

## The Gospel in Romans: Romans 9:14-24

### INTRODUCTION

1. Election and predestination are fighting words in churches today. But you must believe in it, for the Bible teaches it.
2. The question is what does the Bible teach about it? Romans 9 helps us greatly in understanding God's election.

### I. SETTING THE STAGE: WHAT HAS BEEN SAID? (vv.1-5 & vv.6-13)

#### A. Paul's Grief for His Unbelieving, Jewish Kinsmen (vv.1-5)

1. Paul introduced this discussion with his grief over the accursed state of most of his Jewish kinsmen.
2. This context is crucial to bear in mind for two reasons:
  - Interpretation of the verses that follow *must* account for the salvation of individuals being described
  - The doctrine of sovereign election *must* be set within the framework of sincere yearning for the lost

#### B. Paul's Argument for Sovereign, Unconditional Election (vv.6-13)

1. God's promises have not failed. Many of the Jews are lost because not all in Israel belong to Israel.
  - There is a visible covenant community (Israel) and an invisible, elect community (the Israel of God).
  - Membership in the former does not guarantee or presuppose participation in the latter.
2. God never promised salvation to every ethnic Israelite, as the OT itself demonstrates.
  - Isaac was chosen, not Ishmael. Jacob was chosen, not Esau. Not chosen because of anything in them
  - This was to display and defend His "purpose of election." Election is sovereign, unconditional grace.

### II. ANSWERING THE CRITICS – QUESTION 1: GOD'S JUSTICE (vv.14-18)

#### A. Challenging the Justice of God

1. The most common objection to sovereign, unconditional election is that it makes God unfair.
  - Remember the argument: God chooses to save some but not all, not for any reason in them.
  - His election is not based on what He foresees but because He is good. We choose because He chose.
2. Does the doctrine of individual, unconditional election make God unjust? Two things need to be noted:
  - The objection rests on an incorrect conception of grace and God's relation to sinful creatures.
  - The objection misconstrues the impartiality of God and misapplies it in terms of salvation.
3. First, God owes grace to no one, and any expression of grace to sinful creatures is gratuitous.
  - If you think God is obligated to offer the same grace to every person, you do not understand grace. "Human beings are apt to criticize God for excluding anyone, but this betrays a theology that views salvation as something God 'ought' to bestow on all equally." –Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, p.507
  - God chose some to save because He is good. **Rom. 11:5-6; 2Ti. 1:9; Eph. 1:4-6; Rev. 13:8; Jn. 17:6-10**
4. Second, God is impartial in judgment, but He appropriately bestows special mercy on those He chose.
  - The impartiality of God is displayed in two ways: acceptance of all races and judgment of all men.
    - People from all nations will be saved, whoever believes in Christ. **Ac. 10:34-35; Rev. 7:9-10**
    - Men will be judged by their works. That is not good news. None can be saved by them. **Rom. 2:9-13**
  - But to suggest the impartiality of God restricts His freedom to choose some to save is foolish.
    - Are you impartial? Do you also bestow special grace on your children? Do you treat all kids alike?
    - Do you choose your kids by conditions? (e.g. *Do X I accept you?*) God is not unjust to save His own.

#### B. Challenging the Alleged Fairness of Arminianism

1. The basic problem associated with this objection is a problem for all Christians to answer.
  - Why are some men saved and others lost? Why does an all-powerful, all-loving God condemn any?
2. There are only two possibilities: either God is *unable* to save every person or He *chooses* not to.
  - If He is unable to save every person, then He is not all-powerful. How can we trust Him to save any?
  - If He chooses not to save every person, we must ask why. Why has He chosen not to save everyone?
3. The Arminian will answer: He chooses not to overrule man's freedom, thus resulting in many being lost.
  - This means God limits His grace and saving power on the basis of human decision.
  - So what makes the difference in salvation: God's choice or man's? Whose choice enables the other?
  - Thus some are saved because they did something the rest did not. They have reason to boast. **3:27**
4. But the Bible says God's freedom is not limited or determined by human decision. **9:16, 18**
  - These verses eliminate even the possibility that human freewill is the decisive factor in election.
  - Why does God not save all? Because He is most glorified by saving some, but not all. **9:17, 22-23**

### III. ANSWERING THE CRITICS – QUESTION 2: MAN’S RESPONSIBILITY (VV.19-24)

#### A. Challenging the Implications of Election

1. Inevitably when unconditional election is taught, some will say this makes human beings into robots.
  - After all, if the elect are going to be saved anyway, why bother preaching repentance to them?
  - And if no one else is going to be saved, how can God hold them responsible for being lost?
2. Paul gives two answers to this objection in correcting the erroneous presuppositions underlying it.
  - The objection is based on a profound misunderstanding of the God-creature relationship, (20-21)
  - Election is not inconsistent with God’s character because He did not make men wicked. (22-23)
3. First, the objection profoundly misunderstands the God-creature relationship. **9:20-21**
  - God is the Potter, and He has the right to do as He pleases with the creatures He has made.
  - The word translated *right* or *power* in v.21 (ἐξουσία) indicates it is lawful for God to act in this way.
4. Second, double predestination is not unjust because God did not make man wicked. **9:22-23**
  - *Double predestination* refers to two-fold aspect: some elected to save, others passed over by God.
    - Double predestination does not mean the election of both groups is equal in every respect.
    - But it recognizes the choice not to elect for salvation is, in essence, a choice to condemn.
  - So does double predestination make God unjust? Is it wrong for God to create all but not save all?  
“The objection is founded on ignorance or misapprehension of the true relation between God and his sinful creatures. It supposes that he is under obligation to extend his grace to all. Whereas he is under obligation to none. All are sinners, and have forfeited every claim to his mercy; it is, therefore, the prerogative of God to spare one and not another; to make one vessel to honor, and another to dishonor. He, as their sovereign Creator, has the same right over them that a potter has over the clay.” –Charles Hodge, *Romans*, 493
  - The Lord did not make mankind sinful. He made us good. We forfeited that goodness. **Rom. 5:12**
    - Furthermore, all of humanity continues to assent to and participate in rebellion. **Rom. 3:9-12, 19-20**
    - Thus God is not choosing from a neutral set. He is choosing from among those in active rebellion.

#### B. Challenging the Presuppositions of the Objection

1. What should amaze us is not the doctrine that God chose to save some, but that He chose to save any.
  - The wrath of God against human wickedness is the context of His saving, unconditional grace.
  - Rather than criticize His choices, perhaps I should wonder at why He would choose to save me.
2. The premise in v.19 is true (no one can resist His will); the conclusion drawn is false (God is unjust).
  - God has the right to raise up and tear down, bear with and eventually destroy sinful creatures.  
“The punishment of the wicked is not an arbitrary act, having no object but to make them miserable; it is designed to manifest the displeasure of God against sin, and to make known his true character.” –Hodge, 495
  - This is forcefully demonstrated in God’s hardening of Pharaoh in bringing judgment on Egypt.  
“In Pharaoh’s case God demonstrated his patience by not destroying Pharaoh immediately, even though he resisted God’s command. By delaying his judgment on Pharaoh, however, God magnified his name and exhibited more forcefully the greatness of his salvation and the terror of his judgment.” –Schreiner, 521
3. God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart was punitive. It both presupposes the existing evil and punishes it.
  - There is some truth in the dictum attributed to Augustine: “Sin is the punishment of sin.”
  - God did not make Pharaoh evil, but He used Pharaoh as evil, and He hardened Pharaoh in his evil.
    - Every demand made by Moses and every plague that followed hardened Pharaoh’s heart more.
    - The word that brings life and faith to the elect is the same word that brings death to the rest.
4. God is more glorified by bearing with the wicked for a time than by immediately judging them. **9:22-24**

### IV. APPLICATION: WRESTLING WITH SOVEREIGN ELECTION

#### A. Weighing Objections in Light of Paul’s Critics

1. One way we can test our doctrine is by comparing the objections against it to those received by Paul.
  - Does our doctrine raise the same complaints, objections, and misrepresentations as did Paul’s?
2. None of the criticisms raised against Paul’s teaching in ch.9 makes sense if election is conditional.
  - Who will say God is unfair if human beings ultimately make the decisive choice in salvation?
  - Who will complain that we are simply robots if human freewill is the deciding factor in election?
3. Paul is saying more than that the Jews are lost because they failed to believe in the Messiah.
  - In that case, he would merely need to demonstrate Jesus is the Messiah and call for faith in Him.
  - But he goes further: they are lost because not everyone in the visible covenant is elect to salvation.

## B. Implications of What Paul Says

1. First, GOD IS TRULY SOVEREIGN. He is not only in charge of the world and of salvation; He is in control.
  - Jesus did not come to merely offer or extend an opportunity. He came to seek and to save. **Lk. 19:10**
  - Furthermore, God is not doing all He can to save everyone but failing. He saves all He chose. **Jn. 6:37**
2. Second, HUMANITY IS TRULY RESPONSIBLE. We were not created sinful, nor are we excused by election.
  - God's judgment of human being is justified by our original and continuing state of rebellion.
  - God is not obligated to save any, and He would be amply justified in condemning all.
3. Third, GOD'S GLORY IS THE GOVERNING PURPOSE AND ULTIMATE END OF EVERYTHING HE HAS FOREORDAINED.
  - Why are the wicked not immediately judged? Why are some saved, not all? Why do people suffer?
  - God has ordained all things to manifest and magnify the glory of His name and goodness.
  - Therefore, we can be confident there is a purpose toward which all things work. **Rom. 8:28-30**

## C. The Fruit of Believing in Sovereign Election

What should believing in the doctrine of unconditional election produce? Hodge answers (*Romans*, p.503):

1. *The most profound humility in those who are called according to his purpose. They are constrained to say, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be all the glory."*
2. *The liveliest gratitude, that we, though so unworthy, should from eternity have been selected as the objects in which God displays "the riches of his glory."*
3. *Confidence and peace, under all circumstances, because the purpose of God does not change; whom he has predestinated, them he also calls, justifies, and glorifies.*
4. *Diligence in the discharge of all duty, to make our calling and election sure. That is, to make it evident to ourselves and others, that we are the called and chosen of God. We should ever remember that election is to holiness, and consequently to live in sin, is to invalidate every claim to be considered as one of "God's elect."*

## PRAYER OF REFLECTION

Holy God and Father, we thank You that You did not choose to save based on any perceived goodness or righteousness in man. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned, every one of us, to his own way. If You, Lord, waited on us, if You conditioned Your work of grace on our decision or based Your mercy on our worthiness, Lord, none of us would be saved. We thank You that You took the initiative in choosing a people for Yourself, and in calling, justifying, sanctifying, and glorifying all of us who belong to Your Son. Please help us that these truths might warm our hearts, that the doctrine of election would teach us humility, produce gratitude, give us confidence, and make us diligent. To You, O Lord, be the glory and honor in all things.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Romans 11:5-6 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. (6) But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

2 Timothy 1:9 ...who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

Ephesians 1:4-6 ...he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love (5) he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, (6) to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Revelation 13:8 ...and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

John 17:6-10 "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. (7) Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. (8) For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. (9) I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. (10) All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them."

Acts 10:34-35 So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, (35) but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, (10) and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Romans 2:9-13 There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, (10) but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. (11) For God shows no partiality. (12) For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. (13) For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

Romans 8:28-30 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (29) For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (30) And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.