

How Does God Choose

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Unshakeable: Romans / Ro 9:1–16

How many of us, when we were kids would choose teams before we played a game on the playground?

You remember how this would go... two kids, usually the most popular kids would get to pick teams out of everyone who was standing on the wall or against the fence. And it was always the kids with the most skill that were chosen first, and then it was those who were the most liked, or whose friends were picking.

No one wanted to get picked last, in fact, whenever there was only two left there was this uncomfortable silence of determining who was the best of two bad choices.

See, here's what Paul starts to show us this morning, is that from the beginning, God has been choosing His own team. He's been creating for Himself a people; a family.

And maybe that makes us uncomfortable because we think He chooses like we choose with bias or unfairness. But that's not what Paul shows us today.

Paul shows us that God is choosing for Himself a people, but it's not based on birth, not based on our effort. But it's based solely on the mercy of God toward people who did nothing to deserve it.

God is choosing for Himself a people, but how does God choose?

Look with me at our passage this morning [Romans 9:1-16](#).

So we're back in Romans after a bit of a break and I think it will be helpful for us to take a moment and reorient ourselves to this letter that Paul wrote to the church in Rome.

I think it's important for us to keep in mind that Romans is unique in that Paul is writing to a church that he's never been to, that he didn't plant. They know little about him.

And the reason that Paul is writing this letter is really because he wants to partner with them in ministry, he is hoping to stop by on his way to Spain and his hope is that the church in Rome will support him, not just with encouragement and prayers, but he is trying to raise funds for the ministry work.

But this church knows little about Paul, in fact what they might know about him is that he was a Pharisee that once persecuted the Church, but now claims to preach the gospel, so they'd be a little suspicious perhaps.

Paul is writing to them, and he is sharing with them the gospel that he has been traveling around preaching. In essence, Paul is saying this is what I've been traveling to all the churches and preaching and teaching about. It's the most exhaustive explanation of the gospel that we have in the New Testament.

You could easily break Romans off into sections and we've tried to do that. For instance, Romans chapter 1-4 is really about the heart of the gospel and Paul is explaining that the gospel is the power of God for salvation for all who believe, he tells us why we need the gospel, how we have access to the gospel and what Christ accomplished in the gospel.

The gospel is simply the good news of Jesus, and the good news of Jesus is that He came and died a sacrificial, substitutionary death on our behalf and He did that because all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, God's moral standard and because of it we stand in danger of judgment and wrath, but the good news is that you and I by faith in Jesus can be justified, we can be found righteous in God's eyes because Jesus took on our punishment and judgment - that's chapters 1-4.

Romans chapter 5-8 is all about the power of the gospel, what the gospel actually produces in the life of the believer. We find out that you and I have found peace, true and lasting peace with God by faith in Jesus, that we have

been united in Christ's death and resurrection, which means that who we were before Jesus died, the one who was a slave to sin or a slave to our flesh, that person died and we have been resurrected with Jesus. Now we have new life, we are a new creation, born again with the power to overcome sin and temptation.

And chapter 8 is all about what we've been given in the gift of the Holy Spirit living inside of us. We've been adopted into God's family, we are co-heirs with Christ, and nothing, absolutely nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ.

That's where we've been and if you want to catch up on all of that you can go and listen to past sermons on our website, on our YouTube channel, even on Spotify or wherever you listen to podcasts.

We come to chapter 9 and it's like a whole new territory. We go from this explanation of the gospel to Paul, who all of a sudden starts talking about Israel. We wonder like, what's going on here? I thought this was a letter about the gospel.

We come to chapter 9, and some would say that chapter 9 is all about election and predestination and you would be right. We'll get there, but there is so much more going on.

Chapters 9-11, and that really is the next section of Romans, it's all about the progression of the gospel. How the gospel came to us and how it's going to continue progressing throughout history.

What Paul wants to make clear is the progress of the gospel by the sovereign plan of God.

God is sovereign over salvation, and how it moves and progresses.

See here's why Israel matters, because with the gospel the question becomes who are the people of God?

Like, where do the Jews fit into the gospel?

And Paul has made clear that Jews need the gospel just as much as Gentiles, the Jews don't get a pass.

Romans 1:16 ESV

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

The Jews need the power of the gospel just as much as Gentiles.

Romans 2:9–11 ESV

⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek...

The Jews are in danger of judgment as much as the Gentiles.

Romans 3:9 ESV

⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.

Questions would come up, especially for Paul's Jewish readers and listeners. What about Israel? Aren't they God's chosen people? Has God turned His back on Israel?

If the gospel is so filled with the power of God then why are the Jews largely rejecting it? Does that mean that God's Word has failed?

Paul wants us to see, this isn't something new and different, it's just simply the next phase in God's salvation plan, that God has always been calling unto Himself a people, God has been forming Himself a people – even out Israel.

Paul has to answer these questions, and he starts with his heart for Israel. He starts there because Paul has been accused of hatred for the Jews. He has been accused of what we would call an antisemitism.

That's a word that has started to pop up in the culture lately and it's really concerning for us as Christians, because I don't know how any bible believing, bible reading Christian could be an anti-Semite.

There could be real concern for what's going on in Israel right now, but I don't know how any Christian could have a hatred towards any ethnic or religious group, let alone the Jews.

I get this question a lot, how are we to view Israel? And I think our heart towards Israel should be much like Paul's here.

I think that we should have a real burden for the salvation of Israel, that's the burden that Paul has here.

Romans 9:1–3 ESV

¹ I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

Think about what Paul is saying here, he's addressing those criticizing him and saying I have no hatred towards my people, absolutely not, it's quite the opposite, I have such a burden for them.

I long for them to know and believe the gospel so strongly that if it were possible I would be cut off from Christ so that they could know Jesus.

Now of course he's using hyperbole, he cannot take their place. But it tells us this great burden that he has for his people to come to saving faith in the gospel. I want them to know Jesus, I want my people to recognize Jesus as their Messiah, so much I would give my own salvation for it.

Paul had a burden for Israel, I read his words and I think of Jesus own tears He shed over Jerusalem. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing."

We should have a burden for Israel, we should pray for the salvation of unbelieving Israel.

Those of us here with unsaved loved ones, people we love who don't know Jesus, we know that burden well, don't we? Oh how we long to see them come to Jesus. It keeps us up at night, it keeps us on our knees with tears in our eyes, we know this burden that Paul has for his people.

I think we should share that burden for the salvation of Israel.

But I also think that we should have a special affection for Israel as well. Why, well because they are God's chosen people, look what Paul says here, think about how special Israel is in God's eyes, what God accomplished through them.

Romans 9:4–5 ESV

⁴ They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

They belong to the adoption, that is, God chose them from all the nations to show His affection upon... and whatever that means as we will see it cannot mean that Israel is saved nationally, or ethnically.

We've already seen that there is no advantage in salvation for the Jews, he has said that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, both Jews and the Greeks.

So the Jews need the salvation of Jesus just as much as you and I, there is no back door into the kingdom of God for them.

But God has marked them out as the nation by which He revealed Himself to the world. Israel is God's illustration book to the world, they are His chosen vessel.

He goes on and says, to them belong the glory, the shekinah glory of God dwelled and lived with them in the wilderness as they wandered, God chose to

live among them in a powerful way and to them belong the covenants and the promises, to them God gave His law, the very law that reveals the nature of God to use.

He goes on to say, to them belong the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses all came from Israel and all the promises flow through them and last from their race he says came Jesus.

Think about that, of all the nations and ethnicities in the world, God chose to be born as a man into this world as a Jew. Jesus was a Jew, how could we ever hate the Jews?

There should be a burden for Israel, an affection for Israel and in the very least it should cause us to stand for Israel's right to exist, these are after all God's chosen people.

But here's what it doesn't mean, it doesn't mean we worship Israel. Yes, they are God's chosen people, but they are just people, like you and me. Which means they are not infallible, or that the nation of Israel can do no wrong.

It doesn't mean that the people of Israel are not above ridicule or criticism. It doesn't mean that we should hesitate to tell Israel they're wrong when they're wrong.

But it brings us back to the questions then.

Why has Israel, in large part, rejected Jesus as their Messiah? It's not that they stopped believing God would send someone.

Some are still waiting — the Messiah hasn't come yet, so it can't be Jesus. Some don't picture the Messiah as a person at all — it's an age, a time of peace and justice that humanity itself brings about.

Some would say you don't need a Messiah to be right with God — you need the covenant, kept faithfully. Torah is enough. And some would point to the modern

state of Israel itself — the return to the land — and say, that's the redemption we were waiting for.

Different answers, but they all land in the same place — not Jesus.

So Paul asks the question underneath all of it. If these are God's people — His covenant, His promises, His law — has God's Word failed?

And that's exactly where Paul takes us next.

Look what he says in verse 6 and 7. He tells us there is something greater going on.

Romans 9:6–7 ESV

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”

Do you see what Paul is saying? Not all Israel belong to Israel. Maybe you're thinking like what? What does that mean?

Well, it means that from the beginning there have been two kinds of Israel, let's call them physical Israel, and spiritual Israel. Or if you like, Israel by the flesh and Israel of the promise.

What it means is that not everyone who is a descendant of Abraham, are his true offspring. Paul lets us in on a little secret, that's not so secret. That even out of the nation of Israel God has been choosing for Himself a people of promise.

Remember back in [Romans 8](#), just one chapter back when Paul was talking about those who belong to God, those who are a part of God's family? Paul said, they are those whom God foreknew and those whom He predestined... that word predestined we looked at and found that it meant that God had chosen for Himself a people before they were ever born.

Paul is telling us that God was doing that long before the church age, it's what's He's been doing all along. That's why the majority of Israel has rejected Jesus as their Messiah, because they are not the Israel of the promise.

That was true in Paul's day, and it's true of Israel today.

God has been choosing for Himself a people out of Israel. An Israel out of Israel.

What does this look like, how does God choose then who belong to His promise and who doesn't?

Here's what Paul shows us first, that God has been choosing for Himself a people out of Israel, but His choosing has nothing to do with how or where they were born.

God's choosing is not by birth. That's the first things we see.

BIRTH

To prove his point Paul gives the example of Isaac. And he shows us that even though Abraham had many sons, only one was chosen as the child of the promise.

We keep reading there in verses 7-9 that not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.

Romans 9:7-9 ESV

⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. ⁹ For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son."

Let's just read what Paul is saying there, let's just make implications from the text.

Paul is saying that not all the children of Abraham were the children of the promise. Now we know that Abraham had Ishmael, not just Isaac. But God specifically told Abraham, no, Ishmael is not the child of the promise. In fact Abraham actually asks God, could it not just be Ishmael and God specifically says no, it's not Ishmael, he will not be the child of promise, I have something different for him.

Isaac will be the child of promise. God is choosing.

Sarah eventually dies and Abraham marries another woman, that is sometimes forgotten.

In [Genesis 25](#) after Sarah dies, Abraham marries Keturah and he has 6 sons from her and in fact those sons go on and give Abraham grandchildren and so by his death he has multiple sons and grandchildren.

They are all descendants of Abraham, but they are not all a part of the promise. Only Isaac.

See what set's Isaac apart is verse 9 when God declares to Abraham , this time next year, I will return and Sarah will have a son.

I will return, I will do it. Nothing physical about it, because Abraham was old and Sarah past childbearing age, the only explanation for Isaac coming into existence is that God willed it, and fulfilled it.

This was an important distinction for Israel in Paul's time because they assumed that if they were descendants of Abraham they were good, what do I need salvation for, what do I need forgiveness for, we are children of Abraham; we can track our heritage back to him.

But Paul is saying that's not how you become a part of God's people, God's family. It has nothing to do with your physical birth, where you were born, who you were born to, or how you were raised. It has everything to do with God's Will.

Even those who are born into the family of Abraham need the gospel, they need the forgiveness that Jesus brings. It's not familial, it's personal.

The same thing can be said to us this morning. Like maybe you think you're good with God because you've been coming to church since you could remember. Maybe your parents love Jesus, or your grandparents taught you about Jesus. Maybe you were born into a family filled with believers, or maybe you think your good because your spouse loves Jesus.

But it's personal. Have you responded to the call of Jesus on your life? Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus? You cannot be a part of God's people, God's family on the faith of anyone else but your own.

God is choosing for Himself a people and it has nothing to do with birth.

But if it's not about your birth, what about our effort?

Like, is there anything that we can do, or will do that will earn our way into God's family?

Paul moves to another patriarch to further his point, but it teaches us another truth.

God's choosing is not about our effort.

EFFORT

Romans 9:10–12 ESV

¹⁰ *And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— ¹² she was told, "The older will serve the younger."*

See, he moves to talk about Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac we know is the child of the promise and he marries Rebekah and Rebekah becomes pregnant with twins.

But we know that the promise wasn't carried on through both sons, in fact something interesting happens. That even though Esau was born first and he was rightfully heir to the promise, God tells Sarah, that's not what's going to happen. Though Jacob was born second, the promise will continue through him.

God chose Jacob and not Esau. Again both descendants of Abraham, but not both are part of the promise.

Do you see the case that Paul is making here, not all Israel is Israel of the promise. That's why they're not responding to the gospel. Those who respond in faith are those whom God has chosen.

And you say, well what was so great about Jacob? Like, maybe you think God chose Jacob because he was smarter, or more righteous and moral, maybe God knew that Jacob would love Him and serve Him.

Ahhh, but notice verse 11, pay careful attention.

Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue..., not because of work but because of him who calls.

It wasn't anything special that Jacob had that Esau lacked. I know that's how we choose. You're interviewing people for a job, you want the best, most qualified candidate, so isn't that how God chooses? Doesn't that make sense?

Think about Esau, he was a selfish, violent man, set only on satisfying his most basic desires, that's the image Genesis gives us.

But Jacob, is no better. He is a liar and a deceiver. His very name means deceiver, he deceived his own father to get the blessing. And he's a con man,

who conned his own father-in-law out of his herd and takes off in the middle of the night stealing all that he has taken.

It couldn't have been anything that Jacob did. This does away with the idea that some have what God chooses because He looks through time and sees who will serve Him and who won't.

That's not what Paul seems to say here, God didn't choose them because of anything He saw in them. He chose them because He had a purpose to fulfill.

Now that's good news, isn't it? Because, if God is picking people to be on His team, I'm not sure He'd pick me. I am a flawed, sinful, broken man. There is nothing good in me apart from Him. Why would He choose me? Why would He choose you?

I don't know. That information is not made available to us.

Here's what is, that God has a purpose in His election that is hidden from us. We aren't privy to.

There is plan, a purpose in His choosing that remains His will. It's not as though we could go through this room and say you are chosen and you are not, you are, but not you. God has a hidden purpose to who He brings and who He calls.

Look at verse 11, ***it wasn't because of anything good or bad, but it says so that God's purpose of election might continue.***

God's purpose of election... we should be familiar with that word election, we're about to have one in a few weeks. Our municipal election is coming up. And we know how this goes, you head down to your local voting station, head into a booth and you vote or you choose who it is that you want to be leading for the next four years.

Well, that same principle applies when it comes to God's election. Only there is just one vote, one vote that matters. God's choosing, God's selecting all according to His purpose and His will.

And this isn't the only place we see this idea.. it's the same idea we see in [Ephesians 1](#).

Ephesians 1:4-5 ESV

⁴ **even as 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 to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.**

We see it again in that same chapter of Ephesians verse 11.

Ephesians 1:11 ESV

¹¹ **In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,**

Do you see it, He predestined, according to the purpose of His will, to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

And if that makes you uncomfortable, I don't know what to tell you because it's all over this bible we read, that God is working all things, all things in history in the universe according to His will.

Why does God choose who He chooses? We don't know. Paul doesn't give us that answer. He doesn't tell us the why...but he tells us the how.

It's not based on birth, it's not based on our effort, but it's always an act of mercy.

MERCY

God chooses only by his mercy.

Romans 9:14-16 ESV

¹⁴ **What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!** ¹⁵ **For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have**

compassion on whom I have compassion.”¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

These are weighty issues, controversial topics today, as they were in Paul’s day, he knows this is going to rub people the wrong way, he knows the questions it’s going to raise.

And so he answers, the most basic question that is raised today, and it is the question that was raised in Paul’s day... that’s not fair. It’s not fair that God chooses some, but He doesn’t choose others.

Paul words it a bit differently, he says you will ask, is there injustice on God’s part? Is God unjust?

But Paul says no, first of all God is God. Has the right to have mercy on whom He chooses to have mercy. He owes mercy to no one.

That’s what He says to Moses. There Paul is quoting God’s words to Moses in [Exodus 33](#). I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and compassion on whom I have compassion. It’s my right to choose.

What’s interesting though is the background to that quote.

God says that right after the golden calf incident. You know where Moses is up on the mountain and he’s receiving the Ten Commandments. But Israel is down below and gets impatient, and so they convince Aaron to form them a god out of gold to worship. Moses is up on the mountain worshipping the true God, but Israel is down below engaged in idol worship.

And when Moses comes down and sees it — the calf, the dancing, the worship — he’s furious. He breaks the tablets, He burns the calf, grinds it to powder, scatters it on the water, and makes Israel drink it.

And God commands that 3000 Israelites be put to death that day as judgment for their sin. 3000.

But there were more than just 3000 that were worshipping the calf. They were all worshipping the calf. So, shouldn't all of them die?

They all deserve the same punishment, but God chooses to show mercy to some.

Do you see, that's the point. That's mercy. He didn't have to save anyone that day, but He showed mercy to some.

Justice is everyone gets the punishment they deserve, mercy is that God chooses to spare some.

He doesn't have to, He owes them nothing, He would have been right to put them all to death, but He mercifully chooses to save some.

All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. We've seen what happens when mankind chooses, we choose sin every time. We choose to rebel against God.

And we all deserve judgment for our rebellion against God. And God would be right to allow everyone to face judgment.

But He chooses to show mercy.

He doesn't have to save anyone, He would be right and just to allow everyone to face judgment.

But, God in His mercy chooses to spare some.

Let's not call out for justice, let's not call out for fairness, because justice and fairness is me getting what I deserve is getting death, hell and the grave... I don't want what I deserve, I want mercy.

God is creating for Himself a people, a family, one of His own choosing.

And the good news is that it's not by our birth, that it's not by anything that we have done, but God always chooses based on His mercy.

And listen I know that leaves a lot of questions, some of them we can answer next time. But maybe the most important question is, how do I know?

How do I know that I am a part of God's chosen people?

Well, interestingly we actually saw the evidence last week. in our passage in 1 Thessalonians.

Remember what Paul said to that church?

1 Thessalonians 1:4–5 ESV

⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

Do you see what Paul says, this is how you know that God has chosen you. Why? Because you have responded to the gospel.

We know that you are a part of God's chosen people because when the gospel came to you, we saw the evidence of the Holy Spirit and the conviction of the gospel in your life.

How do I know that God chose me, because I chose Him. I've responded to the gospel. I believe in Jesus and God is working in my life.

That's where you need to start today. Don't worry about whether or not you're chosen or whose chosen, that's not in our control. Have you responded to the gospel? Have you responded to God's call to put your faith and trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the only means of your salvation?

And if you have, then you are a part of God's chosen people.

It's kind of like, starting you're car. Listen, some of you could tell me what happens in my engine the moment I turn the key to start it, all the details and all the aspects. All I know is that when I turn the key my car starts.

That's all you need to know for salvation. You put your faith in Jesus, you say Jesus, I trust you, I love you, I worship you.

See, what Paul is saying is there is something going on behind the scenes that we don't fully understand, that behind our choosing to follow Jesus, is God's choosing of us.

God's calling us to be a part of His chosen people. And it has nothing to do with who I am or where I was born. It has nothing to do with what I've done or haven't done, it's not because of anything special in me.

It's only because God, in His sovereign grace, has shown me mercy.

Pray with me this morning.