



Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford

## The Difficult Doctrine of Election - (Romans 9:19-29)

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**[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]**

I used to hate the cliffhanger in television shows, you know what I mean by that, right? Back in the day, when you couldn't record everything on TV (most of you remember that day) TV was an appointment event. So on Thursday night, you had to watch the show you like. *A-Team* was on. I don't even know, it was Thursday or whatever. You had to watch the show, and if you were late, you didn't get to see Mr. T. So, often times the way that those shows would work is they would go through the entire season, and the story and the characters would progress, and of course they'd get to the end, and at the last show of the season, the season finale, they would end it. And you'd be thinking, oh, they're going to wrap it all up. But of course, they'd end it with the cliffhanger. And then you'd have to wait all summer until the next fall when you had to pick it up again on Thursday night. Now, we do this now in Netflix, you know, you're binge watching it, you've got your Cheetos everywhere. You've been in there for a good 12 hours, committing yourself to *Stranger Things*, and they get to the end, and they wrap up some of it, but then the last scene is, oh, it's not actually over, the demogorgon's going to attack. So, the cliffhanger, right? It's a great tactic to try to get you to come back.

Well, last week was a cliffhanger. Here at Northview, we went through one of the most difficult texts, quite honestly, in the New Testament. I don't think it's a difficult text because it's hard to understand; it's difficult because of the implications of it. The way it talks about God, it's very different from the way you and I think about things. We've talked about the doctrine of election out of Romans 9, but we stopped right in the middle of Paul's argument. Mostly because I could see it on your faces. Alright? Let me up for air. Okay, we let you up for air, but we've got to go down again, and we've got to finish what we began. So we're going to pick up where we left off last week in Romans 9:19. Here's how I want to do this. Similar to last week, I want to first give you some preliminaries, some more ground rules for the discussion. Second, I just want to walk you through the passage. Alright? I'm not going to illustrate a ton through that, I just want you to see what he's trying to say. I want to use the illustrations that he's using. So preliminaries, the passage, and then finally I just want to make two points that I think that the entire discussion of election should really point us to, okay? Preliminaries, the passage, the points. Here we go.

### [The Preliminaries]



Here are the preliminaries. I've got two of them this week. We are free to disagree about this. But we are not free to ignore the text about this. Do you understand what I mean by that? We are free to disagree. Listen, lots of good Christians disagree. I need to say that again. I said it last week, I'll say it this week. Godly people on our staff, in this room. You're not going to stand before God one day, and he's going to say, "What viewpoint do you...are you a supralapsarian or an infralapsarian?" Like, he's not going to ask you that question. We believe in Jesus, and that is the entry. Faith is the entrypoint, right? So you can have a different opinion from what I've got regarding this whole subject of election. And that's fine. You can walk out and say, "Ah, I don't really like that." But here's the thing. You're free to do that, but what you're not free to do though is to say, "I don't really like that text." What you're not free to do is to say, "Okay, I see what the passage of Scripture says, but I don't really care what the passage of Scripture says." I bring that up because I used to teach this in a bunch of classes all over the place, and when I was in New Zealand, I used to teach at a Bible college there, and I remember after, they brought me in to teach stuff even if it wasn't a class I was teaching, sometimes the teacher would bring me in and say, "Hey, can you teach Romans 9?"

"Why? Can't you do it?"

"Yeah, but you're the only one who holds that view."

"Okay." So I'd come in, and I was like a zoo animal in the front. You know? Like, oh look, an actual...[Laughter] So I'd present this stuff, walk through the passage, get to the end. One student came up to me and said, "That is really compelling, what you just said, with the way that you walked through that. It seems to be what the Apostle Paul is saying there."

"Yeah, I know, right?" And he said, "Yeah. The thing is, I don't like what it says about God, so I'm going to choose to believe he's different than that."

"Okay, like I get that, I see the challenge there, but what about the text?" I said to him. "But what about the passage of Scripture itself?"

"Well, it just doesn't sit all that well with me." What do you do with Romans 9 though?

See, to me, I think it's fine if you say, "I don't like the picture of God." You've got to deal with this text, though. You've got to deal with what it's teaching about God. Because here's the thing. What you and I know about God, our fullest understanding of God, comes from his revelation of himself in Scripture. You can know God through the created order, through just observing the natural world. But God's fullest revelation of himself is found in Scripture. If you decide that you're going to throw Scripture away because it just doesn't sit with your picture of God, then I've got to tell you, I don't think your picture of God is right. Because he's got the right to determine who he is. Yes? Do you remember...when I was younger, and we had little kids, we used to take our kids to this thing called the Build-A-Bear Workshop. I haven't seen it around very much lately, I was told yesterday that it is still around. Build-A-Bear Workshops are great. You want to get a teddy bear for your little one? And you go in there and your kids can choose what kind of bear. There's like 35 bears that they can choose from. "I want the white one with the fuzzy face." So you grab that one, but it's not done yet, that's just the shell of it. And then they go in and they fill it with all sorts of the foam, and you can say, "I don't want that much foam," or "I want it half foam so it's super squishy." And then after that, do you want sunglasses on it, or do you want to have other things on it? Do you want to have a blue nose or red eyes? Or whatever it is that you choose. You can go all the way through this workshop and you can create your own bear. And at the end, you grab it and say, <in a high voice> "It's all mine, I made



it in my image!" <In normal voice> Right? I spend enough time in the church to realize that I sometimes think that we are working in a Build-A-God Workshop here. Like, people treat God like it's a smorgasbord of options, and like, "Well, I like this kind of God, and I want him to have this sort of thing with him, and I want him cuddly and nice, and not really too intrusive in my life. And so there he is, and I squeeze him and he's made in my image." Listen, I'll tell you what, that's not the real God. the real God is the one who reveals himself in Scripture. And so if you're going to disagree, that's fine, totally. But you need to wrestle with this text too. There's other things the Bible says, as we'll see. But in this text, if God is saying he's a particular way, then you've got to deal with that.

Second preliminary: it's going to take time to come to conclusions on issues like this. Most people, whenever they get cognitive dissonance, which means that somebody teaches you something new and it stirs with your mind, most people when that happens, they're like, "Oh, I don't like the angst, get it over with! Give me a short, Tweetable answer! So I can just go to bed and leave it alone." Can I just tell you, that's not what theological development looks like. Developing your understanding of who God is is less microwave work and more crockpot work. It sits and simmers for a while. You don't just push a button, bing! And it's done and you can eat it. No, it just simmers over a while, so expect that to happen.

When I was doing my doctoral work, I spent two weeks every January with one of our pastors, Kyle Meeker, who's doing his doctorate at the same time. And a friend, Brian from Salt Lake City. And we stayed in the same smelly room for two straight weeks, and we would never go to bed, well rarely go to bed, before one or two in the morning. And that's because we were arguing. You know what we were arguing about? Twenty years after we finished our Master's degrees. Do you know what we were arguing about? The doctrine of election. We were *still* dealing with it. This week, I'm *still* dealing with it. I'm learning more, changing this, and this is what theological development looks like. Well, listen. You're going to wrestle with this, I promise. Keep thinking, keep going back to Scripture. Let the Lord, through his Word, teach you. Okay, to that end, let's look at his Word then.

### **[The Passage]**

Here's the passage. Preliminaries, and now the passage. Previously at Northview. [Laughter] So at the beginning of Romans 9 - I've got to get you up to speed of where we are. So at the beginning of Romans 9, Paul's got this angst in his heart because he's going into all of these places, planting these churches, and when he goes and he preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah to the people of Israel, when he preaches that message to them, some believe and some don't. These are, according to him, his kinsmen according to the flesh. These are his family. His blood relations. And if there's anybody on the planet who should be ready to receive the Messiah of Israel, it should be Israel. God made all the promises to them, and so all of a sudden, most of them are rejecting, at the pinnacle moment, they're rejecting their own Messiah. Paul's like, I don't know what to do with this, because they're rejection of Jesus means that they're condemned. And he says I wish, if it were possible, to trade places with them. I would like them to be saved, and me to be accursed. If it were possible, that's how much it's tearing him up inside. But, he says, it's not as if the promises to Israel, because they're rejecting, some of them are rejecting, it's not as if the promises to Israel are not being



fulfilled. It's not as if God's Word has failed because not all Israel are Israel. Let me show you, he says, let me show you what I mean by "not all Israel are Israel." In other words, God has got this elective plan that he's had throughout all of Israel's history. He chooses some and he leaves others, and it's the ones that he chooses that receive the covenant blessings. So he goes to the very beginning. Okay, so Abraham has two kids, he's got Isaac and he's got Ishmael, and Isaac was the child of the promise, and the one who inherited the blessing. Ishmael was left. Then let's go down the next generation. Then you have Jacob and you have Esau. and Esau, even though he was born before Jacob was and should have had the blessing, he sold it. And the reason he sold it was because God had determined, even before they were born, that he was going to bless Jacob. And Jacob's a jerk. But it doesn't matter, because God has an elective purpose through all of this. There's Pharaoh, and there's Moses, the people of Israel have sinned against God, and Pharaoh has sinned against God, and they all deserve judgement. But God chooses to show mercy on the people of Israel, who deserve judgement, and he chooses to show judgement and harden Pharaoh, who deserves judgement. Do you see that? Everyone deserves it, he hardens some, he has mercy on others. And so you get this in Romans 9:18, his kind of summary thought. He says,

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

His sovereignty over the will of people is exhaustive. Right. So at that point, what's the question that's going through your mind? Like, if you were going to object at this point (and quite honestly, I tend to want to object), what's the objection? What about human free will, Paul? Like, you've laid it out that God it just kind of ordering his universe however it is that he wants. And so how is it that free people who are responsible and held responsible for their choices, how can they be held responsible if God's the one that's doing it all? Well, clearly Paul saw me coming. Romans 9:19 he said,

"One of you will say to me (and you can cross out "one of you" and write "Jeff" will say to me): 'Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?'"

Isn't that the question? Like, people are free, who's able to resist his will? I bring up the movie *Bruce Almighty* way too much. It's like, from the 90s. And I know it totally dates me and it's horrible, but please excuse it for one minute. And it's on Netflix, so you've probably seen it. So it's a film about a guy who wants to be in control of things, and God, Morgan Freeman...who knew? [Laughter] Morgan Freeman decides that he wants to let Bruce, played by Jim Carrey, let Bruce in charge of things. And when Bruce becomes god-like, basically, he gets all the power of God, he starts to do crazy things. Because you know, you can. And so he uses his force power to draw the moon closer to the earth, right, to make it really big for his date. Grows flowers in the middle of winter, he can do all sorts...he can do anything with any inanimate object. But none of it works in order to win the heart of his girlfriend back toward him. And there's this scene in it where he's standing on the edge, and he's been able to do all this amazing stuff, and he's standing at the edge of a schoolground because his girlfriend is a teacher, and she's walking away from him. And he's saying, "Turn around! Turn around!" And she turns around, and he goes, "*Love me!*" You know, Darth Vader-like. And nothing. Turns out Luke Skywalker's more powerful than God, right? The reason I bring it up is because this is actually



the image that most people have about the way that God functions. He can do anything he wants with inanimate objects because they don't have a will, but when it comes to human beings, their will is impenetrable to him. He can do nothing. And that's really what the objection here is. That's the way we view the world. That's the way human wills work, we say. And let's be honest. At this point, you kind of expect, if that's the case, if that's actually true, what you expect Paul to say in response to that objection, who resists his will, Paul to say, "Oh, actually, do you know the movie *Bruce Almighty*? Like, that's actually how it works." But he doesn't. He doesn't appeal to the human freedom, he doesn't appeal to the human will. What does he appeal to? Romans 9:19-20,

"One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?' 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?'"

Talk back to God. That's a phrase every parent in the room is familiar with. Yes? Who are you to talk back to me? Well, maybe it's just me. So let's imagine a crazy hypothetical. My son, lying on a couch in his jammy pants, doing nothing. [Laughter] It's hard to picture. He's got an X-Box controller in his hands, and *Fortnite* on the TV. Slobber. [Laughter] In a trance, right? And I come to him and I say, "Son, I need you to take out the trash." And he's like, "<grunts> I'll do it later."

"No, you'll do it now."

"Do it yourself." [Laughter] Okay, so what do you do here, Dad? You know what you do? You stand right in the middle of that screen, and you begin your lecture. The one that you've given many times. You say to your son, "Son, let me just recount to you the number of ways that your life is blessed by my gifts to you. Number one, the couch you're laying on, in your mess, provided by me. The clothes on your back, provided by me. The X-Box, provided by me. The TV, provided by me. Your very life, provided by me. [Laughter] Who do you think you are, boy, to talk back?" My mom used to say that to me all the time. "Why are you talking back to me?" What is she trying to say? What are you doing when you're saying that? You're trying to assert your authority. You're trying to say, here's the way it actually works, son. You need to stay in your lane. That I have authority over you to ask you to take the trash out, or whatever it is. I have the authority. This is essentially what's happening in this passage. What Paul's response to the question is. Whoa whoa whoa, wait a minute. What right do you have to call down a moral judgement on God for the way he governs his world? "Well, I don't like the way that you've planned this, God, I don't like the idea that you'd harden some and you'd show mercy on others. If I were in charge, I wouldn't do it that way." Really? "Yeah, I'd honor human freedom more." Really? But who are you?

So, if you know your Bible at this point, there should be a character in the Old Testament whose story is just screaming at you, saying, whoa, wait a minute, this isn't the first time anyone's ever asked "Who are you?" to somebody else, where God has come and asked. And the answer, what I'm referring to, is actually Job. So the story of Job. This guy had a bad day. And he, in about, I don't know, five minutes, was told that he had lost all of his businesses, most of his land, and ultimately, his children had been crushed when a whirlwind came and picked up the house that they were in, or at least the roof of the house, and crushed them when they were gathered together in it. As the story of the book goes on, his friends show up and start saying to him, "Man, you must have done something wrong in



order to get this in your life.” And Job’s response is, “No, I didn’t do anything wrong. I’ve never done anything, I’ve only been righteous all these days. In fact, if I had a chance to sit across from God and give him my opinions on this matter, I would show him that he’s wronging me. I don’t deserve any of this bad stuff. I deserve the good stuff, because I’ve done the good stuff. That’s the way it works. If I could have a moment with the Almighty, if I could just have that moment.” And God said, “Okay. How’s 2:00?” [Laughter] Then he shows up in, of all things, a whirlwind. And when he shows up, after Job has had 30-something chapters of complaining with his friends about God’s treatment of him, and how God is wrong, God shows up. Job 38:1-7,

“Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: ‘[Job] Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? [Who is it that’s questioning me, assuming they know better than me?] Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you [Job] when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone— while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?’”

He does this for the next, I don’t know, two, three chapters in the book. It’s just question after question after question after question. “Job, explain to me why the hippopotamus exists. Explain to me, if you’re so smart and you know better than me, then explain to me how it is that you’re going to conquer the Leviathan, that great sea monster. How is it that you can do all these things, if you know so much? If you sit in presumption above me, if you call me to account. Then surely you must know all these things. What are your credentials, Job? Oh man.” I mean, at the end, Job is just flattened, and so he responds in Job 42:1,

“Then Job replied to the LORD: ‘I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.’”

See, that’s the posture, that’s the attitude of a person who understands their place in the grand scheme of things, isn’t it? They understand that God is high and exalted, and all wise and all knowing and makes plans that you don’t understand. But you and I don’t make judgements about God’s plans, because we’re not higher than him. You let God be God. Who are you, oh man, to talk back to... Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?” So here’s Paul, he’s going to double down now on this, and he’s going to give you an illustration on, actually, our place, human beings’ place in his world. Romans 9:21,

“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?”

Alright, so there’s an image here, it’s very common in the ancient world. The use of the potter and the clay in the Old Testament and the intertestamental period, all over the place in all sorts of writings. And it’s because it was so common, that if you needed to have some dishes for your house, you would



either go to a potter, or if you were a potter yourself you'd make them. So he's saying, okay, imagine a potter, and there's the potter and he takes a big lump of clay, he grabs some of the lump and he puts it on the wheel, grabs the water and starts spinning it around. When I was in grade four, we had a class, actually, where we did this. It was awesome. <Whooshing sound> And you start to form it. And once the potter's done, he sticks it in the kiln, heats it up, brings it back out, and he's got this beautiful cup, this beautiful bowl, that he decides, you know what? This is going to be a gift for my wife. "Here you go, honey. I got this for you. It's to eat out of. It's the special dishes that we're going to use to eat from." And as soon as he's done with that, he goes back to his workshop and he grabs another lump of clay, and he puts it on the thing, and he starts <whooshing sound> and he does the same thing, puts it in the kiln, pulls it out, and he says, "Okay, so this one is going to be used for the bedchamber." That's a chamberpot, yeah? What Paul's asking is, okay, if this was like *Beauty and the Beast* and the little things can talk, would they be able, and have a just account to say, "Wait a minute. This is wrong! You have an obligation to do out of the same lump, make everything for the same purpose." If I were to walk in and I were to say to the potter, "What are you doing? This is colossally unfair! You don't have the right to make one thing for one purpose and one thing for another." This is the image he's getting at.

Maybe it's a little more helpful if you and I kind of translate it to our day. So, many of us have special dishes, yes? In your homes? Now, our special dishes are in boxes underneath our house. [Laughter] Right? Because we, back in the day, made the people who came to our wedding buy expensive dishes that we thought needed to be placed under our house. [Laughter] I think that we've eaten off the special dishes maybe, four times, five times, in our lives. There was one day, in fact, that I said to my wife, "We are eating off the special dishes." We hadn't eaten off of them for like, 15 years. Finally, we were going to eat off these dishes. We had stacks of them. She even collected her mother's special dishes which were under their house. Anyway, so now we've got two sets of special dishes. And I said, "We need to eat off the special dishes. What are we having?" She said, "We're eating hot dogs off of the special dishes!" We sat down, china, teacups, right? There are special dishes, and then there are everyday dishes. You can usually know where you place, in someone's estimation of you, if you get the special dishes, or the everyday dishes. "Here's a dish." Or, "Ooh, here's the special dish." Right? Who has the authority to decide which dishes are used? Well, you do. Why? Because you own them.

Here's Paul's point. Ultimately, God has a right to have mercy and to harden. Everybody deserves hardening. God has the right to have mercy on some of them. He has a right to elect for his purposes. And you're saying, "Yeah, but it would be lovely if God were to at least tell us some sense of the purpose he has in it." Okay, here you go. Romans 9:22,

"What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? 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?"

This might be one of the most theologically important passages in the Bible. Here's what he's doing. He's taking the story that he mentioned just a few verses before, okay, verses 17 and 18. Especially



verse 17 about Pharaoh. He says, let me take Pharaoh and his story, and let me principalize it. Let me show you how this story is what God is doing more generally with objects of his wrath in this world. So, go back to Romans 9:17–18,

“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.’”

So, the story of Pharaoh. Moses comes to Pharaoh, sent by God, says, “God says, ‘Let my people go.’” And Pharaoh says, “Who’s this God that I should obey him? Last time I checked, I was the biggest God around, I don’t need to listen to this God in any way.” What should the Almighty Lord have done at that point? What did Pharaoh deserve for that rebellion? Instant judgement. You kind of expect Moses to go, “I’m just going to back up here, just for a second. Okay, that’s far enough.” You know? But what does Pharaoh get? Well, God bares with great patience the one he’s raised up for this very purpose. And he says, “Okay, let’s go ten rounds.” He even gets to the point where he’s propping him up at points. So that at the end of the story, you’ve got Pharaoh running into the Red Sea, chasing after the people of Israel. And Israel’s on the shore, having walked through the Red Sea. And God, in the presence of Israel, the objects of his mercy, he covers up the greatest nation in the planet. And what does this do? Well, it shows God’s character in two ways. One, it shows God as just for judging those who deserve it, and it shows God’s mercy on showing mercy on those who deserve judgement. Right? So, take that whole thing, and here’s the text again. You see what he’s doing in Romans 9:22,

“What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, [he wants to get Pharaoh in that moment] bore with great patience the objects of his wrath [like Pharaoh]—prepared for destruction [raised up for this very purpose]? 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?”

What if he did all of this so he would be glorified? See, here’s the thing. You ask the question, why does God choose some and leave others? Why are there objects of wrath and objects of mercy? Paul’s answer to that is both glorify him. Listen, I need you to pay attention, this is theologically important. I know that you and I think that God’s prime directive, his chief goal in the world, is to save sinners. I’m going to tell you it’s not his chief goal. It’s one of his goals; it’s not his chief goal. God’s chief goal is the glory of his name. So how is God’s name glorified? Well, how is anybody’s name glorified? And the answer to that question is, well, actually when their character is displayed. I glorify my wife when I say she’s a great mother. Look at how she’s acting toward our children. Look at how beautiful she is. These are character traits that she has, and I glorify her for those character traits when they’re displayed before everybody. What about God’s character traits? Are they beautiful and glorious? Well, yes. All of them? Yes. Even his justice? Yes. And his mercy? Yes. how does God display his justice and his mercy at the same time? Well, he has mercy on whom he wills and he hardens whom he wills. You do realize this answers some really big questions. There are people, theologically, who are going to come along and say, “You know, so why is it that God creates a world where he knows all these people are going to go and sin and he’s going to judge them?” You know what the answer to that question is? For his glory. Why is God doing this particular thing in my life? Do





you know what the answer to that question is? For his glory. God is the greatest thing in the universe, the expression of the greatest thing in the universe is glorifying-ly great.

Romans 9:23,

“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—even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?”

See, even us. Listen, I know I’ve been talking about the Jewish nation all along here, but this is not just about the Jews. God’s been calling out a people among the Jews and among the Gentiles, and he’s gathering them together in the church. Jew and Gentile alike. And do you know how sometimes, like last week, because I look at your faces, and some of you want to shake your head at me, and I’m like, okay, let me just show you a bunch of passages of Scripture to prove it. That’s what Paul does here. He says, “Okay, I can see all of you doubt me, so let me go back to the Old Testament, and just kind of riddle you with Scripture.” So he does. Romans 9:25-29,

“As he says in Hosea: ‘I will call them ‘my people’ [he’s talking about Gentiles here] who are not my people; and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one,’ [see, God’s including the Gentiles. It was written about in the Old Testament] and, ‘In the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘children of the living God.’ [See, Gentiles are included. And you have an issue with God selecting some and leaving others? Well, you should have seen it coming.] Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: ‘Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality.’ It is just as Isaiah said previously: ‘Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.’”

Alright, I feel like I need to let you out of a headlock now. [Laughter]

### **[The Points]**

So let’s finish all of this by making two points. Number one, the Bible teaches two things, two facts about salvation, that must not diminish one another. The Bible teaches two facts about salvation that must not diminish one another. Okay, so here’s fact number one. The Bible is crystal clear that if you are to be saved, you must respond to Jesus. You must choose to love him. Out of your freedom, you must want him. You *have* to do this. Jesus says to Nicodemus, “You *must* be born again.” Repent and believe. If you don’t repent, you don’t believe, you will not be saved. It is on you. The Bible’s really clear on that. It’s also really clear that God is sovereign over salvation. That salvation belongs to the Lord. And those he calls will come. So how do you hold those together? Well, the temptation is to say, well I like this one better than that one. Or, I like *this* one better than that one. Then you try to diminish



one of them with the other one. But the Bible never does that. It holds them, quite honestly, side by side sometimes. And it drives you nuts. Because you're like, how can you say that stuff side by side?

So I'll give you one example. Okay, Matthew 11:25-30, Jesus is speaking. Listen to what he does here. He said,

“At that time Jesus said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. [Sovereignty. And then:] Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.’”

Well, which is it, Jesus? Come on! Is God sovereign or are we responsible? And the answer from Jesus, from Paul, from the Bible is: yes. [Laughter] And you're like, but how does that work together? Well, I don't know. But I'll tell you this, that if you go speak to scientists who work in the area of studying light, they will tell you at this present moment that light behaves as a particle and light behaves as a wave. And neither of those...they should cancel each other out. One should contradict the other. But they don't. If you do research assuming light is a particle. If you do research assuming light is a wave, it will work. It will bear fruit. Both are true. And if you speak to scientists and say, “How can both be true?” They will say, “Well, the way it works is that our knowledge base is this large <makes tiny circle with hand> and there is something outside of our knowledge base that explains how these two things can be true. Yes, God is sovereign, people are responsible. And our knowledge base is this big <makes tiny circle with hand> and there is something, perhaps in God's knowledge base that's not in ours, that explains how both of those can be true. But don't you dare diminish one with the other. It shouldn't be uncommon for Christian people, you know that, right? Jesus is fully man and fully God. How's that work? Well, he's both. It's both. God is sovereign. We are responsible. Accept both those and believe them both strongly.

Here's the last one, okay? Instead of debating God's fairness over the doctrine of election, consider God's grace. Instead of debating his fairness, consider his grace. You know, this is a topic that fosters so much debates. We get in fights about it and we debate about it and we wrestle about it and we work through it for years in our minds to understand how these things could be so, and we enter the world of philosophy. And all of that is wonderful and it's great. You should wrestle with it. But the Bible doesn't wrestle with it so much as it glorifies God for it. It's not so much a doctrine to be figured out, so much as it's a doctrine that we turn our attention to God and say, “You are so magnificent.” Listen, Ephesians 1:5,

“In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace.”



What should be going on in your heart here is actually praise for his glorious grace. When I've explained the doctrine of election to my children and walked through Romans 9, one of my boys at one point said to me, with tears in his eyes he said, "But why would God choose me?" And I said to him, "Exactly, son." Because here's the thing. If you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the reason you believe is because God's opened your heart to believe in him. And the reason you opened your heart to believe in him is *not because you're great*. He didn't see anything magnificent in you. You should be Pharaoh. He has every right to judge you. And he doesn't. Not only does he not judge you, he blesses you beyond measure. He should have passed you over, but he's adopted you as his child. Can you believe that? And you and I sit there <arms crossed>. Just for a minute, can you understand how deep the grace goes?

My friend Steve, I've shared before, he's got an adopted daughter from Africa. He's got four blonde-haired, blue-eyed, tall girls, and one African adopted daughter. And you can understand, if you're an African adopted daughter, with all those, several times you'd wonder if you really belong. And so you struggle, as she has over the years. When she does struggle, she often goes into her room and she cries on her bed. My friend Steve, he goes into her room, repeatedly, he gets on his knees, he grabs her little cheeks, he looks her dead in the eye, and he says, "You need to understand something, Jennifer. We walked into an orphanage and we chose you. You will always and forever be mine." To the praise of his glorious grace, my adopted friends. Let me pray for us.

Lord, I am fully aware that much of this is difficult to hear and to study, and we are tempted to go toward the wrestling, and that's all good and excellent, and agreement and disagreement can be reached. And through the iron sharpening iron, Father, we can come to good conclusions. But I pray that more than anything, Lord, that you would cause, by the power of your Spirit, grace to abound in our hearts, and an understanding, Father, of actually what we deserved, who we actually are in the grand scheme of things, and ultimately what we've been given, Father. And that that gap would start to bear fruit in our lives, an understanding of that gap would start to cause us to really worship. Not just with words or songs, although those are great, but also with everything we've got. You are magnificent. You are righteous. You are merciful. And we will spend the rest of our days here, and the rest of eternity, glorifying you for your goodness and your character. We look forward to it. In Jesus' name. Amen.