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Sermon Notes

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## **The Justice, Mercy, and Freedom of God in Election**

### **Romans 9:14-16**

Introduction: “Is that a fact?”

Spurgeon illustration: You have heard the story of King Charles the Second and the philosophers — King Charles asked one of them, “What is the reason why, if you had a pail of water, and weighed it, and then put a fish into it, that the weight would be the same?” They gave a great many elaborate reasons for this. At last one of them said, “Is it the fact?” And then they found out that the water did weigh more, just as much more as the fish put into it. So all their learned arguments fell to the ground. So, when we are talking about election, the best thing is to say, “Put aside the doctrine for a moment, let us see what is the fact?”

Simple question: Is unconditional election a fact?

Secondly: Is God just in doing it?

Thirdly: How do I feel about it? Can I accept it?

Biblical evidence for election is overwhelming:

***Romans 9:10-13 Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. <sup>11</sup> Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-- in order that God's purpose in election might stand: <sup>12</sup> not by works but by him who calls-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger." <sup>13</sup> Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."***

***Romans 8:33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.***

***Romans 11:5 So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.***

***Romans 11:7 What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened***

***1 Thessalonians 1:4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,***

***2 Timothy 2:19 Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his,"***

***John 6:70 Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve?"***

***John 13:18 "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen.***

***John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-- fruit that will last.***

***John 15:19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.***

The Biblical evidence for election is overwhelming... God chooses His children, they are His elect, and He did this choosing before the foundation of the world

Spurgeon: What, then, is the use of our discussing any longer? We had better believe it, since it is an undeniable truth. You may alter an opinion, but you cannot alter a fact. You may change a mere doctrine, but you cannot possibly change a thing which actually exists. There it is — God does certainly deal with some men better than he does with others. I will not offer an apology for God; he can explain his own dealings; he needs no defense from me, ***"God is his own interpreter, And he will make it plain;"*** but there stands the fact. Before you begin to argue upon the doctrine, just recollect, that whatever you may think about it, you cannot alter it; and however much you may object to it, it is actually true that God did love Jacob, and did not love Esau.

Second question: Is God unjust in doing this? That is the very issue Paul takes up in this passage...

***Romans 9:14-18 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! <sup>15</sup> For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." <sup>16</sup> It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. <sup>17</sup> For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." <sup>18</sup> Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.***

Third question: How do I feel about it? Can I accept it?

Obviously it will not change a thing in the universe if you don't accept something that God did before the foundation of the world, and that God has told us about again and again in the Bible. You may say, "I can't believe in a God like this

Illus. Outbreak against Uzzah... man who was a deacon at the time gestured at the open Bible at the very place where it says God struck Uzzah dead for grabbing the Ark to steady it, "I can't believe in a God like that!"

That is terrifying!!! It is nothing less than rank unbelief and rebellion!!

However, God through the Apostle Paul puts forth an effort to explain His justice in unconditional election, and it is worth it for us to pursue here.

Issue of Justice in Predestination:

Frequently visceral reactions against predestination and election comes from the way some evil people have used this doctrine to justify their sins

They say that God predestined that they would do such and such, therefore it wasn't their fault

Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* told the tale of how the doctrine of predestination was misapplied to American slavery:

“In Wilkinson County, Mississippi, a slave gravedigger with a younger helper, asked a white stranger a question: ‘Massa, may I ask you something?’ ‘Ask what you please.’ ‘Can you ‘splain how it happened in the fust place, dat de white folks got the start o’ de black folks, so as to make dem slaves and do all de work?’

The younger helper, fearing the white man’s wrath, broke in: ‘Uncle Pete, it’s no use talking. Its fo’ordained. The Bible tells you that. The Lord fo’ordained the black man to work and the white man to boss.’

The first slave answered: ‘Dat’s so. Dat’s so. But if dat’s so, the God’s no fair man!’”

What this conversation applied to the earthly state of slavery, John Wesley took this issue of justice to the highest level... openly stating that unconditional election in the eternal matter of heaven and hell was the highest form of injustice in the universe:

John Wesley, Sermon on “Free Grace”, Bristol, 1740: “This is the blasphemy clearly contained in the horrible decree of predestination! And here I fix my foot. On this I join issue with every assertor of it. You represent God as worse than the devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust. But you say you will prove it by scripture. Hold! What will you prove by Scripture? That God is worse than the devil? It cannot be. Whatever that Scripture proves, it never proved this; whatever its true meaning be. This cannot be its true meaning. Do you ask, “What is its true meaning then?” If I say, “I know not,” you have gained nothing; for there are many scriptures the true sense whereof neither you nor I shall know till death is swallowed up in victory. **But this I know, better it were to say it had no sense, than to say it had such a sense as this.** It cannot mean, whatever it mean besides, that the God of truth is a liar. **Let it mean what it will, it cannot mean that the Judge of all the world is unjust.”**

There you see it... a man as intelligent and committed as John Wesley became emotional, almost irrational over this doctrine... and he claimed that it would be unjust of God to elect unconditionally!!

## I. Why the Question “Is God Unjust” Comes Here

### A. Review

1. The Problem Paul is addressing: Why so many Jews are rejecting the gospel
2. The seriousness of the problem: Jews are specially God’s people, with unique privileges in the world
3. If most of them are rejecting the gospel of salvation and are being lost, it might seem that God’s promises to them have failed
4. AND THAT IS A CRISIS!!! “Has God’s word to the Jews failed”
5. If God’s word to the Jews can fail, can it not also fail to anyone??
6. Paul’s answer is strong and mysterious:

***Romans 9:6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.***

7. God’s promises have not failed since God never promised that ALL the physical descendents of Israel are the true Israel, the true children of God
8. Case #1: Isaac and Ishmael
  - a. Both physically descended from Abraham
  - b. BUT only Isaac was a child of the promise... a picture of the child of God, specially created by the promise of God, children of God by His miracle-working power
  - c. Ishmael was the child of the flesh
9. Case #2: Jacob and Esau
  - a. Even better case study
  - b. Twins born of one father and one mother in one act of marital relations
  - c. Before they were born or had done anything good or bad, Rebekah was told “The older will serve the younger”
  - d. Full statement was potent:

***Romans 9:10-13 Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. <sup>11</sup> Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good***

***or bad-- in order that God's purpose in election might stand: <sup>12</sup> not by works but by him who calls-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger." <sup>13</sup> Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."***

- e. Lessons learned: God unconditionally chooses and loves one (Jacob) and unconditionally rejects or hates the other (Esau)
  - f. This was done without any reference whatsoever to anything in Jacob or Esau... not on the basis of foreseen works or foreseen faith or anything whatsoever... but in order that God's purpose in election might stand, not by works but by HIM who calls
10. This leads to strong sense of unfairness... but it is the only exegesis that does
  11. Any other exegesis that tries to maintain human autonomy will not raise this objection
  12. NOR the one that comes later:

***Romans 9:19 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"***

#### B. The Question Proves the Exegesis

1. Paul's usual pattern: asking hard questions of his doctrine
2. These questions almost certainly came up as he faced opposition in synagogue after synagogue
3. For example, earlier in Romans, when he had been explaining the doctrine of God's free and unconditional grace, he told us a magnificent thing:

***Romans 5:20 The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more***

Automatically, one will answer: "If that's the case, we can sin as much as we want and grace will cover everything, right?"

***Romans 6:1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? May it never be!***

The phrase "May it never be" implies that the question is abhorrent to right doctrine.

BUT the fact that he brought it up at all "What shall we say then" implies this is what someone who is opposing the doctrine might say against it

4. Same thing happens later in the treatment about the law
  - a. Paul says "We are no longer under law but under grace"

***Romans 6:14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.***

b. Then the accusing question comes

***Romans 6:15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?***

c. And Paul answers it the same way

***By no means!***

5. Ten times in Romans, Paul raises questions against his doctrines, then answers with the phrase “May it never be!”
6. Each of these questions becomes a kind of backward insight into the doctrine
7. Here Paul has been teaching God’s absolute sovereignty in electing Jacob and not Esau, totally on his own sovereign basis... not because of works or because of anything but because of God alone
8. The automatic answer is: THAT’S UNFAIR!! That’s unjust!! It’s not right for God to choose without any reference whatsoever to their deeds or their character or anything
9. NOW this very question proves the doctrine, although the question still needs to be answered
10. If Paul had been teaching election by foreseen works or even foreseen faith, this question would not have arisen... his doctrine would make perfect sense to us, and there would be no charge of unfairness at all

Martyn Lloyd-Jones: “Whatever it is the Apostle has been saying from verse 6 to verse 13 about God’s purpose and the way in which He carries it out, it must be something that, on the surface, at any rate, makes some people think that God has been unrighteous and that He is unfair.”

C. Why the Sense of Injustice?

1. God’s sovereign unconditional election is Paul’s answer to the problem of why so many Jews are rejecting the gospel
2. Paul says this election is unconditional, not based upon anything God sees in any sinner... not based on their deeds or their character... but because of God alone
3. We have a deep sense that this is unfair
4. The issue, we feel, should be left ultimately up to the individual

5. It is unfair if God chooses people unconditionally, without any reference to anything in them or in their lives... just because of His own purpose and plans

## II. Paul Reasserts the Doctrine... as an Answer?

### A. Deep Mystery: How Does This Answer The Question?

1. Seems simply to be restating the problem
2. Issue is clear: unconditional election to eternal life seems unjust
3. Paul seems to answer the question with the same question

***Romans 9:14-15 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! <sup>15</sup> For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."***

And he states it again, just as clearly:

***Romans 9:16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.***

Paul seems to be merely restating the problem, not answering it

But clearly Paul thought he was answering the objections!!

### B. John Piper's Year of Study

1. 1979: Took a year's sabbatical from teaching at Bethel Seminary, and went to Germany to answer one question
2. Focus of his entire study... one word in verse 15... "FOR"

***Romans 9:14-15 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! <sup>15</sup> FOR he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."***

3. The word "for" means that what follows answers the question of the injustice of God

### C. Paul is Making an Argument... Do We Follow?

### D. Six Reasons Paul Gives

Question: "IS GOD UNJUST (UNRIGHTEOUS) for unconditionally electing people to eternal life?"

Paul's unequivocal answer: MAY IT NEVER BE!!!

Six Reasons:

1. The Nature of God
2. The Nature of Justice
3. The Nature of Mercy
4. The Nature of Sovereignty
5. The Nature of Self-Revealed Glory
6. The Nature of Humanity

### III. The Six Reasons Quickly Explained

#### A. The Nature of God

***vs. 14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!***

***NASB: vs. 14 What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!***

God is not unjust in unconditional election simply because God can never be unjust in anything He does. God's passion for justice burns brighter than the sun, and He has proven it again and again in His statements, actions, reactions, and judgments. Above all this, God demonstrated His passionate commitment to justice in the sacrifice of His Son for the sake of displaying His justice. Forever God is free from the accusation of injustice.

1. It is impossible to imagine the God of the Bible acting unjustly
2. Therefore we should not imagine that unconditional election could be unjust
3. God's open display of justice in slaughtering His own Son so as to vindicate His Law and His justice in passing over sin is all the proof we need.

#### B. The Nature of Justice

***"Is God unjust?"***

God Himself is the ultimate standard of justice in the universe. Basically, if God does something, it is by definition just simply because He did it. God is not subject to some higher standard of justice, He IS the higher standard of justice. All words, deeds, intentions, plans, motives are brought against this one perfectly straight edge, the character of God Almighty. And righteousness consists in valuing properly what is most valuable... and God Himself, His own name, His own glory is the most valuable thing in the universe. Therefore, God is just or righteous in unconditional election because in so doing He is valuing His own glory and name above everything else in the universe.

John Piper: God's righteousness is essentially his unswerving allegiance to his own name and his own glory. God is righteous to the degree that he upholds and displays the honor of his name. He is righteous when he values most what is most valuable, and what is most valuable is his own glory. Therefore God's justice, his righteousness, consists most fundamentally in doing what is consistent with the esteem and demonstration of his name, his glory. God would be unrighteous if he did not uphold and display his glory as infinitely valuable.

Now the two keys are in place for understanding the argument of Romans 9:15. Paul is arguing that there is no unrighteousness with God when he elects unconditionally. Why? Using our two keys, the answer is: because God's name, the essence of his glory, consists in his absolute freedom to have mercy on whom he will have mercy. That is who he is. And his righteousness is his unswerving allegiance always to uphold and display this glory. Therefore, he must uphold and display his freedom, if he is to be righteous.

1. God Himself is the ultimate standard of justice
2. By definition anything God does is just!
3. There is no standard higher than God, and God never acts contrary to His own nature
4. At a deeper level, justice itself must be defined relative to God's own character and nature
5. Unconditional election is not unjust, because it perfectly reflects God's passion to uphold His name and His glory

#### C. The Nature of Mercy

***vs. 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."***

Unconditional election is not unjust because it is essentially an act of mercy and compassion, and mercy cannot be demanded, but only freely given.

1. Unconditional election is not unjust, because this real issue is not one of justice but one of mercy
2. All human beings are sinful rebels against the person and laws of God
3. Not one of us can demand anything from God

4. Furthermore, our sin had so corrupted our nature that we hated God, were opposed to His gospel, and had forfeited any claim on Him... not that any created being could ever have a claim on God that God should repay
5. Therefore, all we have left is to beg for mercy... and one can never DEMAND mercy
6. God would never be unjust if He didn't show mercy to a hate-filled rebel
7. It's not a matter of justice but of mercy, and God can give it to whomever He wills

#### D. The Nature of Sovereignty

**vs. 15, 18 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."... <sup>18</sup> Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.**

Unconditional election is not unjust because it best accords with God's proper position in the universe as Creator and Ruler over all He has made. By electing based on His own internal prerogatives, God is upholding His right to reign absolutely over all things.

1. God is a sovereign king who rules over the entire universe for one simple reason: He made it and can do anything He wants with what He's made
2. At the root of sovereignty is freedom... God is FREE toward His creatures... He owes them nothing, least of all an explanation
3. He does not consult with us as to what course of action is best
4. Sovereignty can be generous and gracious... or sovereignty can refuse to be generous and gracious
5. Unconditional election is not unjust because it upholds God's sovereign rights as Creator and King to do whatever He wants with His things
6. If God elected based on something He sees in man, or for any other compulsion outside of Himself, He would cease to be sovereign
7. God's reasons must be completely within Himself... for He is sovereign and not bound in any way
8. He is the "I AM", "I will be what I will be"; "I will do what I will do"; "I will choose whom I will choose"; "I will promise what I will promise"; "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" "I will harden whom I will harden"
9. No other being in the universe can make those kind of final pronouncements... it is God's prerogative alone since He alone created the universe

### E. The Nature of Self-Revealed Glory

***Exodus 33:18-19 Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." <sup>19</sup> And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.***

Unconditional election is not unjust because the elect are being chosen to see His personally revealed glory, and no one can demand that from any other person... it is freely given or it is not given at all.

1. Moses asked God for the greatest blessing a human being can ever experience: to see the glory of the Lord
2. God granted this request to Moses alone among those of his generation... but not fully
3. With the granting of this request, the Lord told Moses the basic principle on which He grants this highest blessing:
4. This is totally relevant to Romans 9, as we will discuss more fully next week
5. Especially so because this is the precise thing to which the elect are chosen... to see the face of the Holy One and live in His presence eternally
6. Unconditional election for this is not unjust because a person gives this kind of intimate self-knowledge and revelation only as he or she chooses... how much more does God Almighty give it only to the ones He chooses
7. A husband and wife agree to be totally open and unashamed with each other... to reveal themselves fully to each other
8. This gift they give to each other freely of their own choice... the suitor cannot demand this of the woman he wants to be his wife... she must give it freely or he will not have it
9. Neither can a woman demand this of a man, but he must give it freely or it is not to be given
10. God's glory is His own to reveal, and He is free to reveal it to whomever He chooses... without anyone charging Him of injustice

### F. The Nature of Humanity

***vs. 20 But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"***

Unconditional election is not unjust because the very human beings who might bring such an accusation are disqualified from judging God's justice in that 1) they are created by Him; 2) they are corrupted by sin and incapable of rendering accurate judgment in the case.

1. Two important aspects of humanity
  - a. First, we are created beings... shaped and formed by the Creator like a potter shapes the clay
  - b. Second, we are sinful and corrupt, with minds polluted by sin
2. Therefore, we are in NO POSITION WHATSOEVER to bring a charge of injustice against God
3. Even if we were sinless and pure, we would have NO RIGHT WHATSOEVER to impugn God's justice, for His ways are so much higher than our ways and His thoughts so much higher than our thoughts
4. However, we are corrupt and sinful... whatever vestige of the original image of God is left in us is perverted and twisted and corrupted by sin... therefore, we are like drunk people trying to judge the straightness of a line
5. We are like blind people judging the beauty of a painting
6. We are radically impaired in our judgment, and God is flawless and righteous in everything He does
7. Thus we are in no position to bring any charge against God's justice
8. Case is thrown out of court!!

#### IV. Application

##### A. Worship God for His Goodness in Unconditional Election

1. All things are done for the praise of His glorious grace
2. Unconditional election puts God where He truly belongs... at the center of our wonder and praise
3. Stand in awe of this perfectly just, perfectly good, perfectly sovereign God!!
4. WORSHIP HIM!!!

##### B. Resist All Temptations of the Devil to Feel God is Unjust

1. God is NEVER unjust

2. He will not be unjust on judgment day
3. Neither will He be unjust in anything He does in your life
4. Even if He should take something or someone precious from you, He is not unjust

#### C. Evangelize Boldly

1. No sinner has ever been disqualified from salvation because of the magnitude of their sin!!
2. Repentant drug addicts and alcoholics and sex offenders and murderers have all found forgiveness at the Cross of Jesus Christ
3. So also have repentant Pharisees like Saul of Tarsus who pursued his own version of righteousness until Christ met him on the Damascus Road
4. NO ONE IS DISQUALIFIED because of sin
5. ALSO defend these doctrines against the false attacks of people who have not fully understood them!! Let God be God!!

#### D. Rest Securely in God's Sovereign Choice

1. God means for you to have security in these doctrines
2. God is greatly glorified by loving and saving wretched sinners like us

#### E. Let Your Pride be Crushed Forever!!