

Romans 9:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

Analysis

So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy—Paul draws the corollary: salvation depends neither on human willing (thelontos, θέλοντος) nor human effort (trechontos, τρέχοντος, literally 'running'), but solely on God's mercy (tou eleontos theou, τοῦ ἐλεῶντος θεοῦ). This excludes all synergism. The will is enslaved to sin (6:16-20) until God grants repentance (2 Timothy 2:25). Works cannot earn grace (11:6).

The athletic imagery ('running') echoes Psalm 147:10-11: 'He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.' Salvation is God's work from first to last—choosing, calling, justifying, glorifying (8:29-30). Human willing and running are results of God's mercy, not causes of it. We choose because he first chose; we run because he first gave life.

Historical Context

This verse became a Reformation rallying cry against Pelagian/semi-Pelagian views that made salvation depend on human cooperation. Luther cited it extensively in 'Bondage of the Will.' Salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9)—grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing the will's bondage to sin (6:16-20) support Paul's argument that it's 'not of him that willeth'?
2. If salvation doesn't depend on human willing or running, what role do our choices and efforts play?
3. How does this verse encourage believers struggling with assurance (if it depends on God, not our performance)?

Interlinear Text

ἄρα	οὖν	οὐ	τοῦ	θέλοντος	οὐδὲ	τοῦ	τρέχοντος
So	then	it is not	G3588	of him that willeth	nor	G3588	of him that runneth
G686	G3767	G3756		G2309	G3761		G5143

ἀλλὰ	τοῦ	ἐλεοῦντος	θεοῦ
but	G3588	that sheweth mercy	of God
G235		G1653	G2316

Additional Cross-References

Ephesians 2:8 (Grace): For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Philippians 2:13 (References God): For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Romans 9:11 (References God): (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)

James 1:18 (Parallel theme): Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Isaiah 65:1 (Parallel theme): I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name.

Luke 10:21 (Parallel theme): In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.

John 3:8 (Parallel theme): The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.