

GOD IS RIGHTEOUS: PAUL'S JUSTIFICATION OF THE FREE
AND MERCIFUL GOD IN ELECTION

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Dr. John Taylor

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Bret Allen Rogers

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ABBREVIATIONS

BDAG	Walter Bauer, Fredrick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, F. Wilber Gingrich, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
BDF	F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Bible Quarterly</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
HB	Hebrew Bible
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NT	New Testament
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
OT	Old Testament
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

GOD IS RIGHTEOUS: PAUL'S JUSTIFICATION OF THE FREE AND MERCIFUL GOD IN ELECTION

Introduction

In Romans 9-11, Paul writes to affirm the Gentile mission in light of God's faithfulness to his covenant people, Israel. Although the majority of ethnic Jews are not believing the Gospel, no Christian should conclude that God is unfaithful to his word (9:6a). His faithfulness to his promises depends not on human beings, but on his sovereign purposes in election (9:6b-13). Israel's unbelief is not an accident in redemptive history, but an integral part of it, even designed for the blessings of Messiah Jesus to come to the nations (9:22-28; 11:25-32). If, by divine design, some of Israel is embracing the Gospel and others are rejecting it, then there seems to be unrighteousness with God. Fervently, Paul eliminates this ghastly conclusion in 9:14-18, by arguing that God is righteous because he is free in his sovereign choice to have mercy on whomever he wills.

Literary Context of Romans 9:14-18

Interpretation of Romans 9:14-18 must take into consideration the larger argument of chapters 9-11.¹ Although the church is enjoying the blessings of salvation in

¹Scholars have often disregarded any interpretation of Romans 9 that is immediately concerned with the purposes of God in predestination and unconditional election. E.g. see R. T. Forster and V. P. Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1973), 67, 75; James D. Strauss, "God's Promise and Universal History: The Theology of Romans 9," in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock [Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1975], 190-208). Their argument is based on the apparent misconception that everyone who argues for these theological points from Romans 9 have failed to see the larger *historical* issues relevant in chapters 9-11. This exegesis will attempt to maintain that predestination

Christ (1:13; 5:1-11; 8:1-39), an apparent problem arises in the minds of these believers because the majority of Israel, God's chosen nation, is separated from Christ and perishing (9:1-3; cf. 10:1). The Gospel is bringing about the 'obedience of faith' among the Gentiles, yet having little effect amongst the Jews. That Israel does not believe in her own Messiah, through whom God promised to save her (e.g. Gen 3:22:18; 2 Sam 7:12-14; Isa 7:14; 9:1-7; 53; cf. Gal 3:16-18), raises the concern of whether or not God is faithful to keep his word. Paul, however, rejects this in 9:6a-11:32, terminating any thought of God not fulfilling his promises to Israel. The current 'grafting in' of the Gentiles and temporary hardening of the Jews is in accord with God's sovereign purposes to exercise mercy to all (11:30-32).

Having summarized Paul's argument in 9-11, a more immediate constituent for the concerns of this paper is what Paul has explained up to the point of v. 14. In 9:1-3, he speaks of a great distress he has over his own kinsmen, who are unbelieving. The eschatological blessings of salvation that God has promised to Israel are apparently not coming to fruition (9:1-5).² As alluded to above, the question for believers is, "Has the word of God failed? If the word, which was spoken to Israel, has failed, then what does this make of salvation in Christ now? Even more, what does this make of God?" Paul is quick to answer this question in 9:6a, "But it is not as though the word of God has

and unconditional election *are* relevant issues in the redemptive-historical problem with Jewish unbelief, rather than being something estranged from it.

²John Piper's analysis shows the privileges of 9:4-5 are "redemptive and eschatological, not merely theocratic and historical" (*The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993], 17-46). This is correct. Paul's concerns in 9-11 do answer salvation-historical questions about the nation of Israel; nevertheless, his larger argument does not overshadow the reality of the eternal state of his contemporaries who are forfeiting their eschatological blessings by not trusting in Christ. In addition, Bruce W. Longenecker rightly argues that Paul is referring to ethnic Israel in 9:1-6, not the church as part of the so-called 'true Israel' ("Different Answers to Different Issues: Israel, the Gentiles, and Salvation History in Romans 9-11," *JSNT* 36 [June 1989]: 96-97).

failed.” He then teaches in 9:6b-13 that the reason God’s word has not failed is because his purpose for Israel’s salvation is according to election. Only those whom God unconditionally elects to be beneficiaries of his promises gain salvation.³ In other words, God is faithful to his word because the elect obtain the promises. His purpose was always to save the “Israel” within Israel.⁴ This, however, raises another objection: if Paul is right, that God’s purpose according to election stands, and salvation is not based on who someone is or what someone does, then he must be unrighteous. Romans 9:14-18 is included in the discourse to answer this objection.

Romans 9:14-18 distinguishes itself as an argument according to four outstanding characteristics. First, the rhetorical questions of v. 14a and 14b mark the objection raised with respect to 9:6b-13. Second, Paul rejects the objection in 14c, only to prepare the way for his argument in vv. 15-18. Third, Paul’s citation of two OT texts then followed by ἄρα οὖν provide support for his argument in v. 14c. Fourth, v. 19 begins with another question from an objector to the conclusion represented in v. 18. Together, these

³The exegesis presented below defends this interpretation of Romans 9:6b-13. Therefore, it is necessary to argue here that Paul’s explanation of unconditional election is referring not merely to historical destinies of nations, but to the salvation of individuals within Israel. Several observations point to this interpretation. 1) Paul’s distress is for his own kinsmen to be *saved* (9:1-3; 10:1f). 2) Paul uses the singular person in vv. 15 (ὄν), 16 (θέλοντος, τρέχοντος), 18 (ὄν), and 21 (σκεῦος). 3) There is an “Israel” within an Israel (9:6b), and thus some individuals saved while others are not (cf. 11:14). 4) Only the elect-remnant obtains salvation in Christ (9:27; 11:7). 5) As a saved individual Israelite, Paul is part of the remnant (11:1-4). 6) The context of Romans 9-11 is dealing with the *salvation* of Israel, not merely her historical destiny (e.g. 9:1-5; 9:30-10:4; 11:25-26). 7) 9:21-23 express God’s predetermined will for the vessels of wrath/mercy. In favor of what is argued here see Piper, *Justification of God*, 47-73; Thomas R. Schreiner, “Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election Unto Salvation? Some Exegetical and Theological Reflections,” *JETS* 36 (March 1993): 25-40. For a differing position see Forster and Marston, *God’s Strategy*, 63-88; Strauss, “God’s Promise,” 196; Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: DoubleDay, 1993), 558-562; G. R. Beasley-Murray, “Righteousness of God in the History of Israel and the Nations: Romans 9-11,” *RevExp* 73 (Fall 1976): 439.

⁴Piper, *Justification of God*, 73.

structural markers show that Romans 9:14-18 is an argument for God's righteousness in his freedom to bestow mercy.

Exegesis of Romans 9:14-18

God is Unrighteous: The Wrong Conclusion Drawn from 9:6b-13 (9:14)

After his argument in 9:6b-13, which affirmed that God's promises were always intended for those within Israel he elects unconditionally to salvation, Paul discerns a possible objection moving towards his reader's lips (9:14). He begins with the inferential question τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν ("what then shall we say"). That Paul is drawing an inference from 9:6b-13 is obvious by his use of οὖν, and by contextual observations made elsewhere when he poses the same sort of question (e.g. 4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31). The deliberative future (ἐροῦμεν) expresses that this question is rhetorical,⁵ and therefore, setting the occasion for the posed objection to God's righteousness in 14b. Paul wants his readers to think about what conclusion to draw from God's purpose in election; namely, that God is righteous to act this way.

The wrong conclusion, however, is then exposed by a second rhetorical question: μή ἀδικία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ ("There is no unrighteousness with God, is there?").⁶ By asking this question, it could be that Paul is continuing with his diatribe style of teaching as observed elsewhere in Romans (e.g. 3:1-8; 4:1; 6:1, 15; 7:7; 8:27-31). He is posing questions only to answer them. On the other hand, this question recalls a similar

⁵A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 875.

⁶That Paul uses the particle μή in this question shows that the negative answer is expected (C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. [Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1959], 156). Cf. Rom 3:3-4, 5-6; 11:1, 11.

one in 3:5, μή ἄδικος ὁ θεὸς ὁ ἐπιφέρων τὴν ὀργήν (“*God is not unrighteous* to inflict wrath, is he?”). There, he was dealing with God’s righteousness to keep covenant with Israel, though many do not believe (3:1-8); here, he is answering a related question. By returning to this issue, it is likely that Paul is dealing with genuine concerns amongst the Roman believers.⁷

Whatever the case, targeted in this question is the very character of God.⁸ Is God himself unrighteous for upholding his word through unconditional election—for example, in his choosing of Isaac over Ishmael (9:7-9), and Jacob instead of Esau (9:10-13)? The negative implied by the question and Paul’s use of the optative μή γένοιτο (“May it never be!”) expresses his utter rejection of such a revolting thought. God is righteous in his sovereign purposes to elect *an* Israel, whom he wills to salvation, within the Israel, “not on the basis of works, but on the basis of him who calls” (9:11).

God is Righteous: The Freedom of God in Mercy (9:15-16)

Since he clearly rejects any notion that would consider God to be unrighteous in his purposes of election (9:14), Paul now adds support to this conclusion by quoting two texts from the Exodus narrative (vv. 15, 17) and drawing two conclusions from them (vv. 16, 18). Paul is now arguing *for* the righteousness of God in his freedom to have

⁷W. S. Campbell suggests, “...that Paul faces real issues in Rome as outlined in 3:1-8 and that his exposition of the Christ-event in chs. 3:21-26, 5 and 8 is particularly designed to answer these problems” (“Romans III as a Key to the Structure and Thought of the Letter,” *NovT* 23 [Jan 1981]: 34). Campbell is right; however, chapters 9-11 are as well an integral part in his answer to the problems of 3:1-8 (cf. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998], 506).

⁸Paul notes this by the preposition παρά (see BDAG, s.v. “παρά”) and the dative of association τῷ θεῷ (i.e. “Unrighteousness is not to be associated with God, is it?”).

mercy in election.⁹ In other words, the following verses do not merely reveal something God did, but the essence of who God is. This is particularly observed in God's freedom to have mercy on whomever he wills for the glory of his own name.

The γάρ of v. 15 is providing the first reason for *why* God is righteous.¹⁰ Contained in this reason is an appeal to the OT scriptures, not human speculation. Paul does not find the OT irrelevant for understanding the contemporary situation in Rome; rather, he applies its theological substance.¹¹ An introductory formula, λέγει (“it/he says”), precedes the quotation from Exodus 33:19.¹² The subject of this verb could be the Scripture, as stated explicitly in 9:17; however, since this is a direct quotation from God to Moses, it is better to take the subject as God himself. In either case, the perfective present emphasizes that what was spoken to Moses still speaks today.¹³ God's word to Moses, preserved in the Scripture, is just as binding.

In Exodus 32, Israel proves to be an obstinate people, especially in breaking the covenant by their idolatrous behavior at Mount Sinai. Nevertheless, the Lord commands Moses to bring the people up to the land promised them (33:1-2). The Lord,

⁹On the surface, it sounds strange that a mere man would argue *for* God's righteousness; however, Paul does this very thing throughout Romans. In 1:17, the gospel Paul preaches *reveals* the righteousness of God. In 3:4, Paul quotes Psalm 51:4 (50:6 LXX) as a vindication of God's righteousness in judgment. In 3:25-26, Paul observes the cross of Christ as that which vindicates God's righteousness in his justification of sinners. There is no reason why he would argue differently in 9:15-18.

¹⁰That the γάρ is giving ground to 9:14c (i.e. God is not unrighteous) can be observed by the *manner* Paul argues elsewhere following μὴ γένοιτο (Rom 3:6; 6:2, 15; 7:7; 11:1, 11).

¹¹J. W. Aageson, “Typology, Correspondence, and the Application of Scripture in Romans 9-11,” *JSNT* 31 (Oct 1987): 53, 56.

¹²E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1981), 23. Paul takes this quotation directly from the LXX with no changes made (see Appendix 3).

¹³Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 532.

however, was not going to travel in their midst, since he might destroy Israel along the way (33:3). On behalf of Israel, Moses intercedes so that the Lord's presence would instead be with them (32:31-32; 33:12-16; 34:9). Moses' prayer and God's response set forth three items significant for the interpretation of Paul's use of Exodus 33:19 in Romans 9.

First, in 33:13, Moses prays to the Lord, "...let me know your ways, that I may know you..." (NASB). Plainly, Moses believes that by knowing the Lord's ways, he will know the Lord. In 33:19, the Lord clearly reveals his *ways* by stating that he is gracious and merciful to whomever he wills to be gracious and merciful. In other words, no constraints outside of God cause him to be gracious and merciful to anyone. He exercises grace and mercy out of his own sovereign freedom. What the narrative is declaring about who God *is*, therefore, is this: God is free to be gracious and merciful to whomever he pleases. Second, at Moses' request to see the Lord's glory, the Lord responds, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (33:19, ESV). To see the Lord's glory, therefore, is to see his goodness made known in the proclamation of his *name*. Moreover, with the proclamation of God's name also comes the revelation of his freedom to be gracious and merciful to whomever he wills. For the Lord to proclaim his name is for the Lord to declare his freedom to have mercy.¹⁴ Third, that the Lord chooses to restore the covenant with Israel, an obstinate and rebellious people, proves that he is free to have mercy on whomever he

¹⁴Walther Eichrodt observes that the name 'Yahweh' reveals something of God, "...who, at one time inspiring terror and at another bestowing blessing, *is at all times a controlling and effective reality*" (*Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, vol. 1 [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961], 191; emphasis mine). In this case, God is controlling and effecting the distribution of grace and mercy.

wills (34:1-10). Exodus 33:19, therefore, is not merely retelling the experience of Moses or the grace shown to Israel, but is declaring the very nature of God.¹⁵

The reason Paul quotes this passage in Romans 9:15 is that God's self-revelation to Moses (i.e. in the proclamation of his name) reveals his sovereign freedom to have mercy. This conclusion obtains further support by the grammar of Paul's exact quotation from the LXX: ἐλεήσω ὃν ἂν ἐλεῶ καὶ οἰκτιρήσω ὃν ἂν οἰκτίρω ("I will have mercy on whomever I have mercy and I will have compassion on whomever I have compassion"). In this statement, the contingent particle ἂν with the subjunctive use of the verb identify two indefinite relative clauses (ὃν ἂν ἐλεῶ and ὃν ἂν οἰκτίρω). In such clauses, the element of contingency rests on the person—in this case God.¹⁶ This means that the distribution of mercy is contingent upon God himself willing to grant it, not on anything else. God does not have mercy on those whom deserve to have mercy; rather, God has mercy on those he wills to have mercy.¹⁷

Following his use of Exodus 33:19, Paul draws the emphatic conclusion ἄρα οὖν οὐ τοῦ θέλοντος οὐδὲ τοῦ τρέχοντος ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἐλεῶντος θεοῦ ("so then, it does not depend on the one who wills nor on the one who runs, but on the one who has mercy, God").¹⁸ All three participles in 9:16 are substantival and best understood as genitives of

¹⁵So Piper, *Justification of God*, 75-89; Schreiner, *Romans*, 506-507. By explaining God's sovereign freedom now, Paul also begins laying the foundation for his argument concerning God's mercy toward the Gentiles in Romans 9:24-26. That is, God is free to include in the covenant people whomever he chooses without being constrained by human will or direct lineage.

¹⁶Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 478-9.

¹⁷The future tense verbs (ἐλεήσω and οἰκτιρήσω) are most likely gnomic. It is always the case that God will have mercy and compassion on whom he wills.

¹⁸The οὖν strengthens ἄρα in order to bring emphasis to the inference drawn from Exodus 33:19. See Stanley Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992),

source—hence, the words “depend on” in the previous translation.¹⁹ Each participle is referring to the personal basis for divine election. Certainly, Paul doubly rejects the first two options. The text notes this by 1) the negatives οὐ and οὐδὲ, and 2) the strong adversative ἀλλά. Since God is free to exercise mercy and compassion on whomever he pleases, then surely his gracious election does not depend on the willing or running of man. Instead, election depends on the one who has mercy, *God*.²⁰ Human efforts do not bind God to elect; rather, election depends on whether or not God chooses to have mercy. God is righteous, therefore, because the bestowal of mercy is based wholly upon his own sovereign will, not upon human exertion or distinctive.

God is Righteous: The Freedom of God in Hardening (9:17-18)

Having established his first point, that God is righteous in unconditional election because he is free to have mercy and compassion on whomever he wills, Paul continues now with a second. In the same manner the γάρ of v. 15 modified v. 14, so also is the γάρ of v. 17.²¹ Thus, vv. 17-18 parallel the argument made in vv. 15-16, both of

207; cf. BDF, §451:2b. BDAG notes that when used together, “ἄρα expresses the inference and οὖν the transition” (s.v. “ἄρα”).

¹⁹It seems that the participles could be genitives of separation: “it is not from the one who wills nor from the one who runs, but from God who has mercy.” Contextually, however, Paul’s emphasis is that God’s election is unconditional and not *dependent on* anything humans do. 1) His election is before the twins did anything good or evil (9:11). 2) It is not based on works, but on God who calls (9:11).

²⁰The genitive θεοῦ is in simple apposition to the substantival participle τοῦ ἐλεῶντος.

²¹That the γάρ of v. 17 is again modifying the implied affirmation that God is righteous in v. 14 is observed by the following. 1) The parallel structure of vv. 15 and 17. Both begin with the postpositive γάρ followed by an introductory formula that comes before a quotation from Exodus (James W. Aageson, “Scripture and Structure in the Development of the Argument in Romans 9-11,” *CBQ* 48 [Apr 1986]: 270-271). 2) The parallel structure of vv. 16 and 18. Both begin with the emphatic ἄρα οὖν and are followed by theological conclusions drawn from the Exodus texts. 3) The conclusion in v. 18 not only relates back to v. 17, but also to the discussion of God having mercy in vv. 15-16 (cf. Piper, *Justification of God*, 158-159).

which support the truth that God is righteous. This, however, should not exclude the fact of v. 17 further explaining Paul's first conclusion in v. 16.²²

Again, Paul uses an introductory formula (λέγει); although this time, he states the subject: ἡ γραφή (“the Scripture”) says to Pharaoh. The message God gave to Pharaoh through Moses is from Exodus 9:16, and here follows the ὅτι of direct discourse: εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐξήγειρά σε ὅπως ἐνδείξωμαι ἐν σοὶ τὴν δύναμίν μου καὶ ὅπως διαγγελῆ τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γῆ (“for this very purpose I raised you up, in order that I might display my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth”).

Paul departs from the LXX on at least four notes, two of which are worth mentioning.²³ First, in order to remove the ambiguity of the LXX's καὶ ἕνεκεν τούτου (“and because of this”), Paul uses εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο (“for this very purpose”).²⁴ This favors the Hebrew text, because its adversative ׀ (‘but’) at the beginning of 9:16 is clearly helping the reader to understand the reason behind so many plagues. God could have wiped out Pharaoh well before the seventh plague, *but* caused him to remain in order that the earth might marvel at God's power and know his name.

²²9:17 seems to be giving further ground that God is righteous *because* he is free. This relates to the previous point made in vv. 15-16.

²³As noted in Appendix 3, the remaining differences are 1) Paul's use of ὅπως for the first purpose clause instead of ἵνα; and 2) his use of δύναμίν (“power”) in place of ἰσχύν (“strength”). Dunn is correct to say of the latter that Paul is emphasizing “God's saving power” (J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, WBC, vol. 38 [Dallas: Word Books, 1988], 554). Without doubt, God's wanting his power and name known in all the earth is directly associated with God's wanting his mercy toward Israel known. However, to affirm this to the exclusion of the emphasis of his judgment upon Pharaoh, as Dunn does, seems to be ignoring the immediate context of Paul's argument for God's freedom, e.g. in vv. 18 and 22 (so Schreiner, *Romans*, 509).

²⁴Piper, *Justification of God*, 165-167.

Second, where the LXX uses διετηρήθης (“you [Pharaoh] were kept”), Paul uses ἐξήγειρά σε. In this context, the verb ἐξεγείρω means “to cause to appear,”²⁵ which better communicates the emphasis of the HB’s הָעֵמֶדְרָתִי (“I caused you to exist/stand”).²⁶ By using this verb, Paul “sharpens” the focus on God’s action in causing Pharaoh to be raised up in history.²⁷ These purposeful exegetical and theological decisions in the apostle’s quotation better point the reader to the pattern of God’s sovereign initiative highlighted throughout the Exodus narrative, to which we now turn.²⁸

Exodus quickly draws attention to the captivity of Abraham’s seed in 1:1-8. Deliverance, however, is near in God’s commission of Moses (2:24; 3:8, 10). Moses is to go before Pharaoh and ask for the release of the Hebrews. Nevertheless, Pharaoh was not going to let the people go, “except by a strong hand” (3:19-20). Without question, Pharaoh’s stubbornness in keeping the Hebrews enslaved is exactly what God planned, in fact, freely caused to come to pass.²⁹ God’s hardening of Pharaoh is not without purpose.

²⁵BDAG, s.v. “ἐξεγείρω.” Also, after searching the LXX with *BibleWorks 7*, it seems that this same usage was understood (e.g. 2 Sam 12:11; Hab 1:6; Zech 11:16; Jer 6:22; Ezek 23:22).

²⁶The *hiphil* stem of עֵמֶד emphasizes God’s causative action involved in the event of Pharaoh’s resistance. According to his sovereign purposes, God has raised up Pharaoh (i.e. caused him to exist in history, and as ruler in Egypt), in order that God’s own power would be displayed in him.

²⁷Albrecht Oepke, “ἐξεγείρω,” in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:338.

²⁸W. S. Campbell, “The Freedom and Faithfulness of God in Relation to Israel,” *JSNT* 13 (1981): 30.

²⁹That God freely caused Pharaoh’s heart to be hardened is persistently demonstrated in the pre-plague narrative (3:18-7:5), the plague narrative itself (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17), the phrase יהוה דבר כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר (“just as the Lord had said,” 7:13, 22; 8:15, 19 [MT 8:11, 15]; 9:12; cf. 9:35), and the objection raised in response to v. 18 in Romans 9:19. The statements concerning Pharaoh’s self-hardening are records of what is historically true of Pharaoh’s choice to rebel. Pharaoh genuinely hardened himself against God. This, however, is not apart from God’s ultimate initiative and design. As in Romans 9:19-20, the mystery stands here, between divine sovereignty and human accountability. For a thorough analysis of the ‘hardening’ texts see G. K. Beale, “An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart in Exodus 4-14 and Romans 9,” *TrinJ* 5 (1984): 129-154. That this hardening was God’s sovereign *response* to Pharaoh’s own actions see Robert Chisholm, “Divine

Repeatedly, this hardening is so that 1) God might show his mighty power (7:3; 9:16; 10:1; cf. 11:9; 14:31), 2) Pharaoh and Egypt might know that he is the Lord (7:5, 17; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 29), and 3) God's name might be proclaimed in Israel and all the earth (9:16; 10:2). God's hardening of Pharaoh in the delayed deliverance of his people is intentional; that is, wrought, so that his purpose to display his power and reveal his name is accomplished.³⁰

This is precisely why Paul quotes Exodus 9:16 in arguing for the righteousness of God; it reveals his freedom to act according to his purpose, even in hardening individuals. Three observations from the Greek text clarify that Paul is arguing in this way. First, the prepositional phrase εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο is functioning adverbially, explaining that the action of the verb ἐξεγείρω is with direct reference to αὐτὸ τοῦτο (“this very [purpose]”).³¹ In other words, this emphasizes the very purpose behind *why* God raised up Pharaoh. Second, the two purpose clauses marked by the conjunction ὅπως are telling of what exactly God's purpose is, namely, to display his power and proclaim his name in all the earth. Third, the middle voice of ἐνδείκνυμι (“to cause something to become known”) calls attention to God's actions; that is, he is displaying his power *for himself* (i.e. for his glory).³² In Romans 9:17, therefore, Paul is establishing that God is free to harden in order to accomplish his purpose.

Hardening in the Old Testament,” *Bsac* 153 (Oct-Dec 1996): 410-434. Forster and Marston provide a similar argument, but with much poorer exegesis (*God's Strategy*, 72-74, 155-177).

³⁰Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 128. Indeed, because of the Exodus, God's power and the glory of his name are later revealed in Canaan (Josh 2:9-10).

³¹For the adverbial use of the accusative τοῦτο, see BDF, §290:4.

³²On the indirect middle Wallace writes, “The subject acts *for* (or sometimes *by*) himself or herself, or in his or her *own interest*” (*Greek Grammar*, 419). The exegesis above favors this last sense.

Based on Exodus 9:16, Paul derives a second emphatic conclusion in the argument of Romans 9:15-18: ἄρα οὖν ὃν θέλει ἐλεεῖ, ὃν δὲ θέλει σκληρύνει (“So then, whom he wills, he has mercy, and whom he wills, he hardens;” 9:18).³³ The ἄρα οὖν is functioning in a similar manner as v. 16; that is, it is drawing an obvious conclusion from the OT quote—hence σκληρύνει (“he hardens”). What is more, this conclusion goes beyond v. 17 and recalls the previous discussion in vv. 15-16—hence ἐλεεῖ (“he has mercy”). The emphasis drawn from Exodus 33:19 was that God’s *name* revealed God’s freedom to have mercy on whomever he wills. In Exodus 9:16, the emphasis is on God’s freedom to harden in order to accomplish his purpose in making his *name* known.³⁴ Remarkably, both of these emphases come together in v. 18 to display the essence of God’s righteousness. In particular, he always acts according to his purpose to make his name known in all the earth,³⁵ by showing mercy to whomever he wills and hardening whomever he wills.

Conclusion

The objection to God’s righteousness that arises from Paul’s argument in Romans 9:6b-13 fails. Indeed, God is righteous to elect unconditionally the “Israel” within Israel (9:14c). The reason he is righteous to act this way, is because he is

³³One uncial (D), a few Latin manuscripts (ar m), the Vulgate, and Ambrosiaster have inserted ὁ θεός in v. 18. External evidence is weak. The earliest of these is dated in late fourth century (vg^{ms} Ambst). This insertion also lacks any confirmation from the papyri and stronger Alexandrian texts. Internal evidence calls for the shorter reading. Additions are characteristic of the Western tradition (D). Therefore, ὁ θεός is most likely a later insertion to help clarify the subject.

³⁴Though this text is specifically referring to God’s act of hardening, it is not to the exclusion of the God’s ultimate purpose to reveal and show his mercy as noted by the context of Romans 9-11.

³⁵This is Piper’s main thesis concerning the righteousness of God in *Justification of God*, 88-89, 100-101, 122, 134, 150, 180, 219. Schreiner concludes the same in his commentary (*Romans*, 507).

absolutely free to do so. In answer to Moses' prayer, God reveals that the bestowal of his mercy is not contingent upon man or his exertion, but wholly rests upon God's will to grant it or not (9:15-16). God is free to have mercy on whom he wills (9:18a). In the raising up of Pharaoh, God reveals that he always acts in accordance with his purpose to display his power and reveal his name (9:17). God is free to harden who he wills (9:18b). Therefore, God is righteous to elect unconditionally whom he wills to salvation, since all that he freely does is in accord with his purpose to reveal his name in all the earth.

Let none who read Romans 9:14-18 commit the same folly as those who raise the objection to God's righteousness. Instead, allow these weighty matters to accomplish at least three objectives. 1) Allow the sovereign purposes of God in unconditional election to be hope *for* missions and prayer, instead of something antithetical to them. The word to the apostle is "Be not afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent...*because* I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10). 2) Allow the freedom of God in mercy to land in a manner that obliterates any carnal judgment of the mind to determine who deserves and does not deserve to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. God is free to save whomever he pleases, the ethnic Jew as well as the dog of a Gentile. 3) Allow the complexities of divine wisdom in salvation-history to lead one to exult in the merciful Lord who ordained it: "For from him and through him and to him are all things, to him be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (Rom 11:36).

APPENDIX 1

Translation of Romans 9:14-18

¹⁴What then shall we say? There is no unrighteousness with God, is there?^a May it never be! ¹⁵For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I have mercy and I will have compassion on whomever I have compassion.”^b ¹⁶So then, it does not depend on the one who wills nor on the one who runs, but on the one who has mercy, God.^c ¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose^d I raised you up, in order that I, for myself, might display my power in you, and in order that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” ¹⁸So then, whom he wills, he has mercy, and whom he wills, he hardens.

^aThe indicative mood of ἐροῦμεν and the implied verb εἰμί, here express a question which “expects an assertion to be made” (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 449). Also, since the particle μή expects a negative answer, it is here translated with this in mind (Moule, *Idiom*, 156).

^bThough ἐλεῶ and οἰκτίρω are in the subjunctive mood, they are translated like the indicative to better communicate the potentiality of mercy being contingent on the subject (God) rather than the verb (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 478).

^cThe substantival participles θέλοντος, τρέχοντος, and ἐλεῶντος are all three genitives of source. This is why “depend on” is inserted.

^dThe adverbial use of the accusative τοῦτο justifies the translation of εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο as “for this reason,” or “for this very purpose” (BDF, §290.4; so NASB, ESV).

APPENDIX 2

Sentence Flow Diagram for Romans 9:14-18

- 9:14 **οὖν**
 Τί ἐροῦμεν;
 μὴ ἀδικία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ;
 μὴ γένοιτο.
- 9:15 **γὰρ**
 τῷ Μωϋσεῖ λέγει·
 ἐλεήσω
 ὃν ἂν ἐλεῶ
 καὶ
 οἰκτιρήσω
 ὃν ἂν οἰκτίρω.
- 9:16 **ἄρα οὖν**
 οὐ τοῦ θέλοντος
 οὐδὲ
 τοῦ τρέχοντος
 ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἐλεῶντος θεοῦ.
- 9:17 **γὰρ**
 λέγει ἡ γραφή τῷ Φαραῶ
 ὅτι
 εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐξήγειρά σε
 ὅπως ἐνδείξωμαι τὴν δυνάμιν μου
 ἐν σοὶ
 καὶ
 ὅπως διαγγελη τὸ ὄνομά μου
 ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γῆ.
- 9:18 **ἄρα οὖν**
 ὃν θέλει ἐλεεῖ,
 δὲ
 ὃν θέλει σκληρύνει.

APPENDIX 3

Comparative Analysis of OT Citations in Romans 9:15 and 17

Romans 9:15 (GNT)	Exodus 33:19 (LXX)	Exodus 33:19 (MT)
ἐλεήσω	ἐλεήσω	וַחֲנַתִּי
ὃν ἂν ἐλεῶ	ὃν ἂν ἐλεῶ	אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֶחֶן
καὶ οἰκτιρήσω	καὶ οἰκτιρήσω	וְרַחֲמֹתַי
ὃν ἂν οἰκτίρω	ὃν ἂν οἰκτίρω	אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם

Romans 9:17 (GNT)	Exodus 9:16 (LXX)	Exodus 9:16 (MT)
εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐξήγειρά σε	καὶ ἕνεκεν τούτου διετηρήθης	וְאוֹלָם בְּעִבּוֹר זֹאת הָעֲמֻדָּתִיךָ
ὅπως ἐνδείξωμαι ἐν σοὶ	ἵνα ἐνδείξωμαι ἐν σοὶ	בְּעִבּוֹר הַרְאָתְךָ
τὴν δύναμίν μου	τὴν ἰσχύν μου	אֶת־כֹּחִי
καὶ ὅπως διαγγελη τὸ ὄνομά μου	καὶ ὅπως διαγγελη τὸ ὄνομά μου	וּלְמַעַן סַפֵּר שְׁמִי
ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γῆ	ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γῆ	בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ

APPENDIX 4

Exegetical Outline

God is righteous (subject) because he is free to act always in accordance with his purpose to reveal his name in all the earth (predicate).

- I. God is righteous in his unconditional election of people to salvation (9:14).
 - a. In disclosing his glory to Moses, God proclaimed his name, which reveals his freedom to have mercy and compassion on whomever he wills (9:15).
 1. Human efforts do not bind God to elect; rather, election depends on whether or not God chooses to have mercy (9:16).
 - b. In raising up Pharaoh, God revealed that he always acts in accordance with his purpose to display his power and reveal his name (9:17)
 1. God is free to have mercy and to harden whomever he wills (9:18)

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