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Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: The Mystery of Election

Transcribed Message
June 27, 2021
Romans 8:28-30

Dr. Charles Ryrie, who was a professor of systematic theology and writer, made the statement: “The doctrine of salvation is both simple and it is complex. On the one hand, most can quote at least part of John 3:16 or Paul's response to the Philippian jailer's question about how it is that one is saved. On the other hand, who can explain a holy God who could become a man and die for sin?” Or if Dr. Ryrie were studying in Romans 8, maybe he would've added to that phrase – or who can understand the doctrines of foreknowledge and predestination? That is our task this morning.

We are working our way through the book of Romans. We're in this amazing 8th chapter. We're nearly to the end of this chapter where we kind of purposely slowed down to be able to understand more fully what it is that God has said to us in these amazing words that He has given to us. It is almost as you're reading at the end of this 8th chapter that every word is an important one and every word is a powerful one and every word needs a greater explanation. That's what we're attempting to do. I would say this to you as we work through these rather challenging concepts – if you feel at times overwhelmed or unsure or where to turn, turn to Romans 11 and verse 33. Just begin to read about over the depth of both the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out. Then it just goes on to encourage us in the glory of who God is and what He is doing.

This morning the mystery of election. God's electing purposes are based on His character. He can't do anything unjust or unloving. Election reveals His grace. Let's start with a quick review and kind of set the table again. We talked about a little bit of this last Sunday but I would say three things. First, it's always good to start with God. It's always good to start with God. I was reading this past week in Isaiah 45 and the 5th verse says I am the Lord and there is no other. Besides Me, there is no god. The psalmist says in Psalm 115 verse 3 our God is in the heavens. He does whatever He pleases. And so

when we begin with God, and that is exactly what we see here in in this passage in Romans, that is a good place to begin. It is a good place to be and it's a good place to stay. We're not going to finish election in chapter 8. No, there's more waiting for us in chapter 9. When we get into chapter 9 Paul is going to say just remember this: God is the Potter. You're the clay. Those are powerful and important words.

Secondly, the Word is clear about the condition of humanity. The Word of God is absolutely clear about the condition of humanity. The language of the Bible is not haphazard. The Holy Spirit of God communicates not just in words, but in the imagery and in the concepts that are put forward. What the Bible presents to us about our human condition is not that we're in the hospital and we need a little help. It isn't even that we're in the hospital and in ICU. it isn't even that we're in the hospital and we're on life support. No, what does the Bible say about our condition apart from Christ? It says we are in sin. We're dead in our trespasses and sins. What is it we need? We need to be born again. We need to be born again. We need a resurrection. That's what we need. That's the second thing to remember.

The third thing is within the doctrine of election there's mystery. There's mystery. We shouldn't not be willing to admit that. There's nothing wrong with saying these things sometimes that if I think about them it makes my head hurt a little bit. I can't quite fully grasp all that is going on. Why should we be able to? We're not God. One of our problems is we want to think that we are God, that we can solve all these things. Here's what we can do. We can acknowledge that it's a mystery. We can acknowledge that it's hard, it's challenging. But what we can't do is say it's so hard I don't want to talk about it. What we can't say is this is just too divisive. Why would you bring up something that has divided churches and people for centuries? Why do you want to talk about stuff like this? You shouldn't be doing that. You just move on a little more quickly on some of these things. Of course, the reason why we can't do that is because that's not what the Bible does. The Bible puts forth these truths and these doctrines and says give yourself over to the study of these things as best you can. Grapple with them as best you can. Ask the Lord to enlighten your mind as best as you can, and step into these truths and trust God to show you what it is that He wants you to know. Jesus did not avoid the doctrine of election. He talked about it. He broke the one rule. He talked about it in

company that was both His followers and those who were not His followers. Paul talked about it. We'll see that. Paul talked about it often. He made no apology for stepping into these things. Peter did the same thing. We should do the same. we should understand there is a mystery involved.

Let me say again this does not in my mind need to be a divisive issue. People can honestly genuinely say I see this differently than you do but we're brothers and sisters in Christ. We can fellowship together. The last I checked John Calvin was not going to be standing at Heaven's gate asking any questions. Jacob Arminius was not going to be standing there asking anybody any questions. We know Peter's going to be there and I just hope the question isn't the train left Denver at 11 o'clock and... I won't be getting in if that's the question. But if there were to be a question, and there won't be because believers will be there. There won't be a question, but if there were a question, it could very easily be worded in that familiar one that says why should I let you into Heaven? My answer would be simply because Your Son Jesus came to this earth and died on the cross, and He did so for my sin. I have trusted in what He did and what He did alone for the gift of eternal life. That, my friends, takes us into what we know about the doctrine of election, because that's ultimately what we want to know. What does the Bible teach? What does the Bible say about this doctrine of election?

I just want to begin very simply by putting forward the concept itself. I know this is elementary, but let's just began there. The concept of election itself. Our church happens to be a polling place so whenever there's election in our community we set up a polling place and people come here to vote. They come here to choose. They come here to select people for offices within our community, state, and nation. We're a polling place. People are electing and selecting when they come here. You make selections and choices every day all through your day. You made the big decision to get up this morning. That was number one. You got up this morning. You decided to come. That was an election. That was a selection. That was a choice. What you wear. Where you park. Where you sit. I know where you sit is the same every Sunday so that's not really a selection. Those are all choices. Those are all selections. Those are all just affirmations that this concept is a very simple straightforward one that we are involved in

all the time. But when we come to the Bible we see that this idea and this word is used a lot.

That's the second thing I want to do. I just want to step into the biblical uses of this word. I've listed seven passages for you there. I'm not going to read all of them. I'll read a number of them. Just listen to what the Word of God says. Deuteronomy 4:37 – "...and because He loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt." 1 Chronicles 16:13 – "Oh offspring of Israel, His servant children of Jacob, His chosen ones." Acts 13:48 – "and when the Gentiles heard this they began rejoicing and glorifying the Word of the Lord and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." I've added in parentheses there the same verse that appears in the Living Bible and when Ken Taylor translated the Living Bible he shows us very clearly his theological position because notice how he translated this. "When the Gentiles heard this they were very glad and rejoiced in Paul's message and as many as wanted eternal life believed." Totally different word. Totally different concept. It's just a reflection of his theology, not of the text. That's why when you're picking a Bible to read, it's okay to read the Living Bible or The Message or a paraphrase, but you don't study out of it, because if you were to study out of that you would look at that verse and say as many as wanted eternal life believed, but that's not what the text says. That's not what the Holy Spirit said. The Holy Spirit said as many as were appointed to eternal life those were the ones who believed.

Listen to what Jesus said in John 15:16 -- "You did not choose me." Wait a minute. I thought I chose you. Jesus said you did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you. We'll talk about that more next Sunday, Lord willing. Romans 8:33 – "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?" There is a little snapshot. There's lots more verses that we find this word being used. Again, this is not a man-made doctrine. This is not some truth that we should run from or hide from. Paul says in 1 Timothy 5:21 he talks about the elect angels. There is this idea not just of humanity, but there's actually a group of angels who are called elect. There's a group that is non-elect. It is a doctrine and a truth that we need to step into. We need to understand as best we can.

The three terms that the Bible uses most often in describing this truth are what we want to look at next. There are three primary ones. This first one we've already

commented on in terms of these verses, but let's look at it again. It is the word "chosen". We have this idea put forward in the word chosen. In the Greek text it is *eklekto*. to pick out, to choose, to select. Listen, if you just leave the New Testament and you go over and you pick up secular Greek, this word appears in secular Greek. It's used by a general who's picking out men for a mission. He *eklekto*'d them. He selected them. He chose them. It's used of the captain of a ship. He picked out people who are going to be rowers in that ship. It's also used of a man who picks out gray hair and evidently pulls them out because he doesn't want them. Did you see the story recently that says that there is now growing scientific evidence that gray hair can actually turn back to its original color? A lot of us are hopeful for that scientific event to take place. So be careful about *eklekto*-ing a gray hair and pulling it out because it may go back to its original color. That just gives you an idea of how this word is used. It's just simply most commonly to select, choose someone or something. Now that's not very controversial.

That is pretty straightforward, but what we step into the next is probably the most controversial of these words and it is the word foreknowledge. The word foreknowledge. Before we jump in your outline I want to say two things before we look at this word in greater detail. They're not in your outline, but I just remind you again that when we're in Romans 8 and in this section of verses this is the work of God that is being described for us here. This is the work of God and in particular the work of God the Father. When we read in these verses verse 29 – "For those whom He foreknew, He predestined..." He in verse 30 called, He justified, He glorified. Who is that? God the Father. That is the work of God the Father that is being lifted up here before us. That's why I said at the very beginning it's always good to start with God because God is the one who is the subject of all of this activity in these verses. It is not us. It's God.

The other thing I would have you note is don't lose sight of the connection of verses 29 and 30 with verse 28. Verses 29 and 30 are helping to explain verse 28. Remember verse 28. "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." We have this great promise to those who love God. To those who have been called. That promise in verse 28 then is linked to verse 29 and 30. We know it's linked because verse 29 begins with the word "for". The word "for" is a word that says to you to pay attention here. I'm going to explain

what I just said. I'm going to add further to what I just said. What he does then in 29 and 30, growing out of the amazing promise of verse 28, is he says to us here is the eternal purpose of God for you. Before time began, God had an eternal purpose in mind for you.

So we come to this word "foreknowledge". This word is probably the most, I would say, misunderstood and it's probably the most controversial of all of these words that we're going to look at. Its common understanding. I could have said what I think would be a common misunderstanding but a common understanding when people see this word "foreknowledge". In the Greek text, this word is *proginosko*. It's a compound word. *Pro* is before. *Ginosko* is knowledge. So you put those together and it is the word from which we get the word prognosis. What you do when you go to the doctor? He is working up a diagnosis. He moves from from the diagnosis to the prognosis. He says this is my best understanding of what's coming. That's this word. *Proginosko*. God knows beforehand. To know something beforehand. To know something in advance.

One way this word "foreknowledge" is commonly understood is that God looks down through time and He sees by way of foresight, He sees ahead of time who will believe and then on the basis of that He picks them for salvation. It might look like this. In eternity past there is God the Father. That is who we said is in view here. You look on that little chart it says God the Father who in eternity past looked down through time and He went down through time and he saw Carlon is going to believe. I think I'm going to pick him. He is going to believe and on the basis of the fact that he's going to believe, I'm going to elect him. I'm going to select him. I'm going to choose him for salvation. That's the way the majority of Christians see and understand this word. It is simply foreknowledge that is foresight.

Is foreknowledge foresight? Yes, it is. But think with me about the implications of this common understanding. My perspective of viewing that word that way in effect empties the doctrine of election of all of its significance. Let me show you why I believe that. I would just ask a couple of questions. The first question I would ask is what is it that God can learn? What is it that God can learn? If we think of God in eternity past looking by foresight or foreknowledge into the future, what is it that an omniscient all-knowing God can come to learn? There isn't anything that He does not know. That's

why we say He is omniscient. Our God is all-knowing. He is outside of time. We're just trying to wrap our head around this by using this language, but God doesn't look down through time the way we do. He lives ever in the present. He's not locked into time. He certainly is not needing to learn anything. There is no knowledge outside of God.

The second thing I would ask is let's say He did look down through time and let's say He did learn something. What is it that He would see when He looked down through time? What is that God would see? We noted last week and we said it again this morning. The condition of our heart apart from and before Christ is very clearly described for us. What is it that God would see if He looked down through time and He saw Carlon Tschetter in space, time, history, moment? What would He see in my heart? He's already told me. Romans 3. There is no one who is righteous; no, not one. There is no one who understands. There is no one who seeks after God. That's what He would've seen. If somehow God could learn something, if somehow God could be encapsulated in time and He looked down through time and He learned something about me, what He would learn and what He would see is already made known and He's already told me. There isn't anybody, none of us that are seeking after God, that are pursuing God apart from the work of God. So if it's simply a matter of foresight that is in view here, I think we have a problem. I believe that what we all can agree on is yes, God has foresight. Yes, God knows the future. But here's what I want you to see.

This word "foreknowledge" means so much more than looking at it from our human perspective. This word is invested with great truth in Scripture. So let's step into that. The word foreknowledge is a word of relation. This is what you see. If you are reading through your Bible and you come across this word repeatedly, it's never simply enough to say that's just foresight, or that's just God knowing something ahead of time. No, there's much more truth invested in this word. Look at verse 29 again in this 8th chapter. "for those whom He foreknew..."

The first thing we say is it's not what God saw. It's who. It's not what God saw. Paul is not describing an event that God saw, that God came to know, that God came to see. He uses a personal pronoun. Who it is that God came to know. The word "know" is so much more than simply an intellectual knowledge. It's a word of personal relationship. In Genesis chapter 4 verse 1, we read Adam knew Eve and she conceived

a son. Obviously, that is more than just intellectual knowledge. The word “know” there is a word of great intimacy. It's describing the sexual relationship within marriage. Adam knew Eve. A personal relationship. A personal knowledge. In 1 Samuel 2:12 we read Eli's sons were worthless men and they did not know God. They didn't know God? They grew up in the high priest's home. How could they not know God? They knew God. They knew about God. They knew who He was. They didn't have a personal relationship with God. That's the idea of knowledge in the Old Testament Scriptures. Jeremiah 1:5. Jeremiah, before you were born I knew you in your mother's womb. Before I formed you, I knew you. He could even say to Jeremiah before you were conceived I knew you. What does that mean? I was in a personal relationship with you, a love relationship. Amos 3:2. God says to Israel out of all the nations of the earth, you alone have I known. God doesn't know the other nations? He didn't = go to geography class? Of course not. He's saying I didn't know the other peoples, I didn't know the other nations the way I knew you.

Then lastly, this is what Peter says in 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 20. He is talking about Christ here. “He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you.” God the Father knew intimately His Son whom He sent to this earth to make provision for our sin. To know, and this is the key point, in Scripture is an idiom. It's an expression for love. You can literally read in all of those passages that I read, you can literally read for you alone have I had a love relationship with. Adam had a love relationship with Eve and conceived a son. Eli's sons were worthless because they had no love relationship with God. Just go down through all of those. It's a word that speaks not just of knowledge but of a love relationship.

Here's the second thing I want you to see. It's not what I did. It's not what you did. It's what God did. That's the point that he is making here. The focus is on God. It's not on us. This is the point of 28, 29 and 30 and all the way through the rest of Romans 8. Listen to this very straightforward statement in Deuteronomy chapter 7 about God's relationship with Israel, and if there was ever a verse that illustrates this for us. it's in Deuteronomy 7 and verse 6: “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession. Out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth, it was not because you were more in number

than any other people that the Lord God set His love on you and chose you, for you are the fewest of all the peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that He swore to your fathers.” That is as clear and plain and straightforward as it can be stated. Why did God choose the Jews? He did not choose the Jews out of all the nations of the earth because there was something inherently about the Jewish people that distinguished them and set them apart from everybody else. He tells us why He chose them. It had nothing to do with merit. It had nothing to do with human goodness. It had nothing to do with human initiative. It had simply to do with the fact that God says I chose to love you. I chose to love you.

Dennis Prager produces a lot of great stuff. He's a Jewish man and he joined with a rabbi to write the book *Why the Jews*. It is about the rise of anti-Semitism and is a very good book, but they make this statement: “God chose the Jews simply because they were the offspring of the first ethical monotheist, Abraham.” Now with all due respect and kindness, that's not why God chose the Jews. That's simply not true. Abraham was an idolator. Abraham was a polytheistic. He was a part of the land of Ur that was given over to idolatry. God did not choose Abraham because he was an ethical monotheist. God chose Abraham out of His divine initiative and love and grace, irrespective of any human merit or anything that Abraham would deserve of his own. My friends, if you have believed and trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, God did not choose you because you are a wonderful person, although I'm sure you are. God chose you out of His divine initiative of love and grace. Foreknowledge is so much more than just God knowing something or God looking into the future. It is a word that Scripture invests with great significance and meaning.

I have been reading in the prophets in my chronological read through the Bible. In just in noting this week, I've been amazed at how many times this word “know” jumps off of the page. It is a word that speaks of this love relationship that God longs to have with His people, this intimacy in our pursuit of God.

That brings us into this third word and I suppose if foreknowledge is controversial, then maybe the word “predestination” is scary to people. The word “predestination”. It is inseparably linked to foreknowledge. Predestination and foreknowledge are simply inseparably linked together. It's hard in some respects to see

a significant difference between them. There are some slight differences, but in general God is saying to us those whom I have set my love upon in eternity past I have predetermined their destiny. So we look at the meaning of this word. It's another compound word. It's the word *proorizo*. Take the word *pro* again which means before and you take the word *orizo* and you put in "h" on the front of *orizo* and put an "n" on the back of it and you have the word horizon. It's really God saying to us that He has designated before, that he has marked out destiny. Remember that wonderful statement of Peter in 1 Peter 2:9 – But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God's own possession. That's the idea of predestination.

Look at this from this vantage point. Our destiny is determined. Predestination says our destiny is determined. What is our destiny? In verse 29, that's what he said. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined. To what? Our destiny is that we would be conformed to the image of His Son in order that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers. So having chosen you, having set His love upon you, God the Father announces that you're going to become like His Son. God loves His Son so much. God wants to exalt His Son so much. He wants to magnify Christ so much that He has chosen in this amazing story of redemption to bring to Himself a people who He has predestined to be a reflection of Jesus Christ. You are going to become like His Son. God's purposes are set. That's why Paul can be so certain that those whom He has called He is going to justify, and those whom He has justified He's going to glorify. So you get to the end of that 39th verse in the 8th chapter – nor height nor depth nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Listen, my friends. Every one of us all through life faces all kinds of rejection. I don't know that we necessarily face it every day, but it could happen a lot. We all deal with rejection. We want a certain friend; that isn't returned. We want a job; we don't get it. We want to be going to a certain school; it doesn't happen. There are thousands of ways that we deal with rejection day after day. Here's what God says in Romans 8:29. He says I have set out destiny for you. it is a destiny that will not be changed. It's a destiny that will not be interrupted. It's a destiny that cannot be thwarted. Whatever you

have faced in this life, have absolute certainty that you are promised to become just like Christ because God has set His love upon you.

I want to give one last thing on your outline. The definition of election just to state it so that we can see it clearly. It is God's sovereign selection or choice of those whom He would save. I'm going to hold the rest of the outline and that will be the review for next Sunday.

Let's think again in terms of what we take away from this morning. What is now a mystery on so many levels will one day in glory, I believe, will be clear for all of us to see, but this is what we can see right now. What we can see right now is that the Bible very clearly says salvation is of the Lord. Salvation is of the Lord. It is a work that God initiates. It is a work that God brings about by His Spirit. It is a work that God will ultimately consummate in our glorified state. Whatever these mysteries are that we grapple with, the one thing that is absolutely certain and clear is that salvation is of the Lord.

It is that salvation that I offer to anyone that is here this morning, to anyone that is listening online or on livestream. It is as simple as we started off. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. It is the answer to the Philippian jailer's question: What is it that I must do to be saved? Paul simply said believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we ask that again your Holy Spirit would give understanding and clarity to anyone listening this morning who has not put their trust and their faith in Christ alone for their salvation. Father, we pray that Your Holy Spirit would give understanding even now, that You would cause those who have not yet believed to realize that it is as simple as believing and trusting in what You have said about Your Son and about us and about how it is that we can have a relationship with You. It is simply to believe and to trust You alone. Lord, we desire to do that in our walk with You. We pray that You will bring glory to Your name through this glorious gospel. We ask in Jesus's name, amen.