

In His Mercy, God Chose You

DARRELL DELANEY

I have often heard the argument of predestination versus free will. One party says God has sovereign choice over whom he chooses. The other party says if God makes us choose him, where is our free will? This debate has been going on for thousands of years. As believers, can we find comfort knowing that God has chosen us? In this episode of *Groundwork*, we will look at these passages in Romans 9 through 11, and allow God to use the Apostle Paul to bring us to the grace and truth found in the Word. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we are in part four of our six-part series in the book of Romans. In the first part, we talked about how sin is actually part of our lives, and God's wrath has been revealed; but also, the doctrine of justification came out, where we realized that we receive salvation by faith, and by faith alone.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; three sections, we have been saying in most every episode in this series. The first part is our sin and misery; the second part of Romans, which we are in now, is deliverance or salvation; still to come will be the service and gratitude part of Romans; but we are right in the middle now. We started with Romans 8 in the previous program. Romans 8 is, as we said in that episode, Darrell, like one giant exclamation mark. It is just nothing but exuberance from Paul; exuberance that we are saved, that we live in Christ, that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ...nothing, nothing, nothing. We are more than conquerors in Christ. Nobody can say anything bad about us.

But, having now looked at that, Paul now, for these three chapters...it is sort of a very interesting and somewhat tortured part of this letter, where Paul begins to wrestle with something that really bothers him, and that is: What about the Jewish people who have rejected Jesus as Messiah? He himself is Jewish; Jesus was Jewish; the disciples were all Jewish. Many, many Jewish people came to believe: Yes, Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah...the Christ, but they didn't all; and there were still some who thought they were good with God, and yet, were rejecting Jesus, and it bothered Paul to no end to figure out: What about them? What about my sisters and brothers who are Jews who haven't gotten the message yet? This is kind of an agonizing question for Paul.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; Paul is in the middle of suffering. He is torn, like you said, because the Gentiles are receiving the message and they are coming in to become the family of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which is great, yes!

DARRELL DELANEY

That is good news; but the Jews are the ones who got the revelation of who God was first, but they are not receiving the good news from Jesus Christ; and Paul speaks about that, and he actually grieves to the point in

this chapter, where he says: If my name can be blotted out so that all other Israelites can be brought in, then let that happen. That is how much he loves his people; but he also talks more in depth about it, starting at verse 6.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Starting in Chapter 9 here: It is not as though God's Word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ⁸In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. ⁹For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son." ¹⁰Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. ¹¹Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹²not only works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³Just as it was written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." ¹⁴What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Paul is using these two examples to show that just because you are born genetically under Abraham and Isaac, and you follow the law of Moses, it does not make you automatically in the family of God. So, he says not all Israel is Israel, and that is his problem; but he also says that the ones who believe by faith are spiritual children of Abraham, just like that is how we got in...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Because we believe by faith just like Abraham did; and so, there is a new Israel being born out of the belief that comes in Jesus Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, it is not automatic that just because you were born into Israel and have the right family tree...that is just the physical side of things. The spiritual side is to accept what God reveals. Now, that included all kinds of stuff throughout the Old Testament and throughout the history of Israel; but now, the big thing that has to be accepted is that Jesus is the one...Jesus is the Messiah...he is the Christ; and if you don't believe that, then don't say that you are saved by your family tree. It is sort of like...it reminds me of John the Baptist, you know, when some of the Pharisees came out and said, you know, don't just say: Oh, we are Abraham's children, so we are fine. John said: God could raise Abraham's children up out of these rocks if he wanted to. You have to believe. You have to have a living faith, not just a family tree or a heritage. So, yes; that is what Paul is saying here, that although he wishes it were not true, because he is agonizing over his Jewish brothers and sisters, the truth is, you cannot just get saved by your family tree and who your mom and dad were and who your great, great, great grandpa was.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is one side of the equation, Scott, where you have to believe, you have to repent, you have to choose to receive Jesus; but before that is the whole conversation of God's sovereign choice...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

And he has predestined and he has called people, and that is how we got into this ancient argument over the years of predestination; and the essence of that argument comes from these chapters; and even in Chapter 8,

where we just talked about in the last episode, it says in verse 29:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

This is a quick definition of predestination. It means that God had a purpose and plan that he set in place, and he makes the sovereign choice; not based on what they are going to do; not based on who they are going to be; but because he chose. He chose because he chose.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; some people have found this predestination thing to be off-putting and scary. Ironically, in scripture it is meant to be comforting. God chose you. It wasn't up to you; thank goodness it wasn't up to you; because as we have seen elsewhere in Romans, particularly as the way Romans 7 ended, if it were up to Scott and Darrell, we would never do it; we would never choose right. So, God chose us. This is supposed to be comforting. Right; in Romans 3, which we looked at in the second episode, you know: No one is righteous; no, not one. The wrath of God has been revealed...we saw that in the first episode, too, from Romans 1. We saw in Romans 6: The wages of sin is death, right? So, that is where we all are. If God doesn't intervene...if God doesn't predestine...if God doesn't choose, then we are in a very, very bad place. Nobody was wrestling with that more in Paul's day than those who were trying to make sense of the fact that, well, you know, the Jews...Israel...they were the chosen people. This is where God chose, through Abraham and through Abraham's descendants, and then through Jacob and then the Israel nation that formed while in slavery in Egypt, right; these were the ones God chose. He did choose them. That is kind of predestination, too; but now it turns out, not everybody in Israel is Israel; not if they reject God's Christ.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that kind of brings us to, today too, some of us have had these questions, like: What about my uncle? He hasn't really received Jesus. What about my friend down the street? What about my neighbor? So, there are a lot of people who don't understand this teaching, and they think God is unfair; they think God is not being just, but as you mentioned when you alluded back to Romans 3, God is just because he is holy, and he doesn't have to save anyone, but out of his mercy, he chooses to save some; and that is a gift that we also can find comfort in if we are looking for God to make it clear who is called; and I pray that we would be able to share the good news so we wouldn't have to wonder.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Some people wonder if this is fair, you know. Boy, does this mean the game of life is fixed? It doesn't matter what we do or don't do. Well, you know, something we sometimes forget, Darrell, is that grace isn't fair.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean, we get what we don't deserve. So, it is really not a matter of fairness, it is a matter of justice; it is a matter of God's mercy and a matter of God's grace. But Paul is going to keep wrestling with all this in Chapter 10, so we are going to turn to that in just a moment. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and we are talking, Darrell, about predestination—God's sovereign choice. We were just in Romans Chapter 9, in this, the fourth program of a six-part series on Romans. We know that God chooses us, and his choice isn't based on future knowledge of what people do; it is just based on God's own

freedom to choose. We all were in the same soup, but God has chosen to pull some of us out of that soup, and we thank God for his mercy.

DARRELL DELANEY

Mercy is what we don't deserve, and mercy is a gift to us. He is good, and if he doesn't have sovereign choice, then he is not God; and that is what we find to be most important in that doctrine of predestination. Now, when we turn to Chapter 10, we want to talk about a famous set of verses. A lot of these are recurring in a lot of different places, but this set of verses that comes in Chapter 10:8-11, it says: But what does it say? "The Word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: ⁹If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. ¹¹As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame."

Now, these verses, Scott, you know have been very powerful all over the Church, all over the world; and a lot of them, they lead into a sinner's prayer, if you will, about this, where we believe with our heart and confess with our mouth. Many people have gotten saved during this verse, but I think it is important to look at the context in which Paul is saying it as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and you know, this leads me a little bit, too, Darrell, to think back to the book of Acts, because in the book of Acts, the apostles kept bumping into people who, by their theology, shouldn't be saved, right? They kept bumping into non-Jewish people, who hadn't been circumcised, hadn't followed the law, didn't keep kosher; and the Holy Spirit was in them; and you know, you think of that story from Acts 10, when Peter gets sent to this Italian Roman soldier centurion's house—Cornelius—and the Spirit falls on them, and Peter is going like: this cannot be true. They cannot have the Holy Spirit! But, they do have the Holy Spirit. Now what? Well, I guess we baptize them as quickly as possible.

Here, Paul is saying: Look, if somebody says Jesus is Lord; if they believe in their heart that he was raised from the dead, they are a Christian. They got the Spirit. They are a believer. They will never be put to shame. So, you know, you think that this person cannot be saved? If they say these things, by the power of the Holy Spirit in them, they are.

DARRELL DELANEY

I agree with what you are saying, but I wanted to zoom back because Paul...we talked about in the beginning of this episode...he is torn because there are Israelites...there are fellow Jews...that are not believing with their heart, they are not confessing with their mouth; and that is breaking Paul's heart. If only they would turn; if only they would hear this message; the messengers have been sent to them; the good news has come to them; but they have not been willing to hear it, and that is part of his pain.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so, this cuts both ways, right? You run into a Gentile, somebody who, meh, your theology up until now says: Well, that person cannot be saved; and then the Spirit falls on them and they... But it does go the other way. Here is somebody who is a Jew, who has done it right all along; has been part the chosen people of Israel, but they cannot say Jesus is Lord; they won't say Jesus is Lord; they won't acknowledge that God raised him from the dead; and then, that goes the other way; and so, you know, Paul goes on to say also, we just have to keep preaching, you know; let's not give up on anybody, whether they are Gentiles or our fellow Jews, they cannot believe if they don't hear, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, preach, preach, preach. This is the great preaching chapter here in Romans Chapter 10: How can they believe if they don't hear? Never say it is not worth preaching to this person. Never say, oh, she'll never believe; she is so worldly, and you know, she will never come to Jesus. Huh-uh, Paul says: For my fellow Jews especially, I gotta keep preaching; I gotta keep telling them about Jesus. They don't want to hear it; they don't like it. Some of them want to stone me for it; some of them do...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But preach.

DARRELL DELANEY

God is actually holding a window of time open for all those whom he has chosen to come in. Paul is reassured by this in this chapter. He talked about...and he alluded way back...to Elijah, and he said: All of them have went on to Baal. Remember when that great death threat was put on his life and he ran to the mountain? He says: I am the only one left! God says: No, no, no; I have seven thousand who have not kissed Baal; who have not bowed to him. And Paul is holding onto that promise; like, where are these remnants of people who need to come? And God is holding the window open so that all the people can come in and be the new Israel.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, that is a curious thing that Paul says here; and sometimes we don't pay a lot of attention to it. These chapters, 9 through 11, are the most complex parts of Romans, and I think even people who *love* Romans...and this comes right after that great Chapter 8...that people sometimes skip over this, because this is like, really complicated; this is like, really hard. So, let's just go to Romans 12, and keep going, right? But no; they cannot do that; and so, yes, there is that interesting idea that, well, maybe...God holding the window open...I like how you put that, Darrell...maybe one of the reasons Israel isn't...not all of Israel at least...is following Jesus is that that is giving the Gentiles a chance to come in...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And maybe when enough of them come in, then God will soften up the hearts of Israel, too. Maybe...maybe...Paul says at one point: Maybe all Israel will be saved someday. I cannot see it right now, right? They are rejecting Jesus right now; but Paul couldn't stop holding out the hope: Maybe? Maybe? Maybe they all could be saved. That is kind of how desperate he is. He is tortured here because he loves his people, and he wishes that what happened to him on the Damascus Road could happen to all of them. It hasn't yet, but he just cannot give up the hope that it might yet.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the hope that he holds out is the hope that we should hold out for those who we don't know, even friends, even enemies, that the gospel is life-changing and powerful. We need to pray that the gospel gets to everyone it needs to get to; that it goes out on all the world. We also need to pray that he gives us the strength to be able to share that with everyone we know.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are going to wrap up this episode in just a few minutes, moving on to Chapter 11...Romans Chapter 11...and see what Paul has to say there, as he brings this three-chapter-long argument, almost with himself, to a close; and then we will see what some take-aways of all this are. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and if you are catching us at this part of the episode, where we are about to wrap up, we have been talking about God's sovereign choice and predestination in Chapters 9 and 10; and we are getting ready to jump into Chapter 11.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Again, Paul here in this part of Romans is wrestling with something that nobody really saw coming, right? I think the assumption all along for Israel—for the Jews—was that when the Messiah comes, everybody is going to follow him; but it didn't turn out that way. Jesus came; he is the Messiah; and a lot of Israel said: No, he is not; no, he is not. Paul said no, he is not. In fact, Paul made it his mission in life, when he was still known as Saul of Tarsus, to wipe out the name of Jesus from the earth. So, he gets it; he understands; but he is wrestling with: Boy, we didn't think this was going to happen, and it did. So, at Romans 11, Paul asks: ¹Did God then reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendent of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ²God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: ³"Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me!" ⁴And what does God answer him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." ⁵So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. ⁶And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. ⁷What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened.

So again, wrestling with what to make of the fact that Israel...not all of it...accepts Jesus as the Messiah. Is it because of God's rejection? No; they rejected the Messiah. Why did they do that? Well, now here Paul says a hard thing, Darrell. Maybe God hardened their hearts, and that gives us even more mystery.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, the mystery is very true; and a lot of people kind of skip over these chapters because you cannot give a cute Sunday school answer, because we really don't understand what is happening in God's sovereign plan here; but if people are being hardened, like he did, for example, harden the heart of Pharaoh, it alludes to this in this chapter, where Pharaoh's heart was hardened so that God could display the wonders and deliver Israel. He was an instrument used at that time; and so, what does it mean that our hearts are hardened? I think part of the issue Romans 1 alludes to, is that God had revealed these qualities of who he is in creation, like Psalm 19 says, and in salvation the special revelation of Jesus Christ, and they have chosen to not believe in those messages; and that has given them over to these hard heart situations.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is interesting you refer to Pharaoh in the book of Exodus. My teacher, Neal Plantinga, pointed out one time that if you actually look at the Hebrew of Exodus, it keeps changing. Sometimes Pharaoh hardens Pharaoh's heart, sometimes God hardens Pharaoh's heart, and sometimes Pharaoh's heart just hardens itself! So, there is not a lot of precision there; but how that goes, the interaction between what God allows or what God causes, or whatever, it is an area of great mystery.

But what we do know, we can go back to Romans 1, in the first part of this series, Paul was referring to all humanity here, but we can refer this to the Jews: ²¹For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

They claimed to be wise, but they were fools; and then Romans 1:24: Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies... ²⁵They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator.

So, God gave them over. So, it is sort of like God didn't want people to leave him; God didn't want Adam and Eve to fall, but once they did, God let it be; then just let the consequences play out.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think the most difficult parts of the passage is that we know God to be all powerful; we know God to be able to divinely intervene and change things. He could do that, but he doesn't do that; and why is that? I think

one of the reasons why is because he doesn't want to override the will that he gave us. If he made us worship him, we would be robots. It wouldn't work. He wants us to choose him. He wants us to, of our own hearts, say we love him, we ask for forgiveness and repentance; and if he intervenes all the time and puts his hand on the scale, so to speak, then we won't get a choice.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, in good Reformed theology, because we are in a Reformed neck of the woods here, you know, we always say that it is God's choice that activates our choice. I mean, look to our own weak...we cannot even choose right, but God can activate our free will...his choice of us first; and you know, speaking of Reformed theology, there is the doctrine of election, which we have been talking about here, actually...predestination and reprobation; but in Reformed theology, we say that election and reprobation are not equally ultimate. That is the theological phrase. In other words, God actively chooses whom he saves, but he doesn't actively damn the others, he just lets them be...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right? So, it is like we are all falling over the waterfall of sin, and God regularly keeps plucking some of us out of the waterfall before we hit the rocks below. He doesn't pluck out everybody. Not because he put us over the waterfall, we put ourselves over the waterfall; but in his great mercy, he is plucking a few of us out, and the others he just lets be. Now, God being God, could he pluck out everybody?

DARRELL DELANEY

Sure.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; at the end of the day, some people say, it will turn out he did; but we don't know that for sure now. What we do know, is that if you are saved, it is because God plucked you out of that waterfall before you hit the rocks.

DARRELL DELANEY

And Paul wants God to pluck every Israelite out of the water right now, if you want to continue with that metaphor. So, there is a section in this chapter where he believes that all Israel will be saved; but we need to couch that definition of Israel in what he said earlier when he said: Not all Israel is Israel. He is incorporating the Gentiles, who are new Israel, when the ones who are believing that are Israelites by birth. So, when he says *all Israel will be saved*, he is talking about the *new* Israel, and that he picks up in verse 25, and he says: I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, ²⁶and in this way all Israel will be saved.

SCOTT HOEZEE

How do we make of all this? Well, you know, God is God, right? We are at his mercy, literally, but thank God he is full of mercy; and this is meant to comfort us. You know, Darrell, we have been saying that Chapters 9, 10, and 11 of Romans are sort of tortured, and Paul doesn't come to final answers on the questions. I like the preacher who I heard preaching on this one time. He said: You know, Paul gets to the point where he is almost out of words. He is like, I want all Israel to be saved; I don't know if we... I just...tsk...tsk...tsk...oh... And so, he concludes: ³³Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths are beyond tracing out! ³⁴Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? ³⁵Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them? ³⁶For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Paul ends with the doxology because you get to the end of your rope and that is all there is. All glory be to God; thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we continue our study with Romans Chapter 12.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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