

Romans 9:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

Analysis

For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion—Paul quotes Exodus 33:19, where God proclaims his name/character to Moses. The double assertion (eleēsō...oiktirō, ἐλεήσω...οἰκτιρῶ) emphasizes sovereign freedom in dispensing mercy. The Hebrew behind 'I will have mercy' is chanan (חֲנָן), 'to be gracious'; behind 'compassion' is racham (רָחָם), 'to show tender mercy.'

The structure 'on whom I will...on whom I will' underscores divine prerogative. Mercy is by definition undeserved; therefore God owes it to none. He dispenses it according to his own good pleasure. If mercy were based on foreseen merit or faith, it would cease to be mercy (eleos, ἔλεος) and become reward. God's freedom in mercy doesn't make him arbitrary; it makes him gracious. The wonder is not that he doesn't show mercy to all, but that he shows it to any.

Historical Context

Exodus 33 follows the golden calf apostasy. Israel deserved destruction; God showed mercy. Moses asked to see God's glory (33:18), and God revealed his gracious character—proclaiming mercy even to rebellious Israel. This became the paradigmatic revelation of God's sovereign grace in the OT.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's freedom to show mercy preserve the very definition of mercy?
2. Why would mercy based on foreseen faith cease to be mercy?
3. How does Exodus 33:19's context (golden calf judgment) illuminate God's mercy after deserved wrath?

Interlinear Text

τῷ	γὰρ	Μωσῆ	λέγει	ἐλεῶ	ον	ἀν	ἐλεῶ
G3588	For	to Moses	he saith	I will have mercy	on whom	G302	I will have mercy
G1063	G3475	G3004		G1653	G3739		G1653
καὶ	οἰκτείρω		ον	ἀν	οἰκτείρω		
and	I will have compassion	on whom	G302	I will have compassion			
G2532	G3627		G3739		G3627		

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 33:19 (Grace): And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.

Romans 9:16 (Grace): So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

Micah 7:18 (Grace): Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

Isaiah 27:11 (Grace): When the boughs thereof are withered, they shall be broken off: the women come, and set them on fire: for it is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour.

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