

Session 8

Chapter 6 Predestination (Part B)

II. Romans 9 Appears to Favor Unconditional Election

A. What is the implication of what says in Romans 9:10-6?

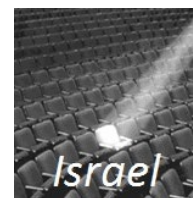
“Not only that, but Rebekah’s children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls—she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ ¹³ Just as it is written: ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’

¹⁴ What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 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 It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”

1. What Paul firmly establishes here.

Confirms the fact of unconditional election by stating “that in all Israel’s history the process of selection and election has gone on . . . , stress[ing] the fact that this election was based not on any merit of the person elected but on nothing else than the will of God Himself.”¹



2. What the objector to God’s unconditional election may say.

Is it just of God to pursue a policy of arbitrary selection altogether? This is neither just nor fair!

3. Paul’s response

- a. The mercy and compassion (15-6) of God cannot be subject to any cause outside His own free grace.
- b. God does exercise His mercy in absolute freedom of choice.²
- c. In short, God is sovereign; He is not subject to human scrutiny.

B. What Paul means in Romans 9:17-8

¹ William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: the Gospel of John*, Volume 2 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 129-30.

² Alan F. Johnson, *Romans: The Freedom Letter*, Vol. 1, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), p. 40.



“For Scripture says to Pharaoh: ‘I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’

¹⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

1. The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart which resulted from his unbelief was designed to show God’s mercy toward those He had chosen to show his mercy—namely Moses and Israel.
2. Pharaoh first hardened his own heart following the first five plagues, then God hardened Pharaoh’s heart in the last five plagues.”³

What may have happened here?

This might have been a case of God allowing a powerful delusion⁴ to harden the already hardened heart so that the “final condition of that man is worse than the first” (Matt. 12:45).

- a. Paul states in 2 Thess. 2:10-1: “They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.”
- b. The apostle expresses a similar thought in Romans 1:24, 6 regarding those who are set on being willful against God: “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts. . . . Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.”

C. The objector raises his voice again

“One of you will say to me: ‘Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?’” (Rom. 9:19).

1. But Paul shuts down his argument, saying (Rom. 9):



²⁰ “But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’

²¹ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

²² What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power

³ Ibid., p. 41

⁴ Describing what was going in the heavenlies, the writer of 1 Kings states: “A spirit came forward, stood before the LORD and said, ‘I will entice [King Ahab]. . . . I will go out and be a lying spirit. . . .’ So the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets. . . .” (22:20-23).

known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory” (Rom. 9:20-3).

2. Paul uses the illustration of potter and clay from Jeremiah, not to answer the charge, but simply to say that “man’s position as a creature does not qualify him to contradict the Creator.”⁵
3. It is irreverent for creatures to criticize or contradict the actions of their Creator (9:22-3), for God . . . is doing nothing unreasonable or unjust, for both classes of vessels serve the highest end:
 - a. The punishing of the vessels of wrath manifests God’s displeasure against sin.
 - b. The pardoning of the vessels of mercy manifests the riches of the His glory.⁶
4. Conclusion.
 - a. Paul affirms the centrality of God and will not lower God’s actions to fit man’s reasoning.
 - b. His response demands that first of all God be acknowledged as God.
 - c. Ultimately, as the potter is responsible for the vessel he fashions, so God is, finally, responsible for what He does in history.

Discussion¹: Talk about the last time you hardened your heart to God: Why did you do it? What did it affect you? How did you come out of it?

III. Can the Unelected People Believe and go to Heaven? (Rom. 9-11)

A. Paul’s high expectation for the Israelites

1. In Romans 9:4-6, Paul lists eight specific blessings and promises that Israel received from the Lord, including “the adoption as sons” and “covenants.”
2. Therefore, the apostle expected many Israelites to be saved.

B. However, the reality was completely the opposite.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *Romans: An Interpretive Outline* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing CO., 1967), p. 80.



A distraught Paul (“I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart”) begins Romans 9 with a stunning admission:

“I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel” (Rom. 9:2-4); “my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved” (10:1).

1. It appears as though Paul momentarily wondered whether God kept his promise; however, the Holy Spirit quickly reminded him that “it is not as though God’s word had failed.”

“Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’ ⁸ In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring” (Rom. 9:6-8).

2. What does this mean?

- a. Simply, some Jews were elected while some were not (9:9-12); and this would explain why many Israelites didn’t believe: they were not elected.
- b. Prior to this revelation, Paul simply assumed that God promised to save the entire nation of Israel (Rom. 11:26), or at least, many Israelites; he now realized that the promise was made only to certain Jews—those whom God specifically elected.

C. Are the unelected Jews unable to believe?

In Romans 11, Paul continues with the theme of election, saying, “What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did” (11:7).

1. In 11:17-21, Paul, using an olive tree to illustrate what happened to Israel, equates the unelected Jews as “[natural] branches [that] have been broken off” (11:17).

Interestingly, Paul says the reason “they were broken off” (11:19) was “because of unbelief”; he does not say it was because they were not elected.

2. Having stated that, Paul clearly declares that nothing will prevent any nonelected Jews from believing.
 - a. He rhetorically asks, “Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?” The answer is, “No, ‘not at all’” (11:11).
 - b. Then he adds, “If [the Jews] do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again” (11:23).



- c. How? This is logically not possible since these are unelected Jews, but Paul says that God can do it because God is both almighty and sovereign.

Ironically, Paul's reasoning here is no different from the reason given for why God chose Jacob over Esau "before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad" (9:11):

The almighty and sovereign God can do whatever pleases Him in order to "make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy" (9:23).



3. Paul hopes that his ministry to the Gentiles will "somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them" (11:14), who, currently do not believe because they are not elected.
4. If election (in Calvinistic sense) means the unelected cannot be saved, then, what Paul asserts here makes little sense!

Paul is not just thinking about the Jews turning to Christ in the future (11:25-6); he also has in mind the unelected Jews turning to God, *now*.

Discussion²: So, what is your thought on election? Can the non-elect be saved (Rom. 10:13: "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"; Rom. 11:23^b: "for God has the power to graft them in again")? If so, then why elect some at all?

D. The theology of both/end (a.k.a., radical middle)

We need the theology of "both/and" with respect to the matter of predestination and election.

1. The "both/and" way of thinking is clearly reflected in Peter's theology. Regarding how Jesus came to be executed on the cross, the apostle declared to the Jews:

"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose ("the predetermined plan", NASB) and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked man, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23).

- a. Obviously, the crucifixion of Christ was the essential component of God's redemptive plan (Gn. 3:15), which He unilaterally planned according to His set purpose.
- b. At the same time, the Lord, having foreseen men's rejection of Christ, confirmed and sealed their denial. This is why Peter was able to place the complicity of killing Jesus on men.



2. The edifice of every systematic theology is built on an *either/or* thinking, which is necessary with issues that substantially affect the doctrine of salvation (Gal. 1:6-7; 1 Jn. 4:1-3).
 - a. However, doctrinal matters that distinguish one systematic theology from another (e.g., rapture, tongues) is never quite that essential, including the basis for election since neither position affects who goes to heaven or hell.
 - b. Thus, our approach ought to be *both/and*, which seems to be that of Paul's as well. That is to say, the Bible teaches both unconditional election and election based on foreknowledge.
3. Yes, unconditional election is biblical, for God has his reasons.

- a. What could that be? Let's begin with this question:
 "What is God's ultimate purpose for which He saves us?"

Eph. 1:9-10^b: . . . [God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, . . . to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

Col 1:18: And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Based on these verses, "the ultimate purpose of God is that His Son shall be supreme in the universe, that He may unite all things in Christ, that in everything he might be preeminent."⁷

- b. This may be why some are elected for salvation.

(1) In order that "Christ might be presented with a redeemed church when he is revealed as supreme in the universe, God has ordained that at least some should be gathered out from the mass" of sinners."⁸

This will occur the wedding supper of the Lamb in which Christ and his bride, the Church, are formally united.

Perhaps Rev. 19:9 refers to those who were bestowed with this special calling of God: "Blessed are those who invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb."

(2) Missiologically, God, by electing some from all nations, ensured that every nation is represented in the wedding supper of the Lamb.

⁷ Hammond, p. 86

⁸ Ibid., p. 88

Rev. 5:9 clearly states that Jesus died to redeem the nations:

“And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.’”

(3) “This gathering of ‘the elect’ [from all nations] is effected by a preordained ‘effectual calling.’”⁹ His basis for election isn’t revealed in the Scripture.

4. While some aren’t elected, but “whatever man may find himself outside the sphere of the covenant of redemption has not had his chances of coming to Christ reduced one *iota* by God’s election grace.”¹⁰

Recall what Paul said in Rom. 9:23: “And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.”

- a. Ultimately, election understood by Arminius implies that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 9:13).

In other word, everyone has received a general invitation to join the wedding supper of the Lamb since “the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Tit. 1:11).

- b. And a person can confirm his election by laying aside his unbelief and believe in the person and the work of Christ.
- c. In this way, election doesn’t excuse the resistant sinner from the original liability incurred by the act of revolt against God. *He* earned hell!

E. That affects the doctrine of *Limited Atonement* (i.e., Jesus died only for the elect).

1. The aforementioned ex-Reformed theologian¹¹, in his lengthy e-mail sent to me in 2013, also confessed:
“I want to be clear that I no longer hold to limited atonement.”

Perhaps, he finally read 1 John 2:2 without the filtering of Calvinism: “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

2. Regrettably, many Calvinists continue to uphold *Limited Atonement* despite the plain meaning of 1 John 2:2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ I used to have intense theological discussions with him when he, then a seminarian, attended my church in the 1990s.

For instance, Reformed theologian R. C. Sproul interprets this verse in such a way that he introduces an issue that is not addressed by John in any of his five books.

3. Sproul's interpretation of 1 John 2:2.

- a. First, he says, "*Our* could refer specifically to Jewish believers," since "the New Testament labors the point that the body of Christ includes not only ethnic Jews, but Samaritans and Gentiles."

(1) I question how Sproul can justify reading "Jewish believers" into 1 John 2:2 when apostle John had not once talked about the Jews in the entire 1 John.

(2) Ironically, Paul, not John, was the one who addressed the Jewish-Gentile conflict in the Church as early as A.D. 49 (Gal. 3:28); John wrote 1 John between 85-95.

Regardless, Sproul drops a major Pauline concern in the middle of a Johannine epistle, which addresses the threats of the Docetics who denied Christ's humanity (1 Jn. 4:3-5).

- b. Moreover, for Sproul's interpretation to make sense, it would seem that the "whole world" should refer to the "Samaritan and Gentile believers" in contrast to "Jewish believers."

So then, it would read: "He Himself is the propitiation for the sins of the Jewish believers; and not for the sins of the Jewish believers only, but also for *those of* the Samaritan and Gentile believers."

- c. However, for an inexplicable reason, Sproul takes a different route to avoid saying that 1 John 2:2 means the entire world. (The Greek *holou tou kosmou* literally means the "entire world.")

Thus, he comments:

"Ample evidence indicates that the term *world* in the New Testament often refers to neither the entire globe nor to all persons living on earth. . . . We know [the] census [taken by Caesar Augustus] did not include the inhabitants of China or South America, so 'all the world' does not refer to all people in the entire world."¹²

What's he saying: 1 John 2:2 (*holou tou kosmou*) should be read: "He Himself is the propitiation for the sins of . . . the parts of the world."

(1) In view of the fact that the word "cosmos" (world) is used 17 times in 1 John,

¹² One wonders whether he is willing to extend that argument to John 3:16: "For God so loved parts of the world . . ."

is he willing to interpret that word found in other verses in the same manner?

1 Jn. 2:15 (NIV): “Do not love the *world* or anything in the *world*.”
(Try reading this as “parts of the world.”)

1 Jn. 3:13 (NASB): “Do not be surprised, brethren, if the *world* hates you.”

1 Jn. 5:19: “We know that we are of God, and that the *whole world** lies in *the power of* the evil one. (*The same Greek phrase used in 1 John 2:2)

(2)He wouldn’t do that. So, he just made an exception regarding 1 John 2:2.

- d. In accordance to the exegetical attempt by Sproul to avoid saying that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, 1 John 2:2 should then read:

“He Himself is the propitiation for the sins of the Jewish believers;
and not for the sins of the Jewish believers only, but also for the sins
of people in some parts of the world.”

- e. Most people would find this interpretation quite contrived and this type of hermeneutical approach to uphold one’s position at all cost a little disconcerting.

- 4. Does this mean that the doctrine of election must be given up?

No, because it is clearly taught in Ephesians 1:11 and 1 Peter 1:1

- a. And 1 John 2:2 clearly states that Jesus died for the sins of the elect. (This is implied when apostle John, no doubt an elect, said, “the propitiation for our sins”).
- b. But the same verse, while making a distinction between the elect and the world, nevertheless says that Jesus also died for the whole world—that’s undeniable.

- 5. Even so, based on the plain meaning of 1 John 2:2, we can conclude:

“Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, died for all men and every man so that he has obtained for all, by his death on the cross, reconciliation and remission of sin; yet so that no one is partaker of this remission except the believers.”

- a. Who said that? Arminius!
- b. I am in no way an Arminian (eternal security gets in the way since Arminians believe that salvation can be lost), but his thought must be a side dish with the main dish being Calvinism so that the latter does not become a rigid ideology.
- c. The same goes for those whose main dish is Arminianism; it needs a side dish of Calvinism so that it does not turn into humanism or Pelagianism

(rationalistic view of human nature).

Discussion³: Why do Calvinists and Arminians need each other? Toward which theological camp do you lean on? Are you balanced in your theological thinking? If not, what corrections do you need to make?

Homework 8

Read over the material covered in the last class and the additional Bible reading (if any). If you have any questions, please note them here and ask me later.

1. What is the explanation given for why God has elected some to be saved?
2. Does this mean unelected people are shut out from heaven? Justify your answer.