

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. ⁹ For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— ¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” ¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

¹⁹ You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” ²⁰ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” ²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? ²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea,
 “Those who were not my people
 I will call ‘my people,’
 and her who was not beloved
 I will call ‘beloved.’ ”

²⁶ “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’
 there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’ ”

²⁷ And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:
 “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them
 will be saved, ²⁸ for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without
 delay.”

²⁹ And as Isaiah predicted,
 “If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,
 we would have been like Sodom
 and become like Gomorrah.” (ESV)

You know, if you ever wanted to clear out a room of unwanted guests, just bring up the subject of God’s predestination, and tell everyone that the discussion will begin in 5 minutes. Done.

Back in 2006, one of the national, evangelical women’s bible studies worried that *they* would clear out rooms and informed their leaders that in their study of Romans that year that they would skip chapter 9 and these hot-button issues of election and predestination.

But God's prophets and apostles view this topic very differently. Look at the Apostle Paul: Far from being embarrassed by the idea that God chooses some, purely in accordance with his own will, and according to his own nature, Paul thinks it is a glorious truth that *nothing* in us, *nothing* that we have done, not even our decision, is responsible for our salvation. We're saved, Paul says, for no other reason than that God chose us in Christ, redeemed us, called us, and justified us. This is just what Paul said at the climax of Romans 8: That those whom he loved, he also predestined, and those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Paul saw this doctrine not as something to be uncomfortable or ashamed of, not as something to speculate about, not as something over which to despair, but something that *moved* him and should *move us* to worship him for his mercy in Christ.

The real issue, I think, with understanding the doctrine of Predestination is a double-sided pride. On the one side, I've heard this doctrine taught or preached without a loving attitude – in other words, with pride. On the other side, I've seen this doctrine taught rightly, but to people who weren't able to accept the humiliation that comes from acknowledging that God doesn't allow us any place for glory in our redemption – again, pride! Pride is a killer when it comes to understanding the bible and understanding grace.

Now as we begin, here is a principle: When one goes to God, you go to God AS HE IS, even if you don't like what He seems to be saying. There is a direct relationship between that acceptance of God, for ALL of who he is, and one's spiritual understanding and growth. There is an inverse principle that goes with this one: the more you try to remake or recreate God, the less godly you'll become. The point is, if scripture teaches election, then election is not an elective. It's a requirement

This morning we're going to look at 3 questions that Paul answers in this passage:

- Is God a Promise Keeper? (v. 6)
- Is God Arbitrary? (v. 14)
- Do I have Free Will? (v. 19)

So first, is God a promise keeper? You see this right away in v. 6: Has the word of God failed?

Now let's remember what Paul is up to: He is a master at predicting the next question his listeners will ask, and he knows the question of the hour because he's heard it before:

If this gospel message that you preach is so great and compelling, Paul, why is it that only a small number of Jews have embraced it, while the vast majority of the covenant people have rejected it? In fact, Paul, aren't the main opponents of your ministry the Jews – the very people to whom the promises were made?! And doesn't that just make you a renegade Jew who left the faith? And by the way, how can we Gentiles have assurance of salvation and all of these wonderful promises of unmerited grace, when these promises don't seem to have been fulfilled in your own people?

A little background: For the Jews of Paul's day, there were TWO covenants. One covenant was of life that was defined by observing the law, whose mediator was Moses, and whose heirs were those people who were born to that nation of Israel, or those who converted to it. The other covenant was a covenant of death, which was defined by breaking that law. So basically, they thought that there were just two kinds of people in this world – Jews that kept the covenant, and Gentiles who broke it.

Make sense?

Now, Paul comes along and says, you're right about there being two covenants that determine human destiny – you're right about that – but they *don't divide* between the nation of Israel and the Gentiles. No, these two covenants divide between those who are in Adam and are under the law, and its just sentence of condemnation and death, and those who are in Christ, free from the law's judgment. and heirs of eternal life.

So instead of the knife cutting between Jews and Gentiles, it now cuts between those who seek to live by *doing* the law, and are therefore condemned, and those who seek life in Christ alone, and are therefore saved by grace, because he is the new mediator who fulfilled the law for us.

"Ok," his listeners say, "Let's say you're right: what about those covenants at Sinai, Moses, and the promise of the land? Doesn't the covenant at Sinai obligate God to save the nation of Israel no matter what?"

A lot of us still have the same understanding of Israel today – we look around, and obviously, most Jews have not accepted Christ as Messiah, so the only way of getting God off the hook for those old promises is by saying either that the Jews will be saved in some other way than through faith in Jesus, or by saying that the promises God made with the Jews at Sinai will be fulfilled at some future date with a restored temple, a restored nation, and even restored sacrifices. So how does Paul answer all of this? Has God gone back on His word? Has Plan A – saving the nation of Israel – failed? Is the church Plan B or has God *always* saved his church in *both* Testaments through the gospel of Jesus Christ as a remnant of Israel AND the World? Is the church a replacement for Israel, or is it the fulfillment of the promise that God made to Abraham that in him and his seed, that ALL of the nations of the world would be blessed?

We won't answer all of this today! But Paul starts his answer by saying that the knife doesn't cut down national or racial lines: "Not all who are *descended* from Israel *belong* to Israel."

To put it another way, the word of God *hasn't* failed because the accusation that God has saved the Jews is based on the wrong premise: just because someone is a *physical, racial* descendent of Israel, does *not* mean that the person is truly an Israelite. And Paul implies that anyone who has read the Old Testament knows this.

We looked at the examples Paul gives last week: Isaac inherited the promise but Ishmael was rejected. But then Paul knew that someone might object that the status of Abraham's children is kind of complicated because they are children of different mothers... so maybe it's this difference in their physical origin that accounts for their contrasting spiritual states.

So Paul moves down one generation in the Israel org-chart, to an even closer parallel to our own situation because Esau and Jacob had the same mother. Even better, they were twins. Esau was the elder son, he was a nicer guy, he was the man's man, and it's Jacob who deceives his brother and steals the blessing. And yet it's Jacob's name that's changed to "Israel."

None of this came as a surprise to God, because before they were even born or had done anything either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, so that it would not be by works but because of him who calls — Rebekah told, "The older will serve the younger." So God's promise, Paul says, hasn't failed. God has *always* been electing and calling a people from among the Jews. Even among Israel he had always been free to choose one and not another. God is not bound to show mercy on every Israelite any more than he is bound to show mercy on every Gentile. He is utterly free in his mercy – after all, mercy that's forced or demanded isn't really mercy at all. But justice.

- **Which takes us to our second point and Paul's next question: Is God arbitrary? You see this question in v. 14.**

In other words, can God do this? Can he get away with this? If God chose Jacob and hated Esau before the twins were born or before they had done anything good or bad, isn't God being arbitrary?

It's kind of amazing, isn't it? After 2,000 years, we're still talking about this, and we're still having the same reaction that Paul heard back then. Because human nature still demands that God share his glory with us. Especially in our culture where the self-made man or woman is the archetype.

Maybe it's because we live in the seat of democracy that we come to Romans 9 believing that if God were fair, everyone would have a shot at heaven, everyone would hear the gospel and use their free will to either accept or reject the gospel. But when someone tells us that God chooses some and bypasses others, all I see is a sovereign, arbitrary God, and that not everyone will have an opportunity at heaven. But friends, this is NOT where scripture begins. Scripture starts this topic with *the Fall of humanity*.

Look, you and I, we're living at the most human-centered period of self-worship in the history of the western world, and even many Christian leaders today find this doctrine repulsive for this very reason. They will limit God to being a cosmic psychiatrist, a wise spouter of principles for daily living, a ruler over the nation's moral or political life, but when it comes to His freedom, His sovereignty, and His utter graciousness in grace, we often end up like the people who looked on at Christ at his trial, before his crucifixion and said, "We will *not* have this man reign over us!"

When it comes to who God loves and how God loves, it is not us on trial before God, but it is He who must be on trial before us. The criminals have put the judge on trial.

And that's the point: Because scripture starts with the Fall, the teaching of grace is not that God would allow everyone to choose, but that he would choose any of us, people dead in sin, at all! And yet God elects to save a multitude of them – so many, a people so vast, that you can't count them all.

Predestination and election are completely tied to *the grace* of God! "It depends not on human will or exertion – which by the way even includes faith, but on God, who has mercy." (PAUSE)

You know, when we talk about grace, we have to remember that grace is not only unmerited, *it's unprovoked*. When you think about election and predestination, isn't it true that you are always thinking of a person who *wants* salvation, but mean old God just won't give it to them? In your mind's eye, they're trying desperately to initiate their own salvation, but God won't extend a hand. Think about that: When a lot of us think about salvation, think about election, and what God does, we are usually thinking about a neutral person, someone without sin, who we believe has a right to be saved.

And you know, if we *are* all good, moral people, basically neutral, for God to arbitrarily choose some and not others *WOULD* make God a capricious ogre.

But when you speak of someone who has a right to be saved, you're not talking about biblical salvation, *because God saves sinners*. And you're certainly not talking about grace. How can you have *merited* grace? Anyone who's trying to earn their salvation by being a good person, Paul says, is really trying to initiate their *own* righteousness by which they think they *should* be saved.

No, God doesn't save sinless, neutral people – because there aren't any – but people dead in sin and transgression.

You see, if we are who the bible says we are, worthy only of God's wrath, who either don't want salvation, or want salvation on our own terms, then this doctrine of election is God's divine rescue plan. We would *only* keep ourselves *out* of heaven if he didn't choose to include us. And if God is waiting for us to take the first step to find our way back to Him, then he is requiring from us the one thing we cannot do. In our natural state we are no more able to *believe* in Him than we are to *obey* Him.

If our condition is really as bad as Scripture says, dead in our trespasses in sins, then it requires a God that will make a move towards us because we will **not** move towards him. The dead cannot even crawl. And if the wages of sin *is* death, then all humanity – without exception – *deserves* death. So it *can't* be unfair if men and women get what they deserve. God does no wrong when he gives over to some people the punishment that they deserve.

Now I know there are some people that avoid the charge that God is arbitrary by saying that, "God foreknew that I would choose him, and that's why I was chosen. He could foresee my faith." The illustration that is often used is: "This is a movie that God has already seen."

There are three problems with this illustration.

1) The text that the illustration is seeking to explain (Rom 8:29) doesn't say "*that* God foreknew," it says, "*those whom* he foreknew." God knew these people as his own, not that he saw down the hallway of time that some would believe. See, the v. 8 never says that you're children of the foreknowledge, but that you are children of "the promise." HIS promise. It is about him, not about you.

2) God didn't just watch the movie of your life in His private screening room, where angels flew into the projectionist's room with the canisters of David's life, and then sat back and watched what I would do. No, God *wrote* the screenplay. He *made* the cameras and the lenses. He *did* the casting. The lighting. He *wrote* the plot. HE PRODUCED AND DIRECTED ME. He is my creator God.

3) Third, if God *did* foresee your life, just what would he have seen? The way this argument goes, God would have to have seen dead people coming to life on their own – Sinful, corrupt people doing good things, and that he would see these people, apart from his grace, *moving towards Him*. Everything in the Scriptures argues against this. In fact, how could God have foreseen us do anything but reject Him?

I know that this doctrine sometimes sounds like God went through the phone book and lucky-dipped certain names to save, or that he uses some sort of Google-like algorithm to spit out names to be saved, but look: No one gets injustice from the hands of God! If you really have been reading Romans all the way along, you know that you get justice, or you get mercy. We talk a lot about justice these days. It's great biblical subject. But if you really want justice... for *yourself*, if you REALLY want it from God, watch out! No, what you want is His mercy and grace!

God is *not* going through the phone book and just picking names out willy-nilly. No, this is God going through a prison cemetery of people who have already been convicted and executed and where nobody ever wanted him, and raises them from the death they have chosen.

- **Finally, do I have free will? You see this in v. 19: "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?"**

In other words, if it is God's choice to save, hey, he could save everyone and he obviously doesn't. But it's not like I can resist his will can I? And if I can't is my will even free, or am I some sort of robot?

Jonathan Edwards noted that as children of the Enlightenment, we have all kinds of misconceptions about Free Will. Edwards said that most people think of their will as this neutral place in themselves – a separate entity – when all the will really is, is the mind choosing (repeat). Edwards goes on to say that the mind always chooses what it perceives to be the highest good, and that in its fallen state, the mind *can't help* but choose that which is according to its nature.

What's he saying? Is the mind free? Do you make decisions? Yes. Do you make decisions about God? Yes. All Edwards is saying is that you make decisions *consistent with who you are*. And who are you without Christ? Dead in your sin, enemies of God, hostile to God, blind in mind, and unable to obey the law, nor do we even want to!

Do you remember that place over in 1st Corinthians where Paul says, we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, **but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks**, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God? Paul is saying that the gospel is incomprehensible to the mind that is not aided by God. So who IS it comprehensible to? Not to the Jew. Not to the Greek. *Only* to the person *called* by God. *That's when* it becomes wisdom.

Let me put this another way. There is a sense in which you can say that Election has nothing to do with the Freedom of the Will. Because Election does not *restrict* the will. It is *the fall* that restricts the human will. It is *the fall* that makes me totally unable to come to God on my own. When Jesus says, **everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin...but if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed**, he's saying exactly the same thing. You need to be saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Friends, all we're saying is that our hearts determine our motives. And if our hearts are but filthy rags, then we will never choose God on our own. The doctrine of election presumes our inability to choose God because of our sin. See, the problem is not whether *man* can choose. The problem is with the object of his desires or choices. God's problem with us is not *that* we choose. His problem is with *what we always* choose.

You know, when I first heard this doctrine, I thought of it as God taking away people's free will. That we're like robots, and we all have a faith button on the back, and for some he pushes the button, and for others he doesn't. But he takes our free will away from us. But Tim Keller says it's more like this: it's more like a bunch of people, they're all blindfolded, and they are walking one at a time into a furnace. One by one, they all fall in and die.

And you recognize several of them, and you say to one of your friends, "What in heaven's name are you doing?"

And your friend smiles and says, "We're all going on vacation."

And you say, "No you're not. You're all about to commit suicide, you're walking into a furnace."

And your friends say, "No way! We're on our way to Miami Beach; I can feel it getting warmer."

So what do you do?

The doctrine of election is not, "I'm going to have to take their free will away, knock them over the head unconscious, and drag them away. No, the doctrine of Election is taking the blindfold off – giving the person eyes to see and ears to hear – so that the guy goes "Wow! What a fool I've been! I'm *not* going to Miami Beach – this *is* a furnace! "

Does this mean the guy's free will has been violated? By no means! It's just that suddenly he sees more of reality than he saw before. In fact, his *fully free* will has been given to him for the first time.

But, you say, the problem is the **unsaved**, right? Why doesn't he violate *everybody's* free will?

The answer to that is, I don't know. But even if you *don't* believe in election, you *still* have this problem. The problem of why a sovereign God isn't saving the unsaved is not a problem unique to those that accept Paul's teaching on election.

And by the way, if you believe that God comes half way, and you come the other half – the other way that salvation is understood, where you co-elect, co-choose yourself – this question here, "Why does God still find fault with us – we can't resist his will..." that wouldn't even come up, right? You COULD resist. It's only if Paul's doctrine really IS that God is the one who saves, and he IS the decider about salvation that you'd even say this! Paul deals with the instinctual question, "Why does God discriminate in his choosing?"

And one thing that's clear from his answer is that the difference between the saved and the unsaved is not rooted in the differences in people – all are the same clay! – there are no distinctions on which salvation must be based, but instead, "thou must save and thou alone."

Look, I know this is hard. But I want you to step back. Step out of your anxiety. At the very least, at a minimum, I'd love for you to see this chapter as not so much awful, but as bittersweet. Because there IS glory as well as tragedy here.

Here is what is going on, Far from being unfair, far from being arbitrary, far from being ungracious, Paul is actually trying to show how just, fair and gracious God really is!!

Do you remember what Paul was doing back in Romans 1 and 2? Paul knew that the church in Rome was filled with Gentiles and some Jewish Christians. And as usual, in all the churches – you see this most clearly in Galatians – as usual the Jewish Christians felt they had a little superiority. And with some reason – Paul acknowledges this – "to them belongs the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ." Good stuff! And so their attitude was that God might save some Gentiles – "I guess that's what he's doing at the moment, but really, WE are God's chosen race, and for them to come in, they will have to become Jews like us. Eat our food, get circumcised."

So when Paul quotes scripture and says that not all Israel is Israel and "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy," that is a hammer blow on that pride.

And if Paul is successful, and if this logic works, and if the Spirit works in their hearts... maybe, just maybe, other Jews will creep forward and whisper, "Do you think that I, even I, could be one of God's chosen, too?" In other words, he wants them to see that from all time, God was saving by grace. That changes everything around! That's where Paul is headed with all of this! The Jews had thought they were automatically the chosen and the Gentiles... well some might be.

Grace is, Paul says, an *Old Testament* concept. This isn't something he made up to make room for the Gentiles that seemed to respond to his preaching – the deepest, most unique, and most foundational doctrine of the faith – GRACE – has always been there, from the moment Adam and Eve were spared and covered in the skin of that Ram. And if you can read these chapters 9-11 like that – like the way Paul was flattening the playing field in Romans 1-2 – that it's all about grace from first to last, all your problems with election will go away.

We have to end. But let me pass on two reasons why this doctrine matters so much. First, election describes the *love* of God. Really! I will never forget the day I learned how critical this doctrine was for the grace of the gospel. I was in a class with the late Edmund Clowney. And he said that election is all about love.

He said, "If your wife asks you, 'Honey, do you love me?'" and you say, "Yes," and she comes back with "Why do you love me?" What are you going to say? "You could, Dr. Clowney said, "tell her the truth: 'Honey I love you ...because of your figure.' 'I love you because you like hiking and I like hiking.' Or 'I love you because you are a lot prettier than I am handsome, and I felt like, hey, I got the deal.'"

But Dr. Clowney said, "there is really only one answer on which you can build a life and a marriage and that is, "Honey, I love you... *just because I love you.*"

And *that* is the doctrine of election. When God says that you are his elect, he's saying I love you, *just because I love you*. It is not an "I love you *if...*" It is an *unconditional* election. It is *unconditional* love. Electing love is its own rationale, and you can't penetrate it any more than you can explain the totality of the love you have for someone.

Clowney said, imagine for a minute, if you *could* go behind your spouse's love. And you found out that he or she loves you because you serve them in some way, or because of your looks, or because of your job... you know what would happen? Watch out, right? Unless you have an enormous, super-inflated self-esteem, you are going to be in a high state of anxiety, the weight of which will crush your relationship. You know you can't sustain your looks or a career or even a strong body to serve your spouse forever.

Security, rest, and real love are going to come only if you know they love you simply because they love you. That they have made a *choice* to love you. That is a liberating love. That is a love that the heart longs for. A love that will never let you go. It's what you need.

Second, election explains the *grace* of God.

One time RC Sproul was leading a bible study in his living room, and a girl said, about Romans 9, I just can't believe in the doctrine of election. And so Dr. Sproul said, "That's okay, but let me ask you a question: Is your neighbor a Christian?" And she said, " No.

Dr. Sproul said, "Why are you a Christian and your neighbor is not?"

And she said, "Because I received Jesus as my savior and my neighbor did not."

Dr. S: So *why* did you receive Christ as your savior and your neighbor didn't?

Well, because I repented of my sins and they didn't.

And *why* did you repent of your sins and your neighbor didn't?

Because I guess I saw the truth about my sin and my neighbor didn't.

And now you know where this is going...

"*Why* did you see the truth and your neighbor didn't?"

And now it gets worse...because she ultimately said, "I guess it's because I was willing to humble myself and she didn't.

"So what makes you humbler than her?"

And the girl stopped.

So Sproul says, "The real reason you're telling me that you are a Christian and that your neighbor isn't is that there is something better about you than your neighbor. See, you can believe in the doctrine of election, or in salvation by works, but there isn't really anything in the middle."

But this is the point. GRACE. If you if you believe in this doctrine how can you look down your nose at anyone who isn't a believer. This is a doctrine that allows you to love your enemy, or love the person who is spiritually and morally bankrupt.

Because now you'll see that person like you're looking in a mirror. Because without the electing love of Christ that is *just* the person *you* are. Saved by grace. Let's pray.