

BIBLE DIFFICULTIES

“Romans 9. 13, 14. I find this passage **THE** difficulty as no other among the young people for the last two years.”

These words from a beloved brother, giving Bible instruction in Switzerland, suggest much food for thought. The tendency to-day is to leave God's sovereignty out, and to want to know “Why?” for everything. Let us never avoid, nor seek to get “round” or “over,” the words of Scripture. They are sometimes startling (e.g. Luke 14. 26), but may it not be that we need to be startled? Always take a verse in its context. In Romans 9. 6 we see that “the flesh profiteth nothing”: in verse 8 there is the contrast between the flesh and the promise as in Galatians 4. 28, 29. The word “election” is found in verse 11, and implies a picking out: thus election never injures any: it leaves some where they are already. Hence “the same lump,” in verse 21, and “He prepared to glory” (23), but “fitted,” not “He fitted “to destruction” in verse 22. Men will be judged according to **their** works (Rev. 20. 12, 13). God is not unrighteous: no one receives more judgment than he deserves. This is fundamental. God never punishes unrighteously (Rom. 3. 5, 6). Mercy is quite undeserved.

We return to the question in verse 13 from Malachi 1. 2, 3. It there refers to God's dealings with the two nations. Can we deny such sovereignty in all history and geography? Why were you born in England, and not in a Brazilian forest? Why born of godly parents, and not of drunken criminals? Had you any voice, choice, or **deserving**? Do not try to explain all, nor wish to understand all now (Deut. 29. 29). You and I are children: God is God: can we **trust** Him, or do we mentally say “No?” In connection with nations we see Pharaoh in Romans 9. 17, “raised up,” not made to sin, but exalted to power (Dan. 4. 17), though a vile person, that the deterrent to others might be more broadcast, than if a petty chieftain had thus sinned. Is this strange? If Esau deserved reward, everything would be different. But Esau chose to sin, and his descendants continued this, like to those of Exodus 20. 5

(“of them that hate Me,” see Ezek. 35. 5, 6). They were evildoers. God cannot love sin: He cannot excuse sinners. If He saves any it is grace, but grace reigning through righteousness.

The natural man says “Why does not God save all?” The saved ones asks, “Why does God save sinners?” I am not “compelled” to go on the way of sin: I chose it. The sin was not God's, it was mine. True repentance says, “Against Thee, Thee only (the Sinless One) have I (the sinful one) sinned.” Why did God have mercy on me? Here and now He **will not** give the full explanation. “On whom He will” (Rom. 9. 18). “Whom He will He hardeneth” is not an isolated expression; it refers to Exodus, where Pharaoh hardened **his heart**. Had not Pharaoh's heart been of this **nature** it would have shown the **reverse** of hardening, by God's dealings within. Were these not actually **warnings** with space for repentance? The **nature** of clay and the nature of wax respond differently to the sun: the latter is melted. “But could not God have compelled Pharaoh?” one asks. This is the thought of the questioner in Romans 9. 19. Here God refuses to answer. In **one** sense He can do everything, but if He is silent here, this is part of our training, in acknowledging His perfect sovereignty. To **claim** that He should compel our wilfulness to become willing is to deny His **mercy**, and make salvation God's duty. This deadly error cuts at the root of the gospel, obliterates all grace, and blames God, leading to sheer atheism. There is a blessedness in silencing self's curiosity, and pride. Grace leads to worship, and to rest in God's perfection. Here is a test for a humble and simple believer.