

God Chooses
Romans 9:1-29
January 18th 2026
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Introduction—a difficult but glorious truth

This morning, we've arrived at a truth, a teaching, a doctrine, in the Bible, which on the surface appears difficult. The difficulty lies not so much in understanding it but accepting it.

(For those of you who are new to us, since last Easter, we've been slowly making our way through Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter by chapter. One of the most important books in the whole Bible because it outlines in a systematic way the Good News of Jesus Christ, which is the message of the whole of Scripture.)

And here in chapter 9 we are taught that God chooses those who are saved. We became followers of Jesus, not by our own choice, our own decision—although we have to believe and we must repent—we come into God's kingdom because **He** chooses us.

God **chooses** us and then one day he **calls** us—we hear him, we sense him, drawing us to himself. We hear the Good News of Jesus Christ and believe, and though it may look as though we chose God, it turns out that we came to God because he first chose us!) This truth is called “election” or “predestination.”

And it seems a difficult truth for two reasons, 1) it does away with human pride. The most important decision in anyone's life, to turn to God or to reject him is ultimately out of **our** hands, and 2) election begs the question, “What about those God did *not* choose?” If God chooses **some**, then it must mean he did not choose **others**. Is that fair, people say? And then they may get concerned about their loved ones and family members who are not yet believers, “Has God not chosen them?” And they may even worry about their own salvation, “Has God chosen me?” You can see the issues this doctrine raises, can't you?

And yet, so important is this truth, that Paul doesn't dodge it. And it turns out, as so often is the case, to be a truth of wonderful comfort and the greatest hope! Let's never shy away from difficult truths, brothers and sisters.

A church pastor called me this week, “I have a family in the church, and the dad is complaining that his primary school child being taught stories that involve death, like Cain and Abel in Church and in Sunday school. The dad says topics like death are too difficult to teach children! What should I do?” We talked a lot about it – and prayed - and I came away thinking to myself, if that happened to me, I would say, 1) First, it's right to be protective towards our little ones, it's right for Sunday School teachers to teach age-appropriately (I am sure ours do, we have expert teachers among us, God's grace). But 2) Second, I'm pretty sure at school, primary school children are being taught about death

in the second world war and the plagues of history—parents should be consistent across school and church! But 3) while we need to be sensitive, we also need to teach the whole counsel of God. And remember that at the very heart of the Christian Gospel is the Good News of the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus, who loved us and suffered and died in our place, to take away all our sins.

Let's make sure, all of us, that all our sensibilities are shaped, not by the passing opinions or culture of the world around us, but by God's Word.

The great advantage of making our way through whole books of the Bible, verse by verse, is that we end up preaching whatever is before us, including difficult teachings, rather than picking and choosing which truths may or may not be acceptable to modern culture. Left to their own decisions, many preachers, may never preach on election.

Let's look at the reasons Paul raises the doctrine of election to his friends, in his letter to them, and then we'll see how comforting and hopeful election turns out to be.

The Circumstances

Why did Paul bring up predestination? Because in the church at Rome, the number of Gentile Christians now - most likely - outnumbered Jewish believers.

When the Church began, made up of mostly Jewish people; Jesus was a Jew, his 12 disciples were Jews, the first church in Jerusalem was made up of Jews.

But then there was a wonderful explosion of converts among the Gentiles (that is non-Jewish people, explain) all over world. Wherever Paul preached the Gospel on his journeys, Gentiles were being converted!

Peter, sent me a post from Sky News this week, which shows that many Gen Z young people (born 1997-2012) are coming to faith today. There's an explosion of young people, or so it seems, coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Praise God! To put it the right way, God is choosing many Gen Z young people.

Back then, there was an explosion of Gentile, non-Jewish converts—but not so many Jews.

And this big mismatch between lots of Gentiles being converted, but only a few Jews, raised a really big question: If Jews are the original people of God, the people of the Old Testament, to whom God made promises, the nation out of whom the Messiah came, why aren't they responding to the Good News?

Why so many Gentiles turning to Christ, so few Jews?

This is the "crisis" if you like, that prompted Romans chapter 9, 10 and 11.

The answer? God's choice! People who are being saved are being saved because God has chosen them. If lots of Gentiles are being saved it's because God is choosing lots of Gentiles, if only a few Jews, then it's because God is only choosing a few Jews.

The truly wonderful news is that God, verse 24, is calling people "not only from the Jews but also from among the Gentiles!"

Let's run through Paul's words briefly and then return to the comfort and hope that predestination brings.

Paul is cut up about his situation:

Verse 1-5

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit— 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, 4 the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. 5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

He loves his nation so much that he wishes he could be damned if only they could be saved! Lord give us just a tenth of the love Paul had for the people around us! In spite of their remarkable spiritual privileges, the Jews were rejecting Jesus, their Messiah!

Now, don't go thinking all the promises in the OT to the Jews have failed, says Paul:

6 It is not as though God's word had failed.

And now the key sentence:

For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.

Not everyone who has descended from Abraham, not everyone who belongs to the nation called "Israel" are **the true Israel**, God's true people, it is only the people out of that nation that God has chosen.

By the way, one of the biggest mistakes some Christians are making in the world today is to think that the whole "nation of Israel" are God's people. And so they are supporting everything the "nation of Israel", "state of Israel" does, because they think everyone in the "nation of Israel" are God's people! It's an easy mistake to make, but it's a fatal one. Not everyone who is an "ethnic Jew" a "biological Jew" a "national Jew" belongs to true Israel—the people whom God has chosen.

It's only the few out of that nation that God has chosen—and it's ***always been that way***:

- Think about **Abraham, Paul says**. He had 8 children in total, but only one of those, the one born to him and Sarah, **Isaac**, was a child of the promise; only one was chosen by God! Only one out of eight were chosen.
- **Isaac**, in turn, had two children, Jacob and Esau, but only one of those was chosen by God, Jacob! And God did not chose Jacob because he was a good boy, and he did not reject his brother Esau because he was a bad boy. God chose Jacob because he decided to choose Jacob! "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (verse 13)
- Are we getting the picture? Not every descendant of Abraham and Isaac, those first Jews, were chosen by God! And this has always been true! It has always been a tiny little minority, a ***remnant (clothing analogy)*** from the nation of Israel that were truly God's chosen people. Read the OT for yourself, most of the Jews turned away from God, only a tiny minority, a ***"remnant"*** were the true chosen people of God. Verse 27:

"Though the number of Israelites be like the sand of the sea only a remnant will be saved."
(Isaiah)

So great was the wickedness of the vast majority of Jews that Isaiah said, verse 29:

"Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have all become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah" (in other words, they would all have been wiped out)

So right throughout the OT God was always choosing just a few from the nation of Israel. And wonderfully the OT also predicted that God would choose some non-Jews, like you and me. Verse 25 and 26:

"As he says in Hosea: 'I will call them 'my people' who are not my people (Gentiles!); and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one,' (Gentiles!) and, 'In the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' (Gentiles) there they will be called 'children of the living God.' (Gentiles)

The fundamental truth of election is, verse 15, that God chooses:

"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (verse 15)

"This is the reason for the make-up of the church in your day, Paul, and indeed in every age, the church is always made up of, not people who were "born Jew" - or even "born into a Christian home or Christian nation." The church is always made up of those whom God has chosen.

We're going to leave the difficult aspect of this doctrine to another Sunday, God-helping us: What about those who are not chosen? because this is enough teaching for one sermon. Let's zoom back out and apply election to us here this morning.

1. Election is a truth to comfort us, not a bone to argue over

With sadness, I must tell you that election, predestination, is a truth over which Christians have argued in the history of the church. Some have said, "We chose ourselves," called Arminians, and others have declared "God chooses us" called Calvinists. The Calvinists are right in this case, but unnecessary conflict has been caused. Let's never argue over secondary doctrines, bothers and sisters. And let's be done with man-made labels! I don't know about you. I just want to be called "Christian" or "follower of Jesus."

2. Election describes God's secret counsels, we should concentrate on preaching the Gospel to all!

Election describes what is going on in the high and mysterious and all-wise secret plans of God. These are things we can never grasp with our small minds! Paul will end this whole section with these words:

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counsellor?"*

What we should concentrate on is not the **theoretical question**, "am I chosen or not?" "is my son, my father, my neighbour, chosen or not" but **the duty, the privilege** of sharing the Good News with everyone around us, confident that **"everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."** (10:13)

This very morning, if you will believe in Jesus Christ as your Saviour and turn away from your sins, you will be saved!

(3) Election is our only hope!

If you and I were left to ourselves, none of us would ever come to God! We are dead in our trespasses and sins! How many times do we hear folk saying, "If one year ago you told me I'd become a follower of Jesus, I would have laughed at you!" And yet it happened! It happened because God chose you and then he drew you to himself and then you heard the Good News of Jesus, you believed it and you received Christ as your Saviour and Lord. Election is the world's only hope! Let me leave the last word to a London Gospel preacher in the days of Queen Victoria:

*"I believe the doctrine of election, because I am quite sure that if God had not chosen me I **should never have chosen him**; and I am sure he chose me **before I was born**, or else he never would have chosen me afterwards; and he must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why he should have looked upon me with special love."*