

**PUTTING GOD ON TRIAL**  
**ALDERWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH**  
**Romans 9:1-21**

**BIG IDEA: GOD'S SOVEREIGN CHOICE OF SOME TO BE SAVED IS REALLY GOOD NEWS!**

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Today we're going to talk about the Number One Unpopular Doctrine Among Christians. A recent national survey revealed that 52% of Americans believe in the existence of Hell and 27% think there might be a Hell. (USA Today poll) That surprised me. I would have expected the numbers to be much smaller based on the number of people I meet who find the idea of Hell offensive and reject it.
- B. Speaking of the Number One Unpopular Doctrine among Christians, you might think that Hell is my subject. But I think I've found another Bible subject that beats out Hell in unpopularity polls and that subject is "Election." Now, I'm not talking about the first Tuesday of November. In the Bible, election has a very different meaning. Let's take a stab at a definition: "*God's sovereign choice, in eternity past, of certain individuals to be children of God.*"
- C. The word, "election", occurs 3 times in the NIV New Testament, and the word, "elect", appears 11 times.
- D. For hundreds of years there has been a heated debate among Christians over the subject of election. It has created a major divide between Christians. Entire denominations are squared off against other denominations because of this "line in the sand" of theology.
- E. The debate is not over whether or not God elects some people to salvation. All Bible students accept that because the Bible talks so clearly about it. So what's the controversy about? The controversy is all about **HOW** God makes that election choice and there are two possibilities:
1. For reasons unknown to us, God just elects some people to be saved. This is called, "Unconditional Election." If this is what you believe, you are a Calvinist.
  2. We know the reason why God elects some people to be saved, and not others. He looks into the future and sees ahead of time which people will believe when they hear the Gospel message, and based on those future faith acts, God elects those people to be saved. This is called "Conditional Election." If this is what you believe, you are an Arminian.
- F. And some of you are probably saying, "Boy that's cutting it pretty fine! Why would anybody care about HOW God chooses people to be saved? Let's just be glad He did!" Some people in history have thought this subject REALLY important...
- G. In 17<sup>th</sup> century Holland, after the Synod of Dort ruled in favor of Calvinism, Arminian pastors experienced serious persecution: 200 of them lost their pastorates, one was beheaded, one was thrown in jail with a life sentence and many fled the country.<sup>1</sup>
- H. The reason we're going to discuss this issue is not to be picky or to try to be controversial. The reason we're going to discuss this issue is because the Bible does. In fact, we have a whole chapter of Romans in front of us about election. So, for some reason, this subject is important to God. Let's try to find out why and to do that we'll attack the passage with three questions.
- NOTE: This is not just some theoretical issue to Paul. **Verses 2- 3,** <sup>2</sup> *I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.* <sup>3</sup> *For I could wish that I myself were cursed [lit. **anathema**] and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race,*
- Cf. **Exodus 32:30-32** *The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin."* <sup>31</sup> *So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these*

<sup>1</sup> Enns, Paul, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 490.

*people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. <sup>32</sup> But now, please forgive their sin-- but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written."*

I. CAN WE GET SAVED WITHOUT ELECTION?

A. Just How Spiritually Capable Are We?

1. We need to remember that the burden on Paul's heart in Romans 9 is to speak to a problem. The problem is that the people of Israel largely rejected Jesus as their Messiah and were under the judgmental curse of God. But, in view of all the promises God had made to the nation of Israel, how could that have happened? **Did "God's word...fail"?** (verse 6). And, if God's word failed for Israel, then could God's word fail for us Gentiles, too? Is this wonderful salvation we have studied in the last 8 chapters on shaky ground? Look at all the advantages the Israelites had, *"Theirs is the adoption as sons; 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 Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen." (9:4-5)*

2. Paul's answer is that God **did** keep His answer to Israel. He says, you just have to pay attention to who is actually included in Israel. Appearances can be deceiving, **Verses 6-7**, *"For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.*

*7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children.*

- 1) Trace the line of promise from Abraham to the remnant. NOTE: Remnant in **verse 27**, *Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. Cf. 11:5, So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.*

- 2) **Romans 9:13** *Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."*

- **Malachi 1:1-3** *An oracle: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi. <sup>2</sup> "I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?' "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" the LORD says. **"Yet I have loved Jacob, <sup>3</sup> but Esau I have hated,** and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals."*

- Hated = "love less" **Cf. Luke 14:26**, *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple."*

- 3) God has always been making choices about who inherits His promises. And He makes those choices sovereignly,

- **verses 11-12**, *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."*

- **Genesis 25:19-23** *This is the account of Abraham's son Isaac. Abraham became the father of Isaac, <sup>20</sup> and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean. <sup>21</sup> Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. <sup>22</sup> The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. <sup>23</sup> The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and **the older will serve the younger."***

- **verses 15-16**, *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 man's desire or effort**, but on God's mercy.*
- 4) Now, where do we, as Gentiles, fit into all this? Has God been making any choices that concern us? Indeed, He has. Look at **Verses 30-31**, *What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.*
  - 5) How did this happen? How is it that at one time most believers on earth were Jewish with a few Gentiles mixed in, and now most believers on earth are Gentiles with a few Jews mixed? Did Jews suddenly get less spiritual and Gentiles get more spiritual? Is this to be explained by the spiritual capabilities of people or is it to be explained by the electing choice of God?
  - 6) That leads us to the debate over Conditional and Unconditional Election, between Arminian and Calvinistic theology...
3. Let me show you a chart that spells out the big divide between Calvinistic and Arminian theology.  
NOTE: 1) **Calvinism** derives from John Calvin (1509-1564) who was a Pastor and Statesman who made his mark in Geneva, Switzerland and he was one of the great voices of the Protestant Reformation.  
2) **Arminianism** derives from Jacobus Aminius (1560-1609) who was a Dutch Pastor and university professor. He originally embraced Calvinism but came to believe that it made God the author of sin and made man a robot manipulated by God.
  2. The heart issue that divides the chart is the question of how spiritually capable we are. Calvinists are pessimistic and Arminians are optimistic.
  3. What is the biblical evidence?
    - **Ephesians 2:1**, *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,*
    - **Romans 3:10-12**, *As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."*
    - **John 6:44**, *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him,*
  4. I can't get around it. The strong language of the Bible convinces me that there was nothing in **me** that made God elect me to be saved.
    - **Augustine**: *God does not choose us because we believe, but that we may believe.*
    - **Charles Spurgeon** came to the same conclusion: *"When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me.... [Then] the thought struck me, **How did you come to be a Christian?** I sought the Lord. **But how did you come to seek the Lord?** The truth flashed across my mind in a moment - I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence on my mind to **make me seek Him**....I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the Author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me....I desire to make this constant confession, 'I ascribe my change wholly to God.'"*
  5. But let me push Spurgeon a step further. Why did God choose him over some other guy?
- B. Just Why Does God Save Us?

1. I don't mean ultimately why God saves us, because we can't even answer that other than to say because He is love.
2. But what I'm getting at is, why did God save me and not my neighbor? Why did God save me but not some in Moroccan?
3. Did God save me because I was more spiritually responsive, because I have a higher spiritual "IQ", than somebody else who is on his way to Hell?
4. The answer is that God saves us **just because He wants to**. He gives us no indication as to why He picks one person and doesn't pick another. In fact, He made that choice long time ago, **Ephesians 1:4-5**, "*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--*"
5. And no fair pleading "foreknowledge" because that just begs the question. "Foreknowledge" in the Bible does not mean that God just has a bigger crystal ball than anybody else. It does not just mean that God can see what is going to happen in the future. "Foreknowledge" means that God knows what is going to happen in the future because God **determines** the future.
  - Foreknowledge means that God knows because He plans.
  - It does not mean that He plans because He knows.
6. Now that leads to a very big and very pressing question, and that question is...

## II. CAN GOD BE JUST AND PRACTICE ELECTION?

### A. Is This a Legitimate Question?

1. Whether it's legitimate or not, a lot of people are asking that question. In fact, it's a very American question because we are so concerned about fairness. We want everybody to be treated equitably in terms of education and job opportunities, health care and no cuts in the ticket line at Safeco Field.
2. Paul gets into this question by retelling a bit of the story about Pharaoh from the Book of Exodus. Remember how God gave him every reason in the world to clue in to the fact that Israel's God was something really special and should be obeyed. But 10 times he refused to obey God and in the end he chased Israel into the sea with his chariot forces and they were all destroyed. How can we explain the incredible stubbornness of this man? The explanation is right here in **verses 17-18**, *For the 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." Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.*
3. **Time out---does that sound fair?**
4. Fortunately, somebody else asked that question and it's in **verse 19**: *One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"* and the Apostle Paul has a direct answer to our question right here in **verses 20-21** *But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him 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 noble purposes and some for common use?*
3. So the answer is, **NO**, it's not a legitimate question. Since God is God, He can do whatever He wants and He doesn't even have to give us a reason. And, in this case, He doesn't give us a reason. Paul just defends God's right to choose those He wants to save and not choose others.
4. Does that bother you? It probably does. Here's why. We all believe that, to be fair, if God's going to save anybody, everybody should have the same chance. We can accept the fact that some people are going to go to Hell as long as we believe that they had the same opportunity to choose Heaven that we had: in other words, Heaven must be an "Equal Access Opportunity." What's wrong with that? One thing.

5. God is under no obligation to take anybody to Heaven. In fact, every one of us deserves to go to Hell. No one could fault God for ignoring us all. Would we be happier if God said, "OK, I'll be fair. Everybody goes to Hell!" Or can we handle the fact that He chooses to rescue some, but not all, from certain destruction? *We focus on the wrong thing.* We should rejoice that God has stooped to save even one of us. We have no business protesting that He has not chosen all of us.
  6. FOOTNOTE ON PHARAOH:
    - 1) In all fairness to God, **before** the Book of Exodus says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, two times it is mentioned that "*Pharaoh hardened his heart*" himself (**Exodus 8:15, 32**). Only **after** that does the Bible say that **God** hardened Pharaoh's heart. So Pharaoh set the sails of his heart and God then filled them with wind.
    - 2) But, nevertheless, God could have applied mercy to this man's heart if He wanted to. Look how God wonderfully saved Paul who was a violent persecutor of the church! Why did God do it for Paul but not Pharaoh? I don't know. God just says, "*I will have mercy on whom I have mercy.*"
  7. But our question remains unanswered. Can God do this and still be just?
- B. So, What's the Answer?
1. The answer is, **yes**, God can be just and practice election. The answer is in the potter analogy. A potter can make anything he wants out of any lump of clay. He can make a beautiful and very valuable ceramic figurine or he can make a ceramic spittoon or a basin for washing dirty clothes.
  2. God is the universal potter. We are the lumps of clay and He has every just right to do with us whatever He wants.
  3. But does that mean that we are just helpless pawns? If so, how can God hold us responsible? That's the burning question in verse 19, which Paul does not answer, **Verse 19**, *One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"*
  4. Let me answer the question, even though Paul doesn't. No, we are not helpless pawns. Just as surely as the Bible teaches that God determines the future, it also says that God is not the author of sin, in fact God doesn't even tempt anyone to sin (**James 1:13**).
  5. And, even though God is the one who elects, predestines, and calls us to Himself in salvation, the Gospel invitation reads, "*whosoever will, may come.*" Every presentation of the Gospel in the New Testament is a genuine invitation, from **John 3:16** right through to the end. When Paul was asked by the desperate Philippian jailer, "*What must I do to be saved?*" Paul didn't say, "Well, there's probably nothing you can do, unless you happen to be one of God's elect." No, this is what Paul said, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved...*" (**Acts 16:30-31**) Paul actually begged people to get saved and he talked to every person he could about Jesus (**II Corinthians 5:20**, "*We implore you on Christ's behalf, Be reconciled to God.*") **II Corinthians 5:11**, "*Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.*"
  6. When it comes to evangelism, there is a sense in which we are supposed to forget everything we've ever heard about election and witness to people as if it all depended on us whether or not they get saved. **I Corinthians 9:22**, *I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.*
  7. And here's a verse that will blow your mind, **II Peter 3:9** *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* If God wants everyone to come to repentance, then why doesn't He elect everybody?
  8. Does this all seem **contradictory**? It's supposed to! This subject has bent the best minds of Christendom for centuries. On the one hand God says we are morally free and morally responsible regarding our sin and our relationship with

Him. All sinners are to hear the call of the Gospel and respond in faith. If they don't, God holds them seriously and forever responsible. On the other hand, we have seen that God says He chose everyone who would be saved before the world was even made. All I can say is:

- 1) God is comfortable with it even if we're not. And it makes sense to Him.
  - 2) I guess we should expect things like this when we deal with the wonder of God.
    - We can't understand how Jesus could be fully man and fully God;
    - How God could always have been in eternity past;
    - How God can be three-in-one.
    - Hey, I don't even understand my computer!
8. Now, if you're still having a hard time swallowing this, let's take an historical case in point: the people of Israel...

### III. CAN WE EXPLAIN ISRAEL WITHOUT ELECTION?

#### A. How Did Israel Get Into the Picture?

1. Did God elect the people of Israel because they were spiritually responsive? Is there any indication that they had a higher "Spiritual IQ" than any other people group in the world?
  - Maybe God chose them because they came from really godly stock way back at the beginning. Nope, that's not it, **Joshua 24:2**, *Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshipped other gods.*
  - Maybe God chose to deliver the Israelites when they were Egypt because they were such an impressive nation. Nope, that's not it either, **Deuteronomy 7:7** *The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*
  - **Deuteronomy 26:5** *Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous.*
  - **Deuteronomy 9:4-6** *After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. <sup>5</sup> It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. <sup>6</sup> Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.*
2. Then, I guess that Israel got in the picture the same way you and I did, by the wonderful and merciful choice of God.

#### B. Where Is Israel in Today's Picture?

1. They are on the shelf. A long time ago, Israel was largely believers, but today very few Jews in the world believe in Jesus as their Messiah and many Jews are actually atheists.
2. Nevertheless, God's up to something. The Jewish heart hasn't changed yet, except for occasional individuals who trust in Jesus, but God is up to something.

- 1) God has preserved the racial identity of the Jews which is no less than miraculous after 1900 years of dispersion throughout the Gentile world.
- 2) God has restored the Jews to their country. Never before in history has a people group utterly lost their land and had it restored to them as has been the case with the modern State of Israel. What happened in 1948 was tantamount to another parting of the Red Sea.
3. One more big thing is on God's calendar for Israel: **Romans 11:26** *And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. 27 And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."*  
Maybe this doesn't exactly mean that **every single** Jew will be saved when Jesus comes back, but it does mean that **so many** Jews will be saved that the nation will be dominantly born again believers in Jesus.
4. How can we explain this prophesied remarkable national turn-around after several thousand years of rejecting Jesus? There is only one explanation: God has chosen that it will be so and He will make it happen. He's got a whole lot of Jews on His eternal "To Do" list and He's going to get them saved. Guaranteed. You can take it to the bank!

CONCLUSION:

- A. You know what this chapter in the Bible does for me? Even though I can't understand all of it, it makes me very grateful. God was so kind as to choose me to belong to Him. If you are a Christian, God called you into the family, too. He didn't have to. We gave Him no reason to choose us. We weren't the best of the litter. We didn't even have our hands raised "Pick me! Pick me!" He just did it.
- B. And that's why election is such good news.

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