

Unconditional Election and the Mercy of God

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[0:00] Hi, everyone. I'm reading from Romans chapter 9 from verse 14 through to verse 29.

! What shall we say then? 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. So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy.

For the scripture says to Pharaoh, for this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

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 moulded say to its moulder, 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 honourable use and another for dishonourable 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?

[1:30] In order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles.

As indeed he says in Hosea, Those who were not my people I will call my people, and her who was not beloved I will call beloved.

And in the very place where it was said to them, You are not my people, there they will be called the sons of the living God. And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.

And as Isaiah predicted, if the Lord of hosts has not left us offspring, we would have become like Sodom and become like Gomorrah. Morning everyone.

My name is Martin. I'm one of the pastors here. And it's my privilege to speak on God's word this morning. We'll be looking at Romans chapter 9.

[2:45] The Bible reading we just heard. Excuse me while I get myself organised. Special welcome to anyone who's visiting or new here. I noticed Sam and Bo Jasmine from Foundry Church in Walls End.

So great to have you visiting. Must be a Sunday off for you. So if you get to catch up with them, please encourage them. And ask about our brothers and sisters at Foundry and how things are going there.

Also, David and Alison Caldwood are back with us this morning. So please make sure you catch up with them and encourage them before they head off to Bogglebri. Is this your last Sunday before?

Or one more Sunday? Okay. Yep. So make sure you take that opportunity this Sunday or next Sunday to encourage them. Now, I've got to admit, I'm nervous about preaching this morning.

I don't generally typically get nervous about preaching or about speaking in public generally. But I am feeling a bit nervous this morning. I was speaking to Dave this week and I said to Dave, I don't think there's any way we'll get through a series on Romans chapters 9 to 11 without offending someone.

[3:53] Because I'm thinking, right, in Romans chapters 9 to 11, these chapters address three of the most contentious areas of Christian doctrine. The doctrine of predestination or election, eschatology, and the place of Israel in God's plans.

And if you put ten Christians in a room together, there are going to be like five different opinions on those questions. And so with a group like this, there's no doubt we have differences of opinions on

each of those issues.

But what we need to keep doing is coming back to the Word of God, wrestling with it, being ready to have God's Word correct and challenge our thinking. And really, I'd love you to engage with the sermon this morning, engage with God's Word, not just sort of listening to think, is Martin, you know, do I agree with what Martin's saying?

Is Martin saying what I think? Or something like that. And evaluating. I actually want you to be hearing the Word of God, like all of us, to be going into the Word of God, wrestling with it. What does it say? And seeking to apply what we find there to our hearts.

So please listen in that spirit and engage with God's Word. Have your Bibles open so you can read it. I'm also nervous, though, because this passage takes us into some deep waters.

[5:13] You know Deuteronomy 29, verse 29, where God says, The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

So there are things that God has revealed to us, things we need to know, and there are also things that God has hidden from us, things we cannot find out. And Paul was an inspired apostle.

Paul's letters, Paul's words are the Word of God, the Scriptures. But even he was aware that as he wrote Romans chapters 9 to 11, he was skirting the boundary between the secret things and the revealed things.

So that's how he concludes in Romans chapter 11, verse 33. He says, Paul knew he was sort of mapping out the boundary between what we know and what we don't know about God's will.

And there are times reading Romans 9 to 11 when we need to take hold of the revealed things and believe them wholeheartedly.

[6:34] And there are also times reading these chapters when we need to hold our peace and say, The secret things belong to the Lord our God. It takes faith to believe what God has revealed.

It takes faith to hold our peace and trust God in what he hasn't revealed. Lord, give us that faith. So I think I'd like us to begin by praying.

So will you join with me in prayer? Heavenly Father, as we come to this deep part of your Word, we pray that you would help us to think rightly, prepare all of our hearts to hear your Word.

May we draw encouragement from it. Please may our meditation on this passage this morning be for the strengthening of the faith of each one of us for your praise and your glory.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, the talk today is from Romans chapter 4, verses 9, verses 14 to 29. I've given it the title, Unconditional Election and the Mercy of God, because it is about those two things.

[7:44] It's about unconditional election, or to use another term, predestination. It's also about who God is. It's about God's righteousness, his justice, and his mercy. Now, to sketch out some context, because we are returning to Romans after a significant break, chapters 1 to 8 of Romans gave us the gospel of how we are saved through Jesus' death for our sins, as our propitiation, turning aside God's wrath, so that we might be justified and have peace with God.

Chapters 1 to 8 sketched out the gospel and the security of salvation in Christ, the security of the love of God. In chapters 12 to 15, Paul will go on to talk about the implications of the gospel for how we live our lives individually, our life collectively together.

And that's the kind of structure we find in quite a few of Paul's epistles, the gospel and then the implications of the gospel. But in between those two in Romans, we have these chapters 9 to 11, which interrupts the kind of normal flow with this particular question.

And the particular question these chapters are addressing is, why are there so few Jews who believe in Jesus? And this is a question Paul is asking in the mid-50s AD.

Even by that time, it was evident that few Jews had responded to the gospel. Now, that question had pastoral relevance for the Roman believers, because some of the Christians in Rome were Jews, some of the Christians in Rome were Gentiles, and it seems from chapters 14 and 15, that there was some friction between believers, and that some of that friction was around Jewish practices like Sabbath observance and food laws.

[9:38] And so by addressing the place of Israel in God's plan of salvation, Paul is laying some theological groundwork for a later appeal to unity between believers, which is going to come later in the book.

So these chapters, chapters 9 to 11, aren't, they're not a mere digression, they're actually integral to Paul's overall argument and purpose in writing. We saw last week, Paul begins chapter 9 by expressing his grief that so few of his fellow Israelites believed in Jesus, but the main point in chapter 9 from verse 6 is that God's word has not failed.

To refresh our memories, verse 6, it's not as though the word of God has failed, for not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel. In other words, belonging to a spiritually privileged community, the nation of Israel, did not guarantee personal salvation for any individual, each individual and every individual who was part of that community.

They were separate questions. Not all who are descended from Israel, part of the community, the nation, belong to spiritual Israel.

Paul backed this up by showing that God's pattern in dealing with humanity is to choose some and not others. Isaac, not Ishmael.

[11:09] Jacob, not Esau. And that it doesn't depend, God's choice of people doesn't depend on anything about the people themselves. Look at verse 11. Speaking of Jacob and Esau.

Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works, but because of him who calls.

She was told the older will serve the younger. That pattern, choosing some and not others, that applied, Paul's point is, that applied not only to God's choice of Israel as a nation to have a special place in his plan, but also to his choice of individuals within Israel who would enjoy personal salvation, who would be individually, personally saved.

And that doesn't only apply to Israel. God chooses who will be saved. In fact, God has already chosen who will be saved.

It is his purpose of election, verse 11. And God doesn't choose people because they're good and he doesn't choose people because they have more potential.

[12:33] He didn't choose people because they had begun to respond to him. He doesn't look ahead through time, see who will believe in him and then reactively choose the people who are going to choose him anyway.

Rather, God's choice of whom he will save is prior and it's definitive and it's not dependent on anything about us. In doctrinal terms, this is the doctrine of unconditional election.

Election, God chooses people. unconditional, unconditional, because God's choice doesn't depend on any merit, faith, godliness or good works on our part.

God's election is a completely free, uncompelled, gratuitous act of God's mercy. But unconditional election, which is there, I've suggested in Romans 9, verse 11, does not always sit easily with us. It didn't sit easily with Christians in the first century either. And so in verses 14 to 29, Paul addresses two objections to election.

[13:45] Two potential objections to the assertion that God chooses people. Verse 14, is it unjust of God to act this way? Verse 19, how can God find fault with us when our salvation depends on His choice rather than our works?

Let's think about each of those objections. First objection, is God unjust? Verse 14, what shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? Now I'm sure you can feel the weight of this objection. Think about justice. It's almost a definition of justice, that justice is concerned with works. Justice punishes what is evil and rewards what is good.

So if God chooses to save people not because of works, isn't that unjust? I mean, imagine a governor or a judge acting that way today, right?

In Australia, right, if acquittals and Australia Day honours and knighthoods if they could still be given, if they're kind of bestowed without any regard for work and on the other hand, fines and imprisonments and executions, you know, all administered without any regard to people's behaviour or deeds or performance, awards and punishments by the governor, by the prime minister, just meted out arbitrarily for no reason than an official's seemingly random personal choice.

[15:19] I mean, wouldn't we say that's injustice? If God chooses to save some and not others, is there injustice on God's part? Well, the answer in verse 14 is emphatic, by no means.

And Paul backs up this answer with two quotes from the book of Exodus. In verses 6 to 13 of Romans 9, we've had some examples from Genesis, from the patriarchs, now we move forward to the book of Exodus, the time of Moses.

And he gives two quotes, verse 15, what God says to Moses, verse 17, what God says to Pharaoh. I'm going to read through the whole section and then we'll step through it.

So verse 15, for he says, God says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy.

For the scripture says to Pharaoh, for this very purpose I 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.

[16:33] Now, I think this might strike us as a strange kind of answer. Because notice what Paul doesn't do. Paul doesn't evaluate God's actions by according to some external standard of justice.

Here's our definition of justice, let's see how God stacks up against it. He doesn't do that. Instead, he takes us back to the scriptures. He takes us back to the character of God as revealed in the scriptures and argues God is not unjust because his choice to show mercy to some, not all, is consistent with how he has revealed himself to be in the scriptures.

It's consistent to what he's shown of his own character. So in verse 15 to 16 we have a positive example and the key word in verses 15 and 16 is the word mercy. This example, he says to Moses, I'll have mercy on whom I have mercy, I'll have compassion on whom I have compassion.

This example comes from Exodus chapter 33. It follows closely on from Israel's sin with the golden calf after they've been brought out of Egypt. You remember that occasion?

They've committed atrocious, appalling idolatry with the golden calf and God proposes to wipe out all of Israel and start again and Moses interceded for Israel and in response to Moses' intercession God has declared that he will forgive Israel, he will bring them into the promised land after all, he will go with them and be their God and their protector and in his relief and in his exuberance, Moses prays to God, please let me see your glory and the Lord replied, I will make all my goodness pass before you and I will proclaim before you my name, the Lord and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

[18:29] I mean, this is, this in Exodus 33, it's setting up what is one of the foundational texts in the Old Testament, the revelation of God's glory to Moses, God's name, God's character and notice how those things, they're all connected, God's glory, his goodness, his name, his character, these are all connected and at the heart of God's glory and goodness and his name and his character is what?

Mercy, compassion, grace. grace. But it's also a sovereign mercy. It is mercy shown on whomever God wills.

Paul's conclusion in Romans 9, verse 16 is, so then it depends not on human will or exertion. Notice how human will and exertion encompass both our inner resolve and our outward execution.

salvation, but it depends on neither of those but on God who has mercy. What's the it that depends only on God who has mercy? Well, in the context, the it must be salvation.

The salvation of each and every individual who is saved depends not on human will or exertion but on God who has mercy. And in verse 17, Paul doubles down on this with a negative example, this time the example of Pharaoh from a bit earlier in the book of Exodus, Pharaoh who stubbornly and defiantly opposed God and opposed God's people.

[19:55] This is the Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt against whom God sent plague after plague but he continually refused to let God's people go. And multiple times we read in Exodus that Pharaoh, not only that Pharaoh hardened his own heart but that God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

So Pharaoh's resistance wasn't just the result of his own willful stubbornness, it was also the result of God's choice to harden him, to render him unresponsive to God's word, to harden him in his rebellion.

In verse 17, Paul quotes God's words to Pharaoh from Exodus chapter 9 to declare both the fact of Pharaoh's hardening but also the reason God gave.

I think it's worth seeing some context here so perhaps keep a finger in Romans 9 and flick back with me quickly to Exodus chapter 9 verse 12 Exodus chapter 9 verse 12 because what I want us to see here is an interplay of two ideas in these verses and I think we need to see them both side by side, we need to see them together.

So Exodus chapter 9 verse 12 to 17 Exodus chapter 9 verse 12 verse 13 Then the Lord said to Moses Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh and say to him Thus says the Lord the God of the Hebrews Let my people go that they may serve me for this time I'll send all

my plagues on you yourself and on your servants and your people so that you may know that there's none like me in all the earth For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence and you would have been cut off from the earth.

[21 : 49] But for this purpose I've raised you up to show you my power so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go.

Now just consider the extraordinary complex of ideas in that verse, in that section. Verse 12, the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. Verse 13, the Lord said to Pharaoh, the commanded Pharaoh, let my people go.

So we've got those two side by side, without embarrassment or contradiction. God's sovereignty, the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, but Pharaoh's responsibility, this command, let my people go, that he is called to obey.

In verse 15 and 16 we have God's sovereignty again. He says, I've raised you up, verse 16, for this purpose I've raised you up. In what sense had God raised Pharaoh up?

Well he'd at least done these two things, he'd appointed Pharaoh as ruler of Egypt, he'd given him power and authority. But in light of verse 15 where he says, I could have put out my hand and struck you and cut you off from the earth.

[22 : 55] He's also allowed Pharaoh to continue in that position, even as Pharaoh resisted God's commands and oppressed God's people. Rather than simply wiping him out straight away, he left him there as Pharaoh, as ruler.

God's sovereignty, verse 17. But then there's human responsibility again. Verse 17, you are still exalting yourself against my people. You will not let them go.

See, in the case of Pharaoh, God asserts both his own sovereignty in raising Pharaoh up and in hardening his heart and in bearing with Pharaoh and ultimately in punishing Pharaoh, but also Pharaoh's individual responsibility in exalting himself, in hardening his own heart and in refusing to obey God's command.

Now what was God's ultimate goal in raising Pharaoh up, in permitting him to continue as long as he did? It was so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

Pharaoh's prolonged ability to resist and oppose God was ultimately to serve a greater purpose that God might be made known. Wasn't it the same with the chief priests in Jesus' day?

[24 : 13] With Pontius Pilate? With Judas Iscariot? With the soldiers who crucified Jesus? Those who committed the most appalling and treacherous evil?

Guilty of terrible crimes against God? And yet at the same time, raised up by God?

Appointed by God? So that Jesus' name might be proclaimed in all the earth. Brothers and sisters, we don't need to fear when evildoers seem to have the upper hand.

But let's take us back to the conclusion in Romans 9. Flick back to Romans 9. Romans 9 verse 18. So then, he has mercy on whomever he wills and he hardens whomever he wills.

Here is an emphatic declaration of God's sovereignty in election. Sovereignty over both mercy and judgment. Now that leads to another potential objection.

[25 : 25] We'll get there soon, verse 19. But just before we get there, there's one thing we need to notice about verses 15 to 18. These two actions of God, which are described here, showing mercy and hardening.

Do you notice that they both assume that the people God is acting towards are sinners? The perspective here is not of a perfect, unfallen humanity and God deciding, oh, I'd like to save some and I'd like to punish others, so I better make this lot really bad so that I can punish them.

The perspective, rather, is of sinful, rebellious, fallen humanity, humanity at enmity with God, and God sovereignly choosing to show mercy to some, but not all, and to confirm others in their rebellion against him.

Now, this isn't just splitting hairs. I think this is an important distinction. It's not the case that we all deserve mercy, but God in his cruelty punishes some.

Rather, it's the case that we all deserve punishment. And God in his mercy forgives some. Well, let's get to that second objection, verse 19.

[26 : 40] Why does God still find fault? Verse 19, you will say to me then, why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will? Now, on the one hand, we can get this objection, right?

If God hardens me in sin, how could I resist that? And so, how could God blame me for sin if he has hardened me in sin?

Now, there's a couple of things we should probably have in mind as we read these words that Paul's going to say in response. A couple of things we should probably have in mind. First, remember back in Romans chapter 1, well, you may remember, Paul had already spoken in Romans chapter 1 about God giving people up to their sin.

Giving people up to their own lusts and passions and debased mind. No one who is hardened by God is trying to resist his will.

In a sense, as in trying to stop being hardened by God. You know, trying to resist the hardening. No one's doing that, right? When God hardens sinners, he is handing sinners over to the wickedness of their own hearts.

[27 : 57] Second thing to keep in mind is that ever since Genesis chapter 3, humans have been coming up with excuses to try and evade the responsibility for our sin. Remember Adam?

The woman you put here with me, she gave me the fruit. Remember Eve? It was the serpent. He deceived me. Remember Cain? Am I my brother's keeper? Here's just another attempt to avoid responsibility for sin.

If I'm hardened, God, that's your fault. But the word of God will not permit us to set God's sovereignty against our responsibility.

It doesn't allow us to do that. In fact, Romans chapter 9, verse 30 to 33, just after the passage, they will be speaking on this next week. Romans 9, 30 to 33 lays the responsibility for stumbling, their stumbling, squarely in the lap of Israel and their unbelief.

[29 : 07] Or as Paul says here in verse 20, But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is moulded say to its moulder?

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 honourable use and another for dishonourable use? God is God.

God is God. God is God. And you are not. And I am not. God is under no obligation to save everyone. As the potter with the clay, God is free to do with sinful humanity, with rebellious Israel, whatever he will.

And in verse 22 to 24, Paul lays out what God is doing, God's plan. Verse 22.

And here, the potter and clay image is still in the background. You can see that from the use of the word vessels in these verses. Verse 22.

[30 : 08] Verse speaks of vessels of wrath. 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?

Now, why in this verse does God desire to show his wrath and make his power known? Why does he desire to show wrath? Is it because God desires wrath in and of itself? Is it because God enjoys destruction?

No. No. That suggestion would contradict the scriptures or contradict what God himself had said. Ezekiel 33 verse 11. God says, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.

Turn back. Turn back from your evil ways. The only sense in which God desires to show wrath is because wrath is deserved.

Because God cannot tolerate sin. Because he allows the weeds to grow among the wheat. He cannot let the guilty, but ultimately he cannot let the guilty unpunished.

[31 : 17] Leave the guilty unpunished. But as God did with Pharaoh in a more general sense, God at present, the present time, endures with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.

He allows sin and sinners to continue. He allows the weeds to grow among the wheat. Why? Verse 23. In order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.

Similar to in Pharaoh's day, God's purpose in restraining wrath in the present time, in holding back the final judgment, is in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy.

Verse 24. Even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles. When God speaks about vessels of mercy in verse 23, he's talking about individual people who are called from among the Jews and called from among the Gentiles, from every nation.

You see, Paul is here, he's applying this teaching of unconditional election, not only to God's choice of Israel as a whole, or to God's choice of the church as a whole.

[32 : 40] But more specifically and pointedly, to his choice of individual people, both Jews and Gentiles, out of Israel, out of the nations, to receive his mercy.

The eternal destiny of each and every individual is in the hands of God. He is completely sovereign in salvation. But let's make sure we continue to structure our thoughts in line with the word of God. Consider God's two actions from verse 18. Showing mercy on some, pardoning others. From one perspective, God's role in each is equivalent.

He has mercy on whomever he wills. He hardens whomever he wills. There are vessels of mercy. There are vessels of wrath. But from another perspective, we can see in this section of God's word that his mercy is primary.

His mercy is primary. God's dealings with Pharaoh. God's dealings with the vessels of wrath. God's raising up of Judas Iscariot and Pontius Pilate and the chief priests are all ultimately to serve his purpose of showing mercy to those he will save.

[34:00] Even the terms used, the Greek terms used in verse 22 and 23 for prepared and prepared beforehand. While they're near synonyms, they're not identical.

And that second, prepared beforehand, may be the stronger of the two. At the end of the day, God hardening whom he wills and God enduring with great patience vessels of wrath are virtually the same thing.

Let me say it again. God hardening whom he wills and God enduring with patience vessels of wrath are virtually the same thing. Perhaps this way of thinking about it will help us. There are people alive today.

There are people living and breathing in our world today who will never put their trust in Jesus Christ. Who will never willingly bow the knee to him.

Who will never listen to his voice or follow in his ways. There are people alive today who will never thank God for his love and mercy. Who will never delight in the Lord Jesus.

[35:07] Who will never join their voice in a chorus of praise. There are self-made people who love themselves, who love money, who love this world. Who want creation without the creator.

Who want the kingdom without the king. The enemies of the cross whose God is their belly and whose glory is in their shame. With each year that passes, is God patiently enduring them?

Or is he hardening them? Well, both. And there's little difference between the two. Because every day these people are hardening their hearts to the testimony of God.

The testimony of creation. Look up at the heavens. The heavens declare the glory of God. The good things of creation which God gives us every day to enjoy.

Which speak of God's kindness. And above all the proclamation of the gospel. The name of Jesus. Going out to every corner of the world. The longer God delays his wrath.

[36:17] The longer he hands people over to sin and rebellion and idolatry. But why? Why? Why is God doing this?

Because God is still in the process of calling and drawing to himself the vessels of his mercy. That work is not yet finished. In verses 25 to 29 Paul continues to gather scriptural support for this whole plan of salvation that he's just outlined.

He quotes from the prophets Hosea and Isaiah moving through the Old Testament. We don't have time to consider these citations in detail. Let me just offer a couple of comments.

The first quote from Hosea is from a couple of verses in Hosea. It's a free citation. It's rearranged kind of to suit Paul's purposes. But let me read it out as Paul quotes it in Romans 9 verse 25 and 26.

Now out of context, at face value, it sounds like Paul is making a point specifically about the salvation of the Gentiles.

[37:40] He's just mentioned in verse 24, people being called not from Jews only but also from the Gentiles, the nations. And these verses, these words seem to fit that.

Those who are not my people, I'll call my people. I think it's usually safe to assume that Paul knows the context of the text he quotes from the Old Testament.

And in Hosea, these words aren't about the Gentiles, they're actually about Israel. They're about Israel who have been so rebellious and so idolatrous and so sinful that effectively they've been cast off as the people of God.

But he says, those who are not my people, I'll call my people. Sons of the living God. Not my beloved. I will call my beloved. I will bring them back. Now I think in Romans, Paul probably wants us to understand this quote from Hosea as true both of Jews and Gentiles.

See, this is how God saves people. Both Israel, despite their Old Testament calling, and the nations, find themselves in the position of being not my people and not beloved.

[38 : 46] Cut off from God. Cast off. Undeserving. But what God is on about is redeeming and restoring and bringing back. Turning enemies into sons.

The next quote, verse 27 and 28, comes from Isaiah 10. It makes the point that only a remnant of Israel will ultimately be saved. But let me attempt to draw together some threads. There are questions that this passage we've looked at this morning doesn't answer.

It doesn't tell us where evil came from in the first place. It doesn't tell us why the serpent was in the garden.

It doesn't tell us why God permitted the fall. It doesn't tell us why God chose to save some, but not all.

It certainly doesn't tell us why God chooses one person rather than another. But we must not let the unanswered questions be an excuse for rejecting the answers God has given us.

[39 : 55] Consider the final quote from Isaiah chapter 1 in verse 29. And as Isaiah predicted, if the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.

Salvation depends on God. Left to ourselves, we are destined for wrath. God's mercy must be free and uncompelled or it is worthless to us.

God's mercy is bestowed on the undeserving by the gracious choice of God alone. If God were not sovereign in salvation, we would not be saved.

And so God's sovereign mercy is cause for praise, not panic. Unconditional election, God's sovereign mercy means that people will be saved.

The alternative is Sodom. The alternative is Gomorrah. When God chose to save people, he didn't just choose to save. He chose people.

[41 : 16] The fact that God chose to save meant that people could be saved. The fact that God chose people means that people will be saved.

Unconditional election means that there are still people who will hear and receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because there are people that God has chosen beforehand for mercy.

As long as God permits this present age to continue, as long as God endures with great patience vessels of wrath, there are still vessels of mercy who will respond to the gospel, not with scorn, but with wonder and joy and repentance and faith.

As Paul says elsewhere of his evangelistic labors, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

But I want to close with a word to any of you who find the doctrine of unconditional election disconcerting. I've been there.

[42 : 21] It's possible to trouble ourselves worrying, am I one of the elect? I've been there too. You won't help yourself by asking that question.

You won't help yourself by asking the question, am I one of the elect? As I mentioned last Sunday, I took my car to the mechanic this week. Actually, I took my car to two mechanics.

And they both gave the same opinion, sadly. But the second mechanic I went to was Jen's cousin's husband, a mechanic called Wes. And when I went to pick up the car, the bonnet of the car was up. He wanted to show me something. And he said, you know, come and look at this. Let me show you the strut top mounts. And, you know, he pointed them out. And, you know, there's the problem, right?

See, we need to replace those. Now, Larry's stepped out for a moment, has he? Larry, we're here. He'd be thinking, sorry? Sunday school, of course.

[43 : 26] Well, I mean, Larry, he'd be thinking, of course, the strut top mounts. I've got a dozen strut top mounts in my shed. And I can now dutifully show you, if I were to lift the bonnet of my car, I could dutifully show you where the strut top mounts are.

I'm still not entirely sure what they do, where Wes will find new ones, or how he'll replace them.

Does it make me a better driver knowing where to find my strut top mounts?

Of course not. Driving a car and repairing a car are two completely different skills. When I'm driving a car, I'm not constantly checking under the bonnet while I'm driving.

I'm not even thinking about what's under the bonnet while I'm driving unless smoke starts pouring out. You don't need to know how a car engine works or how a suspension system works to drive a car.

Of course, you need everything under the bonnet to be functioning properly for the car to go. But that's the mechanic's job, not yours.

[44:33] You could be a perfectly good driver and never even open the bonnet once in your life. I'd just recommend taking out an NRMA Roadside Assistance membership. Kids who haven't started driving yet, like you haven't had your...

When your parents start teaching you to drive, I can guarantee you the first lesson won't involve them popping open the bonnet and saying, look, there are the strut top mounts. Unconditional election is under the bonnet of salvation.

We know God does it. We know it works. But we don't need to concern ourselves overly much with it. God has it covered.

Nobody becomes a Christian by hearing the doctrine of unconditional election. Nobody assures themselves that they're among the elect by asking, am I among the elect?

When you ask that, what are you doing? You're looking at yourself and you'll find no comfort there. We must look up, not in. To Jesus, not ourselves.

[45:42] God doesn't ask us to look under the bonnet. If you spend your time looking under the bonnet, you'll never get in the seat and drive the car. What we need to do is to attend to the promises and to the call of the gospel.

Every word of scripture is true. The gospel, Paul says in Colossians, has been proclaimed in all of creation. Every promise of the gospel is offered to every single individual.

Every invitation of the gospel is extended to every single person. The gospel is not you, you, not you, you, not you.

That's not the gospel. The gospel is, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. The gospel is, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

The gospel is, repent and be baptized every one of you, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the Holy Spirit.

[46:54] The gospel is, believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved. So, hear the word of the gospel. Come, drink, repent, believe, and you will find rest and life and forgiveness and fellowship with God.

Do you think you're too sinful? Do you think the promises of God are not for you? Well, let me close by reading something from, this is a book I'd commend to you, Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism by Ian Murray.

But I'm going to read a quote from a Spurgeon sermon. Repent and be baptized every one of you, said Peter. As John Bunyan puts it, now that's Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, right? Acts chapter 2.

As John Bunyan puts it, one man might have stood up in the crowd and said, But I helped to hound him to the cross. Repent and be baptized every one of you.

But I drove the nails into his hands, says one. Every one of you, says Peter. But I pierced his side.

[48:13] Every one of you, said Peter. And I put my tongue into my cheek and stared at his nakedness and said, If he be the Son of God, let him come down from the cross.

Every one of you, said Peter. Repent and be baptized every one of you. The promises and the call of the gospel are for you.

So hear the gospel and come. Will you pray with me? Heavenly Father, we thank you for your mercy shown to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That you would reach out to redeem sinners. To make us your people. To make us your beloved sons and daughters.

In Jesus' name.

[49:32] Amen. Thank you.