

REMNANT CHURCH SERMON NOTES – ROMANS 9: 14-18
PREACHED ON SEPTEMBER 20, 2026, BY REV. B.B. ANUM-HIGHER

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

➤ **INTRODUCTION**

- In the verses we have considered the past few weeks, Paul has been emphasizing God's distinguishing love and sovereign mercy. He has quoted the words of Prophet Malachi, where God says, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated,” and he now brings the congregation at Rome directly into his argument concerning divine election. “What then shall we say?” he asks. “Does this mean that God is unjust?” You can imagine the question arising as this letter was read in the Roman church. Someone might have objected, “If God chooses some people and passes over others, how can that possibly be fair? How can God be just if he determines that one person will be his and will go to heaven, while another is passed over and remains under condemnation?” So the question before us this morning is this: Is there any injustice on God’s part in choosing some people and rejecting others? Is God fair when he says of one person, “I have chosen him to be mine,” while another is not chosen?
- Someone may press the question even further: On what basis does God choose one person rather than another? Is there something better in the one whom God chooses? Does God choose the more moral person, the more religious person, the more sincere person, or the person who makes the better decision? If God is truly just, should he not simply receive everyone into heaven? How can he choose some and not others without being unjust? Paul answers the objection by directing us to the fundamental truth that salvation is not a matter of justice but a matter of mercy. If you think that salvation means receiving exactly what you deserve, then you have completely misunderstood the biblical teaching of salvation. Salvation is not something sinners can demand from God as their rightful due. It is mercy freely given to those who deserve judgment.

➤ **SALVATION IS ALL ABOUT GOD’S MERCY.**

- Let us consider two men as an illustration. Here is a man who, by the kind providence of a merciful God, has lived what appears to be a decent and respectable life. He has been faithful to his wife. He gives generously to charity.

He is a good neighbor. His children love and respect him. He has worked faithfully for forty years, and throughout those years, he has been a good colleague, an intelligent man, and someone others could depend upon. Yet he never bowed before Jesus Christ. He never became a Christian. He never trusted in Christ or embraced the good news of the Savior who was born, lived, died, and rose again. He rejected Christ, and when he died, he went to hell.

- Yet here is another man whose life seems to be the complete opposite. He has broken every one of the Ten Commandments. He has been violent, dishonest, a thief, a liar, and an adulterer. Through his actions, marriages have been destroyed. He has had four wives, as well as other women. He has never worked an honest day in his life and has spent years in prison. Yet during the final months of his life, he becomes deeply conscious of his guilt and overwhelmed by remorse. He begins to read the Bible. He cries out to God for mercy, confesses his sins, and looks to Jesus Christ for salvation. His sins are forgiven, and when he dies, he goes to heaven.
- At first glance, that seems terribly unjust. How can the respectable man end up in hell while the wicked man ends up in heaven? Is God unjust in dealing with these two men in such different ways? No. God has not been unjust to the first man; he has simply given mercy to the second. The second man received something he could never earn and did not deserve. Salvation is not a reward for good behavior. Salvation is all about mercy. The great question is not, "How good have I been?" but, "Have I received the mercy of God through Jesus Christ?"
- Jesus illustrated this with the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in the temple. Both men went to pray. The Pharisee with pride prayed, saying, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." Notice that his prayer has no elements of confession. He does not ask forgiveness for his sins, perhaps because he believes he has nothing to confess. Nor is there any word of praise or thanksgiving to God. His prayer is all about him. Even the thanks he does offer are designed to exalt himself and place himself above others whom he treats with disdain.
- Jesus tells us about another man, a tax collector. He tells us that the tax collector stood "afar off" or "at a distance," perhaps in an outer room, but certainly far from the Pharisee who would have been offended by the nearness of this man. This man's posture spoke of his unworthiness before God. Unable to even lift his eyes to heaven, the burden of his guilt and shame weighed heavily upon him, and the load he carried had become unbearable. Overcome by his transgressions, he beats his breast in sorrow and repentance and appeals to God for mercy. He prayed, "Oh God be merciful to me, a sinner." Which says Jesus went home justified, which of these men went home saved?
- It is the one who pleaded for mercy. It is the tax collector who was justified and was saved. His prayer is the very one God is waiting to hear, and his attitude is exactly what God wants from all who come to Him. Paul says salvation is not a

question of justice but of mercy. It is God in His sovereignty bestowing mercy on whom He will. Paul summarizes this point in verse 18, "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."

➤ **WHAT IS MERCY?**

- In this passage, Paul uses the word mercy for the first time in Romans, and it is a key word in chapters 9 and 11. The word mercy occurs 7 times in these 2 chapters and only once in the rest of Romans. What is mercy? Mercy means God doing something which He is under no obligation to do. It is God doing something that He is not required to do. Mercy is God acting towards certain people in a marvelous outflow of love and grace. In verse 15, he writes, "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'" Paul was quoting Exodus 33:19.
- What is the context of this verse in Exodus 33:19? You will remember that after the Israelites sinned against God by worshipping the golden calf, the Lord was prepared to send them into the Promised Land without His presence among them. But Moses interceded for the people. During his private meeting with God, Moses asked the Lord for assurances, including this request: "Please, let me see Your glory." God answered him, saying, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Exodus 33:19).
- As the faithful mediator of Israel, Moses pleaded with God not to destroy His people but to remain with them and lead them into the Promised Land. God graciously agreed to dwell among them and reveal His glory through His presence in the tabernacle. The Lord assured Moses, "I will indeed do what you have asked, for I look favorably on you, and I know you by name." Moses had already been given glimpses of God's glory on several occasions, yet he desired to see even more. He longed for a greater revelation of the glory of God. And God was willing to reveal His divine goodness to Moses. How would He do this? He declared, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." In other words, God shows mercy freely and sovereignly to whomever He chooses. God was saying to Moses, "I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose." God could have punished all Israel for their idolatry because they deserve just that, but He showed them mercy.
- If you imagine that salvation is getting what you deserve, then you have completely misunderstood the salvation offered by Christ. Would you like to receive what you deserve from God? The very last thing I want is what I deserve from God. Salvation is not about justice, and whenever you are appealing for justice, you have not begun to understand what salvation is. It is all about mercy. God's justice by itself could condemn to hell every human being on the planet, and that would be completely just, right, and fair because every human being has

sinned, every human being has broken God's Law, every human being except the Son of God will or has sinned.

- God doesn't need to be merciful to anybody; He doesn't have to be merciful to anybody. We cannot criticize Him for being unjust by not forgiving everyone. If everyone went to hell, God would be recognized as completely just, and yet God is loving as well as just, and that is why He is pleased to save some from what their sin so richly deserved. He doesn't need to save anyone. He doesn't have to save anyone.
- There are plenty of reasons why we all deserve to go to hell, why we should be punished by God, and condemned. All of us here, including the children, have broken one or two or all of the Ten Commandments, and the wages of sin is death. What is amazing, and the question we should each ask ourselves, is why does God have mercy on some people? We have no reason in ourselves why we should be forgiven by God, saved, and delivered from hell. Why does God show mercy to some people? Paul says that God is not only sovereign but also merciful and holy. Making reference to Pharaoh, Paul writes in verse 18, "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."
- God is not unjust when He chooses some people for salvation and passes over others. Paul makes it clear that an election does not wrong anyone. Election harms nobody. Instead, it brings immeasurable blessings to those whom God chooses. Billions of Christians throughout history have been treated with extraordinary mercy: they are given new hearts and made new creations; the righteousness of Christ justified them; they are adopted into God's family and enabled to cry, "Abba! Father!" They are united forever to Jesus Christ, who is preparing a place for them. Those whom God does not choose are not treated unfairly. They are judged according to their own lives, sins, and choices. They receive what they have wanted—to live apart from God and without his presence. That is hell.
- Election is not the cause of anyone's damnation, because election is unto salvation. Notice how Paul answers the objection: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." That is what divine election accomplishes. It brings God's mercy and compassion to an innumerable multitude of sinners. Non-election is not what sends sinners to hell. Sin is what brings condemnation. Judas, Hitler, and every other sinner who dies outside of Christ go to hell because of sin and guilt. They are rebels who refused to come to Christ for salvation.
- No one who goes to hell will go there wishing that he had chosen Christ and longing to be in heaven. No one will enter hell crying, "Jesus, have mercy on my soul!" Not one. Do you understand that it does not follow that because election is unto salvation, non-election must therefore be unto damnation? Election explains why some sinners are saved; sin, guilt, and divine justice explain why others are

condemned. Therefore, divine election harms no one. Rather, it brings salvation to a multitude so vast that no human being can number them.

- Imagine an angel in heaven asking a newly arrived Christian, “Why are you here?” The answer will always be the same: “Because of the mercy of God.” Here comes a slave trader who abused enslaved women during their terrible journey to the Caribbean. This wretched man was converted during a storm in the middle of the Atlantic and afterward lived a completely different life. “Why are you here?” the angel asks. “I am a debtor to mercy alone,” he replies. Then here comes Jonathan Edwards' wife, one of the godliest women of her generation, who knew God from childhood and sought to love her neighbor as herself. She endured the loss of her children through illness, the painful removal of her husband from his church, and his premature death, yet she did not become bitter against God. The angel asks her, “Why are you here?” She could answer with the words, “‘Tis mercy all, immense and free, and O my God, it found out me.” No Christian who enters heaven will ever say, “I am here because I wanted to come here and by my own efforts I succeeded.” Not one. Paul says in verse 16, “It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”
- Election, therefore, is not unjust, because those who are in hell did not desire God or heaven, and they have been justly judged for their own sin and rebellion. They rejected God despite the evidence of his glory surrounding them and the testimony of conscience within them. There is, as it were, one inscription written upon the walls of hell: “True and righteous are thy judgments, O Lord.” And the great theme of every song in heaven is the opposite: “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!”
- Paul imagines someone in this passage objecting that God is unjust because he chooses many undeserving sinners to bring into heaven. But the point is that justice is not what we need from God; we need grace. And grace cannot be earned, demanded, or commanded. Grace is the free gift of God, purchased for us by what the Son of God accomplished in love and applied to us by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. If that grace does not come to us through Jesus Christ, then it will never come to us at all.
- So who is man to accuse God of injustice? God is the Creator and Sustainer of all life. Does he not have the right to do with his creation and his creatures according to his sovereign will? Isn't the central truth of the gospel that God saves us—we do not save ourselves? Salvation is not a wage that we earn, nor a reward that we deserve. It is not a gold medal won after years of training, or a degree earned after years of study. It is a gift freely given to those who deserve nothing. And once we understand that salvation is truly a gift, we are driven to the doctrine of election. If salvation is a gift, then God has the sovereign right to bestow it according to his good pleasure. Scripture tells us that he exercises that right: “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (v.15). God is indebted to no one. He is under no obligation to save anyone. He could justly have treated every sinner as he

treated the rebellious angels and sent every one of us to hell. Salvation is not a matter of justice but of mercy and grace. The grace of God is a gift, and it is given according to the will of the giver.

➤ **CAN DIVINE ELECTION BE A BARRIER TO SALVATION?**

- Somebody may ask, "What about the person who genuinely wants to be saved but cannot be saved because he is not one of the elect?" Let me answer that emphatically: such a person does not exist! He never has and never will. It is impossible for someone to sincerely desire salvation and yet be refused salvation, because the very desire to be saved is itself evidence that God has already begun his gracious work in that person's heart.
- Think about Lydia in Philippi. She listened to Paul preach the gospel, responded by believing his message, and desired to be baptized. What made the difference between Lydia and the other women who heard Paul? Was she more deserving? Was she more intelligent, more moral, more religious, or somehow better than the others? No. The difference was that God opened her heart and gave her a desire to receive the gospel. If God has placed within a person a genuine desire to know Christ and be saved, then God will not abandon that work. He will bring that desire to its appointed fulfillment.
- If someone truly desires to know Jesus Christ as Savior, that desire is evidence that God's grace has already begun working within him. And what God begins, he will finish. That is the confidence Paul later expressed when he wrote, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (Philippians 1:6). Therefore, the imaginary person who says, "I desperately want to go to heaven, but I cannot because I am not elect," is a ghost. Such a person has never existed.
- Imagine that I am holding something in my hand and sincerely offer it to you. I say, "Would you like to have this? Please take it. I am freely offering it to you." But you look at what I am offering and decide that it has no value to you. You do not want it; you have no interest in possessing it. Then, suppose I turn and offer it to your brother. Would you have any right to complain? Of course not. You rejected it when it was offered to you. You did not want it in the first place.
- That is the situation of the unbeliever. By his attitude, choices, and way of life, the unbeliever says that he does not want God, does not want Christ, and does not want the salvation that comes by grace. But if he truly wants Christ, he may have him. Christ has never rejected a sinner who sincerely comes to him. Indeed, Jesus gives us this wonderful promise: "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37).
- So hear me carefully. Alongside everything I have said about God's sovereign election, I want to say this just as clearly: If you sincerely want Christ, you may come to Christ. You can receive him now. He is not hiding from you. He offers himself freely to sinners. He says, in effect, "Open the door, and I will come in." If

you do not have Christ, it is not because Christ has refused to receive you. It is because you have not come to him.

- Jesus said to the people of Jerusalem, “I would have gathered you,” but they were unwilling. Their problem was not that Christ was unwilling to save those who came to him; their problem was that they would not come. Therefore, do not invent a person who says, “I want Jesus, but I cannot have him because I do not know whether I am elect.” You do not discover your election by looking first into the secret counsel of God. You discover the evidence of God’s election by coming to Christ in faith. Your faith in Christ is the very mark of your election by God. Come to him, trust him, receive him, and open every area of your life to his gracious rule. Those whom God has chosen, he will bring to Christ; and those who come to Christ, he will never cast out.

➤ **DOESN’T DIVINE ELECTION AFFECT EVANGELISM?**

- Then another question inevitably arises: Why should we preach the gospel to anyone if those who are going to be saved will certainly be saved, and those who are not going to be saved will not be saved? Why, then, do we speak so much about evangelism and missions? Why do we become so passionate about preaching the gospel and calling people to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior? Doesn’t the doctrine of election take the urgency and motivation out of evangelism? Not at all. Think about this carefully and honestly for a moment. Let me ask you a question: Do you expect to be alive next Sunday? Seriously, tell me the truth. Do you expect God to give you another week of life here on earth? You do, don’t you? Of course you do. Everyone sitting here expects to be alive next Sunday. Well then, according to that reasoning, you don’t need to eat tonight. You don’t need to eat tomorrow, Tuesday, or Wednesday. You don’t need any food for the entire week. You don’t need to drink anything, you don’t need to sleep, and you don’t need to take any medication that your doctor has prescribed. Why not? Because if God has already determined that you will be alive next Sunday, then surely none of those things matter!
- Isn’t that absurd? It is downright foolish, isn’t it? If you expect to be alive next week, you will use the ordinary means God has appointed to sustain your life. You will eat, you will drink, you will sleep, and if necessary, you will take your medicine. You trust God’s providence while also using the means he has provided. The same principle applies to God’s election. God has not only ordained the end—the salvation of countless sinners—he has also ordained the means by which that salvation will be accomplished. And according to Scripture, one of the principal means God has appointed is the proclamation of the gospel. God uses the preaching of Christ to bring sinners out of darkness and into his marvelous light.
- So does divine election weaken evangelism? Quite the opposite! The doctrine of election gives us one of the greatest possible motivations for faithful evangelism.

It is an astonishing thought that God may have included your testimony, your prayers, your preaching, or your conversation in his eternal plan for bringing another sinner to Christ. Does that make you want to sit back, fold your arms, and do nothing? Of course not! It ought to make you eager to speak. It ought to make you want to tell everyone you meet the glorious message that “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

- God has ordained both the salvation of his elect and the means by which he will gather them. Therefore, we preach, we pray, we evangelize, we send missionaries, and we call sinners to repentance and faith. We do not know who God has chosen, but God does. Our responsibility is simply to proclaim Christ faithfully, trusting that through the preaching of the gospel, God will accomplish his eternal purpose in bringing his people to salvation.

➤ CONCLUSION

- Are you one of those to whom God has shown mercy? Are you asking yourself whether you are one of God’s elect? Then listen carefully to what Paul wrote in Romans 10:8-11, “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’”
- The way to know whether you have received God’s mercy and you are one of His elect is to repent of your sins, believe the gospel, come to Jesus Christ, and confess him openly as Lord and Savior. Do you want forgiveness for your sins? Do you desire everlasting life? Do you long for the sure hope of heaven? Then come to Jesus Christ and receive him as your Savior, and all these blessings are found in him. God is freely offering Christ to you in the gospel.
- And there is one thing that is absolutely certain for every person who hears this message: no one will remain permanently on the fence. You cannot remain neutral concerning Jesus Christ. You will either come to him in faith and be saved, or you will reject him and remain under condemnation. There is no third possibility, no middle ground between salvation and destruction. Christ is before you now in the gospel. He is the only Savior of sinners, and he freely calls you to come to him. So what will you do with Jesus Christ? Will you trust him? Will you receive him? Will you rest your whole hope of salvation upon him alone? The word is near you. The Savior is being proclaimed to you. Do not hide behind questions about election. Come to Christ. Believe in him. Confess him as Lord. And you will never be put to shame. AMEN.