

**Moses, Pharaoh, and God**  
***Romans 9:14 - 18***

*14What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 15For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. 17For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.*

**One crucial plank in the foundation of discipleship is the admission that we do not know more than God. His wisdom and counsel are vastly superior to ours. Isaiah said that God's ways are not our ways (see Isaiah 55:8). We are in no position to judge the fairness or virtuousness of God's actions. God is holy, just and perfect. We are not. By faith, we trust who God is and what God does.**

**In verse 14, Paul declared clearly that God is not unjust. God always acts in ways that are just and true. At times, we have all wondered why God allowed or permitted certain things to happen. But there is much in life where we simply acknowledge the end of our wisdom and place our trust in a sovereign God to act redemptively and righteously. We trust that God is good and that He will always do what is right by His own standards of fairness and justice. David Jeremiah wrote that, "*if we do not live our lives based on the fact that God is righteous, we have no basis for righteousness in our own lives.*"**

**God did not betray Israel by turning His work of salvation toward the Gentiles. God's purposes were always to raise up and bless a spiritual Israel (made up of Jews and Gentiles) rather than only a physical Israel (made up of a single line of people and descendants). God's thinking has been global rather than linear. And quite often, our basis or standards for righteousness are radically different from God's.**

**In verse 15, Paul quoted from Exodus. He concluded that God is free to dispense His mercy and compassion as He wishes. And when God shows His mercy, He is acting in ways that are both right and good. In verse 16, Paul argued that man does not do anything to deserve this mercy. Our best efforts and attributes do not entitle us to any kind of special mercy or grace. We are beneficiaries of riches we have neither deserved nor earned.**

In verse 18, we learn that God is just and right when He chooses to withhold His mercy. No one is entitled to God's grace. And the Lord is not obligated to be merciful to everyone, everywhere all the time. Some may read verse 18 and wonder if God intentionally and maliciously hardens the hearts of people capriciously and arbitrarily. Not at all. How then do we understand verse 18? David Jeremiah can help us with an interpretation. *"Does God harden someone's heart so they will not believe and then punish them because of what they could not do as a result of His hardening of their heart? If we don't get the correct answer to this question, we will have a warped view of God. The answer is this: God does not harden the heart of anyone who has not first hardened his own heart against God."* We can note several places in Exodus where the Bible states that Pharaoh hardened or stiffened his own heart against the Lord (for example Exodus 5:2 and 7:13-14).

Often our attempts to "blame" God for the hardness or callousness we find in someone else are misplaced. People often harden their own hearts. Because of our fallen and sinful nature, it is not hard for mankind to develop hearts that are stiff, stubborn and resistant to the Lord. God often withholds mercy from hearts that are persistently hardened toward Him. The withholding of His healing mercy and grace is an act of hardening by God . . . but that hardening comes in response to what man has already done. And that act of God is just and righteous because the decision was made by God for His purposes. David Jeremiah wrote, *"but in every case, God's will is known to God and is settled in the context of His good and perfect character."*

Applications . . .

1. Confess now and repent of any hardness in your heart toward God, situation or another person. Never allow that hardness to fester.
2. Give thanks for the mercies of God that you have experienced in the past week. Where did you discover and experience His grace?
3. Ask God for help to trust Him in all the situations you face in the walk of life. Even when answers seem hard to come by, ask for help to trust God and His goodness.