Chosen by God

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[0:00] Last verse, Paul tells us nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. And I've been telling you that that ending, that last verse raises a question for Paul's readers, which is, what about the Jews?

Most of the Jews have rejected Christ. I've been repeating that famous verse from the Gospel of John that we read at Christmas from John chapter 1. He came to his own and his own people did not receive him, which is a comment about the Jews.
Jesus came and many of them, most of them, rejected him. So if God's so reliable, if God keeps his promises, if nothing can separate us from the love of God, what about God's promise to Israel? Aren't the Jews separated from the love of God? So we have spent the last three weeks answering that question. Three weeks ago, we saw Paul's grief, his heartbreak, how devastated he was over the fact that the Jews rejected Christ.
Two weeks ago, Paul lists all the privileges the Jews experienced in the Old Testament. And then last week, we saw the difference between external religion and internal religion.
[1:09] That is, there is this big circle, ethnic Israel. And then within that, this little circle of spiritual Israel. Not everyone who's in ethnic Israel is in spiritual Israel.

And we talked about the fact that for us in 2026, what this means is that we can have a physical connection, an external relationship with the church, but not have a spiritual connection, not have an internal relationship with God.
It's possible to identify as a Christian and for it not to be a true heart reality. It's possible to know the words, but not the tune.
This week, we are now turning to the doctrine of election or predestination, which answers the question, what determines who ends up in spiritual Israel? Who's redeemed from sin?
Now, as I mentioned earlier this morning, Romans 9 is one of the most difficult, most argued over portions of Scripture. It's a type of battleground. And so I'm going to tell you what you're now sick of hearing me saying.
[2:11] I'm going to say something, not everything. I simply cannot answer every question or objection in one sermon that comes up from this doctrine.

So I'm going to try to get at what is in this particular passage. It might raise more questions for you than it actually answers. And so we can say it's the beginning of a conversation, not the end. Happy to talk more if you want. I'm going to read verses 6 through 13. But I want to remind you that last week we covered verses 6 and 7. So if you're thinking, why is he not talking about verses 6 and 7?
It's because I talked about it last week, but I have it here for context. And so with that, I invite you to turn with me to Romans 9, starting at verse 6, which you will find on page 7 of your worship guide. Remember that this is God's word, and Proverbs 30, verse 5 tells us, Every word of God proves true. He is a shield to those who take refuge in him.
[3:12] And so that's why we read now Romans 9, starting at 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 I will return, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only so, but also when Rebecca 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

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told, the older will serve the younger.
As it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we do again praise you and thank you for your word that you've given to instruct us and guide us.
And most of all, to show us Jesus. We ask that you would be at work now, that you would give us, even in this moment, a new hunger for your word, to understand it, to believe it, to follow it.
[4:48] That most of all, you would set Jesus before us, that we'd fix our eyes on him, that we would see his mercy and his grace and his love, that it would lead us to obedience and joy.

And we ask all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. As many of you, if you are like me, have been receiving an ungodly amount of texts the last month or so about the election and who you should vote for, and now it's coming up, so the election is Tuesday, the day after tomorrow.
Don't worry, I'm not going to talk about politics. But when you think about the word election, if I were to play a word association game with you, other words that might come to mind could be politicians or voting, because that's really, in our culture, the only time we talk about elections.
But election is actually a word that has a bigger meaning, which means to choose. So really, an election is when we choose our politicians. Now, this shows up in other words. You might hear someone say, oh, I'm having an elective surgery.
Well, that's a surgery they chose, as opposed to a surgery that had to happen because of an emergency. You might be wondering why I'm talking about choosing and elections, and it's because last week we established that there's this difference between ethnic Israel, all the Jews, and spiritual Israel, Israel that actually believes and follows God from the heart.
[6:15] That raises a question for us, which is who or what determines that inner circle? How does it end up that some are ethnic Israel but not spiritual Israel?

And we talked about the fact that this applies to the church. Not everyone who calls himself or herself a Christian has a real internal reality of faith characterized by repentance that's caused by the Holy Spirit at work in our lives.
And this passage teaches, quite simply, that it is God's choice. That's what verse 11 means when it talks about God's purpose of election.
And this is why we talk about the doctrine of election. It's the doctrine of God choosing. Ephesians chapter 1 also talks about this. There, Paul writes that God chose before the foundation of the world who would truly belong to him.
That's what Paul is getting at at the end of verse 7 when he says, Through Isaac shall your offspring be named. Isaac and Ishmael, both sons of Abraham, God chooses Isaac to be the son of promise.
[7:35] If you go back all the way to last summer, summer of 2025, when we were in the Abraham story, you may remember in Genesis chapter 17, God comes to Abraham to promise the birth of Isaac.

And Abraham says, yeah, but why don't you just use Ishmael? Because he loves Ishmael, as we find out later. Ishmael is already here. Why do we need to be worried about Isaac?
And God says, no. Promise is going to go through Isaac. So Isaac inherits God's promises from Abraham, not because of anything he did, but because God chose him.
God says this to Abraham before Isaac has even been conceived. Ishmael did not inherit God's promises because God did not choose him.
Simple as that. This is another way of saying salvation is 100% by grace.
[8:37] Now, a knowledgeable Jew who's hearing Paul say these things, who's reading this letter, would immediately think, okay, Paul, we know that. We know that God chose Isaac and not Ishmael.

But of course, of course he didn't choose Ishmael. He had the wrong mom. Ishmael, the son of Hagar, who was a servant, not the son of Sarah, who was a wife.
So in a certain sense, Ishmael is illegitimate. Your point doesn't stand. It wasn't because of God's choice. No, it's because of pedigree. The pedigree of being the son of the true wife, the son of Sarah.
Paul anticipates this objection, which is what he does throughout the entire book of Romans. And he's going to do this throughout chapter 9. Paul is always thinking of what counter-argument someone might have.

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He says, okay, you're going to object to Ishmael because Ishmael had the wrong mom. Well, I'm going to give you another example. Let's talk about Jacob and Esau.
[9:37] Jacob and Esau are a watertight case because they're twins. Why does it matter that they're twins? You may know that it is common for scientists to study identical twins, twins that have the same genetic material, to figure out is something nurture or nature.

If one twin gets a disease and the other twin doesn't, then we know that disease is not 100% genetic. It might have some genetic element to it, but there's also an environmental factor.
If it were 100% genetic, then both the twins would get the disease. Now, Jacob and Esau are not identical twins. They don't have the same genetic material.
We know that because we're told how different they look in appearance. We're not studying genetics. We're studying the nature of God's choice. So we don't need their genes to match.
We need their circumstances and their pedigree to match. We don't need their genes to match. We need their circumstances and their pedigree to match.
[10:47] And so that's why Paul writes in verse 10, And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac.

Paul's saying, look, there's nothing to differentiate them except God's choice. Nothing to differentiate them in pedigree, same mom, same dad.
Nothing to differentiate them in circumstance. They were conceived at the same time. You can't even talk about that there was different years where this happened. No, this is our test case. Like we study genes with identical twins.
We're going to study God's choice with twins. Next, Paul anticipates another objection. So we're just going through objection after objection. Okay, you might think, well, there's nothing in the circumstances of their birth to differentiate them.
But Paul, you're not off the hook. Because we know they lived very different lives. Jacob, faithful. Esau, unfaithful. Esau's clearly uninterested in the things of God.
[11:53] So isn't it, okay, they have the same pedigree and the same circumstances. But can't we say that some of it has to do with the fact that Jacob followed the ways of the Lord imperfectly and Esau did not.

So Paul comes back again. Verse 11. Though they were not yet born and had done nothing, either good or bad. It wasn't because of their behavior.
It wasn't because Esau was unfaithful. Jacob was faithful. The decision was made before they were born. They'd done nothing, either good or bad.
So it must not be that. It must be God's choice. Now you might come back with another objection and say, Okay, the decision was made before they did anything good or bad. But God knows everything.
So God knew before they were born what they would do. Didn't God make his choice based on that? So Paul clenches it.
[12:55] He leaves no room for negotiation. But in the second half of verse 11. In order that God's purpose of election might continue.

Not because of works. But because of him who calls. Promise was made before they did anything. The choice was made before they were out of the womb.
And the choice wasn't made on works, their behavior, foreseen or otherwise. It rests and only rests on him who calls.
God chose Isaac because God chose Isaac. God chose Jacob because God chose Jacob.
If you're a Christian, God chose you because God chose you. Didn't choose you because you were smart or beautiful or wiser than anyone else.
[14:02] Didn't choose you because he saw you doing such great deed in the future and thought, I want that person on my team. No. Not because of works.

But because of him who calls. You believe in Jesus. And you follow Jesus. Because God chose you. Because God chose you to believe in Jesus and to follow Jesus.
Augustine, one of the great fathers of the early church, has this famous quote where he says, He chose us not because we believed, but that we might believe.
He chose us not because we believed, but that we might believe. Now I've been telling you, to the point you're probably sick of it at this point, Romans is the fifth gospel.

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What Paul teaches, Jesus taught first. And Jesus says this very explicitly in John chapter 15. You did not choose me, but I chose you.
[15:13] You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

Same thing Ephesians chapter 2 says. God chose you. He prepared good works for you in advance. He didn't see your good works in the future and then choose you. No, he chose you and then prepared the good works.
He chose us not because we believed, but so that we might believe. Now we have to tackle, very briefly, verse 13.
Verse 13 says, As it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. And Paul here is quoting an Old Testament passage. He's quoting Malachi chapter 1, verses 2 and 3.
And this is a verse that gets a lot of attention and some controversy and some angst because it is jarring to hear that God hates someone. And some people give a variety of explanations to try to work their way around it.
[16:25] Some people look at Luke chapter 14 where Jesus says, Hey, you can't follow me unless you hate your father and your mother. Jesus clearly doesn't think you should hate your parents.

That's a violation of the fifth commandment. So Jesus is really saying, You should prefer me. I should have priority over your parents. But I think that softens this a little bit too much.
Because the reality is, Esau really did reject God. We saw that this summer. Esau's interested in the things of the world.
He's not interested in the things of the Lord. And I would suggest that if we're upset with God's hatred, if we're offended by God's hatred, we have lost touch with how terrible sin is.
Esau rejected the creator of the universe. Esau was called to worship God, to love him, to serve him, obey him.
[17:28] And he did not. Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. And I don't think we've just lost touch with how terrible sin is.

I think we've also lost touch with how great and holy God is. God's allowed to hate sin. We don't have to explain it away. That's the black backdrop that allows the diamond of the gospel to sparkle.
What makes the difference between who is in ethnic Israel and spiritual Israel? What makes the difference between who has an external relationship with the church and an internal heart relationship with God?
God's choice. Only God's choice. Now, why is the doctrine of election good news?
Why are we going to talk about this when it's so controversial and people have written books and volumes about all of it, arguing with each other back and forth? Why don't we just skip it? Why don't we just skip chapter 9 through 11 of Romans and go to chapter 12?
[18:43] Why don't we just skip it? Make my life easier. Make our life less controversial. But this is God's word. And he's given it to us for a reason. And the reason is this. He's telling us our salvation rests on God's purpose and God's plan.

Our salvation does not rest on our skill or wisdom or our behavior. And that's great news for us because the foundation of our salvation determines the security of our salvation.
If we chose God, then our salvation depends on us and our reliability. If it is us holding on to God, we might lose our grip.
We could let go. That's a dangerous place to be. If God chose us, then our salvation depends on God and his reliability.
And God never loses his grip. God will not let go. Your salvation is not dependent on the strength of your hold on God.
[20:16] It is dependent the strength of God's hold on you. And what Paul teaches, Jesus taught first.

This is John chapter 6. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me.
That's what he doesn't say. He doesn't say, I'll lose nothing of all the people who were smart enough to choose me. No, I shall lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him

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should have eternal life.
And I will raise him up on the last day. Christian, your hope is that you will be raised up on the last day because of the strength and faithfulness of God.
Not because of your wisdom and perseverance. Jesus then says this in John chapter 10. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.
[21:35] I give them eternal life and they will never perish. And no one will snatch them out of my hand. Why is no one going to snatch them out of God's hand? Because it's God holding on to you, not you holding on to God.

It's God's choice, not your choice. You did not choose me, but I chose you. And then Jesus says this.
My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. And no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. You notice that?
First Jesus says, no one can snatch them out of my hand. And then he adds on to that. No one can snatch them out of the Father's hand. You belong to God because you belong to God.
The foundation of our salvation determines the security of our salvation. And there is nothing more secure than to be held in Jesus' hand and held in the hand of God the Father.
[22:50] That's why we sing. When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast. I'm in his hand. He's not in my hand.

I could never keep my hold. That's the truth. Through life's fearful path. For my love is often cold. He must hold me fast.
You did not choose me, but I chose you. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you and praise you that our salvation doesn't depend on us and how today is going.
But it depends on you, the one who is unshakable, who chose your people before the foundation of the world. We ask that you would remind us of that again and again, that it would give us great joy and confidence and boldness as we know.
That it's not us who hold you, but you who hold us. And we ask all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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