



PREDESTINATION

Part 3 of Religion Saves

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Romans 9 | January 20, 2008

You're listening to "Religion Saves and Nine Other Misconceptions," a sermon series in which Pastor Mark Driscoll answers nine controversial questions about Jesus and Christianity. The following is a presentation of Mars Hill Church in Seattle. For more audio and video content, please visit marshillchurch.org.

Well, good evening Mars Hill. We are dealing with the doctrine of predestination today, part of the "Religion Saves and Nine Other Misconceptions" series. Today's a great day. It's actually the two-year anniversary of our Shoreline campus, which was an experiment in multi-campus that was wildly successful.

And so now, we've got Ballard, and we've got Shoreline and West Seattle and Wedgewood and the East Side. And we're getting ready to launch Mars Hill Downtown, coming up here in a month or so, as well.

Tell you, as well, one thing you can continue to be in prayer for us as a church is just the ongoing growth, as we're straining to handle all the people that God has brought us, and we're very grateful for that. And tonight, I'm going to be covering this doctrine of predestination, and it actually came to me, this concept for this series, when I was preaching through the book of I Corinthians. There Paul answers a bunch of questions that people in his church have.

So, I thought, "Well, that'd be kinda cool." So people voted. We got 893 questions posted online, five-and-a-half thousand comments, 343,000 votes. And so, in the first week, we picked question number nine – we chose the top nine – we dealt with birth control. That was the Richard Simmons glamour shot.

Last week we dealt with humor, which had the camel and the 2×4 , if you remember. This week, we're dealing with predestination.

Next week I get to deal with whatever part of theology I struggle with to this day. After that, how do you overcome sexual sin? After that, faith in works – really, the distinction between Protestants and Catholic view of salvation.

Then we'll deal with dating and courtship for the singles, the emerging Church, and then lastly, worship and the regulative principle. As always, it's online at marshillchurch.org and iTunes and YouTube and all of that. If you want more information on this subject of predestination, my blog tomorrow will have recommended reading, some audio links, as well as answers to common questions.

So, I will go ahead and pray, and we will deal with a very important section of Scripture. I'm going to deal with it as quickly as I can. I will cover a lot of ground, and so I'm just asking mentally you hang in there. We're gonna move quick, and we're gonna cover a lot.

So, Father, we begin by thanking you for being such a great, loving, compassionate, merciful God, who is willing to pursue us for relationship. And Lord Jesus we thank you for making that relationship possible. And Holy Spirit, we thank you for regenerating us, that we might receive Jesus.

As we study, we ask for the mental ability to hang in there, with a lot of content and deep doctrines. And God, I pray that I would be able to articulate your heart and your Word effectively and accurately, so that as many people as possible would love Jesus, in whose name we pray, amen.

Tell you what I'll do, I'll start with the question. Here is the question that was voted on. "Why" – very theological question – "does an all-loving, all-knowing, and all-sovereign God will into creation people he foreknows will suffer eternal condemnation" – meaning hell. "Why does Romans 9:20" – we'll get there eventually – "feel like a cop-out answer?"

Here is the gist of the question. Some people love Jesus, go to Heaven. Other people don't love Jesus, they go to hell. Why? Why is it that some people go to hell, and others go to Heaven? Is it because they didn't choose Jesus, or is it because Jesus didn't choose them? That is the gist of the question.

And then the Bible uses various words to talk about this, such as predestination, predestine, choose, elect, ordain – all of which indicates that the decision of who will be in Heaven forever with Jesus was determined, as Ephesians 1 says, before the foundation of the world, before time began. Some people were destined. Their destiny was predetermined to be with Jesus, in Heaven, saved as Christians forever.

Now, the means by which people are connected to Jesus is described by various theologians in two general categories: Monergism – mono meaning one, and synergism, meaning many, or two.

And I'll use Isaiah 53:1 by way of analogy. He asks the question there, "To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Metaphorically speaking, "To whom has God reached down for the purpose of saving from Satan, sin, death, and hell? And the monergistic position, we'll call it the one-handed position, since it's an easier word to remember, is that God reached down and grabbed some people and saved them through Jesus. Okay?"

The synergistic position is that God reached down his hand to lost sinners, and that they reached back to him so that they took hold of God's invitation, and in so doing, God pulled them out of death and damnation, but he did so by their partnership with him.

I'll give you an analogy of perhaps a swimmer who is drowning. The question is, is Jesus the lifeguard who grabs them, or is Jesus the lifeguard who reaches out, and then only those who are saved are those who likewise respond to him by reaching out and taking hold of his hand.

Throughout the history of the Church, these two positions have been widely debated. I'll start in the early church and move quickly up until the time of John Calvin and his successors. First, I would say that we should begin with Origen, who lived 185 to 254, and John Chrysostom, who lived 347 to 407. In so doing, I want you to get a bit of historical perspective on how Christians have viewed this issue.

They said that salvation was a two-handed event, whereby God looked down the corridor of time, saw those who would choose him, and then he predestined to choose them. And so, election, or predestination, or choosing begins with us choosing God, and then God responding to our choice and choosing us by his foreknowledge of seeing in advance who would choose him.

And so, he knew that we would reach out to him, and he reached out to us, and we were saved in that way. There was, then, another man, in 354 he was born, his name was Pelagius, and he had very bizarre concept that was single-handed salvation, but essentially without God's involvement whatsoever.

He said that we are not sinners by nature. That Adam did not give a sin nature to any of us as our first father. And that we are all born with an open, perfect, blank slate of will and choice, just like Adam was created, and that we could choose good or bad. We could choose God or not. Therefore, to be saved, all we need do is choose God. That's all. It's entirely of our own doing.

That's a heretical, false position. He was rightly condemned as a heretic, and hardly anyone holds that position, except one guy that I debated in a book that I wrote, and he said Pelagius was great. And I absolutely freaked out, because he's not great. He's a false teacher and a heretic. We're not good people who save ourselves. Every Christian agrees that that's not how it happens.

Moving along, then there was a man named Augustine, 354 to 430 is when he lived. You may have heard of him. It is almost impossible to overemphasize the influence that Augustine has had on all of Christian theology and all of Christian history. And he originally held to a two-handed position, but after further study, he came to a one-handed position.

His position was that we are all sinners. We have all turned from God. We have all run from God. We all deserve hell. And God in his mercy reaches down and through Jesus grabs some of us and gives us an ill-deserved gift of grace. He gives us his love. He forgives us of sin. He gives us a new heart. He makes us a new people.

I would call that position single predestination – single predestination. That everyone chooses hell, and Jesus chooses some. That is my position. My position is the Augustinian position. It fits broadly under the history of reform theology, and my job tonight is to make you all good, Reformed, Augustinian, singular, predestination people because it's right.

(Laughter)

Now, there are some who will disagree with that, and we love them. And perhaps they were predestined to be wrong.

(Laughter)

Nonetheless, moving right along, there was another man in the 9th century named Gottschalk. He was a Benedictine monk, and he taught single-handed salvation. Right? that God reaches down and saves sinners. He added to Augustine's position that God not only chooses some for Heaven, but also some for hell. Creates some to love; creates some people to destroy. We would call that double destination.

He so strongly stressed the sovereignty of God that it is clear to me that he underemphasized human responsibility for sin. He went so far as to declare that God was the author of sin, and as a result was renounced as a heretic. Died without recanting, while imprisoned in a monastery.

He, however, along with Augustine had a great influence on another man you may have heard of named John Calvin. John Calvin lived from 1509 to 1564. He is, in regards to many scholars' opinion, the greatest Bible teacher in the history of the Christian faith, outside of the authors of Scripture.

He was a devoutly gifted Bible teacher, and everyone acknowledges that. I really appreciate his work. He and Martin Luther were the fathers of the Protestant reformation, and I named my middle son Calvin Martin after John Calvin and Martin Luther. Pretty much tells you what team I'm on. Right?

(Laughter)

You name your children by virtue of your team. That's why none of my children are named Judas, for example.

(Laughter)

That's a different team.

(Laughter)

John Calvin did teach double predestination, single-handed salvation, but double predestination. Now, just as Augustine and Pelagius in their day duked it out over how God saves sinners, so shortly following the death of John Calvin, there was a man born, actually just a few years before his death, who then grew up under the school in which he founded and trained the teachers. His name was Jacob Arminius. you may have heard of him.

He was a man who lived 1560 to 1609. He originally held the single-handed position of salvation, and then had a change of mind and embraced a two-handed view of salvation. And he said that God likewise looked down the corridor of history, saw who would choose him, and so he chose them. And furthermore, he taught a concept called prevenient grace, which a man named John Wesley later amplified, saying that God opens up the possibility of the sinner to make a free will choice for God.

Now, his followers got together in 1610 at something called the Remonstrance, it means protest, and they were protesting against the popularity of Calvinistic and other forms of Reformed teaching. And they came up with something called the Five Points of Arminianism, named after Jacob Arminius.

Well, in response, the Calvinists got together at the Synod of Dort in 1618 to 1619, and they met 154 times and came out with something called the Canons of Dort, and they responded to the Five Points of Arminianism with the Five Points of Calvinism. This is all historical excurses. I'll share the points with you in brief.

The Five Points of Arminianism begin with free will. We have the ability to choose or not choose God. Secondly, God's election is conditional. It is conditioned upon God seeing who will choose him. Those people who would choose him are the people that God likewise chose. Thirdly, universal atonement when Jesus Christ, our great God and Savior, died on the cross, he died in the place of every sinner to forgive all of their sins, so that anyone and everyone can be saved.

Fourthly, it teaches resistible grace, that God could desire for you to be saved, but you could ultimately resist him and choose not to be a Christian. And fifthly, the perseverance of some saints. That some people who become Christians can later choose not to be Christians, and not go to Heaven, but instead go to hell.

The Five Points of Calvinism absolutely opposed each of these Five Points of Arminianism. I'm not saying they're necessarily bad, but my point is that this is not the best way to do theology – in reaction to someone else's theology. It's best to go to the Bible and just follow the storyline of the Bible. And the Bible starts in Genesis 1 and 2 with Creator and creation and man and woman.

And the Five Points of Calvinism start at Genesis 3. Nonetheless, they begin with total depravity. That we are all sinners by nature and choice. And as a result, we don't have free will. We cannot choose God. We'll deal with that in a bit.

Secondly, unconditional election. That God chooses to love and save some people, regardless of their works – not because they were going to be good or choose him, because all people are bad and no one seeks him.

Thirdly, limited atonement, where Jesus went to the cross and died not for everyone, but for the elect. Now, that position I would have – I would have agreement with the five points, but on that third point, I would add a very lengthy footnote, and my position is unlimited limited atonement.

I preached a sermon on it. It's online. It's part of the "Christ on the Cross" series. It gets published in a book next October, and if you want to find it, you can go there. I don't have time to deal with it. But I would agree with that, plus another position.

Number four, irresistible grace. That if God wants to love you, God wants to save you, God wants you to meet Jesus, you can fight and argue, but eventually, he's going to change your heart and you will meet Jesus.

And number five, everyone who does meet Jesus perseveres, continues with him to the end. They will sin. They may stray. But they always repent and come back. And the question is not, "Can I lose my salvation?" Because it is not mine. As Jonah 2:9 says, "Salvation is of the Lord."

The question is, "Can Jesus lose a Christian?" That's the question. Can Jesus lose a Christian? And the Calvinists would say, "No, Jesus is good from beginning to end." Now, to be fair, both of these teams are Christian. This is an in-house debate.

They agree on the big issues of our faith – the Bible is true. There's one God in three persons, the Trinitarian community of Father, Son, and Spirit. We're all sinners. Jesus is God. His death on the cross takes away sin. And if you don't believe in him, you will go to hell. Right? Both teams believe this.

And the truth is, on both teams there are a few wing nuts, nut jobs, weirdos, and oddballs, just like your family. Somewhere, there's someone with your last name that you just wish they would change their last name. Right?

(Laughter)

I'm sure the Bin Laden family feels that way right about now. Like, "Golly, can't fly anywhere."

(Laughter)

But what I'm speaking of here is the preponderance of people on these teams who love Jesus. And the Arminians, this would include Jacob Arminius,

this would include John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Today this would include the Nazarenes, the Free Will Baptists, the Pentecostals, the Four Square, the Calvary Chapels, the Assemblies of God.

I taught at the Assemblies of God church planting event on Friday. Super nice people. Really gracious. Love Jesus. They're Arminians. I told 'em, "It's funny, God predestined me to teach the Arminians about Calvinism." I thought it was cute.

(Laughter)

They're really nice people. They love Jesus. We love them. Furthermore, today you would see such people as Jack Hayford, great Bible teacher for that team; Chuck Smith, the founder of the Calvary movement; Greg Laurie, the great evangelist – they're all Arminians.

And here's my point. If you're an Arminian who loves Jesus, you can member at Mars Hill Church. Okay? We'll debate this with ya, but we're not gonna divide over this with ya. You could be a Calvinist, you're welcome at Mars Hill. You could hold the Augustinian position, be at Mars Hill. All who love Jesus and have turned from sin, we'd welcome them at Mars Hill. But we would say, "Yeah, well, we could disagree on this and still love one another."

There's doctrines that need to divide us. There's doctrines that need not divide us, but rather we can discuss in a loving way as a family.

On the reform side, there's Martin Luther; John Calvin; the Puritans; one of my heroes, Charles Haddon Spurgeon; Jonathan Edwards; John Owen. A lot of Johns on this team. John Piper, John McArthur, John Gerstner. I don't know what it is –

(Laughter)

Just a lot of Johns on this team. This team, as well, would include J. I. Packer; my dear friend, John Piper, who's gonna be here in February to preach for us at a conference. This would include authors like Wayne Grudem. This would include myself; Mars Hill; the Acts 29 church planting network, which we are a part of; all Presbyterians; some Reform Baptists. All would fit in that Reformed camp.

That being said, we'll now move on to Scripture. That was the introduction to the introduction. Where I want to begin now is with a biblical examination of the big issues which help to set the stage for our examination of Romans 9.

The first thing that I would like to say is that we need to agree on God's heart. God's heart is a heart of love. God's heart is a heart that desires that everyone would turn from sin, trust in Jesus, go to Heaven (not hell), and be saved through Jesus Christ.

I'll begin by reading some Scriptures. Paul says to Timothy, "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture." So, we're going to do that. I'm going to read a lot of Scripture tonight, and I do so in faith that faith comes by hearing the Word of God, just like Scripture says.

Ezekiel 33 reveals the heart of God in this way, "Say to them: 'As I live,' declares the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked,'" – unrepentant sinners, non-Christians, some of you – "but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back! Turn back from your evil ways! For why will you die?"

God says, "I do not delight when a sinner dies without turning to me. I do not delight in their damnation."

I Timothy 2:3, 4 says, "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." Now on that verse, the Calvinists will say, "When he says, 'all people,' he doesn't mean all people." And my point is, "Well, then he says it in a very peculiar way."

(Laughter)

They just say, "Well, all doesn't mean all." I would say, "Well, you're all very silly, and I mean all."

(Laughter)

That let's just read it at face value and say, "God's heart is that all people would turn to Jesus."

II Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance." God's heart is patience, so that everyone has an opportunity, and his heart is that no one would go to hell.

And then the great end zone verse of John 3:16, 17, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son," – that would be Jesus – "that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life." Whoever believes in Jesus receives the gift of eternal life. There is no one here, if you believe in Jesus, that you will be cast away or rejected.

You say, "How do I know that I am elect?" Here is the answer. Do you believe in Jesus? "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

My first point is that God loves you; God loves the world; God loves everyone; God invites everyone to come to him for salvation. Furthermore, God invites us through sending the Gospel out to all people, inviting everyone to turn from sin and trust in Jesus, who is God, who lived without sin, died in our place to pay our penalty of death for sin, and rose to give us salvation.

I'll read these verses to you as well. Matthew 11:28, Jesus says, "Come to me all who are labored and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Acts 16:31 says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you" – and I would say any one of you – "will be saved if you turn from sin and trust in Jesus." Acts 17:30 says, "He commands all people everywhere to repent," that is to turn from sin and turn to Jesus.

And Revelation 22:17 says this, "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" And let the one who is thirsty come. Let the one who desires to take the water of life do so without price." God says three times therein, "Come to me! Come to me! Come to me!" God loves people. God invites all people to turn from sin and to trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of all sin.

Nonetheless, many people do not love Jesus. Many people do not desire Jesus. Why? Why? In John 5:40, Jesus says, "Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. You refuse to."

John 12:46-48, Jesus says, "I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If anyone – if anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day."

In Acts 7:51 it says this, "You stiff-necked people" – that is stubborn, non-Christians – "uncircumcised in your heart and your ears. You can't love and you can't hear. You always resist" – this is active – "resist the Holy Spirit."

And Romans 10:21 says, "But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'" Here is the point. God is good. God desires you to be saved. God desires you to come to Jesus. God invites you to come to Jesus. And some people do not because they refuse Jesus. They reject Jesus. They resist Jesus. They disobey Jesus.

The result is that every non-Christian who goes to hell has no one to blame but themselves. They cannot blame God, that he didn't love them, that he didn't pursue them, that his Spirit didn't convict their conscience, that his Son Jesus was unwilling to receive their repentance.

If you are here tonight and you do not know Jesus, your blood is on your own hands, and your eternity is your own responsibility. You have no one to blame but yourself. That is because we're all sinners. This is our condition by nature and choice. And in that, I mean that we are totally depraved. Not utterly depraved; we could do more evil more frequently with more intensity. The restraining power of God the Holy Spirit, the threat of the rule of law, as well as our own conscience, which is part of our image bearing that God gifted us with, all help to restrain our sin.

So, we are not utterly depraved, but we are totally depraved. And that all of our being is stained, marred, bent, broken, and corrupted by sin. That means that our mind does not think the thoughts of God. That our heart does not desire the things of God. And that our will does not, cannot, will not choose the provision of God through the person of Jesus.

I will read some more. Genesis 6:5 says it this way, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thought of his heart was only evil continually.

In John 8:34, Jesus says, "Everyone who commits a sin is a slave to sin." Slaves do not simply will themselves into freedom. They need liberation.

In Romans 3:10-18, Paul gives a devastating series of summary statements about the human condition in its sinful state, apart from Jesus Christ. "No one is righteous, no not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together, they have become worthless. No one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. In their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." That's the non-Christian.

Romans 8:7 says, "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God." Not indifferent, not just in disagreement, but hostile. "For it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it cannot."

In I Corinthians 2:14, Paul declares that the natural person, the person who does not know Jesus, the person that has been born physically but not born again spiritually, does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly or foolish to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

And the final nail in the coffin of the depth of human depravity is found in Ephesians 2:1-3. Speaking of Christians in regards to their former life as non-Christians, Paul reveals, "And you were dead" – you were dead, physically alive, but spiritually dead – "in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air," – that is Satan – "the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of body and mind, and were by nature children of wrath."

That being said, God's heart is love. God's invitation is Jesus. Our rejection is our own responsibility. And the reason why we reject and refuse Jesus Christ is because we are wicked. We do evil continually. We are slaves to sin. We do not seek God. We do not do good. We do not fear God. Our thinking is hostile to God. We are unable to understand the greatness of Jesus. We are children of wrath who are spiritually dead. Dead, dead, dead! Physically alive, spiritually dead.

Now at this point, some will ask, "What about free will? Can't we choose God?" My answer is simply, "Dead people don't make any decision. The freedom of the will comes from Erasmus of Rotterdam, who was a humanist scholar, wrote a book called The Freedom of the Will. He was countered by Luther, the great Reformer, in his book, The Bondage of the Will.

In The Bondage of the Will, Luther rightly argues that the concept of free will must be carefully explained. First, Luther rightly declares, only God truly has free will. Because only God can do whatever he wants to do. You and I, we do have choices – Coke/Pepsi, Chevy/Ford, PC/Mac. We do make some choices.

But our will is not totally free. I can't choose to be 9 feet tall, live forever, or fly like Peter Pan. My choices are very limited.

Secondly, Luther rightly states that the choices we make come out of the heart that we have, or the nature that is in us. Meaning, if you don't love God, you can't choose him. If you don't belong to God, your heart is not inclined toward God.

In the same way, Jesus says that a fig tree doesn't bear apples. A fallen, depraved human being doesn't choose God. Proverbs says that it is out of the heart, which is the wellspring of life, that the decisions are made. Jesus says that out of the heart, we choose lust and sin and deceit and death and folly. And if your heart is not regenerated, if God has not in Christ given you a new heart, then you cannot choose God.

Augustine says it this way, "God does not choose us because we believe, but that we may believe." Romans 5:10 says it this way, "While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." It's not that we were friends of God, pursuing him. While we were enemies of God, opposed to him, God made us his friends. He gives us a new heart – a heart that desires Jesus.

Everyone chooses Satan, sin, death, and hell. And apart from a new heart, that's all anyone would ever choose. In that way, our spiritually dead condition is not unlike Lazarus, who was physically dead. The story of the Bible is that he was a good friend of Jesus. And you may recall, he died, and they buried him. And he was dead for a while. So much so that the King James version of the Bible says, quote, "He stinketh" end quote.

(Laughter)

That's very dead.

(Laughter)

Lazarus didn't call out, "Jesus, help me. I'm dead." He didn't pursue Jesus. He didn't cry out to Jesus. He didn't stick a hand out of the grave, begging for Jesus. He was dead, as Ephesians and Colossians say that we are spiritually dead. And what did Jesus do? Jesus came to him, as Jesus comes to us. And Jesus called for him, as Jesus calls for us. And Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth." And Lazarus, through a miracle of Jesus, was given life from death. And exactly as Lazarus was brought forth from physical death, so the children of God are brought forth from spiritual death.

Jesus comes to us, calls us by name, does a miracle, and absolutely transforms us from the inside out, so that we would desire him. That is my introduction, and now we will proceed to Romans 9. True story. Let me get some water.

I preached Thursday, and Friday, and Saturday, and Sunday. And I preached all week. I work like an Arminian, but sleep like a Calvinist.

(Laughter)

I thought that was cute. We will begin in Romans 8:28. Romans 9 is the great text in all of Scripture on predestination, along with Ephesians 1:3-11. I can't do them both, though I would love to.

Beginning in Chapter 8, verse 28, to set the stage for Chapter 9, "And we know that for the good of those who love God" – here's my question to you, do you love God? Do you love Jesus? – "all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose." This is a beginning declaration of the absolute sovereignty of God. People sin, and it's their fault.

Satan and demons sin and do evil and injustice and atrocity, and it is their fault. And God is bigger than Satan and sin and sinners, and God works out all things for good, because God is good, bigger, more powerful and sovereign than everyone and everything that he has made.

And this is the grounding of the Christian hope. That though we are bad, God is good. And though life is hard, God works out everything for our good and his glory. He then proceeds to give us what theologians have described as the golden thread of salvation. In it you will see that God is as Hebrews 12:2 says of Jesus, "The author and perfecter of our faith." He initiates it, sees it through to completion.

"For those" – verse 29 – "whom he foreknew". Now, when the Arminians read that verse and they hear that word, they say, "Foreknowledge is that God looked down the corridor of time and knew that we would love him." That's not what it means. The language there is far more than a factual occurrence. It is a declaration of love. God foreknew us in that he loved us before time began. As Ephesians 1 says, "Before the foundations of the earth." Before creation.

When the Bible says that Adam knew Eve, that doesn't mean that he cognitantly was aware of her existence, but that he loved her. That he cared for her. That he desired her. That he pursued her for the purpose of relationship. God foreknew. God foreknew, meaning, he knew in advance that he was going to create some of us to be his children. He knew all who would come into existence, but he foreknew, he chose certain people that he would love, that he would actively pursue for relationship. That he would passionately, continually, relentlessly, graciously pursue for salvation.

That is in eternity past. Those he foreknew he also predestined. He predetermined their destiny. He chose that despite their sin and folly and rebellion and hardness of heart and stubbornness, and not just undeservedness, but ill-deservedness, he predestined to love the unlovely, to love the unlovable. People like me. Some would say, "Does this not lead to loose living, to know that we were predestined, and if you're predestined, you cannot lose your

salvation?"

No, because he says here, "We are predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." Predestination is to live like Jesus in this life, and to be with Jesus when it is concluded. He foreknew. He predestined.

And those he predestined, he called. He sent missionaries and evangelists and Bible teachers and Christians to tell the good news that God came into history. He lived the life we have not lived. He died the death we should have died. He gives the gift we cannot otherwise obtain. His name is Jesus.

And God calls people to himself. And that call was outward through preaching and teaching. And it's inward through the confirmation of the Holy Spirit, where God regenerates our heart and gives us a heart that is tender toward him. "And those he called, he justified." II Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made him who knew no sin to become sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of good."

Jesus Christ, our great God and Savior, friends, went to the cross. He took upon himself all of our sin, and he gave to us all of his righteousness. It's imputed, gifted righteousness. The result is now we could stand before a holy and righteous and good God, and though we are guilty sinners, be declared just, righteous, justified in his sight, if our faith is in Jesus. If our faith is in Jesus.

Furthermore, "And those whom he justified, he also glorified." That is in eternity future. "One day, those of us who belong to Jesus, we will die. Our body will go to the grave, and our spirit will go to be with the Lord," Paul tells the Corinthians, "and there is coming a day when our body and spirit will reunite, and that we will be resurrected to newness of life in a glorified body, to live forever, separated from the presence and power of sin, with Jesus forever in his Kingdom." That is glorification.

And he's saying that in eternity past, God predestined to love those that he had freely chosen in foreknowledge to set his affections on. And that he works through sin and evil in history, guaranteeing that in the end, all that he has chosen will ultimately experience glorification – final salvation with him forever.

My assumption is, at this point you have questions. I will, before entering into Romans 9, state two things. One, the context is clearly salvation. And two, the author is a man named Paul. And many say that Paul was a man who taught the doctrine of predestination most actively, most vigorously, most completely in all of Scripture.

Might I suggest that the reason he did so is because he experienced predestination most powerfully? Do you remember his story? He hated Christians. He opposed Christians. He murdered Christians. Until what? Until Jesus came down from Heaven – that's predestination – knocked him down, blinded him, gave him a new heart, converted him, made him an Apostle to non-Jews, sent him out, and as a result, he loves Jesus and writes many books of the Bible.

He is a man who most passionately and personally understands the doctrine of predestination, because apart from it, there was no way in the world that this man would ever experience the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, some would argue that if you believe in the doctrine of predestination, you will not be very evangelistic. You won't do evangelism; you won't plant churches. You'll think, "Well, God's gonna save everybody, so I'm just going to take a nap." Those who end up acting in that way miss the heart of Paul, and they overlook the life of Paul, who was the most zealous of evangelists and church planters.

Here are his words in Chapter 9, beginning in verse 1. He says, quote, "I am speaking the truth in Christ. I am not lying. My conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ, for the sake of my brothers," – there he is speaking of the Jewish people – "my kinsman according to the flesh.

"They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship of the promises. To them belong the patriarchs. And from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ" – Jesus came through these people – "who is God over all, blessed for ever. Amen."

He there echoes the words of Moses, saying, "My desire is that the Jewish people would meet Jesus, the Messiah. That they would love him and turn to him. And my whole life is about proclaiming Jesus, so that as many people as possible would become Christians. And so that the Jews, in particular, would come to know the Messiah that they have longed and waited for."

The doctrine of predestination fuels evangelism. It does not dampen it. And at this point, Paul anticipates three questions, which I'm assuming you have as well, and the rest of Romans 9 is a succession of answers to these three questions.

The first is, if many Jews did not love Jesus, did God's Word fail? If Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the patriarchs who led to the coming of Jesus and the Nation of Israel, and they had Moses, and they had King David, and they have the Old Testament Scriptures, and they have the temple and the sacrificial system, and the interceding priesthood, and it was all to prepare them for the coming of Jesus, and Jesus showed up, and some people loved him, but some of the Jews rejected him, the question is, "Well, then, did God's Word fail?"

Here's his answer, beginning in verse 6, "But it is not as though the Word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel. And not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring. But, through Isaac shall your offspring be named. This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring, for this is what the promise said, 'About this time next year,' quotes the Old Testament, 'I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.'

“And not only so, but also Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather, Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God’s purpose of election” – there’s our word – “might continue. Not because of works” – that sounds very one-handed to me – “but because of his call, she was told the older will serve the younger, as it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I’” – what’s the word? – “hated.”

The question is, if Israel brought Jesus, and some of Israel rejected Jesus, was that a failure? Paul says, “No.” He says, let’s go back to Genesis. Abraham had a son named Isaac. Isaac had two sons, named Jacob and Esau. They were twins in the womb of their mother. They wrestled in the womb. They wrestled out of the womb. Their descendants wrestled. Herod was a descendent of Esau. Jesus was a descendant of Jacob. Herod tried to kill him. This is a family feud that has gone on for a long time.

And what he says is, when they were in the womb, before they did anything good or bad, God predetermined, predestined, chose that the younger, Jacob, would rule over the older, Esau. That is an inversion of the prototypical birth order. So Esau was born first. He had red hair, was very furry. My kids say he probably looked like Elmo. I don’t know.

(Laughter)

Jacob was then born, and in accordance with God’s providential decree, Jacob was the one through whom Jesus came. He was the patriarch next in line, though Esau was physically firstborn. Now, the truth is, neither of these boys were chosen because they were good boys. Esau was a man’s man, loved to hunt, but he was kind of a knucklehead. Actually sold his birthright for a meal.

And Jacob was a mama’s boy, and a trickster, and a con man. It’s not like God chose the good guy, not the bad guy. They’re both bad guys, as all of us are bad guys. And what he says is this, “God did not fail. That through these boys came two nations, Israel, through Jacob, and Edom through Esau.” And then he moves forward to quote Malachi 1:2, 3, “Jacob I loved, Esau I hated.”

Now, on that verse, there is great debate. And there are three primary interpretive or exegetical options. The first is, that before the boys were born, God said, “I’m gonna love Jacob, and I’m gonna hate Esau. I’m gonna bless Jacob, and I’m gonna crush Esau.” Some would say that sounds very capricious and mean.

Some would say it is not that God actively hated Esau, but that he chose to work through Jacob and bless him and save him, and he chose to let Esau go his own way and sin and get what he deserved. So Esau got what he deserved, and Jacob got grace.

Others would say, “No, it is speaking about the two nations which proceeded from these boys, Israel and Edom, respectively, and that Malachi 1 is speaking about the nation of Edom declaring war on the Nation of Israel, and God rightly hates the Edomites, because they’re sinning, trying to destroy his people, the Israelites.

All right, we could debate this forever. The bottom line is, whether it’s individuals or nations, God has the absolute right to chose whom he will save and whom he will use. Right? Esau has no right to tell God that he deserves to be saved. Edom has no right to tell God that they have a right to be used. That would be presuming on God’s grace.

Likewise, Jacob and Israel, individually and collectively, have no right to demand that God bless or save them in any way. But God chooses, in his divine sovereignty to love and bless individuals and nations, and to let others simply go the course of their own decision and get what they deserve.

And in this, he’s saying that not all Israel is Israel. Not everyone who physically descends from Abraham is also spiritually descended from Abraham. Just because they were born of Abraham doesn’t mean they are born again of Abraham’s God, the Lord Jesus Christ. That within the Nation of Israel, there was remnant of elect people whom God predestined to save.

Now, that being said, Paul anticipates another question. That is, is God unjust to choose some people for salvation and not others? He answers this question in verse 14, “What shall we say, then. Is there injustice on God’s part?” Some of you have that question. His answer is, “By no means, for he says to Moses” – he goes back to the book of Exodus – “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

So, then, it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. That is very one-handed. “For Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose, I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth,’ so then, he” – meaning God – “has mercy on whomever he wills, and he” – what’s the word? There’s the debated word – “he hardens whomever he wills.”

The question is, is God unjust to save some people and not all people? He says, “Well, then, let’s go back to the Old Testament.” We’ve moved from Genesis to Exodus. Let’s look at the story of the Pharaoh. Please think deeply with me on this. The Pharaoh was a man who ruled over a kingdom that was the most powerful and longest-reigning empire in the world to that day.

He ruled, literally, as a god, and was worshiped as god. He ruled over a few million Israelites, and he was a cruel, mean, unjust oppressor. And so God finally could no longer stomach his evil and tyranny. And so God raised up a man named Moses.

And God told Moses, go to the Pharaoh, and declare to him, “You are not God, and the real God commands you to repent. You need to stop mistreating his people, and you need to free them from slavery and bondage, which they have endured for more than 400 years. And God declares that his desire is that they would be free to worship him.”

And so Moses comes to the Pharaoh, and says, “The real God commands you to repent. And to trust him. And to obey him. And to love him. And to follow him. And to honor him. And to glorify him. And if you do not, he will bring judgment. There will be a succession of plagues for every time that you reject the offer of repentance from God.”

Now, at this point, Pharaoh's heart becomes the centerpiece of theological debate. I found some 19 times in Exodus where it speaks of Pharaoh's heart. Sometimes it sounds very Arminian. It says, “And Pharaoh hardened his heart against God.” Other times, it sounds like a Calvinist wrote the book, and it says, that “God hardened Pharaoh's heart.”

And these two teams conveniently read half the verses. Or they read their verses first, and then read the rest really fast, hoping you don't notice. And the question is, what does it mean? Some would say – I call them cruel Calvinists. We're not cruel Calvinists, we're kind Calvinists. Cruel Calvinists have this impression that in Pharaoh is a switch, like a light switch, that says, hard heart or soft heart. And it is as if God went to Pharaoh and flipped the switch to hard heart, and then said, “You have a hard heart, I'm gonna punch you in the mouth for having a hard heart.”

And on that point, God would be unjust. That would be akin to a cruel father over the course of a dinner becoming enraged, taking his son and throwing him across the dinner table violently, and then spanking the boy because he spilled his milk. And at that point, some will quote Chapter 9, verse 20, and say, “Shut up. You're not God.” Which is true, but that still doesn't make God look like a decent, just, loving, merciful, gracious, compassionate God. It makes him look like a capricious Greek god, or a violently abusive Father, which he's not.

Here's my question, did God harden Pharaoh's heart? Yes or no? No certainty in this room at all.

(Laughter)

Yes. God most assuredly hardened Pharaoh's heart. The question is, how did he do that? And the answer is, with love, grace, mercy, kindness, patience, compassion. God could have just crushed Pharaoh. You know what he did? He kept sending Moses, “Here's another opportunity to repent. Here's another opportunity. Do you see the plagues? They're getting worse every time.

“Do you see that sin really does lead to death? Do you see that God really is God? That you really are not God? Do you see that people are suffering because of your sin? Do you see that people are hurting because of your sin? And ultimately, a number of firstborn sons are going to die because of your sin, including your own?”

Friends, God is a wonderful God. And he repeatedly gives to the Pharaoh a sincere opportunity to repent. And every single time, the Pharaoh's heart becomes increasingly hard. Why? Because God made him hard? No, because like Jesus says, he is heaping burning coals on the head of his enemy.

How many of you have had someone who hates you so much that if you're nice to them, they hate you more? If you tell them, “Look, I know you're mad at me, but I really love you,” they get furious. “Okay, well, I'm gonna be praying for you. Is there anything I could do to help you? Is there any way we could work this out? I'd love to try and see if we can come together and have a friendship.”

And every time you do, they get more and more angry. God did harden his heart, but he hardened his heart by being unlike Pharaoh – loving, merciful, gracious, kind, compassionate, and patient. Moses repeatedly went to the Pharaoh and repeatedly asked him to repent. And every single time, the Pharaoh declared, “He is not God. I am God. I will not obey. I will rule. I don't care the cost. I am king of my own existence.”

And the key is this, apart from God changing our heart, you and I are all just like the Pharaoh. God comes to us through conscience, through the Holy Spirit, through Scripture. He convicts us of sin. He calls us to repentance. And apart from a new heart, our old heart just becomes increasingly more hardened, more stubborn, more religious, more self-righteous.

The Puritans used to rightly say that the same sun that melts the ice hardens the clay. That the love of God, the mercy of God, the light of God, the grace of God shines down. And if you do not have a renewed heart as a gift from God, then your old hardened heart just bakes like clay in the sun, and you become increasingly hardened to God. Not that he is evil, but that he is good, and his goodness exposes the depth of your evil.

And if God in Christ should give you the miraculous gift of a new heart, then you melt. And as Romans – I believe it is 2:5 – says, “The kindness of God leads you to repentance.”

In Exodus 34, God declares himself to be a certain kind of God. It is the most quoted verse of any verse in the Bible. It's the same book – actually, just a little bit after he says, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and compassion on whom I will have compassion.”

I'll read it to you. This is who God declares himself to be to Moses, “The Lord passed before him and proclaimed this, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger’ – our God has a long wick – “and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.” Does that sound like a good God? Unbelievably good. “Yet,” we are told, “will by no means clear the guilty.”

God hardened Pharaoh's heart by being wonderful. And it exposed how awful the heart of Pharaoh is. If you are here today and you are not a Christian, I want you to know this, your heart is hard. You think you are God. You reject God's invitation of salvation because you want to be your own little God, and your kingdom may not be as big as Pharaoh's, but you want to rule over it nonetheless. And judgment most assuredly awaits you, as it did him.

That leads to the third and final question. Is God unfair? Is God unfair to save some people and not others? Paul answers that question in verse 19. We

will read this at length, and I will summarize it for purposes of brevity.

“You will say to me: ‘Then why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will? If God didn’t choose us to be saved, then how can he judge us for sinning and rejecting him?’” Verse 20 was the subject which this question was based upon, “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use, and another for dishonorable use?”

“What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power has endured with much patience vessels of wrath – prepared for destruction” – and then, friends, there I believe to hell – “in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared before him for glory?” Those would be elect Christians.

“Even us, whom he has called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles.” God is a multiethnic, multinational, multicultural, multiracial God. “As indeed he says in Hosea:” – he quotes Hosea 2:3 – ““Those who were not my people, I will call my people; and her who was not beloved I will call beloved.””

He then quotes Hosea 1:10, “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called the sons of the living God.” He then quotes Isaiah 22:23, “And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: ‘Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sands of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved. For the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.’”

And as Isaiah predicted when he concludes with Isaiah 1:9, “If the Lord of hosts, the God over the angels had not left us offspring, had he not saved some of us, we would have been like Sodom and like Gomorrah. Every single one of us would have been destroyed in just judgment.”

This concept here of the clay, the pots and the potter is what I intend to focus on. And he is using an analogy in the Old Testament that the distance between us and God is akin to the distance between a clay that is used for the making of various vessels and the potter who makes them.

And some would say, “Well, here he’s not talking about individual salvation. He’s talking about the choosing of nations for use of his purposes.” The truth is that this metaphor appears three times in the Old Testament – Isaiah 29, Isaiah 45, and Jeremiah 18. Sometimes it refers to God making people for salvation or damnation. Sometimes it refers to God choosing nations for blessing and service, while not choosing others for blessing and service.

And there’s a big debate as to whether or not it’s individual or corporate/national, and much like Jacob and Esau, and Edom and Israel, I would say here that’s really not the big idea. The big idea is, God is God, and we are not. And we have no right to tell God that he’s not doing a good job at being God.

We have no right to be like Pharaoh and to say, “Well, that’s his opinion. He didn’t consult me. I think I could do better, given the opportunity. He should inquire of me, seek my wisdom, heed my counsel. He has some errors. He has some folly. He has some mistakes. I disagree with him. I judge him. I denounce him. And I demand of him to give an answer to me.”

What Paul is arguing for is humility. He says, “Who are you to think that you would be a better God than God?” Ambrosiaster, an early Church father, says it this way, “It is a great indignity and presumption for a man to answer back to God, the unjust to the just, the evil to the good, the imperfect to the perfect, the weak to the strong, the corruptible to the incorrupt, the mortal to the immortal, the servant to the Lord, the creature to the Creator.”

Friends, here’s the bottom line. There are only three options. Number one, Satan chooses who has sin forgiven and eternal life granted. That means that no one receives grace. Number two, sinners choose who is to be saved. The result is that we all have already chosen. We have chosen sin. We have chosen Satan. We have chosen rebellion. We have chosen death. We have chosen rejection of God. We have chosen to be objects of wrath. We have chosen hell.

Every single human being has chosen. By virtue of sinning, you have chosen. You have chosen Satan. You have chosen death. You have chosen wrath. You have chosen hell. And the third option is that God, too, would choose. And that God would choose to save some. That God would choose in undeserving, ill-deserving mercy and grace to save some.

Not only that, he would come into human history as Jesus Christ. He would live on this earth in humility, to be tempted as we are, yet without sin. That he would go to the cross, and he would substitute himself in our place, for our sins, and that our God would die and would, himself, endure the penalty and punishment for sin.

And that he would rise, and he would give salvation as a gift, not dependent upon pursuing him, desiring him, choosing him, or yearning for him. Though he invites us, none of us take him up on that offer. And so he pursues us vigilantly, mercifully, compassionately, lovingly, and continually.

And some of you will say, “This doesn’t sound like God is loving.” Yet Ephesians 1 says, “In love he predestined us.” The predestination is the love of God in action. And I’ll close with this, the story from my own life, and it just absolutely in many ways articulates how I see this. I was listening to the radio sometime back, and a well-known Bible teacher said that the doctrine of predestination, quote “presents God as a rapist and not a lover” end quote.

He went on to say that when God in the predestinating sense imposes his will on us, that cannot be true because God is not a rapist. Let me submit to you that God does occasionally for some, in mercy, impose his will. But it is not as a rapist on a victim, but a Father on a child who is going to otherwise die.

[Applause]

I'll give you this illustration. My wife Grace and I, we had our first child, Ashley. We lived right on Montlake Boulevard, right next to Husky Stadium, four lanes of traffic to the university and the games flying by our house all the time. People driving 40 plus miles an hour. And there was an occasion where we were getting in the car, and I was loading something in. I went to grab my daughter, she was 2 or 3 at the time, and she turned and ran from me right toward the street.

And I chased her, and she thought it was a game. She didn't fully understand. Because I was chasing her, she thought it was fun. I caught her before she got too far, and immediately I sat her down. I said, "Sweetheart, you can't run from daddy. There's cars. They'll hit you. You'll die. It's dangerous. Don't ever do that again." We told her this all the time, "Be careful. Don't go near the street. Don't run out in the street."

There was one day we were loading up the car, and I went to get her and put her in the car, and she looked at me, and she turned and she ran as fast as she could right to the street. And the problem was, there was a car parked right in front of our house. So, she was going to run as fast as she could right in front of the car, right into four lanes of traffic going 40 plus miles an hour.

That means that any oncoming cars would be unable to see her until she was in their lane. Now, my daughter turned and ran. And I preached repentance to her. I cried out, "Ashley, stop! Ashley, stop! Ashley, stop!" It was a sincere invitation.

(Laughter)

It was a heartfelt proclamation. It was the plea to repent, which is, "Return to your father." And I know my daughter, and I could tell by the look in her eyes that she was not going to repent. She was not going to exercise her will toward obedience of her father. And I looked up, and I saw coming down the street an enormous truck, going perhaps 40 miles an hour, and I saw my little girl with her ponytail bouncing, running right into the lane of traffic that that truck was coming into.

I ran as fast as I could, preaching repentance all the way. And I chased my daughter. And she stepped in front of the car, right into the lane of oncoming traffic of an enormous truck. I reached out and grabbed her by the neck of her coat. And I yanked her right out of the way of the truck. Literally, my daughter was inches from death. She was literally flying through the air as the truck passed by. I barely got her around the mirror.

That is predestination. That is the goodness of our God, who is a Father. Who has chosen in eternity past to allow some of us by grace through mercy to be his children. And he invites us to repent. And he proclaims to us repentance. And he wants us to turn. And we don't. And we're foolish. And we're obstinate. And we're disobedient. And we're hell bent toward death and destruction.

And in love, he comes into human history, and he extends his hands to us in the person and the work of Jesus. And for any who are Christian, here is the Good News, and why you should love and praise that God. He has not allowed you to receive what your sins deserve. He has instead chosen to give you the love of a father. He has chosen to not allow your will to choose death. His will has chosen for you life.

And he has grabbed you and taken you unto himself, and that is election. That is predestination. That is the loving sovereign Father God.

[Applause]

Now, if you are not a Christian, you are like Pharaoh. You are stubborn, hardhearted, self-righteous. And you will face nothing but judgment and hell and death and wrath. If you are a Christian, we would call you to respond to Jesus with gratitude and worship. And if you are a non-Christian, like Pharaoh, we would call you to repent of sin and receive Jesus, and thank him that you will receive what your sins do not deserve – love, grace, mercy, kindness, compassion, forgiveness, salvation. I'll pray.

Father God, we do thank you that you are our great God. That you desire people to be saved. That you invite people to be saved. That you provide salvation through your Son, Jesus Christ. And God, we confess that we are foolish children who have run from our Father. That we have disobeyed, rejected, resisted. Father, we deserve to die and go to hell.

But God, we are exceedingly glad that you're a good Father. That before time began, you chose to love some, to save some, to pursue some. To give ill-deserving sinners not what they have chosen, but what you have chosen.

And for the rest, Lord God, we know that what they receive is justice. And so, Lord God, it is my prayer that you would give new hearts to those who would hear this Word, that they might join the rest of us who know you and receive grace and love and mercy through the person and the work of Jesus Christ, your hand, reaching out to us, in whose name we say thank you, amen.