

## Chosen People 2

Is God Fair?

*Romans 9:14-24*

*Memory Verses: Romans 9:16*

### MANUSCRIPT

#### Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

We are in a series called Chosen People, walking through Romans chapters 9 through 11, where we must engage with some of the most heavily debated topics in the Bible and throughout the history of Christianity. Topics like election and predestination. God's sovereignty and man's free will. Topics regarding the Church and Israel, and their place in the end times. And along the way we are asking questions like... do we choose God or does he choose us? Do we have free will or are our lives already predestined before time? Can God's plans and promises fail? Is God fair and just if he chooses some and not others? And perhaps above all... who exactly are his chosen people? And as we said last week, where many people only debate these topics trying to win an argument to support an already pre-established and biased point of view, Paul's purpose is simply for us to place our trust in a God who's ways we can't always understand, but who's ways are always good.

Last week we saw how our free choices cannot stop God's divine plan. The purpose of election is to protect his plan of redemption regardless of our choices. Which leads us to where we are today. This week we will answer the question... "If God's plans stand regardless of our actions, then is God really fair?" Or in other words, "If God chooses, do we really have a choice?"

Just recently, my Carolina Hurricanes won the Stanley Cup and became the champions of the National Hockey League. Now imagine there are two kids on the sidelines asking Jordan Staal, the Finals MVP, to give them autographs. Jordan, in his excitement signs an autograph for one kid but not the other. Does this make Jordan an unfair bigot who favors some over others or does this make Jordan a benevolent hero who chose to make some kids 'day? It's clearly the second. Jordan, the hero of the Canes, took time out of his celebration to show love and grace to a child. This is a grand gesture. This is a good thing. Now, does the other kid wish he'd gotten an autograph too? Of course. But, in no way should he have become angry with a man who moments earlier he was cheering.

Or what about two men sitting on death row. The governor calls in and pardons one of the men and not the other. Has the governor been unjust to the second man? Of course not. The second man received justice, the first man received mercy.

In the same way, God gives grace to whom he gives grace and he gives mercy to whom he gives mercy, and in no way is this unjust. The just thing would be to give no one anything but what they deserve, and what we all deserve is **Romans 6:23**... the wages of sin is death, because **Romans 3:23**... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And until we understand this, we will never understand election.

You see, many of us live our lives like God owes us something. We are discouraged or depressed because we love to claim rights that God never promised us. We act like we deserve all of God's blessings when all we really deserve is hell. So let me be clear, God doesn't owe you anything, and you have no rights to anything, and anything God gives you is a grace and a mercy you don't deserve. Get this, **election is not fundamentally about what God owes people, it's about the mercy God freely gives people.** **Romans 3:10-12** tells us that no one is righteous, no not one. But **Romans 5:8** reminds us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Verse after verse, chapter after chapter, Paul is telling the Roman church that salvation begins with God long before it ever gets to us. And here in **Romans 9:14-24** Paul makes that point again. Today's main point is simple... **God is never unjust, because election is always an act of mercy.** Today we're going to see three mistakes people make when they think about election.

#### Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first mistake we make is... **We Confuse Mercy With Obligation.** Look again at **vs. 14-16**. Paul immediately anticipates the objection. Why? Because election naturally feels unfair to the natural inclinations of our humanity. Humans, because of the sin nature that lives within them, are naturally prone to ask, what's in it for us? As we've already discussed, we feel we deserve something, and have a right to demand it. **2 Timothy 3:2** tells us that people are first and foremost lovers of self. **Philippians 2:3-4** commands us to do nothing from selfish ambition, nor look to our own interests... why? Because that's who we are and that's what we do. How dare God make a decision that doesn't include us or worse, bless us. If God makes a decision to bless one person and not another, or to show his mercy and grace to one and not another then clearly God is showing partiality and thus is not fair, right?

Paul answers, by no means. God is not unfair. Why? **Because mercy isn't mercy if it is something owed to us. If God is obligated to give it to us, or anyone else, by definition, it ceases to be mercy. Mercy must be freely given apart from obligation in order to actually be mercy. God would be perfectly just if he saved no one, or had mercy on no one. The shocking thing isn't that some are not saved, the shocking thing is that any of us are saved.** I love hearing stories of celebrities displaying random acts of kindness. One such story involves Shaquille O'Neal, who is commonly

known as a very gracious and generous person. One day he was in a Zales jewelry store and he overheard a man asking the jeweler how much more he owed on the engagement ring he was trying to buy for his girlfriend. Shaq quietly stepped up and paid off the remaining balance so the stranger could bring the ring home and finally propose. Now, do you feel that Shaq is the bad guy in this story because he didn't buy everyone in the store a ring? Of course not, because no one thinks he owed anyone a ring. He is the hero because he showed one person unimaginable grace and mercy. God owes salvation to no one. Which makes every salvation a miracle. Justice would send everyone to hell but mercy allows some into heaven. The proper response to election is gratitude, not entitlement. **God is never unjust, because election is always an act of mercy.**

The second mistake we make is... **We Confuse Sovereignty With Injustice.** Look again at **vs. 17-21**. First, we misunderstand mercy, secondly we misunderstand sovereignty. In order to help us understand, God uses two illustrations. Pharaoh and clay. Let's take them one at a time!

In the book of Exodus, God sends Moses to tell Pharaoh to "let my people go." Just as God chose Moses.. God also chose Pharaoh. Without Pharaoh, the Israelites would not be set free. So God raised him up. God raised him up in the lineage of pharaohs. God raised him up to ascend the throne. God raised him up so that God could show his power through him. God raised him up so through him, God's name would be proclaimed through the whole world. And, of course we think we know what that means because we know **Exodus 9:12** states that God hardened Pharaoh's heart! We see this as God purposefully raising Pharaoh up with a hardened heart so He could then show his power through the 10 plagues. But what if we are gravely mistaken.

What do we know to be absolutely true concerning God's relationship with mankind? Look at **2 Peter 3:9**. Let us be clear, we all have free will! We all have a choice to make. And God is patiently waiting for us to choose him! **We see this theme played out through the book of Romans starting in 1:16 where we see that the Gospel is the power for salvation to everyone who what? Who believes! Who, by their own free will chooses to put their faith in Christ! Also in verse 1:17... the righteous shall live by what? Faith. A conscious decision to believe in Christ. Verse 1:18... but the ungodly freely choose to suppress the truth even though they know it clearly. 1:21... they knew him yet freely chose to reject him. And so what does God do in response to those who consistently and freely choose to reject him? Romans 1:24... Therefore God gave them up to the lusts of their hearts. 1:26... God gave them up to their dishonorable passions. 1:28... God gave them up to a debased**

mind to do what ought not to be done. So what is the pattern and plan of God concerning salvation, free will, and God's sovereignty? We have a free choice to choose his mercy and love. But after we've freely chosen to reject him time and time and time again... God will eventually give our hearts over to our free desires to live for ourselves. God will give us over to a reprobate mind to do the things he hates. In other words, he will harden our hearts. If we choose to live for him... he will use us as part of his plan. If we choose to reject him... he will use us as a part of his plan.

And thus... Pharaoh wasn't hardened from birth... wasn't raised up hardened to God. Time and time and time again he chose to reject God and refuse to let the people go and therefore after he freely chose to reject God... God hardened him. And get this... If Pharaoh had submitted to God and given his life over to the one true God... God would have showed his power through him and to the whole world. But Pharaoh chose the hard way and the sovereignty of God prevailed, and his power was shown regardless. **God sovereignly chooses to harden the hearts of those who have already chosen to be hardened.**

And then Paul moves to the illustration of the clay. And of course this one is simple. The clay has no choice over what the potter turns him into. Some say, this proves we have no choice. Wrong... this illustration is here to merely show, that when God makes a decision to harden us... it's his decision... justified or not... though it is fully justified. And of course... we, the clay... call foul! How dare you do what you want with me God... and then God reminds us... I Am God. **So let's wrap our minds around this. God let's us choose to reject him. When we reject him may choose to harden us. And that is legitimately justified and fair... But even if it weren't, God is the potter and we are the clay and he can do what he wants with us and we can't do anything about it! We choose based on free will and God chooses based on his sovereign will... and its completely and utterly fair! God is never unjust, because election is always an act of mercy.**

The third mistake we make is... **We Confuse Predestination With Predetermination.** Look again at **vs. 22-24**. Look at verses 21-22. There is clearly a flexibility within the election and sovereignty of God. He can desire to show his wrath and at the same time be patient. But there is also a predestined plan and foreknown path. Vessels of wrath prepared for destruction... that was predestined. Riches for his glory for vessels of mercy.... that was predestined. It says, it was prepared beforehand. Even us... we are those vessels whom he has called. **Ephesians 1:4** says we were chosen before the foundation of the world.

We may not like words like foreknown or predestined or chosen or called... but we cannot deny that this is how God works. Likewise we cannot deny that God has given all mankind the free will to choose or deny him. And of course the way we rationalize these two issues is where the tension

usually begins. Look again at **Romans 8:29-30**. He foreknew and he predestined and he called. Let's take these one at a time.

The foreknowledge of God speaks specifically to his sovereign ability to know all things. This is called Omniscience... All knowing! If God is all knowing then he must know what will happen in the future, or know all possible outcomes of the future.

Predestined means that God has a destination in mind that he will sovereignly cause to happen. He can do this because he is all powerful... or Omnipotent. Even in this passage... he tells us the destination... that we would be conformed to the image of his Son.

So... Does God predestine us for salvation because he knows that we will be saved... or does God choose to save us despite what he has foreseen. The first takes our choices into consideration. The second doesn't. Since we know we have free will it must be the first, correct? God must predestine us for salvation based on who he knows will freely choose to be saved. But this also presents a problem. Because in this scenario... God's sovereignty seems to take a back seat to our choices. And if that is the case.. we are more God than God is. We become the potters and He the clay. So that can't be it either right? So which is it? According to Norman Geisler, in his book Chosen But Free, Predestination is not dependent on God's foreknowledge, nor is God's foreknowledge dependent on his predestined plan. Rather, they are both dependent on one another at the same time. A supernatural paradigm we can't fully understand.

So what does that leave us with? It is simple... **God's predestination takes our free will into consideration while also being based up his sovereign will**. Meaning we are predestined but not predetermined. God is not controlling every aspect of our journey. But he is prompting us towards his destination. In short, we are chosen but free. God has elected us... by his mercy... but not without our free will. **God is never unjust, because election is always an act of mercy.**

## Application

So let's go back to the question that started this entire passage. "Is God fair when he elects, chooses, and predestines us?" Is God just when he gives his mercy to some and not others? Is there any injustice on God's part? By no means! Why, because God owes salvation to no one. Because God has a right to rule his creation. Because God still allows us to freely choose or reject him. Because God knows our future, predestines our calling, prompts us toward salvation... and takes our free will into consideration through it all. He chooses us as we also choose him. We are chosen but free.

## Conclusion

The greatest evidence of this is the cross. Think about it. Judas betrayed Jesus. Peter denied Jesus. The Sanhedrin condemned Jesus. Pilate sentenced Jesus. The crowd demanded his death. Human beings made real, free will, choices! Sinful choices! Evil choices! Yet through all of those choices, God accomplished his foreseen and predestined plan of salvation. The greatest acts of human rebellion became the greatest display of God's divine mercy. And he chose to give that to you! And that is beyond fair! **God is never unjust, because election is always an act of mercy.**