

Divine Election

Introduction:

NAS 2 Thessalonians 2:13 God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation ...

In session 1, I introduced the Biblical fact that in eternity past God elected (chose) to save some members of the human race, and to let the rest perish. Every denomination believes this (Protestant, Evangelical, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Charismatic, Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox). What they differ on is how they explain it.

In session 2, I raised the issue of why the Bible even brings up the concepts of election and predestination in the first place: *Why was predestination necessary?* One answer I offered lies in the problem of total inability. Fallen man, in his natural state, does not have the ability to have a saving faith in Jesus. If not for predestination, no one would come to Jesus.

ESV John 6:65 ... no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.

Man's Inability: "We believe it is utterly beyond the power of fallen man to love God, to keep His laws, to understand the gospel, to repent of sin or to trust in Christ."¹

Predestination is not God's way of keeping people out of heaven; it is God's way to be sure there actually will be people in heaven.

Today, in session 3, we will consider: *What was the basis for who God elected? What caused God to elect certain people, and not others? (Rhetorical).*

Do we believe because we were elected, or were we elected because we believe?

Is God's election the cause of our faith or the result of our faith?

Is divine election affect or effect?

Theologians ask it this way: *Is election conditional or unconditional?*

Conditional Election: God elected you before the foundation of the world based on His omniscient realization of who would believe. God's election was thus conditional: a person had to believe.

Unconditional Election: God, in His omniscience, knew that no one, left to his own free but sinful will, would have saving faith in Jesus. Therefore, He granted mercy to some and enables them to believe. There were no conditions anyone had to meet that qualified him to be elected.

¹ Taken from "Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelicals statement of faith"

“God, before the foundation of the world, for His own glory did elect a great multitude of men and women to eternal life as an act of free and sovereign grace. This election was in no way dependent upon His foresight of human faith, decision, works or merit.”²

“Before time began, God chose certain people to be saved based solely upon the pleasure of His good will.”

If the doctrine of total inability is true, then it would appear that the only reason we believe is because we were elected.

Today will directly tackle the question of election. *Is it conditional or unconditional?*

Romans

******What caused Paul unceasing anguish (9:1-5)?** Paul’s sorrow and grief came from the fact that so many of his fellow Jews had rejected Jesus as the Messiah. This begins a three-chapter section on salvation, on why the Israelites reject Jesus:

ESV **Romans 10:1** ... my heart's desire and prayer to God ... is that they may be saved.

ESV **Romans 11:25-26** ... a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved ...

What paradox is evident within this first paragraph (9:1-5)? Israel was the only geopolitical nation that God has ever adopted, and had many spiritual advantages over the Gentiles. However, in spite of all their many blessings from God, they rejected Jesus as the Christ.

Structure: On the surface, it appeared that God’s promises to the Israelites had failed. To help the church in Rome get a better understanding of why God’s promises had not failed, Paul wrote Romans 9-11.³ This brings Paul to introduce the topic of divine election, specifically as it relates to salvation, and why so few Israelites believe in Jesus.

Have you ever wondered why the Jews don’t believe in Jesus? You are about to find out!

******Why has the word of God has not failed (9:6-13)?** In short, God’s promises were never intended for all who are descended from Abraham.

The nation of Israel derives its name from a man named Israel. What was that man’s alias? His alias was Jacob. Jacob’s twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel.

² Taken from the “Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelicals” statement of faith.

³ CEB Cranfield, “The Epistle to the Romans”, Vol 2, *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 447.

Genealogy: Abraham and Sarah gave birth to Isaac. Isaac and Rebekah gave birth to twins: Jacob (alias Israel) and Esau. Jacob (Israel) had 12 sons. **Draw:** Abraham > Isaac > Jacob (Israel) > 12 sons (12 tribes).

Paul began by declaring that not all who are descended from Israel (Jacob) belong to Israel (9:6). What does that Paul mean? Prior to this chapter in Romans, Paul wrote about the difference between a merely physical Jew and a Physical Jew who was also a spiritual Jew:

ESV **Romans 2:28-29** ... no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.

ESV **Romans 4:12** [Abraham is] the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that ... Abraham had ...

Even though Jacob had many physical descendants, not all of them were his spiritual descendants. Not all Hebrews were within the purpose and design of God.

Illustration: Draw a small circle within a large circle. The large circle is physical Israel. The small circle represents the few physical Israelites who were also spiritual Israelites.

In 9:7a, Paul also stated that not all who are descended from Abraham are Abraham's offspring. How did he explain what he meant in 9:7b-9? In short, God elected the children of promise to be His covenant people, not the children of the flesh.

What made Isaac a son of promise (9:7b-9)? Abraham's wife Sarah was barren. Then, long past the time she was able to bear children, God promised they would have a son (Isaac). Isaac's was not a virgin birth, but it was a miracle birth!

Who were Abraham's children of the flesh (9:8)? Abraham's first-born son was Ishmael. The mother was a young, fertile woman named Hagar. It was a normal, natural birth. Ishmael became the father of the Arab peoples. After Sarah died, Abraham had six more sons, through Keturah (**Ge 25:1-2**). These were also children of the flesh as there was no supernatural promise involved.

Paul's Point: Not all physical descendants of Abraham were children of promise. For covenant purposes, God made a choice between Isaac (and thus the Israelites) and Ishmael (and thus the Arabs). Not all physical descendants of Abraham were to be included in God's promise.⁴ God has always made choices among the descendants of Abraham.

Illustration: Draw two circles coming from Abraham. Label on "Ishmael/flesh", and the other "Isaac/promise." Then within the promise circle, draw a smaller circle to represent spiritual Israel.

⁴ Barclay, p. 135.

******What third example of divine election did Paul offer in 9:10-13?** Paul cited the example of Jacob and Esau.

What makes the example of Jacob over Esau especially relevant to Paul's statement that God's word has not failed (9:10-13)? These boys were both sons of Isaac, and were equal in every way: Same father, same mother; both were children of promise; born on the same day. In fact, as twins they were even "womb mates" (!). Despite their sameness, God elected Jacob over Esau, before they were ever born, before either had done anything good or bad.

What can we learn about divine election from 9:10-13? God's selection of certain descendants of Abraham, even from among equal children of promise, was based on "God's purpose of election" (9:11), not anything they would do, either good or bad.

ESV **2 Timothy 1:9** [God] saved us and called us ... not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began ...

Review: How has the word of God not failed (9:6)? It has not failed because God never intended His promises to be for all Abraham's descendants, but only to those according to God's purpose in election.

Summary: Paul made two points: **1)** God has always made selections from within the descendants of Abraham and **2)** God's selection was based on God's purposes, and had nothing to do with human activity.⁵ This clearly points to unconditional election.

******What determines whether or not someone gets God's mercy (9:14-18)?** In short, God's mercy totally, depends on God's will, not man's will. God can do whatever He chooses to do.

ESV **Job 40:2** Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer.... Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his? Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor. Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on everyone who is proud and abase him. Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low and tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below. Then will I also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can save you.

⁵ Barclay, p. 136.

Like any good author, Paul anticipated his readers reactions. When Paul asked if there is injustice on God's part (9:14), it was to surface an objection. What had he written that he knew would upset people? For God to elect Jacob over Esau, before they were born, without any regard for their good or bad actions, strikes at our sense of justice.

No Offense Taken: There is nothing offensive about the view that **1)** God chose Jacob because he foresaw that Jacob would be a good guy, or a man of faith. This view seems quite just. However, the view that **2)** God chose Jacob simply because of God's own purpose, without regard to anything Jacob was going to do, is extremely offensive.

Conditional Election: If divine election was based on God's omniscience of who would have a saving faith, then this was the perfect opportunity to say so in answer to the reader's anticipated objection (**9:14**). Instead, Paul went on to underscore the truth that divine election is not based anything we do or desire.

What is injustice (9:14)? It is the violation of the rights of another. It is to be mistreated. Injustice is when you get something bad that you don't deserve.

Theological Fact: There is no injustice on God's part toward anyone.

Review: What is the difference between justice, mercy, and injustice (9:14)?

- 1)** Justice is when you get exactly what you do deserve (good or bad).
- 2)** Mercy is when you don't get something bad that you do deserve. Mercy is a type of non-justice.
- 3)** Injustice is when you get something bad that you don't deserve. It is to be mistreated.

Perspective: It is important that we get our perspective right: God is under no obligation to save anybody. God has chosen some for mercy and the rest God passes over. One group gets **mercy** and the other group gets **justice**. But no one ever gets **injustice**; mercy is non-justice, but it is not injustice. There is no injustice with God (**9:14**); there is justice and there is mercy, but no injustice.

Mercy or Justice? Paul wants his readers to understand that when we read about God electing Jacob and not Esau, we are tempted to object that it is not fair. However, the last thing we want from God is fairness or justice. If God is just, we all go to hell. Instead, what we want from God is mercy.

Review: According to 9:15, on whom does God have mercy? Paul here quoted **Exodus 33:19**, God speaking to Moses, to make the point that God has mercy on whomever He wants to have mercy.

ESV Psalm 115:3 Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

Based on 9:16a, on what does God's mercy not depend? It does not depend on human will or effort. God is not obligated to show mercy to anyone. Mercy, by definition, is not obligatory. A convicted criminal cannot go up to the judge, pound on the bench, and demand mercy.

On what does God's mercy depend (9:16b)? It depends on God.

Truth: This verse alone should forever put an end to the view that God's election was based human will or exertion.

******According to 9:17-18, why did God raise Pharaoh up to a position of authority?** It was to accomplish God's purpose of proclaiming God's might in all the earth. It was a witness to the nations, and a witness to the Israelites.

Pharaoh did not get mercy. Instead, he was hardened. How does God harden someone (9:18)? God never tempts anyone to sin; for God to harden someone means He simply leaves them alone to do what comes naturally. Water flows downhill; it takes a dam to stop it. To harden someone, God merely takes away a person's normal sin restraints. God elevated Pharaoh to a position above the law (absolute power corrupts absolutely). Other ways to harden include removing the restraint of family love, or societal expectations, or tradition.⁶ **Example:** Young men in their home countries are typically civil, and well behaved. However, put them in the army in a war in a foreign country, and they are prone to loot, steal, and behave immorally (they are removed from normal constraints, and free to be who they really are). There is a very thin veneer of civility on every society.

What is the point of 9:18? The point is that God shows mercy totally at his own prerogative, and even hardens others. God does want what God wants to do. **Aslan** is not a tame Lion.

Application: God chose Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Moses over Pharaoh, and you over your unbelieving neighbor.

******What gives God the right to do with people as He pleases (9:19-21; half paragraph)?** God has authority over us because He made us. Our relationship to God is like that of a lump of clay to the potter.

⁶ In Exodus 8:15, 19, 32 Pharaoh hardened his own heart. In Exodus 9:12, 10:1, 20, 27 God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Don't resume on God's grace. Don't presume you can reject Jesus today but accept him later, at a time of your own choosing.

What is the literary purpose of 9:19? The purpose is to voice another anticipated objection from his readers. The idea is that we must be free moral agents to be held responsible. The statement that God's election of Jacob over Esau was not based on anything good or bad they did, is offensive. The fact that God's mercy does not depend on man's desire or effort is offensive. The fact that God hardens people (like Pharaoh) is offensive.

Conditional Election: If Paul believed that God was merely responding to man's freewill, stating so here would remove all objection. However, Paul did not offer that explanation. Instead, he doubled down on God's sovereignty and authority (the same as in **9:14**).

What is the answer to the first question in 9:20?

ESV **Job 38:1-7** ... the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? ... Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"

What is the answer to the second question in 9:20? No; what is molded will not question the molder:

ESV **Isaiah 29:16** You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, "He did not make me"; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"?

A man of faith speaks thus:

ESV **Isaiah 64:8b** O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

What is answer to the question of 9:21? Yes, the potter has the right to do whatever he pleases with the clay. We really are like pottery, made for either wrath or mercy.

ESV **Genesis 2:7** ... the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground ...

The Point: It is blasphemous to judge God based on our limited human perspective. We would as soon understand God's ways as we would teach a dog calculus.

ESV **Isaiah 55:8-9** ... my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Paul's next question runs from 9:22-24. It is an incomplete, "what if" question.

What is the answer to Paul's question? If God desired to do that, no one could stop him. It is what it is. The purpose of the question is to state the big picture of God's workings among men. God's temporary withholding of wrath is designed to benefit the vessels of mercy.

What paradox is evident in 9:22? God desired to show his wrath and power, but instead, He patiently endured their sins until later.

ESV **Romans 2:5** ... because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

According to 9:22, what was true of those who should have received God's wrath long before they actually did receive it? They were created from the beginning as vessels of wrath. They were prepared (in advance) for destruction.

ESV **Proverbs 16:4** The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.

ESV **1 Peter 2:8b** They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined (*tithémi*) to do.

What example of a vessel of wrath prepared for destruction (9:22) did Paul already cite back in 9:14-18? Paul cited the example of Pharaoh from Exodus 1-18.

Based on 9:23, why did God temporarily hold wrath back from the vessels of wrath (9:22)? It was in order to make known the riches of His glory to the vessels of mercy.

God's mercy shines brightly against the backdrop of God's wrath.⁷ **Example:** God held back His full wrath against Pharaoh until after the ten plagues so that all Israel could see God's glory.

According to 9:23, for what purpose did Paul did God prepare the vessels of mercy (9:23)? He prepared them for glory.

ESV **Romans 8:30** ... those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Two Vessels: There are only two types of vessels (people) in the world: **1)** vessels of wrath prepared for destruction and **2)** vessels of mercy prepared for glory. Based on what Paul wrote in **9:6-18**, it appears the die was cast before either was ever born (just as with Jacob and Esau).

Repeat Opening Statement: In eternity past God elected (chose) to save some members of the human race, and to let the rest perish.

⁷ Dennis, *ESV Study*, 2173.

According to 9:24, who, specifically, are these vessels of mercy? According to 9:24, the vessels of mercy are those whom God has called from both Jews and Gentiles.

ESV **Romans 8:30** ... those whom he predestined he also called ...

Paul's overall point concerns Israel. Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel (9:6). God's promises were only intended for those Israelites who also had the faith of Abraham. Why then in 9:24 did Paul add that God called people from the Gentiles also? The context concerns why the Jews rejected their Messiah, Paul is here introducing truth that the Gentiles have been part of God's original plan of salvation, since the beginning. It is not that God's plan A, for Israel, failed, and so God had to revert to plan B (saving Gentiles).

ESV **Romans 1:16** ... the gospel ... is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Paul's Point: God word has not failed (**9:6**). His promises were never for all the Israelites, and His purpose was also to bring Gentiles to salvation (**9:24**).

*****What word did Paul use to describe the number of Israelites who are saved (11:5-7)?** God only elected a remnant to be saved. Even in Elijah's day, seven thousand men was a fraction of the total population.

According to 11:5-6, what determined who made it into the remnant? The remnant was chosen by God's grace, not according to man's good works. That is because:

ESV **Isaiah 64:6a** ... all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

ESV **Romans 11:7b** The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened ...

ESV **Romans 11:25-26** ... a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved ...

Conclusion

ESV **Romans 11:33-35** Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"

Did we come to Jesus because we were chosen, or were we chosen because we came? Why? It appears that we came because we were chosen. If we were not chosen, then we would have neither the ability nor the inclination to come to Christ.

NIV **John 10:26** ... you do not believe because you are not my sheep.

In the Bible, there are lost sheep and saved sheep; lost sheep become saved sheep, but goats never become sheep. You don't become a sheep by believing. You believe because you are a sheep. Everyone is born either a sheep or a goat.

ESV **Acts 13:48** ... as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

They were not appointed because they believed, the believed because they were appointed.

Apart from God's election, there is no one who seeks God nor understands the things of the Spirit.

This is called Unconditional Election.

ESV **1 Corinthians 4:7b** What do you have that you did not receive?

This includes your faith:

ESV **Romans 12:3** ... think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

ESV **Acts 16:14** One who heard us was a woman named Lydia.... The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

God didn't open the other women's hearts.

ESV **John 6:65** ... no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.

ESV **Philippians 1:29** ... it has been granted to you that ... you should ... believe in him ...

Conclusion: Predestination was necessary because left to ourselves none of us would ever come to Jesus for salvation. Therefore, God unconditionally chose certain people for salvation and works in their lives so as to cause them to believe.

Election: "We believe that God, before the foundation of the world, for His own glory did elect a great multitude of men and women to eternal life as an act of free and sovereign grace. This election was in no way dependent upon His foresight of human faith, decision, works or merit."⁸

Unconditional Election: "Before time began, God chose certain people to be saved based solely upon the pleasure of His good will."

⁸ Taken from "Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelicals statement of faith"

PPT>>>> “My Lord, I did not choose You”, a hymn by Josiah Conder (1836):

My Lord, I did not choose You
For that could never be
My heart would still refuse You
Had You not chosen me
You took the sin that stained me
You cleansed me, made me new
Of old You have ordained me
That I should live in You

Unless Your grace had called me
And taught my darkened mind
The world would have enthralled me
To Your glories I'd be blind
My heart knows none above You
For Your rich grace I thirst
I know that if I love You
You must have loved me first.

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04/03/2024



Extra Material

Discussion Questions

In Ephesians, when Paul gave the basis for someone being predestined, what reason was given?

Explain how it is that God's promises to Israel have not failed?

Upon what does God's mercy depend?

Did God pick you because He foresaw that you would one day believe, or, do you believe because God picked you to believe?

Extra Material

Steps of Salvation: Notice the steps of salvation. First you were "chosen" and "predestined" by God the Father (1:11), next you "heard" the Gospel (1:13),* then you "believed" in Jesus and finally you were "sealed" (1:13) by the Holy Spirit. Notice that hearing is one step in the process. Just as God predestined the *end* (salvation), He also predestined the *means* (the chosen at some point in time have to hear and believe the Gospel). We need to open our mouths and tell people about Jesus!

ESV **Romans 10:14** ... how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?

PPT>>>ESV 2 Peter 1:10 ... make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

How can you know if you are predestined or not?

PPT>>>ESV 2 Peter 1:5-7 ... make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

Consider these statements:

ESV **John 15:16** ~ You did not choose me, but I chose you

ESV **1 John 4:10** ~ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

ESV 1 **John 4:19** ~ We love because he first loved us.