

*Election*  
**Doctrine of Election**  
Romans 9:1-29  
Parker Evangelical Presbyterian Church  
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**Pray.** There is a great Scottish prayer that I love that begins like this, “As the rain hides the stars, as the autumn mists hides the hills, the happenings of my lot hide the shining of Thy face from me. Yet, if I may hold Thy hand in the darkness, it is enough; since I know that, though I may stumble in my going, Thou dost not fall.” Romans 9-11 is a reminder of the underlying truth of that prayer. That God is in charge of history. That history is really His Story and no others. As Christians we believe God stands at the beginning of history, initiating it and sovereignly directing it. In Jesus Christ, we see God standing at the center of history, giving it meaning and purpose. And we believe God stands at the end of history, bringing it to its final triumphant conclusion at the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of His Son. However, there are times in life when our faith fails us. When we look around at the world and we see the suffering, we see things we cannot understand, and our belief in the sovereign power of God falters. The happenings of our lot, the sin that so easily entangles, the suffering and pain of life hides the shining of God’s face from us and we feel like we are wandering in darkness. We wonder if God has failed. We wonder if God has abandoned us.

I remember sitting in the darkness late one night in a rundown apartment in Boulder. My roommates had gone to bed and I couldn’t sleep. It was the fall of 2003 before Kristi and I started dating. I had been a Christian for about six or seven months. But my life was a complete mess. The previous spring I had received a letter from CU expelling me because of my poor grades. Since I had been lying about the extent of my drinking to my parents, to my friends, to everyone I knew; I felt I couldn’t tell them the truth so I shouldered the burden alone,

pretending it had been my decision to lay out a year. I was working at Barnes and Noble around thirty to thirty-five hours a week. Couldn't afford a car so I walked to work every day. It was two miles there and two miles back. And yes, it sure felt like it was uphill both ways! Especially when it was snowing! I was struggling to make ends meet, falling further and further behind every month. While I was involved with a strong Christian fellowship, there was a limit to what I could do since I wasn't in school and the rest of my friends were. I felt disconnected and very alone. And I remember sitting on our couch night after night, crying out to God in the darkness. Struggling to find something, anything to hold onto for hope. I was crushed by the weight of my sin, by the poor choices I had made, and wondered where it was all going and how God could love someone like me. And then I stumbled onto these three chapters from Romans.

I share that with you because so often when we approach the doctrine of election – or as it is more commonly known, predestination – our minds immediately recoil. We don't like it. We resist it. It seems to be unjust. It seems to take away our freedom. It seems so arbitrary and capricious as if God were up in heaven playing a game of “duck, duck, goose” with our eternal destinies. But nothing could be farther from the truth. This doctrine is a gift, my friends. A gift from our Heavenly Father who wants us to know complete and total security in a very insecure world. It is a gift from our Father who wants us to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that this relationship we have with Him, doesn't depend on our faithfulness. Doesn't depend on the choices we make. Doesn't depend on us remaining pure and holy. It depends completely and utterly on God's decision to have mercy on us and to show us His love and grace. Too often we divorce predestination from the relationship it is intended to undergird. Turn with me to Exodus 20 for a minute. This is the famous Ten Commandments passage. What is the first commandment? Come on, you can answer, you don't have to raise your hand. Go ahead and

shout it out. That's right, you shall have no other gods before me. Very important command. However, that is NOT where the Ten Commandments begin. They actually begin one verse earlier where God says, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." Do you know why that's important? Because God always begins with the relationship. His commands, his eternal decrees, all of his expectations for our lives flow from his great love for his people. This is a critical point that is so often missed! If God began by just issuing commands then our faith would just be a list of do's and don'ts. It would be about rules and we would walk around always wondering if we had done enough, accomplished enough, said enough, prayed enough, read our Bibles enough, you name it to please him. To make God happy. To earn his love. But that's not the kind of God we serve, my friends. That is not the character of our heavenly Father. He love us and so his commands, his expectations, his words, are always, always, always couched first and foremost in a relationship. And the same is true when it comes to the doctrine of predestination.

I am going to probably commit heresy here when I say this but this is where John Calvin got it wrong, in my estimation. He divorced God's eternal decree from God's eternal love for his people. Calvin begins with predestination and makes God's choice to save some and not save others seem so arbitrary. And that's why we resist when someone starts talking about it. We think it messes with our freedom. We believe it makes a mockery of our choices. Because we do not trust that God's choices are grounded first in God's love. I think Karl Barth was much closer to the truth on this issue because he grounds the doctrine of election in the Elected One, Jesus Christ. He says that predestination has first to do with the Predestined One, Jesus Christ. And through our relationship with Him, we too are elected and predestined. Now I know some of you are wondering what the heck we're talking about. You came here this morning looking

for something, maybe you're not even sure what, and now you find yourself thrown into the deep end of the pool. You came here with a burden looking for hope, looking for answers, looking for something to relieve the burdens you carry in your life and now the preacher's up there using big five-dollar theological words that you've never heard before. And you're wondering how you can make a graceful exit without anyone noticing. It's okay. I promise if you'll open your heart to the Word of God this morning that by the end of this sermon, you'll walk out of here more free than you've ever been.

Turn to Romans 9:1-29. We'll take it slow. **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 could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.** Remember Paul has just gotten finished in chapter eight with this wonderful doxology about how nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. He is pumped. He is excited. And then he looks around at his countrymen. He looks around at his people, the Jewish people, and he sees that so many of them have not come to faith. Despite all the gifts they had been given – the adoption as God's chosen people, the covenants, the law, worship at the Temple, etc. – they have rejected their Messiah, Jesus Christ. And this begs a very scary question...has God failed? Ever felt that way? Like you had been abandoned by God? That no matter what you did and no matter how hard you tried, your life only seemed to get worse. Salvation always seemed to be beyond your grasp? That's how Paul felt. But then he goes on and he says...

**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 simply 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 I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” And not only so, but also when 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 might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”** Remember now, Paul is a Jew. Not only that, he is a former Pharisee. A Jew of Jews and what he is saying here is startling for someone of his background. What he is saying is that it is not their ethnicity that counts, it’s not their biological tie to Abraham that makes a person a child of God, it is God who gets to decide who is a part of His family. Esau was biologically related to Abraham. As much a child of Abraham as Jacob and yet he was rejected. And not rejected because of what he did. It wasn’t because Esau sinned some horrible sin that God simply couldn’t handle. It wasn’t because God looked into the future and saw the man Esau would become. No, the Bible says that before they were even born, before they had done anything good or bad, God chose to love Jacob and rejected Esau. I know what you are thinking. How could God do such a thing? That’s exactly what Paul was thinking as well.

**What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! For God says to Moses, “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. For the 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 has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.**

When I was growing up we had this phrase we would often say...let me see if I can remember it right here...I always said it when something happened that I didn't like...oh yeah, now I remember, “that's not fair!” O, you know that phrase? Do kids still talk like that? It never does go out of style, does it? And if we're honest, some of us had that phrase running through our minds as we listened to what was just read. But let's talk about fair for a minute, from God's perspective. Remember, everything in Scripture is grounded in this relationship God desires to have with us so put yourself in his position for a moment. You are in love with someone and you spend an incredible amount of time building a home for them. A home that is full of beautiful and precious things. It is really a paradise. And you invite that person into this home you have made and you lavish them with all kinds of blessings only to have them reject you and walk away. Is that fair? Let me give you another scenario. You have a loved one who is literally in slavery. They live in bondage under a cruel tyrant. This man is sadistic. He is merciless. He is heartless. And you go in and save them from this man. You literally set them free and you bring them to a place of safety and security only to have them reject you and grumble and complain about the blessings you've given them. Is that fair? Let me give you one more. Out of love for this person, you literally give your life for them. You literally sacrifice yourself for them by giving yourself up to torture and suffering and death in their place only to have them despise you and reject you. Is that fair? Do I need to keep going? By every measure of justice and standard of fairness you could possibly apply, we deserve death. We deserve hell. But God loves us and so he decides to show mercy on us and yes, he uses some, like Pharaoh as

his instruments and he hardens their hearts and we don't understand and we have questions. Again, so did Paul.

**You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” 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 honorable 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, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’ And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand 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, “If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.”** Is Paul copping out? Some of us probably think he did. But you can't deny the truth of his words. If God is God, he has every right to do what he chooses with his creation. If God is the potter, he has every right to mold the clay in whatever way he wants. Now this is where we really need that reminder about the relationship. Paul is not suggesting here that God is arbitrary. He is not suggesting here that God is capricious and just up there in heaven doing whatever he wants. God has a purpose and that purpose is to save. To deliver. To take a people who were originally “not

my people” and make them a part of his family. To take a people who were orphaned and alone and abandoned and lost and bring them and make them his sons and daughters. To take those who were not loved, who were not cared for, who were abused, and make them his beloved children. This is what God is up to. This is God’s plan. This is God’s purpose. And it includes not only Jews but Gentiles also. What is the main point of the book of Romans? Do you remember it from the first week or so of this study? What did Paul say in Romans 1:16? **For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.** This is what Paul is working out here for us, how this salvation comes about because that is God’s primary, overriding concern. That is what grounds this doctrine of predestination. God wants us to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that he loves us. He wants us to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we are his children. That our identity as God’s sons and daughters is not grounded ultimately in our choices – because our choices fail us, our decisions too often go wrong – but in His choice first to love and to show us mercy and grace.

Now we’re just dipping out toes into the water on this one and we’ll work it out over the next several weeks but let’s make sure we bring it home. Down to our level. I promised you that if you were open to it, this Word from the Lord would set you free in ways you never dreamed possible when you came in here this morning. So let’s get back to that frightened twenty year old young man sitting on his couch night after night not sleeping because of the stress he’s feeling and the fear that’s churning inside. Alone. Isolated. Picks up a Bible and reads Romans nine, particularly that last part where Paul’s quoting Hosea. **“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’”** And all of a sudden it dawned on me...I am a child of God. Not by right. Not by works. Not by choice. But simply

and solely because God has made a choice to love me as his own. Now all of a sudden, all the poor choices I made in my life don't take on quite so much significance. The burden and the weight of my sin doesn't seem quite so heavy. I don't feel quite so trapped by the decisions I've made. I am free. Do you see why predestination is so important? This isn't about God overriding our choices. It isn't about God violating our free will. In actuality, this decision by God to set his love on us makes us more free than we can ever imagine. It actually establishes our freedom! It grounds our freedom! In a world that is so full of uncertainty and the unknown, isn't that something to hold onto? Doesn't that give you a rock on which to lean? A freedom that can never be shaken because it is founded on God's choice and not our own? My friends, if the Son has set you free, you are free indeed! **Close in prayer for those who don't know this freedom.**