A Chosen People, not a Choice People

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[0:00] Father, we always need your Holy Spirit, every second of every day, but sometimes, Father, we think we can just go on our own steam. So, Father, we thank you so much for hard words like Romans 9 that remind us and open our eyes to how we need your Holy Spirit to come into our lives, to lead us and guide us into all truth, to inwardly free us, to reveal our hearts to ourselves in the context of your existence and your reality and your power and your great love for us.

Father, thank you for Jesus and his death upon the cross. Thank you, Father, that he is your power for salvation for all who believe. And thank you, Father, that as we put our faith and trust in you, in your Son, Jesus, that you make us vessels of mercy built for your glory.
And so, Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would move in our lives, in our minds, in our wills, in our hearts very deeply to draw us closer to you this morning. And this we ask in Jesus' name.
Amen. Please be seated. So, quite a text. I'm going to say just, first of all, it's interesting and hopefully, you know, because I only use an outline when I preach.
Sometimes I forget what I'm going to say in the sermon. Or I get it out of order, out of place. But the very, very first crisis of faith that almost made me stop being a Christian was connected to a question that this text deals with.
[1:36] I had become a Christian and given my life to Jesus in November. And it would have been the spring of the following, like the following, you know, about six months later, in conversation.

I was in the context of evangelizing. I got into a conversation with two men who really pressed in on me a certain couple of objections about the Christian faith that all involved whether or not I had free will and whether things were determined.
And it rocked me. It was the first time in my young Christian life. I doubted whether, in fact, I had a severe doubt, season of doubt as to whether or not the Christian faith was true.
And I wondered if I had to walk away from it. And those same questions of free will and determinism are touched on in this text. And I'll return to that in a moment.
But some of the issues which this text touches upon are perennial issues that worry us and that people who think deeply about things try to think deeply about things which this text touches on, do we have free will?
[2:47] Like that's not just a Christian question. It's a human question. And it's a human question because there, in fact, most systems of thought deny, when you look at them very, the way most, I don't want to insult people, but most Canadians don't have a system of thought.

I mean, that's just a fact, right? And that's fine, you know? But most systems of thought, when you press into them, lead you to the conclusion that there's no free will. And yet at the same time, what every person thinks about, at least at some times, is that the deep human desire for freedom.
There is a deep, persistent human desire for freedom. And it's funny because we maybe don't think of this, but we want freedom in the context of some order.
And there's other things that we want about that freedom, but there's this deep human longing for freedom, which is why we sometimes wonder and worry about whether we have free will. It's the same thing that goes on in our culture right now, where many people are very concerned about the huge economic and other types of climate forces which seem to want to overwhelm human beings and take away their freedom and take away their liberty.
And it's because we have this deep desire for freedom and liberty that texts like this that we just read sound a bit scary and frightening. So we're going to look at it.
[4:15] And just one more thing. I should have said this first. Just ask those of you who, well, actually, it doesn't matter if this is your church home, and I'd ask your prayers for me this coming

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Wednesday evening. Our ministry at the university church on Wednesday, they're going through the book of Colossians.

And when Daniel first told me about this, I knew that in Colossians there was a very, very another text of terror. Slaves obey your masters. Wives submit to your husbands.
Which on the University of Ottawa campus, of course, those are completely non-controversial statements. And as just as they are in Canada. So I volunteered to preach on it.
And now the hour of truth has come. That will be this Wednesday evening. I will, in the ground floor of the university center with who knows who passing by, I will look at the book of Colossians and what the Bible teaches on those topics.
And I would deeply desire your prayers for me. That I will do it in a way that is true to the Bible and honors and glorifies God.
[5:19] So I ask your prayers for it. Now let's look at this question here. So turn to Romans because that's where Laurie just read. And before we read chapter 9 verses 1 and following, we're going to just go back to what happens just before chapter 9 to sort of set the stage.

Because Paul doesn't jump into the problem of free will and determinism first. He starts with something else. Last week we looked at predestination. And so Paul's already getting people used to this idea.
And in fact, in an odd way, Paul talks about this whole issue. But in a way that at first we don't realize that there's something about God's sovereignty at work because we like the basic promises. And it's one of the greatest passages in the Bible. It's a passage that's well worth us memorizing. And we're having on a mirror or something so we can meditate upon it regularly. And chapter 8 verse 31 goes like this.
Christ Jesus is the one who died.
[6:35] More than that, who was raised. Who is at the right hand of God. Who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
What a text. What a text. And it's hard for many people not to read that text and have their spirits lifted. But there's two types of things that also go on with this text.
The first is, your spirits are lifted and then you go home and you get a bit bored and then you waste three hours looking at pornography.
[7:51] Or you go home and you start working on your income tax and you cheat on all the numbers to give yourselves a better return.

And then later on in the evening it strikes you what you've done and you start to doubt the text. And that God actually means it.
Or that he can actually do it. The other thing that happens with a text like this is that some of us, when we sit listening to the text, we put our arms back like this and say, Oh yeah.
Oh yeah. You know, everybody else is getting all excited but we're like a hard rock on a stream and the water is just flowing over us. It's not doing anything to us. And inwardly, we say, Oh yeah, that's not true.
If that was true, what about Israel? What about all those promises that God made to Israel? God made all those promises to Israel and none of those things have come true. Gotcha. Gotcha.
[8:56] And so Paul, who he's been around the block a few times in evangelism and conversations. He's been a Christian for 20 some odd years and he's been an evangelist to Jewish people, to pagans.

He's been all over the Roman Empire. And so he knows that there's these types of objections that go on. Both those good-hearted people who've now had a, or maybe it's not, or have had maybe a financial crisis or a health crisis and now we start to doubt Romans 8.
Or all along we just sort of sit there and think, No, no, no. I know a few things about the Bible. I've heard you preach a few times and I know that that's just not true. Look at Israel. It didn't happen. So Paul, in chapters 9, 10, and 11 of Romans, he's going to deal with a series of objections, both about

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free will and determinism because there's a large part of Greek philosophy believed in fate, that there was no such thing as free will.
And there was another school of Greek philosophy that just believed in fundamentally randomness. Some of you might have heard the saying, You can't step into the same river twice. That was said by a Greek philosopher prior to this.
And so Paul's aware of that. And so he's aware of that there's a series of objections. He's going to deal with it 9, 10, and 11. And so we're starting to look at these objections today.
[10:21] And so let's look now at what Paul actually says. Let's just read the first five verses. So mindful of these things that go on in our mind, of doubting that what God has just said in Romans 8 is true, what Jesus has accomplished on the cross is true, that the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is true.

And we have these doubts. So what does Paul go to? He goes like this. 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 and sisters, my kin 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.
Amen. So now this is a very, very curious move on his part for two reasons. The first thing is that we see that this is not, what Paul is about to talk about now isn't just a dry intellectual matter.
[11:47] You know, it's not like there's a couple of physicists arguing over quantum mechanics or something like that, although I've been told they can get very heated over some things like that, you know, but, you know, the rest of us would look at it and say, why are you getting heated over something like that, right?

But this isn't a dry academic question. For Paul, this is a deeply emotional question. He's deeply emotionally involved in it. It breaks his heart that so many people, like him, Jewish, and like he was before he became a Christian, devout Jews, have rejected Jesus.
It breaks his heart. It's not a merely intellectual exercise. It's not just playing games with words. And the second thing, which is very interesting, and as we'll start to see in his answer, he does something which we human beings often don't do.
Often, under the pressure of our emotions and our breaking heart, our broken heart, we change our theology. And in a sense, we act as if God is clay and we're the potter.
And I'm going to return to this idea, and we can change God so that our heart is broken less. But Paul is not going to do this. In fact, he's going to double down on the issue.
[13:12] Because I think actually, and this is the conclusion I've come after wrestling with this text all week, is that everything in Romans 9 is true. And to deny parts of Romans 9 only actually lead you into other trouble, problems, which we just haven't thought about, which are actually far worse.

But the main thing here is to see that it breaks Paul's heart. So how is he going to now start to try to address this question? Okay, you said all these wonderful things about how nothing can separate us from the love of God.
What about Israel? Isn't that an example against what you're saying? Some of you over the last couple of weeks have asked me, what about friends of ours who were Christians or seem to have been Christians, but now are living a life completely far from God?
I'm not going to talk about that question. Paul talks about that in chapter 11. So in two weeks' time, I'll talk about that. But for now, Paul is asking, what about Israel? Has God kept his word or not? Well, let's look and see what he says. Romans 6, 9, 6 to 13. And this, in some ways, Romans 9, 6, it's the key, but you realize that when he starts to prove it from the Bible, it opens up cans of worms.
[14:23] But Romans 9, 6 is the key. But, it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.

Just pause a second. A few years ago, when I was in a debate around a controversial moral issue, and part of that controversial moral issue was that, was text in the Old Testament, mainly New Testament text, but Old Testament text.
And so, a person who was arguing against me tried to argue that in my own personal life, I hadn't kept all of the commandments around being a priest in the Old Testament.

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And they thought they'd got me. And I began my answer by saying, I'm not a priest. Which, at the time, in that Anglican congregation, shocked them.
And I, and then I went on to explain that I'm a presbyter, not a priest. And those Old Testament things don't apply to me. It's just a matter of looking at the Bible more closely. So what Paul is going to say here, he makes his general statement, but it is not as though the word of God has failed.
[15:33] For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel. And now Paul's going to prove it from the Bible. He's going to prove that this is what the Old Testament actually says.

That just because, biologically, you can trace yourself back to Abraham, or biologically, you can trace yourself back to Isaac, or biologically, you can trace yourself back to Jacob, and so therefore, you were Jewish.
Well, it is not as though the word of God has failed, for not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel. Verse 7, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring.
But, here he quotes the Bible, through Isaac shall your offspring be named. Then he says, verse 8, this means that it is not the children of the flesh, in other words, mere biology, who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring, God's promise.
Verse 9, for this is what the promise said. And now he's going to quote the Bible again. About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.
[16:41] Just a bit of an aside. He takes the narrative part of Genesis as if God is speaking. Just a little aside. It's all the way through this is how the Bible understands itself is it's God speaking.

It's his words. And that verse 10, 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 told, now we quote the Bible, the older will serve the younger. As it is written, he quotes the Bible again, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.
Now, not to get carried away with it, Esau I hated, it's called a Semitism. I probably didn't say that word right. It's a figure of speech when translated literally sounds really, really weird and even hateful, but it's just a figure of speech back from the time that the Bible was written, and it means rejected, not chosen.
You think about it, sometimes in movies they have like a computer or a robot or an alien who spends time with human beings, and the robot or the alien is always getting confused by figures of speech.
[18:07] You know, like when you say the person's a few bricks shy of a load or a person has a screw loose or something like that, and then they'll have the robot look in the person's head to see where the screw is that he can, or she or it can, you know, straighten.

It's a figure of speech, but it means completely rejected. That's what hated means, completely rejected. Now, it's a little bit of, it's still a bit of a text of terror.
It brings up this idea that you have Isaac and Ishmael, and God chooses Isaac, but not Ishmael, and then you have Isaac's twin boys, and God chooses not Esau, one of the twin boys, in fact, the natural leader by the natural culture, the natural order of things.
God doesn't go along with the natural order of things. In a sense, what God does is he deconstructs natural order.
He deconstructs cultural expectations of how things should work. He, in a sense, demythologizes the myths and the gods of our culture about how things should work, and he chooses the younger one, Jacob, over the older one, the natural one, the reasonable one, the logical one, the obvious one, the cultural one.
[19:33] He doesn't choose that. He chooses the youngest. But in both cases, they're chosen while they're in the womb. Why? Election.

He calls them out. Election is a, what it basically means is it would be as if, I don't know, let's say some terrorists have surrounded this building, and there's a bomb, and we're all going to die.
And then the police say, outside, as a matter of good faith, could you release four people? And they call out, you, you, you, you. Off you go.
The rest stay here to be bombed and die. Election means called out, chosen out. That's what it means. So on one hand, you say, okay, you know, oh, Paul, this is where we as Canadians, let's just be honest, for a second as Canadians, you would say, Paul, why didn't you just stop at verse

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six?
Like, if you had just stopped at verse six when it just said, but it's not as though the word of God had failed for not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, say, okay, good enough for me. But now you go ahead and tell us and try to bring out in the story what's going on with Isaac, the election called out.
[20:55] You've just made it worse. You've just made it worse. You know, it's very, very interesting. In some ways, all of the book of Romans is an extended meditation from a verse in the book of Habakkuk.

We'll look at Romans 1, 16 to 17 in a moment, but when it says, the righteous shall live by faith, that's a quote from the book of Habakkuk. And in Habakkuk, it's the same type of thing. Habakkuk is complaining to God about what's going on, about all of the evil that's going on in Israel and why doesn't God do something about it? And God says, good news for you, Habakkuk. I've answered your prayers.
I'm going to have, I think it's Assyria, I'm going to have Assyria invade and punish you guys. And Habakkuk goes, whoa, God, one second, you can't do that. That's the wrong answer. Like, and why on earth would you do that?
God, Assyria is worse than Israel. Okay, so it's the same type of thing that's going on here that Paul gives an answer and if we're honest, we go, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Okay, can we, I wish we could now replay, just rewind that because you've actually seemed to have made it worse, not better.
[21:58] Here's the thing for us to understand. Andrew, if you could put up the first slide. we are a chosen people, not a choice people.

This, if you don't understand this idea, then nothing in this text is going to make sense, but it's what the text is saying. It's still a very frightening text to us because it makes us feel completely and utterly naked.
But you know how choice means, you know, you see these things, you know, in the food sections, they talk about it all the time. If you ever read the food section, the citizen, they'll talk about in these real hipster, high-end restaurant type places, how, you know, or you see it in movies, they go down to the market, they don't just sort of pick the cheapest 10 fish they can find, but they pick the choice fish and the choice vegetables because the person who goes down is an expert at recognizing the choice bits of meat and the choice herbs and the choice fish and the choice vegetables, and because of their expertise and skill, they identify what is choice and then they bring it back to cook for discerning people like us.
Well, I go to McDonald's so it wouldn't be for people like me, but, and so it's very, what the Bible is going to, what Paul is going to try to have completely and utterly removed from our mind and from our spirit is any sense that I am choice.
there's something about me just a little bit special. You know, maybe it's because of my background and upbringing or maybe it's because, I don't know, have you heard how I can harmonize when they're singing up front or have you heard how I can pray or have you heard how I can preach or have you heard how I can lead or have you heard how I can parent my children or have you heard how it's deeply within us to start to desire that we are choice and the Bible is not going to ever explain to us, it's going to say that it's not random, it's going to say that it wasn't as if God just was going, okay, baby's being born, baby's being born, yeah, another baby being born, you know, eenie, meenie, miney, moe, catch a tiger, okay, pick that one, catch a tiger by the toe, pick that one.
[24:17] It's not, he's not saying it's random. At the end of the day and the purposes of God, nothing about why you or I were chosen is revealed.

But what God wants us to know is it's not because I'm choice. It's not because I'm choice. Now, this at first is very, very, very, very, very frightening.
If it wasn't for the gospel, it would be deeply frightening because, you see, at the heart of all religion and spirituality is an attempt to be choice, an attempt to put God in some type of an obligation or lock to do things for us because we are choice.
I am choice. Why am I choice? Well, I prayed the sinner's prayer. I've learned how to speak in tongues. I can recite the Apostles' Creed. I go to church. I tithe.
Therefore, you have some obligation to me. I've done something to contribute to this relationship and you have some obligations to me. And the Bible wants us to completely and utterly lose any sense of that, that there's nothing at all about me ever being choice, that it's all about God doing

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what I cannot do and what you cannot do, which is to make us right with him.
[25:42] He does it all with nothing left over. And, you know, on one hand, we feel terribly naked if there's not something choice about us or not something that we can do that would make us choice.

But at the same time that we feel naked about it, we don't want to acknowledge how much religion and spirituality makes us anxious and makes us false and makes us hurtful and spiteful and arrogant towards others because that's always what religion and spirituality does.
and it doesn't matter if your spirituality is Anglican spirituality or green spirituality or left-wing spirituality or right-wing spirituality, it makes you and me hard-hearted and it makes us insecure because what happens if I fail?
I thought I was choice, but I just wasted three hours looking at pornography. I just cheated on my income tax. I just went out and I had a next, you know, just half a glass of wine too much and I spent the whole time slandering everybody I knew and putting everybody down.
I can't be choice. And religion and spirituality makes us profoundly insecure because we have to maintain that type of choiceness and because nobody can maintain being choice, we become arrogant and we put up these barriers in front of us and around to keep us from people and we do things to put people down and look down our noses at them and so it either creates a type of insecurity or it creates arrogance and pride which comes from insecurity.
[27:27] The Bible wants to deliver you from pride and arrogance and from insecurity and from religion and spirituality and from being irreligious and unspiritual.

He wants to deliver you from this. God calls. I am not choice. I'm chosen by God.
Here's the next thing. Andrew, if you could put up the next point. I freely call out to God he who first called me.
I freely call out to God he who first called me. Now, it's in Romans 10.
Next week's sermon. This week's sermon is going to really emphasize this aspect of God's calling me and making it look like, and not making it look like, really bringing us to this sense that God calls every human being first with no exception.
[28:35] And yet, somehow God's call to me enables within me a type of freedom for me to call out to him. Romans 10 is going to talk more about this human side of human responsibility.

That's next week. Romans 9 is emphasizing he calls me first. He calls you first. You know, 1 John chapter 4, this is love.
Not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. It's a deep biblical message.
He calls first. I freely call out to God he who first called me. The Bible holds these two things together.
that God is completely and utterly sovereign and that we have significant freedom. And that God wants us to be free.
[29:34] In a sense, only the Bible, when you read it, only the gospel, only Jesus, and understanding that he died upon the cross, that he is the power of God for salvation, only this teaching is the answer to our longings and yearnings to be free.

And the more we become of God's, the freer we become. The more we bow to Jesus through grace, the taller we are.
The more we let ourselves be carried in his arms, the stronger we are. The more we surrender to the Holy Spirit, the freer we are.
The more we hecho before we beam the more we amen the more now and the more we leave it.
that question for us. Paul anticipates it. Let's look at what he says. Verse 14. What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means. For he says to Moses, now he quotes the Bible, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.
[31:08] One second. Once again, okay, let's just be honest Canadians for a second, okay? Don't we wish as honest Canadians he just stopped with verse 14? Come on, don't get off all your pious stuff, okay?

Honest Canadians said, okay, just answer 14. No. Okay. Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, don't say that. Oh, no. 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 inwardly we groan. So then, verse 16, it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, for this very purpose

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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 whom ever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. And most of us wish he'd just stopped with verse 14, if you're honest. But we should be glad that he goes beyond. Here's the first thing, if you could put up the next point.
No one is owed eternal communion with the living God. Everyone deserves eternal separation from the living God. That's what the Bible teaches. In other words, that's partly why Paul is saying the actual, absolute last thing that God is, is unjust. The issue here isn't whether God is unjust, but whether or not God will show mercy. Because God is completely and unfailingly just. And as part of God's justice, well, people who don't want to be in communion with God, at the end of the day, he says to them, thy will be done. And if you think about it for a second, let's just think about some of the objections to this. If you think about it for now, and let's say all of a sudden God promoted you to be his coach. And so you coach God to have mercy on all. And so you get to, and you go around and you go to all of the mosques in the city. And you go to all of the places where people are doing yoga right now. And you go to all the coffee shops right now. And then later on tonight, you go to all the bars.
And you tell them, good news, I'm coaching God. Every one of you is now in full communion with God. It's going to kick in at midnight tonight. And I've worked it out for you.
[34:01] How do you think that would go? Do you think they'd all come up and say, oh, thank you so much? Do you think all the people in the bar would come up and say, oh, thank you so much that you forced me to be in communion with God? Do you think all the people in the mosque would come? Oh, thank you so much that I'm not going to be with Allah and Muhammad, his prophet. I'm so glad. No. What do you think would happen? Like, how's that plan going to work? It's not going to work at all, is it?

They don't want it. They don't want it. It violates our freedom. It violates our longings and our yearnings. But some of you might say, okay, well, George, what about the hardening part? Like, couldn't, like, what does that mean? Next point, please. Everything in my being saved comes from God. Everything in my heart, in my hardening comes from me. You can see this in the text, and we're going to see it in a moment where Paul even doubles down even more with this potter and clay text. That, like, see, this is the thing about, remember his anguish at the beginning of the story, but rather than allowing his, here, in a sense, what Paul is doing, and we don't recognize it, what we see here, Martin Lloyd-Jones has this fantastic phrase in the book of Romans, we see logic on fire. Logic on fire. His broken heart, rather than making him want to try to be like a potter and making God like the clay and change God, it makes him plunge into God and to realize even more fully the greatness of the gospel and the greatness of what it is that God has done for us and is doing for us in the person of his Son. And we see here that in this text, when it talks about the hardening, we'll see it again in a few moments, that everything in my being saved comes from God, but everything in my hardening comes from me. It's an asymmetric relationship. Sorry, I had to throw in one big word because, you know, I went to university and got a master's degree and all that, but that's how it works. If you go to the going deeper in the bulletin, I give you the text from Exodus that shows that thing in the story of Pharaoh and God in the book of Exodus and Moses. And that's what Paul is going to say at, we'll see it with the potter and the clay, that God prepares the clay for glory, but that the clay that's being made for destruction isn't prepared by God.
In a sense, the world, the flesh, and the devil, me and my buddies do it to myself. Could you put up the scripture text that we've been looking at every week, Romans 1? Could you guys say this with me? Remember, those of you who haven't been here before, that Romans 1, 16 to 17, which concludes the quote from Habakkuk at the end, it sort of summarizes the entire book. And let's read it together. 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. For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.
You see the importance of I am not ashamed of the gospel? If Paul is going to make clear to us that the heart of the gospel is a power of God for salvation, not a power of God for salvation to those who are choice, therefore it's sort of a bit on me as well, actually. But to really understand that being made right with God is going to involve God.
When it says the righteousness of God, there's a double meaning there. It means that God is going to act in a right way. God has to act in a way which is completely and utterly just. But God is going

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to act in something. He's going to go not only, he's going to be just and never stop being just, but he's going to be merciful as well. And he, while being right, will do something to make us right with him. And he is going to do it all. He is going to do it completely and utterly. He is going to foreknow. He is going to predestine. He is going to call. He is going to make right. He is going to glorify. He is going to do it all. And as we start to understand what he is going to do it all means, that it means that I am not choice but chosen. Then once we start to realize the consequences of that, we start to be ashamed of the gospel because it doesn't sound Canadian. It won't play well.
[38:47] It won't play well in the graduate seminars at the university, in the director's offices, in the federal government, in the coffee shops, in the hipster restaurants, and even just your local Tim Hortons, wherever, or even the homeless shelter maybe where you can just get a cup of coffee for free. And we end up wanting to be ashamed. But Paul wants us to understand that when it says it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, he means the power of God for salvation with nothing left over, nothing excluded. It's all God.

You see how once this grips you, it completely deconstructs and demythologizes religion and spirituality. That once this grips us, there is the possibility to, in a sense, to start to lose our profound sense of insecurity that our favor with God depends upon our religious performance or religious emotions or our religious feelings. Or in terms of how good we are at raising our kids or how good we are at relationships or how good we are at making money or how healthy we are or how good looking we are or how people think about us or whether we get a PhD or any of those other things which make us profoundly insecure, that as this grips us, as this grips us, I am chosen, not choice. It is God's power of salvation that is going to be at work in me, not my works, not my actions, not anything. It profoundly starts to maybe make us relax, to give us the courage to look at things in the past that have deeply wounded us or things that we've done that are deeply evil. It can start to actually relax us and to say, what is it within me that drives me to look at pornography? What is it within me that drives me to want to, in my speech, constantly put people down? What is it within me that drives me to want me to have the most expensive consumer gifts? Why is it that I feel this huge compulsion to buy yet another pair of $150, $300, $500 sunglasses? Why do I need seven pairs of $500 sunglasses? I don't have that, by the way. I'm just trying to think of something that some of you might struggle with. Literally, that's not my issue, expensive sunglasses. But I understand why some people are driven to it. But some of you might say, okay, George, just one more thing about the problem. You know what? I'm just going to have to go over time today. So I'm just going to have to go over time. I think I just have to go over time. That's life. What about the problem of mercy? Remember, what does it say here? I will have mercy on whom I have mercy. He has mercy on whomever he wills and hardens whomever he wills. I've already explained the hardened mercy. Here's this subtle way that we want to make an obligation on God. Imagine for a moment, imagine that we're in the United States, we're all Americans, and President Obama is just about to leave office because fill in the blank has just won the president and he or she is about to become president next day. And many presidents do this just before he leaves. He puts a whole pile of presidential pardons in.
And one of the people who he's given a presidential pardon to is a bleepity, bleepity, bleepity, bleep guy who ripped you off and ruined you financially. Bleepity, bleepity, bleep. Fill in the blank.
[42:34] Now, would you say, oh, isn't that so fantastic that President Obama showed mercy and left that creepy, bleepity, bleepity guy off the hook so he doesn't have to bleeply, bleeply pay for what he did? That is not what you would feel.

But it would be very, very different if after, if you heard about a story where somebody, and you hear about these things, you hear about, you know, you heard about the gunman who killed all those school kids in an Amish community, and how the Amish community forgave the fellow and urged a lesser sentence.
Doesn't it make a big difference if the victims are the ones who show mercy? Because they've freely done it. You wouldn't feel the same way if you found it afterwards that the Amish people only did it because Donald Trump gave them $15 million if they would say they'd shown mercy, and you wouldn't think it was the same way.
It has to be free. Mercy has to be freely given by the one who's been wronged. And God is ultimately wronged by our sin.
And if God is compelled to show mercy to everybody, well, first of all, some of us won't want mercy. Go back to that earlier analogy about how do you feel about if you went to all the bars and the

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mosques and stuff, and just all the Tim Hortons, how would they feel?
[43:58] But God freely shows mercy. Let's try to wrap this up. What about the potter and the clay? Are we puppets? Has God made us puppets?

And does God, when he uses this analogy of the potter and the clay, is he doing it just to shut me up and shut you up? Let's read it. It goes at 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? Well, what does 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? Notice, he doesn't say that he's, the Greek is very, very clear, and even the English, doesn't say here that God prepared it for destruction.
That's not there. There are some Christians who believe in something called double predestination, and I think the Bible doesn't teach that. I think it's wrong.
[45:16] It doesn't say here that God does it. Verse 23, 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.

And we'll just pause here. Now here, just trying to wrap it up, let's be honest about one of the things that drives us in this entire problem with the text. Because the Bible, as I've said time and time again, the Bible helps us to see our hearts, to be honest about our hearts, without cynicism or romanticism in the context of the living God.
So what is it, partially at root, that we have a problem with this entire text? If you could put up the next point, Rebecca. Rebecca, I believe that I am the potter and God is the clay.
But God's grace calls me into the real world, where God is the potter and I am the clay. This is a profoundly countercultural thought.
Most psychology wants to teach us that, I mean, you know, there's whole systems of thought, that God is just a concept that we manipulate, or the powerful manipulate, or the weak manipulate.
[46:36] It's in Nietzsche's thought, it was in Freud, it was in behaviorism, it's in Marxism, it's in basically most contemporary mainline churches' religion, is that God is like a clay and we're the potter, and we can manipulate these images and we can do whatever it is.

In the Anglican Church of Canada, when it talks in the Book of Alternative Services, in 1985 it describes, what is it that says the Bible, is a repository of our symbols that we use to talk about God.
And it says to something deep within us that we want God to be the clay, because you know what, I'm the potter. I believe that I am the potter and God is the clay, but God's grace calls me into the real world, where God is the potter and I am the clay.
Next point. Remember I said that my early crisis of faith was around the whole problem of free will and determinism, and one of the things that I eventually came to, I didn't go to this text, but I came to understand that first of all, the guys who were challenging me, that they weren't being intellectually honest.
It's an important thing for those of you who are engaged in evangelism, is that whatever objection a person has to the Christian faith, that objection isn't just an objection to the Christian faith, it's a problem for all philosophy.
[48:02] And when I put the thing back on them, they just got grumpy with me, and they called me names.

But the fact of the matter is, is that their argument that everything has a cause and effect, and whatever I think I have about free will is just a matter of cause and effect, I said, well, that counts for your thought too.
Why are you exempt from that? That's when they started calling me names, telling me they were smarter than me and all that, but they just all meant as they didn't have an answer. But I started to realize this truth.
Only the loving, all-powerful, and sovereign God can be the ground and guarantor of human freedom in an ordered creation. I know it's a big thought. I just, those of you who are in university, or those of you who are struggling with intellectual things, this is a deep part of the Christian worldview.

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It's why it is that it's within the Christian worldview that science developed. It's why it is that in the Christian, it's only the Christian world, every other system of thought is going to lead you to a sense that you must be determined and you have no free will.
[49:09] And it's only in the Bible that we understand that there are lots of things that overwhelm our free will, that we have viruses, there's Alzheimer's, there's things that cause dementia. There are huge forces, and the Bible doesn't say that we have free will and every single thing, but it says we have significant free will and that God made us for freedom.

He made us for love. That in fact, at the heart of the Christian faith is that from all eternity, the Father has loved the Son and the Son has loved the Father. And that out of love of the Father from the Son and the Son from the Father, that out of that abundance of love, that all creation came into being.
And that even when the creation fell, out of the abundance of love, a complete, self-sufficient, unending, eternal, unstopping, unfailingly love, that out of this, that the Son willingly set aside his glory and honor and divine prerogatives and came to live amongst us so that he could do for us what we could not do for ourselves when we decided that we would be like God and therefore bent ourselves and became addicted to the desire to be like God and to see God as the clay and us as the potter.
And we who could not save ourselves or help ourselves, Jesus came and died upon the cross, taking upon himself our desire to be eternally separate from God.
And he took all of that upon himself and he offered us when we put our faith and trust in him, a faith and trust in him that comes because God first called me and there's nothing choice about me, but God called me and I put my faith and trust in Jesus and he is the one who makes me right with himself and I now no longer am a vessel for destruction, which is what I want, but when I put my faith and trust in Jesus, calling out to God for mercy to do what only he can do, he makes me a vessel of mercy to reflect his glory.
[51:07] Only the loving, all-powerful, and sovereign God can be the ground and guarantor of human freedom in an ordered creation.

Just seven and eight, we'll do them really quick. Seven, this isn't to shut us up. The potter and the clay thing, that's not to shut you and me up. Remember I said that it's, you know, earlier on that God's grace calls me into the real world?
God's word silences my boasting so he can have a conversation with me. You know, some of you have maybe gone to a supper meeting or something, you sat beside somebody, all they do is boast. Like how many of you like going to Facebook pages where all they ever do is talk about how wonderful their kids are and how they're always successful and they're always winning awards and they're going from strength to strength? How many of you say, I want to check that page out because they boast all the time?
I love going to that. Okay? Nobody does that. God's silence is our boasting so we can have an honest conversation with us, our need for mercy.
[52:18] The final point, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ crucified alone, God has made me into a vessel of mercy prepared for his glory.

By grace alone, through faith alone, through faith alone, in Christ crucified alone, God has made me into a vessel of mercy prepared for his glory. Listen to what it says again.
In order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory. Friend, some of you might say, God would never call me.
He's called you. God could never do anything out of my terrible, crappy lump of clay. He can do anything. I don't care how God, no matter how terrible you think you are as a bunch of clay, even if you think you're old, wrinkled, cracked, broken, disgusted, whatever it is.
This is the wonderful thing about the text. God can take any lump of clay and make it into a vessel of mercy for his glory. It doesn't matter if you're 90 years old or if you're a young person.
[53:29] It doesn't matter what your IQ is or what your income is or your educational attainments. God can make you into a vessel of mercy for his glory. He's calling you.

He does not tell you these things in this text to shut you up, but to say, Lord, have mercy. You are the potter. I am the clay. I call out to you.
Make me a vessel of mercy for your glory. Please stand. Father, you know how deeply addicted we are to believing that we are the potter and you are the clay.

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Father, you know that that's something deep within us. We thank and praise you, Father, that you have redeemed us in Jesus, even though we still struggle with this.
Father, we ask that you help us to struggle with it more. Help us, Father, to be able to repent at an ever deeper level of this attitude of our heart and our mind that you are clay and we are potter.
[54:44] Father, may your Holy Spirit bring us ever deeper into Jesus in the mystery of redemption, the mystery of what you accomplished for us on the cross, that we might let go and relax and understand that you are the potter and we are the clay.

And we thank and praise you, Father, that you call us. We thank and praise you, Father, that when you call us, you make us right with yourself and that you are at work within us in the circumstances of our lives to make us ever more plainly and ever more clearly into all eternity a vessel of mercy prepared for glory.
Father, we thank you for this great and precious promise and make us disciples of Jesus gripped by this gospel living for your glory. And we ask this in Jesus' name.
Amen. Amen. Thank you.

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