

Romans 9:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Analysis

Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth—Paul summarizes both sides of divine sovereignty. Eleei...sklēronei (ἐλεεῖ...σκληρύνει): 'he shows mercy...he hardens.' The parallel structure emphasizes God's absolute freedom in both salvation (mercy) and judgment (hardening). None can resist his will—he accomplishes his purpose in both elect and reprobate.

The hardening is judicial, not arbitrary. God gives rebels over to their chosen path (1:24, 26, 28). He removes restraining grace, allowing sinners to ripen in rebellion. This serves his purposes: Pharaoh's hardening glorified God in the Exodus; Israel's hardening (11:7-10, 25) opened the door for Gentile inclusion. God's sovereignty doesn't make him capricious; it ensures his redemptive plan succeeds despite human resistance. His will cannot be thwarted.

Historical Context

The hardening theme recurs throughout Scripture: Pharaoh (Exodus), Sihon (Deuteronomy 2:30), Israel (Isaiah 6:9-10), the unbelieving (2 Corinthians 4:4), those who reject truth (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12). It functions as just judgment on those who first harden themselves, yet serves God's larger purposes.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does judicial hardening (giving people over to their sin) differ from arbitrary cruelty?
2. What does it mean that God hardens 'whom he will'—what is the relationship to human choice?
3. How can God's sovereignty in both mercy and hardening coexist with genuine human responsibility?

Interlinear Text

ἄρα	οὖν	ὅν	θέλει	ἔλεει	ὅν	δὲ
Therefore	G3767	on whom	he will	hath he mercy	on whom	have mercy and
G686		G3739	G2309	G1653	G3739	G1161
θέλει	σκληρύνει					
he will	he hardeneth					
G2309	G4645					

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 11:20 (Parallel theme): For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

Exodus 4:21 (Parallel theme): And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.

Deuteronomy 2:30 (Parallel theme): But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day.

Isaiah 63:17 (Parallel theme): O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance.

Exodus 7:13 (Parallel theme): And he hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.

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