

PHARAOH & EGYPT

The Plan of Salvation for the Nations



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This might seem like an unlikely topic for this series. Most of our other studies concentrate on the people of God whose example we can find in the Faith Hall of Fame of Hebrews 11. They are the ones the Bible brings forward as the leaders whose lives glorify God, and ones whom we are called to imitate (see **Heb 13:7**). Why is it that now we are studying one whose fate, it seems, was to incur the very wrath of God? Why would we study Pharaoh and the Egyptians?

Within the story of Pharaoh and the Egyptians is contained a question of the ages: Would God have desired Egypt's salvation? In Exodus, we hear of God hardening Pharaoh's heart so that Pharaoh does not let Israel go. This is especially difficult if we consider Paul's conclusion on the subject is rather troubling: "*therefore God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden*" (**Rom 9:18**). But as the next verse asks, if God was the one who hardened Pharaoh's heart, how is it that he is still held accountable for his stubbornness? Paul's answer to that does not make it any easier to understand. He said, "*but who are you, a human being, to talk back to God?*" (**v. 20**). And then he reasserts God's sovereignty.

I have gone through two sessions on the topic of Predestination with the initial group of readers of this article, so this topic should not come as an utter shock to them. If you are a later audience, do request that article; because this is not the forum for that particular topic.

But in all standard, without a detailed look at this matter, and without a deeper understanding of it, we may misunderstand the God's plan for salvation of the nations. This is what we shall look into.

There are 3 ways with which I would like to dig deeper into this:

1. An Investigation of the Exodus Narrative

We will look intensely into the actual narrative and construct the message as it was supposed to be understood by the original readers.

2. An Investigation of Paul's Doctrine through a Contextual Reading of the Book of Romans

It is a well known-fact that Paul sometimes uses words that are difficult to understand (**2 Pet 3:16**). What we must be careful not to do though, is to misinterpret what he said and create a teaching that is contrary to what he intended.

3. A Hypothesis as to the Reason behind the Ambiguity: The Wheat and the Weeds

What is the mystery behind this difficulty, and how to understand it? God is firstly unfathomable, but He is also the God who reveals His will, so that we can live holy lives. How do we understand this in a way that would cause us to live the way He intends for us?

What I will attempt to show from this study is how the events of Egypt; especially the 10 plagues, were used by God to prove to the Israelites, the Egyptians, and even the whole world that He alone is God, and that they should worship Him alone. In short, the plagues delivered the Gospel to even Pharaoh and the Egyptians. If they choose to obey Him, they would be spared of the plagues; and if they choose to worship Him, they (yes, even the Egyptians) would be engrafted as part of God's people.

Finally, we will see how God meant for the Israelites to fulfill the promise of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; that they will be God's witnesses and channel of blessing to the whole world; to the glory of God.

Tab 1.0: Exploring the Intent of the Plague and Pharaoh's Hardening of Heart

Plague/ Sign	Defeated gods*	Purpose	Who/ How Convinced	Distinction	Pharaoh's Response	
Prologue Staff into Snakes			Imitated but Superiority proven		Would not listen (7:13)	
I Blood		Hapi, god of annual Nile flood	"By this you will know that I am the LORD" (7:17)	Imitated (not convinced)	Heart became hard, and did not even take this to heart (7:22-23)	
II Frogs		Heqt, goddess of childbirth	Unimitable Time of cessation - "so that you may know there is no one like the LORD our God" (8:10)	Imitated but superiority proven by the time of cessation	Pharaoh hardened his own heart upon relief (8:15)	
III Gnats		Thoth, god of magic	Unimitable sign. Magicians - "This is the finger of God" (8:19)	Magicians acknowledged this is the work of God (8:19)	Pharaoh's heart was hard (8:19)	
IV Flies		Ptah, creator god	Distinction - "so that you will know that I, The LORD, am in this land" (8:22)		Between My people and your people (8:23)	Hardened his heart (8:32)
V Livestock		Hathor, mother goguess, pictured with cow ears, horns	Distinction so that Pharaoh will investigate (9:4, 7)	Pharaoh and his men investigated (9:7)	Between the belonging of the Israelites and the belonging of the Egyptians (9:4)	unyielding heart (9:7)
VI Boils		Isis and other health gods		Magicians utterly defeated (9:11)		The LORD hardened his heart (note: start of such term) and Pharaoh would not listen (9:12)
VII Hail		Shu, god of dry air	Incontestible God - "So you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth" (9:15).	There are officials of Pharaoh who "feared the LORD" (9:20)	Between God's people + Pharaoh's officials who feared the LORD (9:20) and the other Egyptians	"This time I have sinned" (9:27) but then upon relief, he sinned again and his heart was hard (9:34-35). Acknowledge accountability I have sinned against God and you. Now forgive (10:16). The LORD hardened his heart (10:20). Acknowledge personal accountability & need for repentance
VIII Locusts		Min, god of fertile crops	Repetition/ hardenings "so that I may perform these miraculous signs among them (Egyptians), and that you (the Israelites) may know that I am the LORD" (10:1-2)	There are officials of Pharaoh who wanted God gone (10:7). But responded with "the LORD their God"		The LORD hardened his heart (10:27) and Pharaoh made an ultimatum to Moses to not deal with him again (10:28)
IX Darkness		Ra, sun god			Between the residences of the Egyptians and the Israelites (10:23)	The LORD hardened his heart (10:27) and Pharaoh made an ultimatum to Moses to not deal with him again (10:28)
X Firstborn		Pharaoh, the ultimate idol	Hardening "so that My wonders may be multiplied in Egypt" 11:9). Distinction "then you (Pharaoh) will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel" (11:7). Final Plague "then he will let you (Israelites) go" (11:1)	The Egyptians were "favourably disposed" toward the Israelites and the officials respected Moses (11:3)	Between the people who urged the Israelite to leave (12:33) and the many who left with them (12:38)	"Go, and go, and also bless me" (12:32)
Epilogue Red Sea			"I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for Myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD" (14:4, 18)	"When the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant"		

* This list of the "Defeated gods" is derived from Miller S, The Complete Visual Bible, p.37

• An Investigation of the Exodus Narrative

Table 1.0 summarizes what we are going to study, and details the specific verses we should pay careful attention to. These are the things I want us to pay careful attention to:

- **The Purposes of the Individual Plagues.** They are specified in Plagues I, II, IV, VII, VIII, and X. In the rest of the plagues, similar intents can be inferred. If we are to summarize this, the intent would be this:
 - **So that the Israelites will know that they serve the True and Only God.**

(1) First and foremost it was given to the Israelites as God's chosen people. They who had been enslaved under the powerful nation of Egypt must know that their God is the only true God whom they must serve. Before Moses went to Pharaoh, God first gave the signs through Moses so that the people would believe that Moses would indeed set them free by the authority of the omnipotent God. *"This," said the Lord, "is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers-the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob-has appeared to you" (4:5).* They were given three signs which preceded the 10 Plagues. (2) and then the Israelite were given the best seats of the house as God displays His magnificent power to the Egyptians. Starting from Plague IV, they could witness all the Plagues befalling the Egyptians but not them. And in Plague VIII we are told the reason. The repetitions of the Plagues were done *"so that I may perform these signs of mine among them that you (the Israelites) may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and that you (the Israelites) may know that I am the Lord" (10:1-2).* They were the primary audience.
 - **So that the Pharaoh & Egypt will know that the God is Israel is the True and Only God.**

The Plagues to Pharaoh bears many significance. (1) It was first prophesied, even before the very first plague, that Pharaoh would resist until a time when a plague of the firstborn son would be given. It was also prophesied that God would harden Pharaoh's heart (7:21-23). Now at the very least this shows us that God is in total control of history. That even Pharaoh's stubborn rejection was not to catch God by surprise. Such foreknowledge may seem disturbing at first; but if you really think through it, we should not have it any other way. A god who gets surprised by the turn of events unfolding in history is not the God of history; he would be a god confoundable by history. And that is not the God of the Bible. (2) The Plagues were an answer to Pharaoh's initial challenge, *"Who is the LORD, that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go" (5:2).* That was Pharaoh's excuse; he did not know the Lord. So, regard the Plague as God's introductory revelation to Pharaoh; in response to this challenge. At the very first Plague, in 7:17, God made His reasoning clear: *"By this you will know that I am the Lord."* During the Second, Moses gave Pharaoh the challenge to set the stage, to determine the time of cessation of the Plague, *"so that you may know there is no one like the Lord our God" (8:10).* During the Third, even Pharaoh's own magicians conceded utter defeat *"this is the finger of God" (8:19).* During the Fourth, and all the subsequent Plagues, distinctions were made so that the Israelites were not affected *"so that you will know that I, the Lord, am in this land" (8:22).* Therefore, unlike popular belief held at the time, God is God of the whole earth, and not territorial.

Note that before the Sixth Plague, there was no mention of the Lord hardening the Pharaoh's heart. For example, in the Second, the term used was Pharaoh "*hardened his own heart*" (8:15), and also during the Fourth (8:32). I will leave the explanations of these terms later; but we should note that God allowing the hardening of Pharaoh's heart does not excuse him from accountability. It is at the sixth Plague that the term "*the Lord hardened his heart*" (9:12) was explicitly used. But something did change after the Sixth Plague.

During the Seventh, we already see some officials of Pharaoh fearing the Lord (9:20) and God reasserts His dominion "*so you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth*" (9:15). By this time, Pharaoh's response to the Plague already displayed a recognition of accountability "*this time I have sinned*" (9:12). And by this time, there is a new pattern emerging; that is Pharaoh admitting to guilt but yet hardening his heart yet again upon signs of relief (9:34-35). So, in fact, during this Seventh Plague, Pharaoh was already convinced that YHWH was God of the whole earth, and that he was serving idols all this time. Which is why it is no surprising that by this time round, God said these very words "*for by now I could have stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you My power and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth*" (9:15-16). I will explain later how this actually corresponds to how God gives man over to sin as a result of their hardened hearts; as stated in **Romans 1**. This way, we would have a thorough understanding of the theology of Paul; and not fragments of it.

During the Eight (and also the Tenth), God starts to reveal His reason for using so many Plagues. These reasons are stated in **10:1-2** and **11:1**. And these summarizes the reasons: (1) So that the signs will be multiplied in number and therefore intensify the message it bears (2) so that the signs may be performed among the Egyptians (3) and so that the distinction will be made clear who are the chosen people of God (4) so that the chosen people will know the Lord. Take special note of Pharaoh's reaction to the Eight. He now realizes not only the wrongdoings, but to the personal transgression his actions are targeted towards: "*I have sinned against God and you. Now, forgive...*" (10:16). Pharaoh now knows the Lord, and knows Him personally. He now believes with absolute certainty that the Lord is God of the whole earth. But yet, he chose not to worship Him. This is suppressing truth with wickedness; and the very thing that incurs the wrath of God (**Rom 1:18**).

The climax of our story comes at the end of the Ninth Plague. Here, Pharaoh has had enough of Moses and of his message. He made an ultimatum to not deal with him again (10:28). So Pharaoh has hardened his heart in such a way that he has now made an ultimate decision to reject God. No more consideration. It does not matter if He is the One True God; Pharaoh is dead set against Him. God now chooses to unleash the ultimate Plague of the Tenth. This was to be a curtain-closer; a plague to end all plagues. And God said this "*on that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD*" (Ex 12:12).

Now, I have put up in Table 1.0 the names of the Egyptian gods that were defeated in each plague. The Ninth Plague actually defeated Ra, the sun god of Egypt. He was defeated when the very light he claimed to control was not turned to darkness without him being able to do anything about it. But

the fact that this supreme god was number nine in the list proved that in the heart of Pharaoh, Ra was no *numero uno*. No, there was someone more supreme in his heart; one he serves with more dedication. Who was that? It was none other than Pharaoh; himself! The Tenth Plague defeated none other than Pharaoh, as the firstborn of Egypt was put to death including Pharaoh's own firstborn and sole heir to the throne. Now this is interesting. Despite every temple that Pharaoh erected for the many gods of Egypt; despite his apparent dedication to religion; all those gods were not the ultimate object of his worship. No, they all serve someone of higher importance; and this was none other than Pharaoh himself. But this should tell us something about idols, doesn't it? False gods are but images we humans create to project our own lofty ideals. Some even unashamedly create gods to fulfill their own needs and desires. In China, you have a god for prosperity that looks like an obese happy man holding up a symbol of gold. What happens if you worship that god? You get rich. Who then is the ultimate purpose of worship? Us! Our desires and needs take precedence over righteousness and truth. This was true of Pharaoh; it is still true of us.

However, when the Israelites were set free, to leave Egypt and worship God; something else transpires. But this occurred ever so subtly many of us often miss it. The Israelites left Egypt with "*many others*" (12:38). Who could this be, but the very Egyptians themselves? This was about the only verse that indicates that some of the Egyptians actually became part of the Israelites. Why would we miss this? Because the distinction will get even more subtle. Immediately after the Exodus, God made sure that the foreigners are allowed to partake of the Passover when they are circumcised (Ex 12:28-49). This signifies that they are in fact engrafted as a fellow Israelite and a fellow heir to the promise of God! From then on, they are to abide with the laws of God (see eg. Lev 18:26), and the Israelite were warned to love them as their own, and treated as a native-born (Lev 19:34). They have become, in fact, descendants of Abraham through faith (see Rom 4:16). They are the engrafted Israelites!

○ **So that the Whole World will know that the God of Israel is the True and Only God.**

The event of Egypt goes beyond that nation and that age. By God's grace and design, it goes beyond the boundary of time and space to affect people of all nations and all time. The Israelites are to preserve its impact by telling this story to their children and grandchildren (10:1-2). But even beyond that, in 9:15-16 we are told that this would go farther than Egypt; but that God's name would be proclaimed in *all the earth*.

And we see that this indeed happened. The story of how an enslaved nation was able to stand against its supreme oppressor, who at the time was the most feared nation in all the world was no small feat. Even without the aid of newspapers, radio or internet, the news of Egypt's defeat spread throughout the nations of ANE (Ancient Near East). Ever heard of the English saying "your reputation precedes you?" Well the Exodus accomplished this, and more. It would strike fear in the hearts of the nations that Israel would set to conquer. The testimony of Rahab describes the sentiments of the Canaanites "*I know that the Lord has given you this land and a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt... When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below*" (Jos 2:9-11). It would also make the

mighty Philistines cower with fear and say in desperation “*Oh no! Nothing like this has happened before. We’re doomed! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness” (I Sam 4:7-8).*

Again, there would later be people like Rahab who, because of their faith are counted amongst the chosen people of God. For who can serve as better example of the extent of God’s grace and forgiveness than Rahab did? A prostitute in a foreign land would later on be included even in Hebrew 11’s list of the heroes of faith (Heb 11:31). And of even greater significance, that she would even be counted as part of the lineage that was the very lineage of Christ (and that she, a woman, made it as one of the five women mentioned – Mat 1:5).

- An Investigation of Paul’s Doctrine through
a Contextual Reading of the Book of Romans**

I hope so far I have at least warranted the claim that Romans 9; far from demonstrating unaccountability, was demonstrating God’s justice and grace even to those who are against Him. By looking in greater depth the sole witness of Exodus, we are already able to discern the goodness of God within His unfathomable acts.

Now, I hope to further proof this despite the very confusing words of Romans 9. The basic methodology is this: that we should always let Scripture interpret Scripture; and see a writing in its context and intent. We have let the narrative of Exodus interpret the writing of Romans 9. Next, we will look at the overall message of the Book of Romans itself; which will give answers to the question of Pharaoh and his hardened heart.

The first (and perhaps the greatest) clue is already found in the very beginning of the Book of Romans; at Romans 1. In this chapter we read of two paths man can take:

- Those who live by Faith, who will be brought from Faith to Faith (Rom 1:17)**

Refer to the Chapter on “*The Story of Abraham: God the Author and Perfecter of Faith*” for further readings on this topic. However, in summary, our lives of faith is given by God and God alone is its Author and Perfecter. And this is summarized below:

	The Major Role (of its Providence)ⁱ	Rom 1
Basic Faith	God the Father	Rom 1:16-23
Saving Faith	God the Son	Gal 2:16
Serving Faith	God the Holy Spirit	1 Kor 12:7-11
Surrendered Faith	The Triune God	2 Kor 12:7-10

- Those who live in Rebellion, who will be brought from Depravity to Depravity (Rom 1:18-32)**

God “giving over” man to his sin and depravity. And this happens three times (1:24, 26, 28). And there are four stages of Depravity. (1) Suppression of Truth, (2) Impurity or Corruption, (3) Lustful Desires, (4) Depraved Mind and the Murder of Conscience. This is depicted below:

	The Sin and the Exchange	Rom 1
Basis of Rebellion	Suppression of Truth with Wickedness Exchanges True Glory with Images	v. 18-20

Given over to...	Sexual <i>Impurity</i> – Free sex Exchanges Truth for Lie	v. 21-25
Given over to...	Shameful <i>Lusts</i> – Homosexuality Exchanges Natural for Unnatural	v. 26-27
Given over to...	Depraved <i>Mind</i> – Justification of Sin Outright rejection of the knowledge of God	v. 28-32

If we look at it this way, we can understand how and why God would give people over to Depravity. What happened with Pharaoh can exactly be explained by this table in Romans 1.

Suppression of Truth

Pharaoh’s basic problem, as later on revealed was NOT that he did not know that he was serving the wrong god. He did know. But worshipping those gods came to him as convenience because they ultimately served Pharaoh and served his needs. Pharaoh wanted gods he could control, those whom he can use to control the mass. He was most probably of the same opinion with Rousseau, who needed a *civil religion* to act as a social contract so he could easily steer everything to his own needs. In short, Pharaoh did not want God; he wanted to be god; and this is why the very last Plague which made him finally surrender was not when God defeated Ra, but when God defeated Pharaoh. Although not very evident, but this was the initial “suppression of truth with wickedness.” For although Pharaoh knew that there is a supreme God that made the universe, he neither glorified Him nor gave thanks to Him (comp **Rom 1:21**) and in doing so gave himself over to futility. Although Pharaoh claimed to be the wise king who advocated religion, he became a fool because he *exchanged* the glory of God for images of gods that he made to look like a mortal human beings and birds and animals and reptiles (comp **1:22-23**). The first exchange was made. True glory for images. And so the gods of Israel are made to look like the creation; and not the actual Creator. It was gods made in the image of man, not man made in the image of God. It is because of this that God gave him over to the desires of his heart, which had already decided not to worship the One True God.

Impurity or Corruption

Because of this, God gave Pharaoh over to impurity, so that Pharaoh degrades his own concept with his magicians, and created a civil religion to serve his own ends. He does another *exchange*. He exchanges Truth for lie and therefore worshipped and served beings he himself knew he created rather than the Creator (comp **1:25**). There was a legend of the story of Abraham amongst the Jewish culture. This is most probably fabricated, but it does have a good lesson.

Abram saw that his father was making idols of wood and stone to sell for a living. And when he went away, Abram went to the storage and destroyed all the idols. When his father returned, he was very angry with Abram, and asked him, “why did you destroy all the idols? You have done a very bad thing today!” Abram replied, “but father, I did not do it. When you left, these gods fought amongst themselves and killed each other.” He was immediately scolded. “Why would you lie to me? How could these wood and stones come to life and kill each other? They have no life and are merely created images.” And so Abram said, “then I would ask of you, why would you worship such dead gods?”

When we humans worship the very images we create, is that not silly? But that is indeed what we have done through the religions we create. This is plain stupidity, but we are given over to it because of what our heart has decided. Pharaoh and his magicians worshipped images that they created. Which was why their defeat

meant nothing. They knew those idols were but a fragment of their imagination. Their unrepentant stubbornness gives them over to the next stage.

Lustful Desires

Now, this third stage already affects our feelings and desires. We, as beings created after God's own image, should desire truth, holiness, justice and all of the attributes of God. But because of our depravity, we do not want God, and do not desire Him. And so, we fight against that which we were created to be, and made another *exchange*. We exchange the natural for the unnatural.

Pharaoh had already admitted by the 6th Plague that he was in the wrong. He conceded that there is an absolute right or wrong that even he should submit himself under. He admitted "*this time I have sinned*" (**Ex 9:27**). He knew there was a standard to adhere to, and admitted that he had transgressed or fallen short against that standard (note: sin as hamartia, missing the mark). And in the Seventh Plague, he even admitted that this shortage was in comparison to what God has set for him (**Ex 10:16**). See how little by little, Pharaoh is stripped of his excuses? Though from the very beginning people were already without excuse (**Rom 1:20**), by gradually exposing this underlying thoughts and desires, they are even more proven inexcusable. But since they persist in hardening their heart, they are given over to the last stage.

Depraved Mind

There is a trigger to this final giving over. In Romans 1, it is described this way: "*they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God*" (**1:28**). In other words, sinners have been exposed to the overwhelming proof of the existence of God. But they react in ways that keeps suppressing this knowledge with their decision and desire to continue to do evil. Finally, despite a convincing knowledge of the existence of God and their accountability to God, they decide that their love of the world and their desires to please themselves therein is more precious, more valuable and more worthwhile than retaining the knowledge of God. What they ultimately do is to reject God outright and claim that they have no knowledge of Him, despite evidence to the contrary.

And is this not what happened to Pharaoh at the end of the Ninth Plague? Despite knowing and acknowledging his accountability and even sinfulness before the Lord, he still resisted the truth. And he made an ultimatum that would send him over to the dark edge: he decided to completely reject God and His discipline. He is in fact saying, "I know that the Lord God is the God of the heavens and the earth. I know that there is no God but the Lord. I know that He commands me to let the Israelites go. I know that He has proven, time and again, that the gods I claim to serve are but of my own making. I know all that. But worshipping this God would mean that I need to lose all my slaves who has helped my so much in my labor. And not only that. God has commanded that they should not leave empty handed. I will not have that. I am a self-made man who has achieved this status because of my abilities and efforts. I am not going to let God take that away from me just because He commanded me. He had never been there my whole life, so why now?" He was dead set against the knowledge of God; and justified himself whilst doing so. He thought that he had justification not to acknowledge God or obey Him. His conscience is finally killed; and so he was given over to a depraved mind.

That was an explanation of what happened to Pharaoh based on the pattern of Romans 1. The same principle explained how he was given over to a hardened heart; and how, with each increasing Plague, his accountability actually grew, and not diminished. It showed how the message of the Truth became increasingly overwhelming.

And as a little side note, it is interesting that the very same thing that happened with Pharaoh is happening with all man who is in the true Egypt – the world of sin. And it is also interesting how Paul chose sexuality as the temperature check of human hard-heartedness. As they are given over to a more serious depravity, a more impure and unnatural sexual acts followed. And this is exactly what is happening in our world today. Notice how it peaked with the Sexual Revolution of the 1960's to the 1980's; but not without progress. Until the 18th century the word "homosexual" was not even used; and that people referred instead to Sodomy; and it was in most part of the world a criminal act. The decriminalization of homosexuality and gradual degradation eventually started in 1930's to the 1960's and in 1970's we could witness the start of the formation of gay communities. Starting from the 1980's and 1990's most developed countries have decriminalized homosexuality, with some prohibiting discrimination against sexual orientationⁱⁱ. We who are Christians living in the present world can only stand bewildered at the apparent illogical conclusion of this battle of homosexuality. How could they be so irrational? How is it that they can logically think that if a child is born with one arm, it is a handicap, and not normal; but when the same logic is applied to sexual orientation, they refuse to accept design? Human beings have 2 arms, that's design. If they have one arm, that's handicap. Marriage is between a man and a woman. If someone has a different sexual orientation (if this is even proven to be genetic, and I would think otherwise), that is an abnormality that is to be dealt with love but in truth. But enough about that, for this is not its intended topic.

The Wheat and the Weed

The more important thing for us to note is that God gives sinners over to depravity for one reason, but with two possible outcomes. The reason is this: In response to sin, God gave the standard of the Law. When man compares himself with this standard, he realizes how utterly sinful he is. Therefore, as Paul explains, "*the Law was brought in so that trespass might increase*" (**Rom 5:20**). But this increase in trespasses will do one of two things: it will reveal if we really are those who live in accordance to the flesh, whose ultimate desire is to please ourselves, or whether we are those who live in accordance to the Spirit, whose ultimate desire would be to be reconciled to God.

In the Book of Romans, Paul gave the believers no choice; and the basis for this is found in the preceding chapter, in chapter 8. Paul classifies man into only two possible types:

1. The Psychikos – Those who live according to the flesh (**8:5**)
2. The Pneumatikos – Those who live according to the Spirit (**8:6**)

And this is the determining factor as to how this person will live their lives. Those who live according to the flesh (1) does not have Christ (2) is death (3) sets their minds on what the flesh desires, (4) is hostile to God, (5) does not and cannot submit to God's law, (6) cannot please God.

On the other hand, those who live according to the Spirit (1) have Christ in his heart, (2) is life and peace (3) have their minds set on what the Spirit desires, (4) is enabled to become children of God, and to live in accordance to His will.

But the difficulty is that the Bible does tell us that sometimes it is difficult to differentiate between the two. At least, for us as human beings, it is very difficult. **Matt 13:24-30** tells us about the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds, and how God purposely let the two grow together undiscerned until the harvest. We may have people like Saul, who seemed zealous at persecuting the Church. But He is the sheep that listened to the call of Christ, who returned at the very summon. But we may have Judas, who looked no different from the other Apostles of

Christ; doing wonders and preaching the Gospel of salvation along with all the godly men but would finally prove an apostate.

Even those who are of the elect may still be committing sin; because he has not heard the voice of his Master. Like Saul, he is still in search of God; maybe even in the wrong places. And God allowed him to be given over to sin so that he would appreciate grace when it is given to him. But like Saul, when the summon from the Lord comes, his ultimate desire to please God would cause him to respond in faith. And there would be those who are not of the elect but yet are residing with the people of God. He comes to church weekly in all apparent zeal, but his heart is dead set on how the church can benefit him. Like Judas, he lingers on with the apostles thinking that the network could grant him superiority in the coming Kingdom that Christ was to establish. But when the Kingdom presented to him proved different to how he thought it would be; when it offered him none of the fleshly benefits he desired, he would be quick to turn to betrayal; in search for that which he wanted most: Not God but money.

As we come to the conclusion of this chapter, the most significant question is most probably how this should relate to our own assurance of salvation. This then would be the verse to end with. Jesus' prayer to the Father says this: *"Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent"* (**John 17:3**). Salvation is not just about going to heaven; it is about knowing God. It is (as the Westminster Shorter Catechism says) about us glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. See, that is what sin does to us; it causes us to want the wrong things, to appreciate the wrong things. And this sin causes us to not want the truth even when it is presented explicitly to us. Whether we are ones who live according to the flesh or according to the Spirit depend on whether we truly want to please God and whether we value His attributes.

Soli Deo Gloria!

ⁱ I put the heading as "Major Role" because whilst it is important to understand that all of the Triune God is involved in every stage of our salvation. However, the major role in each stage is undertaken by One. For example, it would be heresy to say that God the Father descended to earth and was crucified on the Cross. It was God the Son who was crucified, thereby accomplishing the redemptive work that was prepared by God the Father. And it was God the Holy Spirit who gives gifts to the Body of Christ so that we could function in such a way that glorifies the Son.

ⁱⁱ Data taken and summarized from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality> Accessed 05.06.11