



# COMMENTARIES ON 'ROMANS'

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

## Chapter 9

**Verse 1.** *"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost."*

Did I not seem yesterday to you to have spoken some great and exorbitant things of Paul's love toward Christ? And great indeed they were, too great for any words to express. Yet what you have heard today are as far above those things, as those things were above ours. And yet I did not think they could be exceeded, still when I came to what has been read today it did appear far more glorious than the whole of the former. And that he was aware of this himself he shows by his exordium. For as on the point of entering upon greater things than those, and therefore liable to be disbelieved by the generality, he first uses a strong asseveration about the matter he is going to speak of; which many are in the habit of doing when they are going to say somewhat which is not believed by the generality, and about which they feel the utmost certainty in their own minds. Hence he says, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, and my conscience beareth witness,"

**Verse 2, 3.** *"That I have a great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ."*

What sayest thou, O Paul? from Christ, thy beloved One, from Whom neither kingdom nor hell, nor things visible nor intelligible, nor another world as great, would separate thee, is it from Him that thou wouldst now be accursed? What has happened? Hast thou changed, hast thou given over that love? No, he replies, fear not. Rather I have even made it more intense. How then is it that thou wouldst fain be accursed, and seekest a separation, and a removal to such a distance, that after it there is no possibility of finding a more distant one? Because I love Him exceedingly, he may reply. How, pray, and in what manner? For the things seem a riddle. Or rather, if you will, let us learn what the curse is, and then we will question him upon these points, and shall understand this unspeakable and extraordinary love. What then is the curse? Hear his own words, "If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." (Corinthians 16:22.) That is, let him be set apart from all, removed from all. For as in the case of a thing dedicated, which is set apart for God, no one would venture so much as to touch it with his hand or even to come near it; so too with a man who is put apart from the Church, in cutting him off from all, and removing him as far off as possible, he calls him by this name in a contrary sense, thus with much fear denouncing to all men to keep apart from him, and to spring away from him. For the thing set apart, no one, from respect of it, ventures to come near to. But from him who is cut off, all men separate themselves from a very opposite feeling. And so the separation is the same, and both the one and the other are equally removed from the generality. Still, the mode of separation is not the same, but in this case it is the opposite to what it is in that. For from the one they keep back as being dedicated to God; from the other as being estranged from God, and broken off from the Church. This then is what

Paul means when he says, "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ." And he does not say merely that I could be willing, but using a stronger term, he says even, "I could wish". But if what he says trouble you in your feebleness, consider the real state of the case, not only that he wished to be separated, but also the cause for which he wished it, and then you will see the greatness of his love. For he even circumcised (Timothy, Acts 16:3), and we pay no attention to what was done, but to the intention of it, and the cause of it, and hence we wonder at him the more. And he not only circumcised a person, but he even shaved himself and sacrificed (Acts 18:18; 21:24), and yet surely we do not therefore assert him to be a Jew, but upon this very score to be perfectly free from Judaizing, and clear of it, and a genuine worshipper of Christ. As then when you see him circumcising and sacrificing, you do not therefore condemn him as Judaizing, but upon this very score have the best reason for crowning him as quite an alien to Judaism; thus when thou seest him to have become desirous of being accursed, do not therefore be troubled, but upon this very ground give him the loudest praise, when thou knowest the cause why he wishes this. For if we do not look narrowly into the causes, we shall call Elijah a manslayer, and Abraham not a manslayer only, but a murderer of his son. And Phinees and Peter we shall implead for murder likewise. Nor is it in the case of the saints alone, but also of the God of the universe, that he who does not keep to this rule, will be suspecting sundry unbecoming things. Now to prevent this happening in all cases of the kind, let us bring together both the cause, and the intention, and the time, and all that makes in behalf of what is so done, and in this way let us investigate the actions. And this we must do now also in the case of this blessed soul. Now what is the cause? It is Jesus Himself Who is so beloved. And yet he does not say for Him; for what he says is, I would wish that I were accursed from Him for my brethren. And this comes of his humbleness of mind. For he has no wish to make himself conspicuous, as if he were saying something great, and doing Christ a favor in this. Wherefore also he said "my kinsmen," that he may conceal his high aim. Since to see that he wished it all for Christ's sake, just hear what comes next. After speaking of kinsmen then, he proceeds,

**Verse 4, 5.** *"To whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the father's, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, Who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."*

And what is this? one asks. For if with a view to the belief of others he was willing to become accursed, he ought to have also wished for this in the Gentiles' behalf. But if he wishes it in the Jews' behalf only, it is a proof that he did not wish it for Christ's sake, but for his own relationship to them. But in fact if he had prayed for the Gentiles only, this would not have been equally clear. But since it is for the Jews only, it is a clear proof that it is only for Christ's glory that he is thus earnest. And I am aware that what I am saying will seem a paradox to you. Still if ye do not make a disturbance, I will presently endeavor to make it clear. For what he has said he has not said nakedly; but since all were talking and accusing God, that after being counted worthy of the name of sons, and receiving the Law, and knowing Him beyond all men, and enjoying such great glory, and serving him beyond the whole world, and receiving the promises, and being from fathers who were His friends, and what was the greatest thing of all, having been forefathers of Christ Himself (for this is the meaning of the words, "of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came"), they are now cast out and disgraced; and in their place are introduced men who had never known Him, of the Gentiles. Now since they said all this, and blasphemed God, Paul hearing it, and being cut to the heart, and vexed for God's glory's sake, wished that he were accursed, had it been possible, so that they might be saved, and this blasphemy be put a stop to, and God might not seem to have deceived the offspring of those to whom He promised the gifts. And that you may see that it was in

sorrow for this, that the promise of God might not seem to fall to the ground, which said to Abraham, "I will give this land to thee and to thy seed," that he uttered this wish, he proceeds,

**Verse 6.** *"Not as though the word of God had taken none effect."*

To show that he had courage to bear all these things for the word of God, that is, the promise made to Abraham. For as Moses seemed to be pleading for the Jews, yet was doing everything for God's glory (for he says, "Lest they say, Because He was not able to save them, He led them forth to destroy them in the wilderness" (Deuteronomy 9:28); stay Thy wrath), so also does Paul, That they may not say (he means) that the promise of God has fallen to the ground, and He has disappointed us of that. He vouched to us, and this word has not issued in deed, I could wish to be accursed. This then was why he did not speak of the Gentiles (for to them no promises had been made by Him, nor had they worshipped Him, wherefore neither did any blaspheme Him on their account), but it was for the Jews who had both received the promise, and had also been brought into closer connection with Him than others, that he expressed this wish. Do you see, that if he had expressed it for the Gentiles, he would not have been shown to be doing this so purely for Christ's glory? But Since he was willing to become accursed in the Jews' behalf, then it was most evidenced that it was for Christ's sake only that he desired this. And for this cause he says,

*"To whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the service of God, and the promises."*

For the Law, he means, which speaks of Christ, comes from thence, and all the covenants made with them, and Himself came from them, and the Fathers who received the promises were all from them. Yet still the opposite has resulted, and they have fallen from all their good things. Hence, he means, I am vexed, and if it were possible to be separated from the company about Christ, and to be made an alien, not from the love of Him (that be far from him; for even all this he was doing through love), but from all that enjoyment and glory, I would accept that lot, provided my Master were not to be blasphemed, that He might not have to hear same saying, that it has been all for stage-effect; He promises to one, and gives to another. He was sprung from one race, He saved another. It was to the forefathers of the Jews that He made the promises, and yet He has deserted their descendants, and put men, who never at any time knew Him, into their good things. They labored in the practice of the Law, and reading the Prophets, while men who have come but yesterday from heathen altars and images have been set up above them. What foresight is there in all this? Now that these things may not be said of my Master, he means, even if they are said unjustly, I would willingly lose even the kingdom and that glory unutterable, and any sufferings would I undergo, as considering it the greatest consolation possible no longer to hear Him Whom I so long for, so blasphemed. But if you be still against allowing this explanation, just reflect that many fathers have at many times taken up with thus much for their children, and have chosen to be separated from them, and rather to see them in honor, considering their honor dearer to them than their company. But since we are so short of love like this, we cannot even form an idea of what is here meant. For there be some that are so wholly unworthy even to hear the name of Paul, and that stand at such an interval and distance from that vehemency of his, as to fancy that he says this of temporal death. Who I should say were as ignorant of Paul, as the blind of the sun's rays, or even much more so. For he that died daily, and set before him dangers thick as a snow-storm, and then said, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine?" and still unsatisfied with what he had said, and after going above the heaven and the heaven of heavens, and

running through the Angels and Archangels, and all the higher orders of beings, and taking in at once things present, things to come, things visible, things intelligible, things grievous, and things good, that were on either part, and leaving nothing out at all, yet not even thus satiated, but even bodying forth another non-existing creation, how should he, by way of saying some great thing after all those things, make mention of a temporal death? It is not so, surely it is not! But such a notion is that of worms nestling in their dunghill. For had he said this, in what sense would he be wishing himself accursed from Christ? For death (Philippians 1:23) of that sort would have joined him more closely with the band of Christ, and made him enjoy that glory the more. Yet some there are who venture to say things different from these, even more ridiculous. It was not then, they say, death that he wished to have, but to be a treasure, a thing set apart, of Christ's. And who even of the most worthless and indolent that would not wish for this? And in what way was this likely to be in his kinsmen's behalf? Let us then leave these fables and trifles (for it is no more worth while making a reply to these things than to children babbling at play), and let us go back again to the words themselves, luxuriating in this very ocean of love, and fearlessly swimming there in every direction, and reflecting upon the unspeakable flame of love - or rather say what one may, one shall say nothing worthy the subject. For there is no ocean so wide, no flame so intense, as this. And no language can set it forth as it deserves, but he alone knew it who in good earnest gained it. And now let me bring the words themselves before you again.

"For I could wish that I myself were accursed." What does the "I myself" mean? It means I that have been a teacher (1 Corinthians 9:27) of all, that have gathered together countless good deeds, that am waiting for countless crowns, that desired Him so much, as to value His love above all things, who all my days am burning for Him, and hold all things (Philippians 3:8) of second importance to the love of Him. For even being loved by Christ was not the only thing he cared for, but loving Him exceedingly also. And this last he cared most for. So it was that he looked to this only, and took all things light-heartedly. For he kept one aim in view in all circumstances, the fulfilling of this excellent love. And this he wishes for. But since things were not to take this course, nor he to become accursed, he next attempts to go into a defense against the charges, and so to bring what was bruited abroad by all before them as to overthrow it. And before he openly enters into his defense against these, he first lays down some seeds of it beforehand. For when he says, "to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God, and the promises," he does but say that God willed them indeed to be saved, and this he showed by His former dealings, and by Christ's having sprung from them, and by what He promised to the Fathers. But they out of their own untreatable temper thrust the benefit away from them. And this is also the reason of his setting down such things as set forth God's gift, not such as were encomiums upon them. For the adoption came of His grace, and so too the glory, and the promises, and the Law. After taking all these things then into consideration, and reflecting how earnest God along with His Son, had been for their salvation, he lifts up his voice aloud, and says, "Who is a blessed forever. Amen."

So himself offering up thanksgiving for all men unto the Only-Begotten of God. What, he says, if others do blaspheme? Still we who know His mysteries, and His unspeakable Wisdom, and great Providence over us, know well that it is not to be blasphemed, but to be glorified, that He is worthy. Still not satisfied with being himself conscious of it, he endeavors next to use arguments, and to use a sharper way of speech against them. And he does not direct his aim at them, without first divesting them of a suspicion they had. Lest then he should seem to be addressing them as enemies, further on he says "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." (Romans 10:1.)

And here, along with other remarks, he so ordered things, as not to seem to be saying what he was going to say out of enmity against them. Hence he does not decline calling them even kinsmen and brothers. For even if it was for Christ's sake that he said what he did, still he is for drawing their mind to him also, and paves his way to what he has to say, and quits himself of all suspicion owing to what had to be said against them, and then he at last goes into the subject most of them were looking for. For many, as I have already stated, wanted to know what was the reason why they who had received the promise fell short of it, while those who had even never heard of it were saved before them. Therefore, to clear up this difficulty, he brings forward the answer before the objection. For to prevent any from saying, What? Art thou more thoughtful for God's glory than God is for His own? And does He need thy aid that His word may not fall to the ground? In reply to these things he says, I spoke this not as if God's Word had fallen to the ground, but to show my love for Christ. For as things have had this issue, we are in no want of words in God's behalf, or of showing that stand His promise did. God said to Abraham, "To thee and to thy seed will I give the land." And, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Genesis 12:7, 3.) Let us see then, he says, of what sort this seed is. For it is not all that are from him that are his seed. Whence he says, "For they are not all Israel that are of (or from) Israel."

**Verse 7.** *"Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children."*

Now when you come to know of what kind the seed of Abraham is, you will see that the promise is given to his seed, and know that the word hath not fallen to the ground. Of what kind, pray, is the seed then? It is no saying of mine, he means, but the Old Testament itself explains itself by saying as follows, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." (Genesis 21:12.) What is, "In Isaac?" Explain.

**Verse 8.** *"That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise, these are counted for the seed."*

And observe the judgment and depth of Paul's mind. For in interpreting, he does not say, "they which are the children of the flesh, these are not" the children of Abraham, but, "the children of God:" so blending the former things with the present, and showing that even Isaac was not merely Abraham's son. And what he means is something of this sort: as many as have been born as Isaac was, they are sons of God, and of the seed of Abraham. And this is why he said, "in Isaac shall thy seed be called." That one may learn that they who are born after the fashion of Isaac, these are in the truest sense Abraham's children. In what way was Isaac born then? Not according to the law of nature, not according to the power of the flesh, but according to the power of the promise. What is meant then by the power of "the promise?"

**Verse 9.** *"At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son."*

This promise then and word of God it was that fashioned Isaac, and begat him. For what if a womb was its instrument and the belly of a woman? Since it was not the power of the belly, but the might of the promise that begat the child. Thus are we also gendered by the words of God. Since in the pool of water it is the words of God which generate and fashion us. For it is by being baptized into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost that we are gendered. And this birth is not of nature, but of the promise of God. (John 3:3; Ephesians 5:26; James 1:18; 1 Peter 3:21.) For as after first foretelling the birth of Isaac, He then accomplished it; so ours also He had announced before, many ages ago by all the

Prophets, and afterwards brought it to pass. You know how great He has set it forth as being, and how, as He promised a great thing, He furnished it with abundant easel (Hosea 2:1, etc.) But if the Jews were to say, that the words, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," mean this, that those born of Isaac should be reckoned to him for a seed, then the Edomites too, and all those people, ought to be denominated his sons, since their forefather Esau was a son of his. But now so far are they from being tailed sons, that they are the greatest possible aliens. You see then that it is not the children of the flesh that are the children of God, but that even in nature itself the generation by means of baptism from above was sketched out beforehand. And if you tell me of the womb, I in return have to tell you of the water. But as in this case all is of the Spirit, so in the other all was of promise. For the womb was more chilled than any water owing to barrenness and to old age. Let us then gain accurate knowledge of our own nobility, and display a life worthy of it. For in it is nothing fleshly or earthy: hence neither let there be in us. For it was neither sleep, nor the will of the flesh (John 1:13), nor embraces, nor the madness of desire, but "God's love toward man," which wrought the whole. (Titus 3:5.) And as in that case it was when the age was past hope, so in this also it was when the old age of sins had come over us, that Isaac suddenly sprang up in youth, and we all became the children of God, and the seed of Abraham. (Isaiah 40:31.)

**Verse 10.** *"And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac."*

The subject in question was an important one. Hence he turns to several arguments, and endeavors by all means to solve the difficulty. For if it was at once strange and new for them to be cast out after so great promises, it is much more strange that we even should come into their good things, who did not expect anything of the kind. And the case was the same as if a king's son, who had promises made him that he should succeed to the power he had, were to be east into the level of disreputable men, and in his place a condemned man, and one laden with evils unnumbered, after being taken out of prison, were to come into the power, which properly was the other's. For he means, what have you to say? that the son is unworthy? Well, but so is this man unworthy, and much more so. Hence he ought either to have been punished along with the former, or to have been honored along with him. Now it was something of this sort which befell the Jews and the Gentiles, or something far more strange than this. Now that all were unworthy, he has shown above, where he, says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23.) But the new thing is, that when all were unworthy, the Gentiles were saved alone. And beside this there is another difficulty that some one may start, he says. If God had no intention of fulfilling the promises to them, why make them at all? For men who know not the future, and are many times deceived, do promise even the undeserving that they shall have their largesses. But He Who knoweth beforehand things to come as well as things present, and hath a clear knowledge that they will make themselves undeserving of the promises, and therefore will not receive any of the things specified, - why should He promise at all? Now what is Paul's way of meeting all this? It is by showing what the Israel is to whom He made the promise. For when this has been shown, there is at the same time demonstrated the fact that the promises were all fulfilled. And to point this out he said, "For they are not all Israel that are of Israel." And this is why he does not use the name of Jacob, but that of Israel, which was a sign of the virtue of that just man, and of a gift from above, and of having seen God. (Genesis 32:28.) Yet, "all," he says, "have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23.) Now if all have sinned, how come some to be saved, and some to perish? It is because all were not minded to come to Him, since for His part all were saved, for all were called. However, he does not set this down yet awhile, but meets it from an advantageous position, and from other examples, by bringing before them another question, and as in the former case meets a difficulty very great, by another

difficulty. For when he was discussing how by Christ being justified all the rest enjoyed that righteousness, he brought in Adam's case, saying, "For if by one man's offense death reigned, much more they which receive abundance of grace shall reign in life." (Romans 5:17. And the case of Adam, indeed, he does not clear up, but from it he clears up His (or his own), and shows that it was more reasonable that He Who died in their behalf should have power over them at His will. For that when one had sinned all should be punished, does not seem to be so very reasonable to most men. But that when One had done aright all should be justified, is at once more reasonable and more suited to God. Yet still he has not solved the difficulty he raised. For the more obscure that point remained, the more the Jew was put to silence. And the difficulty of his position passed over to the other, and this become clearer from it. So in this passage also, it is by raising other difficulties that he meets the questions raised, inasmuch as it was against Jews that he was contending. Hence he takes no pains to solve the examples which he has brought before us. For he was not answerable for them as in the fight against the Jews. But from them he makes his own subject throughout clearer. Why do you feel surprised, he means, that some of the Jews were saved, and some not saved at this time? Why of old, in the patriarch's times, one may see this happening. For why was Isaac only called the seed, and yet he was the father of Ishmael also, and of several others. "But he was of a mother that was a slave." And what has this to do with his father? Still I will not be captious. Let this son be set aside on his mother's account. What are we to say of those sprung from Keturah? were they not free, and from a mother that was free? How came they not to be honored with the same preference as Isaac? And why do I speak of these? for Rebecca was even Isaac's only wife, and bearing two children she bore them both to Isaac; still those so born, though of the same father, and the same mother, and the fruit of the same labor, being both of one father and one mother, and twins besides, yet did not enjoy the same lot. And yet here you have no mother's slavery to account for it, as in Ishmael's case, nor can you say that one was begotten of this womb and the other of a different one, as in the case of Keturah and Sarah, since in this case they had the same hour in common to them for their birth. This was why Paul then, in order to give a clearer example, says that this happened not in Isaac's case only, "but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac."

**Verse 11-13.** *"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, it was said unto her, the elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."*

What was the cause then why one was loved and the other hated? why was it that one served, the other was served? It was because one was wicked, and the other good. And yet the children being not yet born, one was honored and the other condemned. For when they were not as yet born, God said, "the older shall serve the younger." With what intent then did God say this? Because He doth not wait, as man doth, to see from the issue of their acts the good and him who is not so, but even before these He knoweth which is the wicked and which not such. And this took place in the Israelites' case also, in a still more wonderful way. Why, he says, do I speak of Esau and of Jacob, of whom one was wicked and the other good? For in the Israelites' case, the sin belonged to all, since they all worshipped the calf. Yet notwithstanding some had mercy shown them, and others had not.

**Verse 15.** *"For I will have mercy, He says, on whom I will have mercy, and I will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." (Exodus 33:19.)*

This one may see also in the case of those who are punished, for what would you say of Pharaoh who was punished, and had to pay so heavy a penalty? You say he was hardened and disobedient. Was he then alone such, and not even one person else? How came he then to be so severely punished? Why even in the case of the Jews did he call that a people which was no people, or again, why not count all worthy of equal honor? "For if they be" (it says) "as the sand of the sea, yet shall a remnant be saved." (Isaiah 10:22.) And why is it to be only a remnant? You see what difficulty he has filled the subject with. And with great propriety. For when you have power to throw your adversary into perplexity, do not at once bring forward the answer, because if he be found himself responsible for the same ignorance, why take unnecessary dangers upon yourself? Why make him more bold, by drawing it all upon yourself? Now tell me, O thou Jew, that hast so many perplexing questions, and art unable to answer any of them, how thou comest to annoy us on account of the call of the Gentiles? I, however, have a good reason to give you why the Gentiles were justified and ye were cast out. And what is the reason? It is that they are of faith, ye of the works of the Law. And it is owing to this obstinacy of yours that ye have in every way (Mar. and several Mss. all) been given up. For, "they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." (Romans 10:3.) The clearing up then of the whole passage, to give the whole sense summarily, is here brought out by that blessed person. But that this may be clearer, let us investigate the things he says also one by one; this knowing, that what the blessed Paul aimed at was, to show by all that he said that God only knoweth who are worthy, and no man whatever knoweth, even if he seem to know ever so well, but that in this sentence of his there are sundry aberrations. For He that knoweth the secrets of the hearts, He only knoweth for a certainty who deserve a crown, and who punishment and vengeance. Hence it is that many of those, by men esteemed good, He convicts and punishes, and I those suspected to be bad He crowns, after showing it not to be so; thus forming his sentence not after the judgment of us slaves, but after his own keen and uncorrupt decision, and not waiting for the issue of actions to look at the wicked and him who is not so therefrom. But that we may not make the subject more obscure, again let us go to the very words of the Apostle.

**Verse 14.** *"What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid."*

Hence there is no such thing in the case of us and the Jews. And then he goes on with another thing, a more clear than this. And of what sort is it?

**Verse 15.** *"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."*

Here again he adds force to the objection by dividing it in two and meeting it, and starting an other fresh difficulty. But to make what I have said clearer, one must needs explain it. God, he means, said that "the elder shall serve the younger," before the travail. What then? "Is God unrighteous?" By no means. Now listen to what follows also. For in that case the virtue or the vice, might be the decisive thing. But here there was one sin on which all the Jews joined, that of the molten calf, and still some were punished, and some were not punished. And this is why He says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." (Exodus 33:19) For it is not thine to know, O Moses, he means, which are deserving of My love toward man, but leave this to Me. But if Moses had no right to know, much less have we. And this is why he did not barely quote the passage, but also called to our minds to whom it was said. For it is Moses, he means, that he is speaking to, that at least by the



dignity of the person he might make the objector modest. Having then given a solution of the difficulties raised, he divides it in two, by bringing forward another objection besides, as follows:

**Verse 16, 17.** *“So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.”*

As then in the one case, he means, some were saved and some were punished, so here also. This man was reserved for this very purpose. And then he again urges the objection.

**Verse 18, 19.** *“Therefore He hath mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he then find fault? For who hath resisted His will?”*

See what pains he takes to embarrass the subject in every way. And the answer he does not produce forthwith, it being a useful thing not to do so, but he first stops the disputant’s mouth, saying as follows,

**Verse 20.** *“Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?”*

This he does to take down the objector’s unseasonable inquisitiveness, and excessive curiosity, and to put a check upon it, and teach him to know what God is, and what man, and how incomprehensible His foreknowledge is, and how far above our reason, and how obedience to Him in all points is binding. So when he has made this preparatory step in his hearer, and has hushed and softened down his spirit, then with great felicity he introduces the answer, having made what he says easy of admittance with him. And he does not say, it is impossible to answer questions of this kind, but that it is presumptuous to raise them. For our business is to obey what God does, not to be curious even if we do not know the reason of them. Wherefore he said, “Who art thou that repliest against God?” You see how very light he makes of him, how he bears down his swelling spirit! “Who art thou?” art thou a sharer of His power? nay, art thou sitting in judgment upon God? Why in comparison with Him thou canst not have a being even! nor this or that sort of being, but absolutely none! For the expression, “who art thou?” doth much more set him at naught than “thou art nothing.” And he takes other ways of showing further his indignation in the question, and does not say, “Who art thou that” answerest “God?” but, “that repliest against,” that is, that gainsayest, and that opposeth. For the saying things ought to be so, and ought not to be so, is what a man does that “replieth against.” See how he scares them, how he terrifies them, how he makes them tremble rather than be questioning and curious. This is what an excellent teacher does; he does not follow his disciples’ fancy everywhere, but leads them to his own mind, and pulls up the thorns, and then puts the seed in, and does not answer at once in all cases to the questions put to him.

**Verse 20, 21.** *“Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?”*

Here it is not to do away with free-will that he says this, but to show, up to what point we ought to obey God. For in respect of calling God to account, we ought to be as little disposed to it as the clay is. For we ought to abstain not from gainsaying or questioning only, but even from speaking or thinking of it at all, and to become like that lifeless matter, which followeth the potter’s hands, and lets itself be drawn

about anywhere he may please. And this is the only point he applied the illustration to, not, that is, to any enunciation of the rule of life, but to the complete obedience and silence enforced upon us. And this we ought to observe in all cases, that we are not to take the illustrations quite entire, but after selecting the good of them, and that for which they were introduced, to let the rest alone. As, for instance, when he says, "He couched, he lay down as a lion;" (Numbers 24:9) let us take out the indomitable and fearful part, not the brutality, nor any other of the things belonging to a lion. And again, when He says, "I will meet them as a bereaved bear" (Hosea 13:8), let us take the vindictiveness. And when he says, "our God is a consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24; and Hebrews 12:29), the wasting power exerted in punishing. So also here must we single out the clay, the potter, and the vessels. And when he does go on to say, "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?" do not suppose that this is said by Paul as an account of the creation, nor as implying a necessity over the will, but to illustrate the sovereignty and difference of dispensations; for if we do not take it in this way, divers incongruities will follow for if here he were speaking about the will, and those who are good and those not so, He will be Himself the Maker of these, and man will be free from all responsibility. And at this rate, Paul will also be shown to be at variance with himself, as he always bestows chief honor upon free choice. There is nothing else then which he here wishes to do, save to persuade the hearer to yield entirely to God, and at no time to call Him to account for anything whatever. For as the potter (he says) of the same lump makes what he pleaseth, and no one forbids it; thus also when God, of the same race of men, punisheth some, and honoreth others, be not thou curious nor meddling herein, but worship only, and imitate the clay. And as it followeth the hands of the potter, so do thou also the mind of Him that so ordereth things. For He worketh nothing at random, or mere hazard, though thou be ignorant of the secret of His Wisdom. Yet thou allowest the other of the same lump to make divers things, and findest no fault: but of Him you demand an account of His punishments and honors, and will not allow Him to know who is worthy and who is not so; but since the same lump is of the same substance, you assert that there are the same dispositions. And, how monstrous this is! And yet not even is it on the potter that the honor and the dishonor of the things made of the lump depends, but upon the use made by those that handle them, so here also it depends on the free choice. Still, as I said before, one must take this illustration to have one bearing only, which is that one should not contravene God, but yield to His incomprehensible Wisdom. For the examples ought to be greater than the subject, and than the things on account of which they are brought forward, so as to draw on the hearer better. Since if they were not greater and did not mount far above it, he could not attack as he ought, and shame the objectors. However, their ill-timed obstinacy he silenced in this way with becoming superiority. And then he introduces his answer. Now what is the answer?

**Verse 22, 23, 24.** *"What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom He hath chosen, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles."*

What he means is somewhat as follows. Pharaoh was a vessel of wrath, that is, a man who by his own hard-heartedness had kindled the wrath of God. For after enjoying much long-suffering, he became no better, but remained unimproved. Wherefore he calleth him not only "a vessel of wrath," but also one "fitted for destruction." That is, fully fitted indeed, but by his own proper self. For neither had God left out ought of the things likely to recover him, nor did he leave out ought of those that would ruin him, and put him beyond any forgiveness. Yet still, though God knew this, "He endured him with much long-

suffering,” being willing to bring him to repentance. For had He not willed this, then He would not have been thus long-suffering. But as he would not use the long-suffering in order to repentance, but fully fitted himself for wrath, He used him for the correction of others, through the punishment inflicted upon him making them better, and in this way setting forth His power. For that it is not God’s wish that His power be so made known, but in another way, by His benefits, namely, and kindnesses, he had shown above in all possible ways. For if Paul does not wish to appear powerful in this way (“not that we should appear approved,” he says, “but that ye should do that which is honest,”) (2 Corinthians 13:7), much less doth God. But after that he had shown long-suffering, that He might lead to repentance, but he did not repent, He suffered him a long time, that He might display at once His goodness and His power, even if that man were not minded to gain anything from this great long-suffering. As then by punishing this man, who continued incorrigible, He showed His power, so by having pitied those who had done many sins but repented, He manifested His love toward man. But it does not say, love towards man, but glory, to show that this is especially God’s glory, and for this He was above all things earnest. But in saying, “which He had afore prepared unto glory,” he does not mean that all is God’s doing. Since if this were so, there were nothing to hinder all men from being saved. But he is setting forth again His foreknowledge, and doing away with the difference between the Jews and the Gentiles. And on this topic again he grounds a defense of his statement, which is no small one. For it was not in the case of the Jews only that some men perished, and some were saved, but with the Gentiles also this was the case. Wherefore he does not say, all the Gentiles, but, “of the Gentiles,” nor, all the Jews, but, “of the Jews.” As then Pharaoh became a vessel of wrath by his own lawlessness, so did these become vessels of mercy by their own readiness to obey. For though the more part is of God, still they also have contributed themselves some little. Whence he does not say either, vessels of well-doing, or vessels of boldness, but “vessels of mercy,” to show that the whole is of God. For the phrase, “it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth,” even if it comes in the course of the objection, still, were it said by Paul, would create no difficulty, Because when he says, “it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth,” he does not deprive us of free-will, but shows that all is not one’s own, for that it requires grace from above. For it is binding on us to will, and also to run: but to confide not in our own labors, but in the love of God toward man. And this he has expressed elsewhere. “Yet not I, but the grace which was with me.” (1 Corinthians 15:10.), And he well says, “Which He had afore prepared unto glory.” For since they reproached them with this, that they were saved by grace, and thought to make them ashamed, he far more than sets aside this insinuation. For if the thing brought glory even to God, much more to them through whom God was glorified. But observe his forbearance, and unspeakable wisdom. For when he had it in his power to adduce, as an instance of those punished, not Pharaoh, but such of the Jews as had sinned, and so make his discourse much clearer, and show that where there were the same fathers, and the same sins, some perished, and some had mercy shown them, and persuade them not to be doubtful-minded, even if some of the Gentiles were saved, while the Jews were perishing; that he might not make his discourse irksome, the showing forth of the punishment he draws from the foreigner, so that he may not be forced to call them “vessels of wrath.” But those that obtained mercy he draws from the people of the Jews. And besides, he also has spoken in a sufficient way in God’s behalf, because though He knew very well that the nation was fitting itself as a vessel of destruction, still He contributed all on His part, His patience, His long-suffering, and that not merely long-suffering, but “much long-suffering;” yet still he was not minded to state it barely against the Jews. Whence then are some vessels of wrath, and some of mercy? Of their own free choice. God, however, being very good, shows the same kindness to both. For it was not those in a state of salvation only to whom He showed mercy, but also Pharaoh, as far as His part went. For of the same long-suffering, both they and he had the advantage.

And if he was not saved, it was quite owing to his own will: since, as for what concerneth God, he had as much done for him as they who were saved. Having then given to the question that answer which was furnished by facts, in order to give his discourse the advantage of other testimony in its favor, he introduces the prophets also making the same declarations aforetime. For Hosea, he says, of old put this in writing, as follows:

**Verse 25.** *"I will call them My people, which were not My people; and her beloved, which was not beloved."*

Here to prevent their saying, that you are deceiving us here with specious reasoning, he calls Hosea to witness, who crieth and saith, "I will call them My people, who were not My people." (Hosea 2:23.) Who then are the not-people? Plainly, the Gentiles. And who the not-beloved? The same again. However, he says, that they shall become at once people, and beloved, and sons of God.

**Verse 26.** *"For even they shall be called," he says, "the children of the living God."*

But if they should assert that this was said of those of the Jews who believed, even then the argument stands. For if with those who after so many benefits were hard-hearted and estranged; and had lost their being as a people, so great a change was wrought, what is there to prevent even those who were not estranged after being taken to Him, but were originally aliens, from being called, and, provided they obey, from being counted worthy of the same blessings? Having then done with Hosea, he does not content himself with him only, but also brings Isaiah in after him. sounding in harmony with him.

**Verse 27.** *"For Esaias," he says, "crieth concerning Israel."*

That is, speaks out boldly, and uses no dissimulation. Why then lay a charge against us, when they afore declared the same thing with more than trumpet's loudness? And what does Isaiah cry? "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved. (Isaiah 10:22.)

Do you see that he too does not say that all are to be saved, but that those that are worthy shall? For I regard not the multitude, he means, nor does a race diffused so far distress me, but those only do I save that yield themselves worthy of it. And he does not mention the "sand of the sea" without a reason, but to remind them of the ancient promise whereof they had made themselves unworthy. Why then are you troubled, as though the promise had failed, when all the Prophets show that it is not all that are to be saved? Then he mentions the mode of the salvation also. Observe the accuracy of the Prophet, and the judgment of the Apostle, what a testimony he has cited, how exceedingly apposite. For it not only shows us that those to be saved are some and not all, but also adds the way they are to be saved. How then are they to be saved, and how will God count them worthy of the benefit?

**Verse 28.** *"He will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness," he says, "because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth." (Ib. 23, LXX.)*

What he means then is somewhat of this sort. There is no need of fetching a circuit, and of trouble, and the vexation of the works of the Law, for the salvation is by a very short way. For such is faith, it holds salvation in a few short words. "For if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in

thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” (Romans 10:9.) Now you see what this, “the Lord shall make a short word (LXX.) upon earth,” is. And what is indeed wonderful is, that this short word carries with it not salvation only, but also righteousness.

**Verse 29.** *“And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and had been made like unto Gomorrha.” (Isaiah 1:9.)*

Here again he shows another thing, that not even those few were saved from their own resources. For they too would have perished, and met with Sodom’s fate, that is, they would have had to undergo utter destruction (for they (of Sodom) were also destroyed root and branch, and left not even the slightest remnant of themselves,) and they too, he means, would have been like these, unless God had used much kindness to them, and had saved them by faith. And this happened also in the case of the visible captivity, the majority having been taken away captive and perished, and some few only being saved.

**Verse 30, 31.** *“What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.”*

Here at last is the clearest answer. For since he had used a proof as well from facts (“for they are not all Israel that are of Israel”) as from the case of the forefathers Jacob and Esau, and from the prophets Hosea and Isaiah, he further gives the most decisive answer, after first adding to the perplexity. The points discussed, then, are two; one that the Gentiles attained, and the other that they attained it without following after it, that is, without taking pains about it. And again in the Jews’ case also there are two difficulties of the same kind; one that Israel attained not, the other that, though they took pains, they attained not. Whence also his use of words is more emphatical. For he does not say that they had, but that they “attained to righteousness.” For what is especially new and unusual is, that they who followed after it attained not, but they which followed not after it attained. And he seems to be indulging them by saying, “followed after.” But afterwards he strikes the blow home. For since he had a strong answer to give them, he had no fear of making the objection a little harsher. Hence he doth not speak of faith either, and the righteousness ensuing thereon, but shows that before the faith even, on their own ground they were worsted and condemned. For thou, O Jew, he says, hast not found even the righteousness which was by the Law. For thou hast transgressed it, and become liable to the curse. But these that came not through the Law, but by another road, have found a greater righteousness than this, that, namely, which is of faith. And this he had also said before. “For if Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God” (Romans 4): so showing that the other righteousness was greater than this. Before, then, I said that there were two difficulties, but now they have even become three questions: that the Gentiles found righteousness, and found it without following after it, and found a greater than that of the Law. These same difficulties are again felt in the Jews’ case with an opposite view. That Israel did not find, and though he took pains he did not find, and did not find even the less. Having then thrust his hearer into perplexity, he proceeds to give a concise answer, and tells him the cause of all that is said. When then is the cause?

**Verse 32.** *“Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the Law.”*

This is the clearest answer in the passage, which if he had said immediately upon starting, he would not have gained so easy a hearing. But since it is after many perplexities, and preparations, and demonstrations that he sets it down, and after using countless preparatory steps, he has at last made it more intelligible, and also more easily admitted. For this he says is the cause of their destruction: "Because it was not by faith, but as it were by the works of the Law," that they wished to be justified. And he does not say, "by works," but, "as it were by the works of the Law," to show that they had not even this righteousness.

"For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone;"

**Verse 33.** *"As it is written, Behold I lay in Sion a stumbling-stone, and rock of offense and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed."*

You see again how it is from faith that the boldness comes, and the gift is universal; since it is not of the Jews only that this is said, but also of the whole human race. For every one, he would say, whether Jew, or Grecian, or Scythian, or Thracian, or whatsoever else he may be, will, if he believes, enjoy the privilege of great boldness. But the wonder in the Prophet is that he foretells not only that they should believe, but also that they should not believe. For to stumble is to disbelieve. As in the former passage he points out them that perish and them that are saved, where he says, "If the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant shall be saved. And, If the Lord of Sabaoth had not left us a seed, we should have been as Sodoma." And, "He hath called not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles;" so here too he implies that some will believe, and some will stumble. But stumbling comes of not taking heed, of gaping after other things. Since then they did give heed to the Law, they stumbled on the stone, "And a stone of stumbling and rock of offense" he calls it from the character and end of those that believe not.

Is then the language used made plain to you? or does it still want much in clearness? I think indeed that, to those who have been attending, it is easy to get a clear view of it. But if it has slipped anybody's memory, you can meet in private, and learn what it was. And this is why I have continued longer upon this explanatory part of the discourse, that I might not be compelled to break off the continuity of the context, and so spoil the clearness of the statements. And for this cause too I will bring my discourse to a conclusion here, without saying anything to you on the more immediately practical points, as I generally do, lest I should make a fresh indistinctness in your memories by saying so much. It is time now to come to the proper conclusion, by shutting up the discourse with the doxology to the God of all. Let us then both pause, me that am speaking and you that are hearing, and offer up glory to Him. For His is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.