, where is the line between Good and evil, and who's to blame?



Is it Vadim's free-will that is to blame? You know physicists, psychiatrists and theologians all argue as to whether or not there even is such a thing. And even if there is such a thing, what could it possibly be? The Bible doesn't even use the term; it speaks of God's will, our will, and freedom, but doesn't even mention "free will" as such.ⁱⁱ

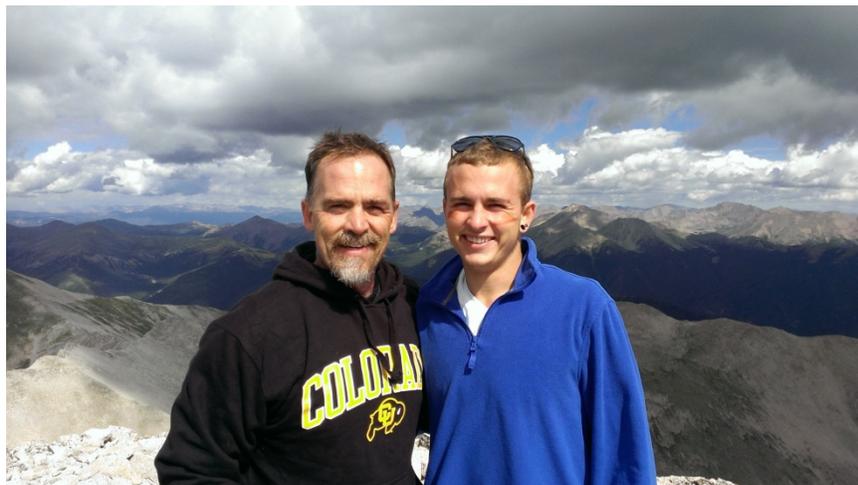
St Paul writes about freedom, and yet he just told us in chapter 6, that every one of us is a slave, either of sin, or of righteousness; either of the devil or of Jesus—and Jesus sets us free, as he is free: Jesus—the slave of all. But this is the point: a slave can't just freely will to will himself free, particularly free of himself. So, who's to blame? Vadim's free-will?

- Or maybe the free-will of Vadim's commander that told him to pull the trigger?
- Or Vadim's parents who didn't stop him from joining the Russian Army?
- Or Vladimir Putin who chose this war? Or maybe Vladimir Putin's parents?
- Or maybe the Nazi's, Joseph Stalin, or that Jew: Karl Marx?

But then, was it Karl Marx's nature or nurture? Because Karl Marx didn't make himself and Karl Marx didn't pick the family he was born into. And if Karl Marx had free-will, and free-will is not nothing, but something, then he didn't make that free-will, for God is the maker of all things and must allow for the "no things," like evil. You see all our blaming leads back to God and back to Paul's question, which is a prophetic word from Isaiah—Isaiah 29:16 and 45:9

"Israel, you turn things upside down. Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker 'he did not make me?' ... Woe, sorrow, to him who strives with his maker. Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or 'your work has no handles'?"

As Paul quotes it, "Why have you made me like this?" "Why did you make Vadim like this, Vladimir Putin like this, humanity like this and reality like this? Lord, I'm aware of some faults and it looks like you're to blame" we say. Romans 9:20: "But who are you, O man, [O Adam], to answer back [to argue, to dispute, to reason] with God?" That's an utterly fascinating question, especially in light of the fact that Paul had basically memorized Isaiah, and in Isaiah Chapter One, God says to Israel, "Come now, let us reason together, (also translated "dispute," or "argue") though your sins (that's our brokenness, our incompleteness, our faults) though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be white as snow."ⁱⁱⁱ



When Susan and I decided to have a fourth child and name him Coleman, we kind of expected him to argue with us, and hopefully even reason with us, and we would have been infinitely disappointed if he hadn't. For if he hadn't, he wouldn't have been human; we wouldn't have been able to shape him in our image, and Coleman would never be free. "So come now, Israel," says God, "let's have an argument about your faults and your neighbor's faults... and see if we can find fault and place some blame." You know the name Israel means "Wrestles with God." And Paul has just mentioned, Israel, Abraham, Isaac, and Moses.

In Genesis 18, as we spoke on last week, by a tree, Yahweh appears to Abraham as a man, who is also a walking talking promise. He informs Abraham and Sarah, that he will return, and Sarah will have a son. But then, God considers hiding from Abraham what he's about to do—for in Abraham and his seed, all the nations of the world will be blessed. And you see, that would include Sodom? Well after the Good News of the Promised Seed, God informs Abraham, that he's going to Sodom to judge Sodom. And then, Abraham begins to argue with God.^{iv} It's the very first argument with God recorded in all of Scripture.

Abraham says "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty, will you then sweep away the place and not spare it? Far be it from you to do such a thing." In other words, "God you're not acting like yourself. Whenever we argue that God is not good, we're arguing that God is not acting like himself for God is the Good and the very definition of the Good with which we're judging God as not good. Well God says, "for fifty, I'll spare it." So, Abraham says, "I'm dust and ashes" (which by the way is what Sodom is reduced to, for a time.) "I'm dust and ashes... but What about for forty-five?" God says, "for forty-five I'll spare it." Abraham then argues for thirty, then twenty, then ten... and God agrees that for ten, he'll spare Sodom. Abraham stops at ten, apparently for the reason that in the Hebrew mind, ten is the smallest number of persons that is still a people, a community.^v In the Hebrew mind, you can't destroy a person, without destroying everyone in that person's group, for each of us are the people that we love. Well, God doesn't find ten and reduces Sodom to dust and ashes. But through Ezekiel, about a thousand years later, he promises to make Sodom new, just as he makes Jerusalem new, who will also been reduced to dust and ashes. But in Genesis 18, he doesn't appear to have informed Abraham of that fact. It appears that he wants Abraham to argue, and I suspect it wasn't just Abraham that was arguing; it was the Promised Seed in Abraham.

In Exodus 32, Moses has a very similar argument with God. He's on the mountain with God, and God has just informed him that Israel has made an idol—a golden calf--when God says to Moses, "Let me alone, that my wrath can burn hot against them, and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you?" Basically, "You and yours can go to heaven, and I'll send all of them to hell." And Moses argues, saying but what about your promise to Abraham Isaac and Jacob? What about the glory of your name? Then God—almighty and all-knowing—relents; He agrees with Moses and relents. And God is eternal. Go figure.

I recently read a statement from a very well-known pastor defending the idea of predestination to a hell of endless torment. He writes, "I have three sons. Each evening, after they have fallen asleep, I lay my hands on them and pray for them, but I realize that possibly God has not chosen my sons to be his sons. And although I think I would be willing to give my life for their salvation, I would not rebel against the Almighty if they would be lost."^{vi} Well, I think God

would say to Pastor Piper and to the institutional church, “How about a little more arguing? Do you really think that your compassion is greater than my compassion? Just who the hell do you think I Am?”

Abraham argues. Moses Argues. Then, Moses goes down the Mountain, grows furious, and kicks some Israelite butt. Then goes back up the mountain and says, “Yahweh, they have sinned but now if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written. (I’d rather be damned with them, than saved without them).” And God says a peculiar thing: “Whoever sins against me, I will blot out of my book.”^{vii} That means that each of us, have been blotted out of God’s book. And yet someone must’ve written us back in, and all of Israel back in, and even Sodom back in. As if we each must experience rejection in time, to know election for all eternity.^{viii}

It’s just after this, that Moses asks to See the Glory of God, and God says, no man can see my face and live, but you can see my backside, while I hide you in the cleft of the rock and my goodness passes by and I declare my name, “Yahweh. And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.”^{ix} Moses argued. But it wasn’t just Moses that was arguing with God; it was the Promised Seed in Moses that was arguing, that was reasoning, and is, actually, the Reason of God—and the Glory of God—the free will of God. Fifteen hundred years later, he (the promised seed) would hang on a tree in a garden, as all the sinners in the world took his life and he gave his life and he lifted his head and cried, “Father forgive them, they know not what they do.” He reasoned with God and he is the reason of God; he is the Judgement of God, the free-will of God; he is the true Israel of God; he is the wrestler at the edge of the Promised land, the Promised Seed in whom all the nations of the world will be blessed and through whom all will enter. To see him, as he is, is to die with him and rise with him; he is the face of God. He not only argues for salvation like Abraham did; he not only volunteers to be damned with his kinsman like Moses did. He descends into hell, and every dark place in which the children of Adam hide from the Glory of God; he is the Salvation, that is God.

It was twenty years later, that Paul wrote to the Romans saying, “I was praying that I myself would be an anathema from Christ for the sake of my brothers... the Israelites.” Do you understand? That wasn’t just Paul that was reasoning with God; that was the Promised Seed in Paul—Paul who is now the very Body of Christ and perfect image of God Paul, who was asking this question: “What will become of Israel? Why do you still find fault, for who can resist your will? So, who are we to say to our maker, ‘Why have you made me and my kinsman like this?’ Who are we?”

Romans 9:1-6:

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish [literally: “I was wishing or praying”] that I myself were ~~accursed and cut off~~ [*anathema*] from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. ⁴ They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption [*uiiothesia*: “sonship”], the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

⁶ But it is not as though the word [Logos] of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel... [More literally translated: “Not all of Israel is Israel.”]

And like we preached last week: Not all of Abraham is Abraham; Not all of Isaac is Isaac, not all of Jacob is Jacob, and not all of you is you. There is an old you that is giving birth to the new and eternal you.

Romans 9:7-8:

And not all are children of Abraham, because they are his offspring [sperma], but “Through Isaac shall your offspring [sperma] be named.” ⁸ This means that it is not the children [tekna] of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring [sperma].

Jesus said to an old Pharisee in John 3:6, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” Whose spirit is he talking about? Well, his Spirit, the Spirit of the promised Seed. John 3:7, he continues “Do not marvel that I said to you, y’all must be born again.” “You must.” That’s the judgment of God.

Romans 9:8-13:

This means that it is not the children [tekna] of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring [sperma: “seed”]. ⁹ For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man [koiten: coitus] our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— ¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written [in Joel a thousand years later], “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

And we say, “Wait a minute! Where’s the fault and who’s the blame?” 10 years ago, I preached a whole sermon on just this verse titled, Does God love everyone, even Esau? I was going to re-work it and reproach it, but I like it as it is, and you can access it on our website online:^x

[Dec 4, 2011 Sermon, Does God Love Everyone, Even Esau?](#)

I preached it because Calvinists who seem to like the idea of endless torment love this verse but just aren’t paying attention. It says “hated,” as if this happened in time; but not “hates,” as if this is forever.

- And they forget that there is no “forever without end,” for Jesus is the End, and the wrath of God comes to an end.
- And they forget that God is Love, and so, Love has done this hating.
- And they don’t notice that when Love hates, Love burns until there is nothing left to hate, and all is filled with Love.

- And they forget that Love hates all evildoers—all the proud, according to Scripture.^{xi} Love hates the darkness in which Adam hides. So, God not only hated Esau, and Edom his descendants, but all of Adam, that is spelled just like Edom...
- And they forget that God began to hate Israel, the moment they crossed the Jordan... according to Hosea.^{xii}
- And they don't notice that Esau the firstborn, looks a lot like Jesus the firstborn, and Jacob who cheats him out of the blessing and the birthright looks an awful lot like us... who cheated Jesus out of the blessing and the birthright as he cried "My God My God why have you forsaken me."
- And they forget that it was all according to plan, for in this way all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26) and all sinners are justified (Romans 3:23).

They forget the Promised Blessing, that through the Seed of Abraham passed down through Israel (and Judah), God blesses all the nations of the world including Edom, Sodom, Egypt, Judah, Russia, Ukraine, Esau and you. But mostly, they entirely miss the point of election, that God elects, and we don't elect—for God has free will.

So, who does God elect and on whom does God have Mercy? Well, that's the huge point to which Paul is building. Don't stop reading at chapter nine, particularly at verse 13.

Romans 9:13-17:

As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."^{xiii} ¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice [*adikia*: unrighteousness] on God's part? By no means! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷ For 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."^{xiv}

Scripture says that God "hardened Pharaoh's heart."^{xv} How do you suppose he hardened his heart? Well maybe God delivered him up to his own desires, just as Paul says that God delivers all of us up in Romans chapter 1. Maybe God delivered him up to his own dream. You know all the Pharaohs dreamed that they were God or the mediator between God and man.^{xvi} And so maybe he dreamed that he was his own creator, and that dream turned into a nightmare as he tried to justify himself and so create himself. We all dream that we are our own creator, which means we have no creator, which means that we are utterly alone, which is an absolute nightmare. It's utter blindness and the knowledge of evil.

Romans 9:18:

So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

So, who does he freely will to harden and upon whom does he freely will to have mercy? Romans 11:32, "God has consigned all to disobedience (that's hardening), that he may have mercy on all." That is the Free Will of God Almighty. And so, who's to blame if not Pharaoh, Esau, Israel, Ishmael, Sodom, Vladimir Putin, Vadim Shishimarin, or myself?

Romans 9:18-21a:

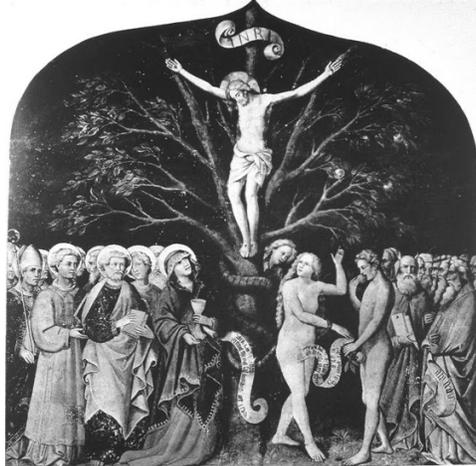
So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. ¹⁹ You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” ²⁰ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” ²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay...?

You know, if what we just read is true (“all consigned to disobedience” and “mercy on all”), you should be able to find fault just about everywhere and in everyone—Egypt, Sodom, Israel, Edom, Ukraine, Russia, your neighbor and yourself—and yet, the faults really won’t be their faults, and what you thought was “free will” may only be a bad dream. There is only One Will that is an entirely free will.

And who are you to answer back to God? Well, maybe you’re his kid and maybe he expects you to ask questions. Maybe it’s how he makes you in his own image. So anyway, jump on the blame train, if you feel that you must. But this is what you’ll find: no matter where you start, it will always arrive at the same location.



Blame Vadim Shishimarin and you’ll find yourself blaming his commander, then his parents, then Vladimir Putin, then Joseph Stalin, and then Karl Marx, then the Jews or the Christians that blamed the Jews. But whoever you blame, keep on blaming—and you’ll find fault, and it will be fault in them, but not their fault, for they’re ultimately not to blame. You won’t find the one to blame, until you arrive at a tree in the middle of a garden.



"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

And you can blame the one hanging on the tree, for he is the Free-will of God, He is the Beginning and the End and the Way between: The Plot and the Author. He subjected creation to futility; He planted the tree in the garden; He made Adam, and he consigned all Adam to disobedience; He put him to sleep and let that snake speak those lies. If you're going to blame anyone, blame him.



Gibson, Mel (Director). (2004). The Passion of the Christ [Motion picture]. USA: Icon Productions.

And yet, there is a problem, isn't there? He has no faults. He isn't evil. He is the Good. He is the Word of God Almighty. And that means that everything that's anything, even the "no thing," is going precisely according to plan. If I ever saw him (the Face of God) as he truly is, and so believed what I saw, I suspect that I'd die to one reality, and find myself living in another even before my body turned to dust. I imagine that I'd suffer pain in this world, be rejected in this world, perhaps even crucified in this world and that wouldn't be fun. But I'd be impossible to offend, for you couldn't sin against me. Whatever you intended for evil, I would say "well God intended it for Good."

- I'd forgive you your sins before you could even commit them.
- I'd find faults—so to speak—but they would immediately turn into hope.

- I'd feel sorrow, but never be anxious or afraid.

And if you said to me, "What's wrong with you? Are you sleeping?" I'd say "No, I do believe that I'm just waking up." And if you said, "You're blind," I'd say, "Well actually for the very first time I think I'm beginning to see the light."

A group of visitors at a summer resort, had watched the sunset from the gallery of the hotel. A fat, unromantic-looking man, had lingered until the last glow faded, and had seemed thrilled through and through by the beauty of it all. One guest, more observant than the rest, wondered about this; and so, at supper she said to this man, who sat next to her, "You certainly did enjoy that sunset. Are you an artist?" "No, madam, I'm a plumber," he responded with a slow grin. "But I was blind for five years."^{xvii}

I think Paul is saying that we were all predestined for a temporal bout with blindness, that we would return, and forever see the Light. I think the Bible is saying that we all were predestined to encounter evil, that we would freely and forever choose the Good in freedom. I think we all may be having something like a nightmare, but soon we'll wake in our Father's arms, return to reality, and know it for the first time.

Well, if you need a Scapegoat, if you need someone to blame, at the end of the day, you can only blame the Good and the Life. But, just look at him; he is not blaming you. You broke his Body and shed his Blood, with every one of your self-centered judgments. But this is his judgment:

Communion

He breaks the bread and says, "this is my body given to you." And he takes the cup saying, "this is the eternal covenant in my blood, poured out for forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you."

This is the Free-Will of God Almighty and God is Love.^{xviii} And you will love, for he first loved you. I think I just spoke the Word of God—May it "dwell in you richly."

Benediction

"And so, who are you, Oh man, to answer back to God?" Who do you think you are, Abraham, arguing with God? Who are you Moses to reason with God? I know who you are, you're his kid. Who are you Paul, to ask these questions? He would tell you, "Well, it's no longer I who live but Christ Jesus who lives in me. You're his kid. You're his masterpiece. You're his image, under construction and predestined for freedom. So, believe the Gospel and when you believe it understand that we're free. "Jesus in me" are free. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ I point that out, because, sometimes, people who struggle with the idea of God's Will, like to argue that God has different kinds of will, and that you can resist some kinds of "God's will," like *thelema* (sometimes translated "desire," or "wish" as well as

“will”), but not *boulema* (sometimes translated “plan” as well as “will”) . And yet here in Romans 9, Paul uses both words, to describe what theologians have called double predestination. God’s *thelema* is the revelation of his *boulema*.

ⁱⁱ There are references to the “free will offering” in the Old Testament, but “free will” translates a word that means something like “voluntary” but is not the combination of the word “will” and “free.”

ⁱⁱⁱ Isaiah 1:18

^{iv} For a wonderful exposition of Abraham’s argument with God and Moses argument with God, see: Jan Bonda, [The One Purpose of God](#), pp. 45-63

^v Exodus 18:21, cited in Bonda, p.47

^{vi} Bonda, p.30

^{vii} Exodus 32:32-33. In Revelation 20:12 “books are opened” and “the dead” are judged by what was written in those books—they are books of deeds. We all die when judged by our deeds. “Then another book was opened which is the book of Life.” It’s the Lamb’s Book of Life. In it are “names” (v.15), not deeds.”

^{viii} Both Calvinists and “Arminians” will argue that in order to appreciate our election to Grace, or our decision of Faith, it is necessary that some suffer rejection. But Paul is saying that we each must experience our own rejection (knowledge of evil), in order to be known by the Good (in whom we are elected), and so know the Good and have Faith in the Good, who is infinite and eternal Grace. We are each predestined to death and resurrection, and God predestines himself in Christ to do it with us, in us, and for us, for he is the Good and the Life. That’s predestination to desecration in time, and creation for all eternity.

^{ix} Exodus 33:16

^x <https://relentless-love.org/sermons/does-god-love-everyone-even-esau/>

^{xi} Psalm 5:5

^{xii} Hosea 9:15

^{xiii} Only because He elects and rejects, loves and hates, makes alive and puts to death, can He be apprehended and worshipped by men of this world. The paradox that eternity becomes time a, and yet not time, is the tribulation of the Church and the revelation of God. He makes Himself known in the parable and riddle of the beloved Jacob and the hated Esau, that is to say , in the eternal, twofold predestination. Now, this secret concerns not this or that man, but all men. By it men are not divided, but united. In its presence they all stand on one line—for Jacob is always Esau also, and in the eternal ‘Moment’ of revelation Esau is also Jacob. When the Reformers applied this doctrine of election and rejection (Predestination) to the psychological unity of this or that individual, and when they referred quantitatively to the ‘elect’ and the ‘damned’, they were, as we can now see, speaking mythologically. Paul did not think either quantitatively or psychologically, nor could he have done so, since his emphasis is set altogether upon God’s concern with the individual, and not upon the individuals concern with God... We know already what this duality in God means. We know that it involves no equilibrium, but that it is the eternal victory of election over rejection of love over hate, of life over death. But this victory is hidden from us in every moment of time. We cannot escape the duality, since the visible Jacob is for us Esau, and we can only conceive of Jacob as the unobservable Esau.

--Karl Barth, [The Epistle to the Romans](#) pp. 346-347

^{xiv} In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.”—Isaiah 19:24-25

^{xv} The purpose of the rejection of Pharaoh could be, and in fact is, identical with the rejection of Moses. Both are servants, not masters: servants of the wil of God. The one manifests that ‘Yes’ of God. The other His ‘No’; the hone His mercy, the other His hardening; both, the good and the bad , are made usof to maintain and expose the invisible glory of God. The man that is hardened is the visible man. Who because of his ultimate separation from God, neither know more practices repentance. Bu twho among us either knows or practices repentance? This is our hardening. The man to whom God shows mercy is the invisible man, the man who is miraculously united with God, the new-born man whose repentance is God’s work.
- Barth, pp. 352-353

^{xvi} The Egyptians believed their pharaoh to be the mediator between the gods and the world of men. After death the pharaoh became divine, identified with Osiris, the father of Horus and god of the dead, and passed on his sacred powers and position to the new pharaoh, his son. - <https://www.britannica.com/topic/pharaoh>

^{xvii} Walter Knight, [Knight's Master Book of New Illustrations](#) (Eerdman's, Granc Rapids 1956) 681

^{xviii} I’m not always sure if I have “free-will.”

But we have free-will, me and Jesus have free will, whenever I Love.

