

Romans
Divine Election (Part 5)
Romans 9:6-29
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Well, I invite you to turn with me to Romans, chapter 9; Romans, chapter 9. Perhaps you saw the article this past February. On February 22, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram reported that more than 10 years had passed and nearly 150 people had been executed since a Texas governor had spared an inmate from a death sentence. Governor Abbott accepted the state parole board's rare and unanimous recommendation to grant clemency to death row inmate, Thomas Whitaker, less than an hour before his scheduled execution. Whitaker, 38 years of age, was convicted for the 2003 murders of his mother and his 19-year-old brother. He had planned those murders of his family with his roommate in order to gain the inheritance from his parents.

In the process of all of that, he was sentenced to death despite the pleas for a life sentence from his father. His father had been in the incident and had actually survived the gunshot wound to the chest in the shooting. Kent Whitaker pleaded with the parole board and with Abbott not to take his son away since, as he said, he had already lost the rest of his family. In response, Governor Abbott reduced Whitaker's sentence from the death sentence to life in prison.

As I thought about that story, I was reminded of the reality of something very similar to that is what has happened to us. And yet for all of us who are in Jesus Christ, we have not merely had clemency granted and our sentence reduced, but rather, we have been completely and permanently pardoned. In Whitaker's case, it was based on factors about his case; but in our case, God chose us for no reason in us but that He had chosen to pardon us for our countless crimes against Him. That's what Paul is teaching us in Romans, chapter 9.

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We're studying the 9th through 11th chapters of the book of Romans. The central issue is introduced in the early verses of chapter 9, and it's this, why have a majority of God's chosen people, Israel, rejected their Messiah and His gospel? Paul provides, in these three chapters, three separate answers for that question.

The first of them is, "The Reality of Divine Election." He answers, beginning in verse 6 of chapter 9, and running through verse 29. With "Divine Election: Explained and Illustrated," really running from verse 6 of chapter 9, down through verse 13. In verse 6, he begins with "A Foundational Explanation;" that is, not every physical descendent of Abraham belongs to true spiritual Israel, and the simple reason for that is divine election. God chose specific descendants of Abraham. And Paul demonstrates that with three biblical illustrations: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

We've looked at that in great detail. But having explained and illustrated election, the next progression in Paul's argument is the one we come to today and it is, "Divine Election Defended;" Divine Election Defended. This part of his argument begins in verse 14, and runs down through verse 23.

You see, like all good teachers, Paul anticipates the potential reaction of his readers.

Undoubtedly, in his many years of teaching these truths, he had come to expect these common responses to divine election. He expected the Romans and us to immediately respond to the fact

of unconditional election, that is that God chooses, based on nothing in us, but solely because He chooses. He expected us to respond with two objections.

Objection number one is God isn't fair. The second objection is, if God chooses based solely on something in Himself and not on me, then that must mean my will isn't free. So those are the two objections: God's will isn't fair, verses 14 to 18; and my will isn't free, verses 19 to 23. Paul graciously, but completely, demolishes both of those objections in this passage. Let me encourage you; if you have had or still harbor these objections to election, you need to truly listen to Paul's, and ultimately the Holy Spirit's answers responses to those objections in this passage.

So let's start today with objection number one, God's will isn't fair. Paul addresses this objection in verses 14 to 18. You see, the first common response to unconditional election, that is God's choice of some to be saved based solely on Himself and on nothing in them, the first response to that is always, (What?) it's not fair. In fact, one liberal commentator, yes, there are liberal commentators, a lot of them. One liberal commentator says Paul, here in this passage, takes, "A false step." Another says that what Paul teaches in this passage is, "thoroughly immoral." Several of the early church fathers were so bothered by this passage that they considered verses 14 to 19 to be just Paul's quotation of his enemies.

Let's be honest; when we first heard about sovereign election, it violated our basic human sense of fairness. But ironically, the fact that this is the first objection that Paul anticipates only proves the truth of unconditional election; because the only way you can understand this truth

and respond, "It's not fair," is if it's conditioned on nothing in the sinner. Because if Paul were here teaching conditional election, that is, he's choosing based on something in you; let's say He looks down through time and he sees that you, given the chance, will believe, what's unfair about that? Nobody would ever say, "That's unfair." So the very objection itself only proves what we have seen in this passage so far.

Notice how he begins in verse 14, "What shall we say then?" Paul begins with a question that he often used when he was afraid that someone might hear his teaching and come to the wrong conclusion, and he wants to correct that potential wrong conclusion. Then having asked the question, he introduces objection number one there in verse 14, "There is no injustice with God is there?" Here's the first objection that comes, "That's not just; that's not fair of God!" And he says, "Can that objection be true?"

Now the Greek word translated 'injustice' there is the word 'righteousness' within 'a,' an alpha, in the Greek text added to it, to negate it. This happens in English; take the English word 'atheist.' The word 'theist' means one who believes in God; add an 'alpha privative' to it, which is what it is technically called, and it negates it. Now you have an 'a'-theists and atheists, one who does not believe in God. That's exactly what Paul does here with this Greek word. The word is 'righteousness' and he adds that alpha negative to the beginning of it to say, 'unrighteous,' is unconditional election unrighteous? Or, let's put it this way, here's the real objection. Has God acted against what is right, against the dictates of justice in choosing and saving people based solely on His own free choice? Have you ever asked yourself that question? Of course you have, and how should you respond? You should respond exactly the

way Paul does here in verse 14, “May it never be!” To Paul, the very thought of there being an injustice in God is unthinkable and impossible. So how do you respond then to this objection of unfairness?

Paul's response comes in two parts, using two different men, Moses and Pharaoh. Let's look at his response to this objection of unfairness. The first part of his response, we could put it this way, Scripture clearly teaches that God justly selects some to whom He shows mercy; Scripture teaches that God justly (There's the key word.) selects some to whom He shows mercy; that's the message of verses 15 and 16. Now Paul immediately provides Scriptural evidence to show us that it is perfectly just for God to give unearned mercy to some in order to display His grace. Notice what He says in verse 15, “For (In other words, here is why the objection of unfairness is not justified.) for he says to Moses (And then he quotes from the Scripture.) I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” Paul chooses Moses as an example of the elect man, the one on whom God chooses to have mercy.

Now, one interesting note, both this verse, in verse 15, the passage he quotes in the Old Testament, and the one that he will quote down in verse 17, are both passages in which God Himself speaks, because you can't get any closer to the heart of God than when God Himself says, “This is true about me.” Now let's look at it together. The first quotation in verse 15 here comes from Exodus 33 and the second half of verse 19; we read it this morning in our Scripture reading. Just to remind you of the context, Moses has asked the Lord to show him His glory. The Lord agrees with that and says He's going to cause all His goodness to pass in front of Moses; and while there is some visual display of the glory of God, probably in blazing light, at

the same time, God will proclaim His name, that is the essence of His character to Moses. He follows that promise that he's going to do that for Moses with this quotation, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

Now if we were to go back to the Old Testament and look at the passage in context and we looked at it in the original language, you will discover that the stress, the emphasis in the original language in that verse, is on God's free and sovereign choice. In fact, if you really want to get the sense of what that verse is saying, substitute the word 'whomever' for the word 'whom.' In fact, look in Romans 9, and let me read it to you that way, "I will have mercy on whomever I have mercy and I will have compassion on whomever I have compassion." God says it is my free and sovereign right to choose the person on whom I will show mercy.

Now, Paul follows that scriptural evidence, that quotation from Exodus 33, with his own logical deduction from that Old Testament text. Notice verse 16, "So then," this is Paul's deduction from Exodus 33:19, "So then, it (What is it? There is a lot of discussion among the commentators about what Paul means here, but the obvious choice is to go back to verse 15 and refer to God's saving mercy.) "So then, God's saving mercy does not depend." Now you'll notice that the words 'does' and 'depend' are not in the original; they're in italics in our text to show they're not in the original, but the basic meaning of them is there in the text, they're implied, they're understood.

"So then, (Here's my logical deduction Paul says of the text in Exodus 33.) God's saving mercy does not depend. . ." And what comes next are really three separate conclusions that Paul

makes; let me give them to you as the three separate conclusions that they are. Conclusion number one, God's saving mercy does not depend on the man who wills. In other words, the source is really the idea here, the source of God's saving mercy is not our own will; it's not because of any human decision that God chooses to show mercy.

There's a second conclusion; God's saving mercy does not depend, notice what he says, on the man who runs. The source of God's saving mercy is not our running. What does he mean by that? He's talking about human effort expended. Saving mercy is not ours because of some effort we have expended. So saving mercy does not depend on human will, human decision; saving mercy does not depend on human effort, the one who runs. But thirdly, saving mercy depends, notice what he says, "on God who has mercy." The source of God's saving mercy is solely God's absolutely free decision to show mercy.

Now, what's Paul's primary point here? There are really two of them. One is that it is God's sovereign right to decide on whom He will show mercy. But there's another side of it that balances it and gives us a further understanding about God. Paul is saying, "Since no one can receive God's mercy by human decision, and no one can earn it by human merit, God alone must determine who receives it."

You see, sometimes we look at this and we say, "Well, how harsh of God not to show mercy to everyone?" You're missing the whole point; it's just like humans to do that. The point here is if God doesn't show mercy, no one gets it because we'll never earn it, we'll never get there by the

expression of our own will; the only way any human being ever enjoys God's mercy is if God, in mercy, initiates it and displays it.

Steele and Thomas write this, "If God had not graciously chosen a people for Himself and sovereignly determined to provide salvation for them and apply it to them, none would be saved." That's the point!

Now, I started out this morning with an illustration about the governor of Texas granting clemency to a prisoner. Occasionally, and in this case it was just clemency, but occasionally the governor of Texas can decide, has the right and authority, to decide to pardon, completely pardon, a death row inmate. That's essentially what God does with us. You remember back in Romans, chapter 3, we discovered there and in that indictment of all mankind, that we live our lives, Romans 3:19, on death row; we are accountable to God. It's like the verdict has already been reached, and the sentence is just waiting to be carried out. We live our entire lives here on death row. I want you to think about the illustration of the governor. When the governor decides which death row inmate that he's going to pardon, think practically, how does he decide that? No prisoner on death row can, by the exercise of his own will, decide he's going to receive a pardon? Can you imagine that; some prisoner is sitting on death row says, "That's it. I'm to be pardoned"? No, he doesn't have the right or authority to do that.

Also, no prisoner can earn pardon. In fact, all of the prisoners on death row have already earned their fate by their choices and sins and decisions. So the governor must act; that's the only way anyone gets mercy. The authority must freely decide who it is he's going to grant the pardon to.

He elects a prisoner to life. That's exactly what happens in divine election. But there are two key differences.

In the case of the governor, there are, at times, something about the prisoner that motivates him to choose that prisoner for a pardon; maybe there are questionable circumstances surrounding the case or the conviction; maybe it's related to his good behavior while in prison; maybe it's that his father pleads for clemency and says, "This is my only relative left; don't take his life." So sometimes when the governor makes a choice, there's something in the prisoner, often in fact, there is something in the prisoner that moves him to do so. But when God chooses whom He will pardon, there is absolutely no reason related to us that moves God to do so.

Another key difference between the human pardon granted by the governor and God's pardon of sinners is that when the governor pardons a criminal, and this is so important to understand; when the governor pardons a criminal, justice is not met. You see, justice demands the death of the death row inmate. Think for a moment about the victim of that death row inmate. Think about the victim's family. How do they feel about that pardon? They often don't appreciate it; they feel justice has been somehow trampled upon because justice hasn't been met. When a criminal is pardoned, the crime actually goes unpunished and justice is ignored. But God can't do that! God cannot ignore justice, and He cannot fail to justly punish a single crime. This is sobering, but think about this for moment. The fact that God is perfectly just means that not one single crime can go unpunished. That means not one sinful thought, not one sinful attitude, not one sinful word, not one sinful act, can ever go unpunished and God's justice be preserved.

Because God is perfectly just, He demands that justice always be done and God always does justice. He always acts in justice.

This morning we read Exodus 34, verse 6 and 7, and we love those statements, “(God is) gracious (and merciful; He’s)...compassionate...slow to anger...abounding...(in steadfast love, forgiving) iniquity, transgression and sin.” But the very next phrase is what? “(And) yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.”

You see, there's the great tension of the Old Testament; the great conundrum of the Old Testament. How can God be forgiving of iniquity, transgression, and sin and yet not leave the guilty unpunished? It's very important that you understand this. You know, some people have this sentimental idea about God, that God can just decide who He's going to pardon and say, “Pardoned.” God cannot do that! Why? Because it is a violation of His very nature, which is to be perfectly just; and if He were to just wipe away the sin like the governor and say, “You're pardoned,” then His justice would not be met. He simply cannot do that. God can only pardon a criminal if His justice has been perfectly satisfied with regard to that person's guilt. That, my friends, is why Jesus Christ had to die, and He had to die in our place because it was the only way that God could truly forgive us is if His justice was satisfied in that someone paid the penalty for that sin, every single sin, that everyone who would ever believe in Jesus Christ. It was placed on Jesus and He suffered the penalty for those sins.

1 Peter, chapter 2, verse 24, Peter says, “(Christ) Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.” We

died the death we deserved 'in Christ' and He died it for us. 1 Peter 3:18, "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just (in the place of) the unjust, so that He might bring us to God." It was the only way; this is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If you're here this morning and you have never come to know God, your Creator, understand this, God is perfectly just; I promise you that not one sin you have ever committed will ever go unpunished; God promises you that. There are only two options. Either you will be punished for those sins forever because God is just, and He's not going to bend or taint His justice for you and I neither of us will be the exception. Or, God's justice can be satisfied in the death of Jesus Christ in your place if you will repent and believe in His Son. That's the gospel of Jesus Christ. But God's justice will and must be satisfied.

If you will repent and believe that gospel, think about this, you will become, and I love this, permanently right with God, your Creator. Look over in chapter 10. Paul is going to get there. In chapter 10, verse 8, he says this is the message about "faith which we are preaching," here it is; here's my message. He says, verse 9:

That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be (spiritually rescued); for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." ...There is no (difference) between Jew and Greek; ...the same Lord ... (abounds) in riches for all who call (upon) Him, for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

Listen, that's the invitation to you. Permanently right with God because the justice of God was satisfied in Jesus Christ if you will repent and believe.

So the Scripture teaches then, that God selects some to whom He shows mercy, ultimately only because His justice has been satisfied in Christ. That's the first part of Paul's response to this charge of unfairness.

The second part of Paul's biblical response to the objection of unfairness to election is this, here's the second part. Scripture teaches that God justly passes by others to whom He shows justice. Scripture teaches that God justly passes by others to whom He shows justice. This is verses 17 and 18. Again, Paul provides scriptural evidence to show that it is perfectly just for God to choose to give earned justice to some in order to display His glory. Look at verse 17, “For (And this goes back up to the objection itself; here's a second answer to the objection about fairness.) For the Scripture says to Pharaoh.” By the way, notice the difference: in one case, God says; in the other case, Scripture says. You see, when Scripture says, God says. But notice what he says here, the quote, “Scripture says to Pharaoh, “FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YO UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH.”

Pharaoh here becomes Paul's example of the non-elect man whom God chooses to give justice.

This quote also comes from Exodus, let's look at it. Go back to Exodus, chapter 9; Exodus, chapter 9, and let's start at verse 12, because Paul's going to pick this up in just a moment, Exodus 9, verse 12:

The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the Lord had spoken to Moses. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh...say to him, 'Thus says (Yahweh), the God of the Hebrews, "Let my people go, that they may serve Me. For this time (By the way, this is just before the seventh plague of hail on the land of Egypt.) For this time I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people (And for the first time, God explains why He's doing this.) so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth.'""

God says, "I'm going to demonstrate that all the gods of the Egyptians are idols; they're false gods; I alone am the true God, and I am not a localized national deity; I am an international God. There's no one like me in all the earth."

And He adds in verse 15, "For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth." You know what He's saying to Pharaoh? "Listen, what you've seen so far isn't judgment; because if I wanted to judge you, you wouldn't be here. What you've seen so far is really mercy." Verse 16, "But, indeed, for this reason (And I want you to note these next words because you're going to see them different in Romans.) for this reason, I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name (throughout) all the earth."

Now go back to Romans, chapter 9, and let me show you the difference. Paul here slightly changes the quotation in order to punctuate that this is God's initiative. Instead of saying what it says in Exodus, "God allowed you to remain," he substitutes, "God raised you up." In other words, Paul is saying, "God caused Pharaoh to appear on the stage of history for a purpose."

And what was that purpose? What was God's purpose in raising up Pharaoh, a man that He did not choose to save? There are two of them. First of all, "For this reason, for this very purpose, I raised you up; to demonstrate my power in you." What's He talking about? He's not just talking about His power to work miracles in the plagues; He's talking about His power to save on the one hand, to save the Israelites and many of the Egyptians who come to faith; and His power, on the other hand, to judge, and that is the rest. "I've demonstrated my power, power to save and power to judge."

And secondly, "That my name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth." God says, "I want to put my name, that is, my character on display." And what's His character? We read it this morning in Exodus 34, His saving character. "He is a God who is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and yet at the same time, a just God who will leave no sin unpunished." (Paraphrased) God put Himself on display through Pharaoh in Egypt.

Now, Paul again follows that scriptural evidence in verse 17, with his own logical deduction from that Old Testament text in verse 18. Here's Paul's deduction from that. "So then (Here's his conclusion.) (God) has mercy on whom He desires, (He's already made that point back in the earlier verses, and then he adds this.) and He hardens whom He desires." That's His conclusion from the couple of verses we just looked at, verses 17 and 18. God hardens whom He desires. You see, Pharaoh's unwillingness to obey God was because of the hardness of his heart. In fact, the term 'hardness,' if I had time I would take you back and show you, occurs 14 times in Exodus 4 to 14. It has the connotation of one's heart being spiritually insensitive.

Now, it's important to understand that the hearts of unbelievers, of all sinners, are naturally hard toward God. They may act like they're soft toward God, but that's not the statement of Scripture.

Ephesians, chapter 4, verses 17 and 18 says:

...that...the Gentiles...walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, (And here's the bottom line.) because of the hardness of their heart.

That's ground zero in man's rebellion against God. In addition, so not only is it naturally true, but in addition, both by a decision of the will and the constant practice of sin, sinners make their hearts harder. That's Hebrews 3, verse 13, "The deceitfulness of sin" hardens the heart even further. But that's not what Paul says. Notice here he says, "God hardens whom He desires."

Now this is a difficult truth, but I want you to stay with me. First of all, let's be clear about what this doesn't mean. It does not mean that God works evil in the hearts of anyone. James 1 says that, "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts He any man." God doesn't produce evil; He can't look with evil with any approval. That's not what's going on here. In fact, I didn't take you to a verse back in Exodus 9 that I want to call your attention. Exodus 9, verses 34 and 35 say this, "when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, (Now listen.) he sinned again and hardened his heart." Next verse, verse 35, "Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the LORD had spoken."

You see, both are going on in those two verses. He sinned and hardened his own heart, and his heart was hardened because God had spoken that it would be true. What I want you understand is this simple truth, God hardens those already in rebellion against Him. God doesn't cause anyone spiritual insensitivity. Rather, He withholds His grace and allows them to continue in the state of sin that they have already freely chosen. Again, if we had time, we could look through those occurrences in Exodus, and you would see that again and again, Pharaoh hardened his own heart against God, and he refused to humble himself before God. God's hardening of Pharaoh, then, was a judicial act. He chose to abandon him to his own stubborn sinfulness. God's hardening, however just like His mercy, is a sovereign act. That is, it's not caused by anything in the individuals who are hardened. You see, God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but Pharaoh wasn't a worse sinner than others that He saved, that's the point.

Here's how Hodge puts it, Charles Hodge:

Pharaoh was no worse than many other men who have obtained mercy. Yet God, for wise and benevolent reasons, withheld from him the saving influences of his grace and gave him up to his own wicked heart so that he became more and more hardened until he was finally destroyed. God did nothing to Pharaoh beyond his strict desserts, what he deserved. He did not make him wicked; He only refused to make him good by the exertion of special and altogether unmerited grace.

You see, Paul's point here and don't miss this, this is the key point, that God has the right to decide who gets mercy, and God equally possesses the right to decide who gets justice. Douglas Moo writes, "Just as God decides on the basis of nothing but His own sovereign pleasure to

bestow His grace and to save some individuals, so He also decides on the basis of nothing but His own sovereign pleasure to pass over others and so to damn them.” This is what theologians call “the dark side of election.” Here's the issue, why did God choose not to show grace to everyone? You ever ask yourself that question? Probably have!

Your response to that question is called your ‘theodicy,’ your defense, your justification of the ways of God. Now ultimately, of course, God doesn't need a defense; He's the sovereign God; He answers to no one. Psalm 115, verse 3 says:

...our God is in the heavens;

He does whatever He pleases.

But, whatever God pleases is also right because He's not only sovereign, but He's also righteous; He's just.

Genesis 18:25, Abraham says, “Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly?” That's a rhetorical question and expects what answer? Of course He's going to act justly. Deuteronomy 32:4, Moses says:

...all (God's) ways are just;

A God of faithfulness and without injustice,

Righteous and upright is He.

Job 8, verse 3, another rhetorical question:

Does God pervert justice?

...does the Almighty pervert what is right?

What does that question deserve? A round answer of, “No, of course God doesn't!” So in that sense, we don't need to defend God. But if by the defense of God, we simply mean trying from Scripture to better understand His ways, then of course that's appropriate.

So here's the problem with the dark side of election. If God chooses some people for salvation, does He choose others for hell? Going back to my illustration, when the governor of Texas decides to grant a pardon to a death row inmate, he is, at the same time, choosing to allow the others to suffer for their crimes. He's making a choice in both cases, but there are two important observations. One is it's not unjust for the governor not to pardon all the inmates; that's not unjust. Justice does not demand mercy.

Secondly, although the governor's choice to pardon one criminal is, in effect, a decision not to pardon the others, those two decisions are inherently different. His decision to pardon one criminal is an active choice; he is deliberately selecting the criminal to pardon. His decision not to pardon the others is a passive choice; he is merely passing by the others and allowing them to face what they have earned. What the Bible teaches is that God chooses actively some for salvation and simply passes by everyone else.

In the study of theology, this is called ‘reprobation.’ Here's how one systematic theology defines reprobation. “It is the sovereign decision of God before creation to pass over some persons in sorrow, deciding not to save them and to punish them for their sins and thereby to manifest His justice.” A number of biblical texts make this point. We're going to get to chapter 9, verse 22, where Paul speaks of vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. Romans 11:7 says

that there are those in Israel who obtain salvation; the rest, however, were hardened. I Peter 2:8, speaks of those who “stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were...appointed.”

Now, based on a cursory reading of those texts, some have concluded that God chooses people for hell in exactly the same way that He chooses people for heaven; that He works unbelief in the hearts of the damned in the same way that He works faith and repentance in the hearts of the saved. But listen carefully; that is not what the Bible teaches. In fact, when we compare election to reprobation, there are several crucial distinctions; you must get these.

Number one, in election, God actively chooses; in reprobation He passes by. Take Psalm 81, verse 12, God says:

I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart,

To walk in their own devices. (God said, “I gave them over to their sin.”)

Or, Acts 14:16, “In the generations gone by (God) permitted all the nations to go their own ways.” Three times in Romans 1, Paul says, “God gave them over to their chosen sin.”

A second crucial distinction is this, in election, God chooses with great delight; in reprobation, he passes over with great sorrow. Don't miss the heart of God in these two different kinds of choices. In Ezekiel 33, verse 11, “‘As I live!’ declares the Lord God.” Listen, God is swearing by Himself. He says, “‘As I live!’ declares the Lord God, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your

evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?” That is the heart of God. In great delight, He chooses some for salvation; in great sorrow, He passes by others.

Number three, in election, the cause for the sinner’s salvation lies in God alone; in reprobation the cause for the sinner’s damnation lies in the sinner alone. Luke 13:34, Jesus says this, “O Jerusalem...How often (Listen to that.) How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!” You would not have it!

Listen, if you're here this morning and you're not in Christ, don't you dare think that you will be able to use election as some sort of accusation against God, “Well, I didn't believe because I wasn't elect.” No, you haven't believed because you will not have it! John 5, verse 40 says, “you are unwilling (Jesus says this.) you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.” 2 Thessalonians 2:10, “those who perish, (do so) because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.” It comes down to this, if you end up in heaven, it will be because God graciously chose you; if you end up in hell, it will be because of your many sins and your stubborn refusal to repent and believe God's gracious offer of His Son in the gospel.

Number four, in election, the ground is God's grace; in reprobation, the ground lies in God's justice. Look at those distinctions; understand this, the reality of reprobation should produce sorrow in our hearts over those who don't believe just as it does in the heart of God as we saw in Ezekiel 33. That's how God responds. But in the end, accepting the doctrine of election and its darker side of reprobation ultimately comes down to faith.

Let me just be honest with you, I understand intellectually how it brings God greater glory to save only some and to pass by the rest and to give them justice. I understand how that exalts God's character in a fullness that saving everyone wouldn't. But I can't say to you that it all makes perfect sense to my finite mind; I can't wrap it all up in this neat little package with no loose ends.

On the wall in the lobby of this building are our church's distinctives; there are two of them: "A High View of God," and "A High View of Scripture." Let me just say to you that here in Romans 9, on this issue of election, those two distinctives collide, and they demand an answer from each of us. They demand an answer to this question: Am I willing to believe what God has revealed about Himself and to trust Him or not? Am I going to rewrite the Bible? Am I going to ignore the part about election and reprobation? Not because I can't basically understand it, but because I don't like it.

Let me put it bluntly, if it is the right of the governor of Texas to pardon whom he chooses and to pass by whom he chooses, how much more is it the right of God, our Creator? Am I willing to stand with Abraham and say, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is right?" Will I affirm with Moses, "All his ways are just, a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He." In the end, Paul says this in Romans 9, "It is perfectly just, it is perfectly just for God to give earned justice to some to display His glory and to give unearned mercy to others to displace His grace; it's God's right as God." (Paraphrased) Some get mercy; some get

justice, but no one gets injustice. Everyone is treated fairly. There is no unfairness in the biblical doctrine of election. This is our God!

Let's pray together. Our Father, these are hard things for our finite minds, but thank you for making it so clear to us. We worship you, oh, God, as the one who has the sovereign right to make these decisions. We thank you that you are a God of justice and that everyone on this planet gets justice; no one gets injustice.

But, Father, we thank you even more that, in your sovereign grace, some of us, for no reason in us, experience your grace. We thank you that, in Christ, you punished our sins so that you could be both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Father, we love you and we are so grateful for what you've done. We worship you! Thank you for exalting yourself in our minds this morning. Help us to bow our hearts and our knees before you and to acknowledge that you are God, and may we let you be God; may we acknowledge your right to be on your throne.

Forgive us for ever questioning you; forgive us for, in our puny little minds, concluding that, in some way, you aren't fair. Thank you that you haven't treated us with justice; instead you treated us with mercy because you treated Christ with justice.

Father, I pray for those who are here this morning who are not in Christ. Lord, do not let them, I pray, use election as an excuse; help them to see that it's because they will not come that they

have not come, and may you work in their hearts today to draw them to yourself. May they be willing because “whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.” We pray in Jesus’s name, Amen.