



Pastor Kyle Mercer
Why Doesn't God Save Everyone?

August 16, 2026
Series: Sovereign
Romans 9:14-24

**BIG IDEA - IF GOD IS SOVEREIGN OVER SALVATION, ARE PEOPLE
STILL RESPONSIBLE FOR HOW THEY RESPOND TO HIM?**

Good morning, Two Cities Church, across all of our campuses. I want you guys to know that we worship and serve a sending God. The first missionary in the Bible is God, and part of the way you can even understand the Bible itself is it's the written-down record of the mission of God.

So, we are serious about sending. That's why we're calling August *Multiply Month*. That's why last week I introduced you to Spencer and The Oaks Church and this week to Preston Gammons and Ten10 Church in Greenville, North Carolina. Now, why Greenville, North Carolina? Well, really, at the end of the day, we let the planter pick, but as he did his research, he was looking around, and it looks like, as I've been talking to Preston, that Greenville, North Carolina...

Yes, there's a medical community there. Yes, there's, of course, ECU. You're not too far from the beach. What he said as we began to talk was "It feels a lot like Winston-Salem 10 years ago when we moved here. It's a growing area, and there's opportunity to come alongside a lot of great churches there and to plant a gospel-centered church."

Here's what's interesting about Preston, and same with Spencer, and same with the guy we'll meet next week. He was, like all of you are, in the marketplace and then, about a year ago, made a transition (imagine this; he has three kids) to leave the marketplace, to leave a career and a job he loved, and to come on staff and go into full-time ministry, which, by the way, I think is one of the healthy signs of a church.

In an unhealthy church, what happens? All of the staff leave the staff to go sell life insurance and do real estate. True? In a healthy church, people like *you* and *you*... You're sitting there, going, "You know what? Is there a better way...? Let me pray about it. Is there a better way for me to leverage my life for the Great Commission?"

So, here's what we're doing. I'm going to do it this week and then... Get ready. I'm going to try to say it differently, but we're basically doing the same thing next week. We are inviting you... We're kind of a crazy church. We're asking you to leave our church, please, and to go with Ten10 Church to Greenville, North Carolina.

Here's what we need to do. We need to build a launch team. Why do we call it a *launch team*? Because the hardest part of anything is launching it. I don't know anything about this, but they say when you put a rocket into space, to get it into space you use about a swimming pool of gasoline or fuel every few minutes. Once it's in space, it can go on the same thing your Ford Expedition can go on. So, the hardest thing is getting the church plant into orbit.

If you're interested or you know somebody in Greenville, North Carolina, or you've always thought about going back or you could get your master's degree and you could do it at ECU, text the word *TEN* to 39808, and Preston will follow up with you and get you all the information you need. Also, again, a reminder. We're going to be having interest meetings on September 20 for all three of our church plants after the 11:00 service.

With that said, I would be remiss not to mention this before we start. We have some new guests with us today. Don't worry; I'm not going to make anyone stand. We're not going to have you shake everyone's hand around here and tell us if you're new. But this is Promotion Sunday, which means across all of our campuses, all of our sixth graders are in here for the first time.

Can we welcome them? There we go. I see some proud parents and grandparents. They could not have come on a better Sunday than *this* one as we dive into literally the deepest passage in the entire New Testament. So, let's pray for them. Let's pray for me. Let's pray for Preston.

Lord, it's a joy to send. The apostle Paul, when talking about sending, said it was necessary to send Epaphroditus, but then he also said, "I want to joyfully send Epaphroditus. I'm glad to do it." So, would you create a church in which it hurts to send but in which we are so grateful and glad to send people?

Lord, would you prepare our hearts, particularly the hearts of the new sixth graders in here, to receive your Word? Lord, would we have the posture of we are not so

much to study the Word as to be studied by it? Would you do that today? Would you give us eyes to see and hearts and ears to hear? In Jesus' name, amen.

If you're new, you can open up to Romans 9:14. If you're new, you'll always know what I'm preaching on next because it's just the next verse from the verse I just left off on. The reason that is... And this is important. We have a lot to talk about today. I only have 40 minutes left right now, but I'm going to try to do it.

We practice here something called *expositional preaching*. I know you're like, "That's a boring word," but it's Sunday, and we're going to learn some new words together. *Expository* or *expositional*... What's the root word? *Expose*. So, my job is just to expose what the Bible says.

Now, there are different ways to preach. Some people do topical preaching. I'm not making fun of that. Topical preaching is verse *with* verse. A lot of you grew up in or have been to topical-preaching churches. They're like, "We're doing a series on marriage," and then they go to six different passages that talk about marriage or parenting or finances or habits or whatever. Expositional preaching is not verse *with* verse; expositional preaching is verse *by* verse.

Here's a good way to think about expositional preaching. Get ready for this. It's the opposite of your algorithm. What is your algorithm? Don't act like you're not on social media. Your algorithm is designed for you to give you exactly what you're going to like. You know, you start watching certain reels or your spouse sends you certain reels, and you start seeing the same things. Right? During the political season, you see everybody you agree with and nobody you disagree with.

Here's why we practice expositional preaching. We think it is the healthiest diet for a church, because we cannot treat the Bible like a salad bar. I know how some of you are...extra croutons, extra ranch, no beets, no shredded carrots. We can't do that. We just have to say, "Whatever the Bible says, we're going to say it."

Look. For the younger people, my job is to be Ron Burgundy. Do you remember Ron Burgundy? Don't act like you haven't seen that movie either. They trick him because he just can't help himself. He reads everything that's on the teleprompter. That's me with the Bible. I just can't help myself.

Here's what's going to happen. When we talk about difficult topics, you're going to have two options. I'll just tell you what they are. You can decide what you're going to do. Whenever the Bible confronts you, you can either edit the Bible or change your mind and heart. That's it. Unfortunately (I won't call them out by name), there are denominations and networks and seminaries that have said, "It's too hard to change

my mind. It's just too hard to repent and change my heart, so instead, I'm going to change the Bible."

Today, I'm going to read us the deepest section of Scripture that exists, I think...in the New Testament, for sure. Just so you know, I waited 10 years to preach Romans. I've preached fully through, like, 27 books of the Bible and a lot of the New Testament. I don't mean this in a patronizing, demeaning way. I just knew the church was not going to be ready in the first few years. I was like, "We're not ready to study Romans because, basically, we're not ready for Romans 9."

So, today, I'm going to just read it to you, and then I'm going to expose what it says, and then we're going to call to respond to that. Okay? So, let's do this together. Romans 9:14-24. Some of you have never read this before, or you kind of read it over and went, "That was kind of strange," and just kept reading. Let me try to unpack this.

"What shall we say then?" What? In light of the doctrine of election, which I'll restate in a second. Basically, Paul is like, "What shall we say then in light of 'Jacob I loved and Esau I hated'?" ***"Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'"***

That should shock you. God decides who he'll be merciful to and who he'll have compassion on. But that's not even the most shocking part. ***"So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on..."*** Nope, it doesn't say on *you*. Nope, it doesn't say on *faith*. Nope, it doesn't say on *belief*.

"...but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh..." It's going to get more intense. ***"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."*** It gets *more* intense.

"You will say to me then, 'Why does he still find fault?'" In other words, "What are we supposed to do?" ***"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?"*** We still haven't gotten to the deepest part yet. Here it is.

"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?"

Paul is basically saying this. People love to judge God for judging people. Right? Don't we love to do that? The world loves to judge God for judging people. I'll show you this. Have you ever had anybody...? Maybe you've said this at times. It's okay. Here's a classic American kind of idea when they start to hear about the God of the Bible. They say something like, "I could never believe in a God that..." and then they fill in the blank.

"I could never believe in a God that allows suffering. I could never believe in a God that sends people to hell. I could never believe in a God that is sovereign with all of the horrible things that happen in the world." I've told you this before. They've psychologically proven this. People view God as a bigger, smarter version of themselves who basically agrees with them, and then the God of the Bible shows up, and it's like, "Whoa! He's bigger and better and more different than we could have imagined."

I'm going to try my best to take us somewhere today, but first I need to go back to verse 11. We read verses 14-24. Just go up to verse 11. It's important. You have to see this. This isn't Kyle's idea. Okay? Romans 9:11. This is what Paul is spending the rest of the chapter defending.

"...though they [Jacob and Esau] were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad..." So, not based on anything they did. ***"...in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works..."*** You might think it would say, "...but because of faith." Nope. ***"...not because of works but because of him who calls..."***

Okay. We're going to talk in depth today about the puzzles and problems of predestination, the enigma that is election. If you missed last week, let me sum it up. Let me say this. This is important to understand. The doctrine of election is something that theologians and church practitioners call an *open-handed issue*. There are open-handed issues, and there are closed-handed issues in Christianity.

Let's start with the closed-handed. A *closed-handed issue* is "If you don't believe this, you're not a believer." *The Bible is the Word of God. Jesus is the only way to salvation. We need to have conscious, saving faith in the person and work of Christ. There are two eternal destinations: heaven and hell.* There are 10 to 20 things that are closed-handed. Christians have always believed them. If you don't believe them, you're not a believer.

Then there are open-handed issues. *The details of the return of Christ*. When it comes to the return of Christ, we are not on the planning committee; we are on the welcoming committee. *How a church should be ordered*. We have convictions about that, but biblical Christians can disagree. *Election* is one of those. It's an open-handed issue in which... This is important, and this will actually show your maturity. Can you disagree without becoming disagreeable or divisive?

Basically, as soon as people understand the doctrine of election, they go through their cage stage. Have you heard of this? It's like they become intoxicated with new information, and we're going to maybe buy a cage and put them in it, because you want to protect them from everybody else in the church.

Here's how you can think about it. There are two views on the doctrine of election, and you can decide which one you want to believe based on Scripture. One says, "You know what? God chose me because he saw that I was going to choose him." I want you to know that's probably what most Americans think. I'm talking Bible-believing, Jesus-loving Christians.

Here's what they think: "Yeah, I know God chose me. I got all the verses. Predestination just means God chose me because he saw that I was going to have faith in him." The other view is "I chose God only because he first chose me." The reason I believe *that* one is I don't think you need to write Romans 9 if election means "God chose me because I first chose him." You wouldn't then say God is unjust. You wouldn't ask that question. You wouldn't have any of the questions Paul raises.

All I'm trying to say is you can be in this church, be a Community Group leader, and be a vibrant part of this church if you believe the first one, that God chose you because you first chose him. In fact, I believe you're wrong, but I also believe God predestined you to be wrong. Gotcha. So, we're going to have fun together.

Election is a big deal in the Bible. The word *election* is only used six times, but the word *elect* is used 20 times, and guess which person in the Bible uses the word *elect* the most? Jesus. Then there are words like *chose* and *chosen*, which are euphemisms and soft language for election. They're used 220 times.

What's interesting is no one gets upset when you say, "Hey, God chose Abraham." No one is upset. Everyone is like, "Yeah, that makes sense." Did you know God chose David, even though he was the youngest, and didn't choose anybody else, and he's the king? God chose Noah. God chose Esther. God chose the apostle Paul. We don't mind any of that, but when it gets personal, we do.

Paul deals with three arguments. He takes an argument of *morality*, an argument of *ontology*, and an argument of *purpose*. Let's take the argument of morality first. Let's

go back to verse 14. Verse 14 says, ***"What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part?"*** It feels unjust for God to choose some, and what actually feels more unjust is for God not to choose a bunch of people.

"By no means!" That's the strongest negative. "May it never be!" ***"For he 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."***

Let's talk about justice. Obviously, there has been a conversation in our nation that has been kind of confusing for 10 years about the word *justice*...social justice and all this stuff. I don't have time to get into all that. I want to give you the biblical definition of *justice*.

This is interesting. The words *justice* and *righteousness* in English are two words. In Hebrew and Greek, especially in Greek, it's one word. What you and I think is *justice* has to do with systems and *righteousness* has to do with personal piety. The Bible just puts those two together.

Justice is giving every person what they're owed or what they deserve. That is justice. In fact, the entire court system... And everybody loves to watch a good court case. You know, *A Few Good Men*. *Judge Judy* went for 25 years. Women love the true crime podcasts...all that stuff. Well, here's what's interesting. There are two types of justice. I'm simplifying things. There is what's called *retributive justice* and *restorative justice*.

Retributive justice is why court cases exist. In retributive justice, it's like, "Who did something wrong?" and "What they owe is to be punished." Then in the court case, usually (it's not always like this), you're also going, "And is there somebody who's innocent? Was there somebody who was a victim, and what could the state do to try to restore what was lost, give them healing, give them hope, give them financial compensation?" Because you're trying to figure out, "How do I give each person what's due?" Sometimes it's something restorative; sometimes it's something negative and retributive.

So, Paul goes, "Guys, is God unjust? Is there injustice in God?" Here's the thing. Paul says, "No. By no means. May it never be." Here's what I want you to think about. This has been really helpful for me. When it comes to how *we* act, there are just things we do and unjust things we do. God doesn't have the category of unjust things he does. In fact, Romans says that in the gospel we see the righteousness or the justice of God. Here are God's categories. Not just and unjust; it's justice and grace.

Here's how it works with salvation. Election is just the beginning of salvation. Election is salvation from eternity past. That's another way to think about it. He's

saying, when it comes to dealing with God, some people get grace, and some people get justice, but nobody gets injustice, which leads to the question...*Is this fair?*

When my wife and her brother and sisters were young, they used to say, "That's not fair." My father-in-law, who's a good old Southerner, said, "Fair? Fair is where you bring your pigs in the fall." Margy said she didn't really get that until she was, like, 18. She was like, "Oh, yeah. Why is Dad talking about the fair?"

Basically, life is not fair. God is not fair. You don't want God to be fair, because if God is fair, then everybody just gets what they deserve and nobody gets grace. By the way, the only reason Christians get grace is because Jesus was punished, and that was God's justice at the cross.

Last week, we talked about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Esau. Paul goes, "Let me give you another famous person to talk about: Moses." So, let's go to Moses. He says, ***"For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'"***

By the way, think about this. When it comes to salvation, God had three options, as far as I can see it. God could save everybody. We're going to talk about it in the end. Why didn't God save everybody? You probably think that's what *you* would do. Right? You'd save everybody. People teach today what's called *universalism*. It's a lie. The average American believes in universalism. "Hey, if you believe in heaven, everybody is going there."

"What do you have to do to go there?"

"Don't worry about it. You just have to die. Just die, and then everyone goes to heaven."

We don't believe that. Then you think about it *this* way. Yeah, God could have saved everybody or God could have saved no one. Now, no one is really excited about the whole idea that God would save nobody. No one is starting a church plant called "First Damned of Corinth" or something. No one is like, "Come on. No one will believe, and everybody you tell won't believe, and no one is going to heaven. Who's on the launch team?" We're not doing that.

But here's what's interesting: that's what happened to the demons, so it's not that far off. If you know the story of the demons, none of the demons had a chance to repent and experience the grace of God. So, if you wanted an example of "Man, what would it be like if nobody could receive the grace of God?" it would be what happened to the demons.

Then there's another option, which is some are saved and some are not. Then you go, "Well, why does that happen?" and Paul goes, "Let me tell you the story of Moses." See, here's the thing. I'll tell this really quickly. Moses has these two super-famous encounters with God.

Do you remember the first one, the burning bush? God appears to him in a bush that's burning but not consumed. You know, "Take your sandals off." He takes his sandals off, and God is like, "Hey, I'm going to free my people from Pharaoh." He's like, "That's awesome." God is like, "And I'm going to confront him."

"That's awesome."

"My people are going to be set free to worship me."

He's like, "This is so awesome." Then God is like, "And I want you to do this," and he goes, "This is not awesome." Do you remember that? Finally, God talks him into it, and he's like, "All right. I'll do this, but my brother Aaron has to help me," and all this stuff. Then he says, "God, real quick...I almost forgot. It's going to be a little awkward if I go to Pharaoh and I don't have the name of God. So..."

Up until this point, we don't know God's name. We've already gone through the whole book of Genesis, and we don't know God's name. In Exodus, he says, "God, what's your name?" and God says, "I Am Who I Am." He's like, "Is there a nickname?" *I Am Who I Am*. Here's what God is saying: "I am the self-defining, self-existing God. Nobody defines me except for me." We've been trying to define God for all of human history.

What's interesting is the second one is what he's referencing here, but I wanted to tell you the first one because they have a similar pattern. "I Am Who I Am. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." Moses is frustrated because it's hard leading people. They're grumbling, and all this kind of stuff, in the wilderness.

So, he goes up on the mountain and prays to God. I'll tell you exactly what he says. He says, "Please," which is interesting, because that word is not in the Bible a lot, and it's not in prayers a lot. He says, "Please, show me your glory," which is like, "I want to see what makes you God. I want to see the best part of you," speaking with human language. God says, "Okay. I'm going to have to hide you in this rock."

He passes by him and says, "I will declare to you my name. I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." Basically, God says, "At the center of being God is I get to do whatever I want to do." Isn't that kind of the definition of being God? He says, "I get to have mercy on

whomever I want to have mercy, and I get to have compassion on whomever I want to have compassion."

Look at this. It leads him to ask this question. In verse 17, he moves on, but it's the same thing. ***"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."***

See, part of what it's talking about is the absolute sovereignty of God. Let me try to explain this. When people break up the sovereignty of God... That's that God is in control of every detail and everything in life. Theologians break up God's sovereignty into two spheres: *government* (meaning, his rule and reign over natural disasters and everything that happens, details of life) and his *grace*. What I've found is that, actually, most Christians don't have a problem with God being sovereign in his government.

Now, sometimes you have to look back in the rearview mirror of your life and go, "Okay, that was really painful, but now I can see," whether it's the massive events of human history or the details of your individual life. Rarely do I meet a Christian who says, "I don't think God is in control," but the same Christians who would say God is in control of his government often won't step over *here* and go, "Actually, yes, and God is also in control of who ultimately gets the grace to believe."

Well, it gets a little bit more shocking to us because we're told about the story of Pharaoh. Remember who Pharaoh is? They called him the *son of God* in Egypt. He was ruling and reigning over the people of Israel, and he was abusing them and enslaving them for his own economic advantage.

But be honest. We can't be too hard on Pharaoh, because you don't know what *you* would do if you had what... Let me say it this way. The difference between us and Pharaoh is usually resources. You've tried to be a tyrannical king over your own little kingdom, and it hasn't worked very well, but if you had the opportunity to be like Pharaoh...

I want to talk about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, because Paul goes, "He has mercy on whomever he has mercy, and he hardens whomever he hardens." Here's what I want you to know. Five times in the exodus account it just says Pharaoh's heart was hard. That's all it says. We don't know... Did God harden it? Did Pharaoh harden it? Like, what happened? It just says Pharaoh's heart was hardened or Pharaoh's heart was hard.

There are five or six times where it says Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Now, that would be an interesting study for a Community Group or a DNA Group, because guess what? Guess when Pharaoh hardened his heart. He hardened his heart every time God gave relief and things started to go well. He hardened his heart as soon as God said, "Okay, I'll remove the flies. I'll take away the darkness. I'll take away the frogs." He hardened his heart.

It says one time... We don't know exactly what it was, but it says he sinned. I'm quoting Scripture here. "Pharaoh sinned and hardened his heart." So, does sin harden your heart? Absolutely. Then, there's a weird kind of verse later in the account that says, "Pharaoh's heart was hardened along with his servants' hearts." So, there's a hardening...

Some of you have experienced this. You sent your kid off to school, and they started hanging out with the wrong group. They came back, and you were like, "Why is your heart so hard? Oh, you've been hanging out with other people who have hard hearts toward God, and that's had an effect on you."

Then there are another five or six times... So, five times it says his heart was hardened, and five or six times it says Pharaoh hardened his own heart, and then five or six times it says *God* hardened Pharaoh's heart. That's the scary part, but let me encourage you. I mean, it's still scary, and it *should* scare us, but God didn't harden... Order matters. God didn't harden Pharaoh's heart until after Pharaoh already had hardened his own heart.

Now, obviously, I'm not a cardiologist, but I looked up... I was like, "Man, I wonder if there's a connection between our spiritual heart, which is the seat and sum and center of who we are... I wonder if there's a connection between our spiritual heart and our physical heart." I looked it up, and I wasn't surprised that the number-one killer of Americans is heart disease. So, I did what you do. I got on Claude and YOUR.AI and dove into all this.

I found out that the way heart disease happens... Doctors literally call it the *hardening of the arteries*. It happens three ways. It happens by what you consume. (That's exactly how our hearts get hard.) It happens gradually, one meal at a time. (For us, it's one decision at a time.) Then, the scariest part and the reason it's so deadly is it's painless until it's not. What does every guy say the week before he has a heart attack? His wife is like, "Are you doing okay?" "I feel great." That's what every guy says the week he has a heart attack.

So, we're told God has mercy on whom he'll have mercy, and God hardens whomever he hardens. So now you can understand this. Look at this. In light of that, here's the next question. Verse 19:

"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?"

By the way, we're moving from the argument of morality to the argument of what's called *ontology*, the nature of being. By the way, it's not wrong to have questions for God. We see this in the Psalms. We can have questions for God; we just can't have lawsuits against God.

I don't know if you've ever heard of this guy. This guy's name is Ernie Chambers. This is going to sound like I made this story up. I did not. Ernie Chambers was a state senator for the state of Nebraska, and he is the first person in American history to sue God. I'm not even kidding you.

He brought a lawsuit against the Almighty for the Almighty allowing there to be storms and hurricanes and tornadoes. You can read about this. Some of you are looking at it on your phone. Here you go. This is what I love about it. The judge threw the court case out because he said the Almighty could not be delivered papers. Is that not a parable in and of itself?

Basically, the guy asks, "What do we do now? I mean, God is God. What are we to do?" and he says, "Who are you to ask God these questions?" Here's basically what Paul is saying that we need to hear. This is going to be potentially the most shocking part of the message for some of you. Let's pause and prepare. You are not the center of the world. That's what you've been told your whole life. Right? "You're a snowflake," and "Here's a participation trophy," and unfortunately, you were the absolute center of your parents' lives.

Look. I'm guilty of this too. The first time I saw the movie... Have you ever seen the movie *The Truman Show*? I saw *The Truman Show*, and I promise you, this was my thought: "I wonder if that's true about *my* life." Then I thought, "That is the most arrogant thought I could possibly have, as if the entire world revolved around me and everybody else was just playing a part in a story about me."

Paul goes, "Guys, you're not the center of the universe; God is." Actually, we don't even have... This is not the full answer, but this is part of the answer. We don't even have the rights or the wisdom to correctly question God, because as soon as we try to use reason, we're using the reason God gave us. So, we have to kind of go, "What do we do in light of all of this information?" Let me read it one more time.

"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?"

There's a story in the Old Testament called *Job*. Some of you, if you don't know your Bible very well, open it up, and you're like, "It's a sign. I need a job." Well, you probably do, but the book is called *Job*. In the book, this guy is suffering immensely, and he asks God a bunch of questions.

Then at the end, God appears to him and basically says, "Who darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?" He asks him a bunch of questions, like, "Were you there? Can you put a ring in the Leviathan's nose? Did you set the sun up? Do you know where I hide the hail?" and all that kind of stuff. At the end, Job says, basically, "I repent in dust and ashes. I have asked things of which I do not understand and of things that are too wonderful for me."

There's one more level of this I want to show you. Here's where it all goes. Look at verse 22. ***"What if God..."*** And you tell me how you would interpret... I don't know how else to interpret this verse. ***"What if God, desiring to show his wrath..."*** So, God wants his anger to be manifested. By the way, that is basically the entire book of Revelation: the manifestation of the wrath of God.

"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?"

Paul talks about vessels of mercy and vessels of wrath. I'm going to give you another big word. Okay? We talked about *election*, which can sound like a scary word. Here's another word that kind of sounds scary: *reprobation*. If you want to sound smart at a dinner party, just use that word, but you're not going to want to describe what it means, so don't use it. *Reprobation* is the language of God passing over people and not choosing them. That's the theological category for it.

Let me read the verse slowly and show you how this shows up. ***"What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath..."*** Now look at this. It's important. ***"...prepared for destruction..."*** So, God doesn't prepare them; they prepare themselves for destruction. They get what is just. ***"...in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy..."*** Look at this. Different language. ***"...which he has prepared***

beforehand for glory..." So, in election, God is active. In reprobation, God is passive, passing over people.

Now we have to ask the deepest question...*Why doesn't God just save everyone?* Let's really ask that question together. I had this great lady come up to me after the 9:00 service on Sunday. We had a very warm "brother and sister in Christ" conversation. She said to me, "You just taught that God chooses us before the foundation of the world, but then Pastor Donovan gets up at the end of the service and reads the verse that says, 'God desires everyone to be saved.' How does *that* work together?"

Well, think about this. No matter what you believe about election, every Christian has to agree with this: God desires something that doesn't happen. Right? So, wherever you fall on the doctrine of election, you have to go, "God desires all people to be saved, but everybody is not saved." Then you have to go, "Well, then God..." This is kind of an "order of theology" thing. "Oh, then God must desire something more than everybody being saved."

What does God desire more than everybody being saved? Do you know what the answer is for the average American Christian? "My freedom." Americans love that. They're like, "Yes! Our freedoms are so important. They're more important than God saving everybody." You having the freedom to choose is more important than God saving everybody. It kind of puts you at the center of it again, in my opinion, and also, I don't think it's what Paul says.

Paul says not everybody is saved, but God desires everybody to be saved, but that doesn't happen. So, what does God desire more than everybody being saved? The answer is to show his glory, which is worth thinking about for, like, three years. Here's what I think. If it's my freedom or everybody be saved, take away my freedom, please.

Like, is it really that important? No. There's something way more important to God than everybody being saved, and it's the full display of the greatness and glory of God on display. Listen. Jonathan Edwards said this. Many people believe he's the greatest mind America ever produced. Jonathan Edwards basically said, "It doesn't really feel like you're saved unless somebody else was lost."

Basically, at some point, when we see the judgment of unbelievers, those of us who are Christians will feel like, "Oh my goodness. I just saw what I was saved from." There are things about God we could not know that he wants us to know if everybody was saved. We would never see his wrath. And there are things about God that we would not know if some of them were not saved. We would never see his mercy.

See, what's interesting is on the other side of the garden of Eden, on the other side of Adam and Eve and their sin (this can blow your mind too), we now get to know God better than Adam and Eve did. Adam and Eve only knew God as Creator and Father. They did not know him as Judge. They did not know him as Redeemer. They did not know him as gracious and merciful.

So, Paul ends in verse 24. "**...even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?**" What are we supposed to do with this doctrine? We are supposed to treasure it in our hearts, but it's not something we're meant to share with a bunch of non-Christians. This was written in the middle of a long letter to a church that was suffering.

Some of you have never heard these things, and you've been a believer for 10 years. You're like, "I didn't even know Romans 9 was in my Bible, and I thought *elect* was just a nice word for *Christian*." You never thought of any of this. By the way, that happens to people all the time. They've been Christians for years and years and years, and then they have the theological "birds and the bees" talk, and they realize how they were born again.

Non-Christians never need to ask the question, "Am I elect?" They need to ask the question, "Do I love and believe in Jesus?" You know, they say that when you get to heaven (it's a famous story), the door you enter will say, "Whomsoever will believe in Jesus Christ." Then, when you walk through the door, you turn around, and it says on the other side, "Chosen from the foundation of the world."

Guys, by the way, this is supposed to... I know you have to think about it. You can't think about it for five minutes. If you think about it for five minutes, this isn't going to affect you. If you think about these things, it's used as a comfort to suffering Christians. It's used as an encouragement to people who are doubting. It's used to motivate people for evangelism.

Come back next week. At the beginning of chapter 10, after Paul gives this deep doctrine of election, he goes, "Brothers, my prayer and heart's desire for them is that they would be saved." Then he spends all of chapter 10 basically talking about the need to send missionaries. So, do not ever let this turn you into being fatalistic or deterministic.

I love this quote by A.A. Hodge. He was a professor, and he was teaching this doctrine, and his students had a lot of questions about it. So, this is what he wrote. You know, some student asked him, "Well, does God know the day I'm going to die?" and he said, "Yeah." Then he said, "Well, what if I stop eating food? If I stop eating food and I die because I stop eating food, is that the reason I was going to always die?"

I know it sounds confusing. Watch this. A.A. Hodge basically said, "Does God know the day you'll die? Yes. Has he appointed that day? Yes. Can you do anything to change that day? No. Then why do you eat? To live. What happens if you don't eat? You die. Then if you don't eat and die, then would that be the day that God appointed for you to die?" I love how he ends. "Quit asking stupid questions and just eat. Eating is the preordained way God has appointed for living."

We started to talk about this in my Community Group this week. My summary of my Community Group was basically... I think everyone in there was like, "Yeah, I believe these things, but what do I do now?" Well, you do everything the apostle Paul did. You pray, because God ordains the means, not just the end. God ordains praying. God tells us to pray. How do you not know that the prayers you're praying for your prodigal son are not the thing God determined before the foundation of the world he wanted to use?

I mean, Paul basically... You know, Paul suffered a lot. No one notices this, but the apostle Paul, in one of his letters, says, "I suffer everything for the sake of the elect." You might have just passed over that verse, but here's what he's basically saying: "I know there are people who are going to believe everywhere I go, and everything I do, I do for them, but I don't know who they are until I preach the gospel and they believe."

So, here's what we're going to do. In a minute, like every week, the band is going to sing, and across all of our campuses, I want you to come forward. I want you to come forward to recommit to being on mission. I want you to hide these truths in your heart. We're not ashamed of them, but we hide these truths in our hearts. They're deep within us, and we treasure them, and then we get to work. Actually, if you really understand these truths, here's what you realize: the pressure is off, but the mission isn't off.

Listen. I have a bigger concern in this room right now. Notice how Paul said, "Even us." We have to focus. I don't want you to think about anyone else except yourself for a second. I want to ask you...*Do you have a hard heart?* Pharaoh's heart got hard over time. Do you know what Pharaoh's favorite word was? If you go back over the exodus account, the word Pharaoh uses 10 different times is *tomorrow*.

Nothing will harden your heart like saying, "Tomorrow." Pharaoh said "Tomorrow" 10 different times until today wasn't there anymore. I want to encourage you right now to not just say "Today"; I want you to say "Now." Listen. Often, before your heart gets hardened against God, it gets hardened against somebody else.

The Bible says, "Do not let there be a root of bitterness among you." This happens in marriages. This happens between families. This happens with friendships. This

happens at work. If your heart is even a little bit hard toward somebody, I want you down at the altar when we start singing.

If you have somebody in your life and you would say, "God, I see it. My son's heart is getting hardened," I want you to come and say, "God, would you have mercy on him? God, would you not harden that heart? He's hardening it. God, would you not harden that heart, but would you have mercy?" We are going to be the type of church that has this deep theology that would blow people's minds if they knew it, but we are so gentle and so desperate for them to believe. Let's pray.

Lord, across our campuses right now, if anybody's heart is hard, I pray they would walk forward and say, "God, I don't want to have a hard heart." There are hymns written where great hymn writers write songs that say, "God, don't harden our hearts." Lord, do not let hard hearts be in Community Groups or in marriages or in families or among nuclear families or families of origin. Lord, would you soften our hearts? Would we not say "Tomorrow"? Would we not even say "Today"? Would we say, "Right now," Lord?

Would you get us on mission, Lord? Would this have the effect it had on the apostle Paul, who did not retire and move to a lake house but went on mission because of all of the great truths of Romans 9. Would you build in us a church that is really centered and sent, deep in your Word, wide in your mission. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.