

ROMANS

THE CHRISTIAN'S CONSTITUTION

STUDY TWENTY-FOUR

Straight Talk about Predestination

Romans 9:1–33

The fact is, Christianity is all about God, not about us. What a great relief to know that the truths of the Scriptures and the great theological doctrines of the faith do not revolve around us, though they impact us and embrace us.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

LIFE seems to revolve around us when we see a breathtaking sunset on the beach with family and friends or a twinkling star in the sky on our birthday. When we ponder, however, the vastness of God's creation—the hundreds of billions of stars within a galaxy and the billions of galaxies in the universe—we realize that we are a small part of something much bigger. Life, in fact, doesn't revolve around us!

Similarly, Christianity seems to be about us when we think of the day we placed our faith in Jesus, our weekly church services, or our Christmas and Easter celebrations. And yet, as we peer into the vastness of God through the telescope of Scripture, we realize that we are part of a much greater reality.

In his commentary on Romans, Pastor Chuck Swindoll helps us see the bigger picture:

God's "plan of salvation" is a mighty river of destiny into which each believer plunges. This river of righteousness will eventually flood the world, washing away the old order to make room for the new. . . . Make no mistake: Paul's letter to the Romans is *not* about our salvation. His primary subject is the righteousness of God, of which our salvation is a part.¹

God, in His sovereignty, chose to include us in His grand narrative of redemption. God's master plan also included God's chosen people, the Jews . . . but most of them rejected His Son. Did God's plan fail somehow? What went wrong? Could what happened to them also happen to us?



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In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll examine how Paul addressed these questions, and we'll plant our feet on the solid theological ground of God's *predestination*—the doctrine that our God predetermines whatever comes to pass, including salvation. God's predestination regarding our salvation is often referred to as the doctrine of *election*. It's an important subject tied directly to the sovereignty of God, and, once we grasp it, it is one of the most reassuring doctrines in Scripture, a “strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls” (Hebrews 6:19).



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Pause and be astonished by the nature of God—His boundless and unfathomable qualities.

*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too great for me to understand! (Psalm 139:6)*

In prayer, admit to God that His knowledge exceeds your understanding. Request and receive His wisdom from the book of Romans.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The word translated “predestine” comes from the Greek word *proorizo*—meaning “to determine beforehand, to ordain, to decide ahead of time.” Paul introduced this doctrine earlier when he wrote about our salvation:

Those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son . . . and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Romans 8:29–30 NASB)

How does this passage give you a sense of security in your eternal destiny?

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God also chose Abraham and his descendants and made an unconditional covenant with them. In our passage, the Jewish apostle Paul tackles some questions on God’s sovereign election of Israel, their rejection of the Messiah, and God’s ongoing faithfulness to them.



Observation: God’s Sovereign Election of Israel

Take the first step of *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, observation, by reading [Romans 9](#) in different translations to see what it says.² Feel Paul’s strong desire for the Jews to accept Jesus as Messiah. He certainly had names and faces, family members and friends in mind when he expressed his feelings. Then, note Paul’s descriptions of his Jewish brothers and sisters in [9:1–6](#). What advantages did they enjoy as God’s chosen people? Try to find eight benefits Israel enjoyed and list them in the following chart.

Israel’s Benefits as God’s Chosen People Romans 9:4–5	
1.	5.
2	6.
3.	7.
4.	8.

Has the word of God regarding Israel failed to hold true because they rejected the Messiah? Paul’s answers in [9:6–33](#) coalesce into four great truths on predestination.

Predestination Begins with God’s Sovereign Choice—Romans 9:6–13

Paul started with a basic understanding that faith, not DNA, links us to Abraham. Reread [Romans 9:6–13](#) thoughtfully. Note Paul’s question, answer, and Old Testament support.

Just because you’re born of Abraham’s stock doesn’t mean you’re in the faithful family of the Israelites. That takes faith in the Messiah.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Predestination Upholds God’s Perfect Character—Romans 9:14–18

Now, look closely at [Romans 9:14–18](#). Summarize Paul’s second question, response, and Old Testament support. How did God use Pharaoh to show His character?

Predestination Shows Us God’s Mercy—Romans 9:19–22

What common objection did Paul anticipate in [Romans 9:19–22](#)? What common Old Testament illustration did he use to respond?

Predestination Defends God’s Fairness—Romans 9:23–33

Although God has “the right to show his anger and his power” (Romans 9:22) toward sinners, He shows patience instead. Why? Find the answer in [Romans 9:23](#).

What evidence of God’s patience from the Old Testament did Paul list in [9:24–29](#)?

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How did Paul sum up his teaching in [Romans 9:30–33](#)? What points do you observe about God’s character and how we must come to Him?

God’s perfect character gives Him the right to make His choices.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: God’s Character and Predestination

Turn to your Bible-study resources to help you understand predestination. If you have a Bible dictionary or commentary, feel free to consult them. For an online resource, consult the meaning of [predestination](#) in *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* at biblestudytools.com. Write down a few notes on the concepts that are most helpful.

In [Romans 9:14–23](#), Paul stated that God has the sovereign right to do with His creation as He pleases. According to [9:15–26](#), God told Moses that He would have mercy on whom He has mercy. Examine carefully the term [mercy](#) in *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* at biblestudytools.com. Summarize how mercy characterizes God’s nature and explain why believers are referred to as “objects of mercy.”

God is not obligated to show mercy on anyone. Only by His grace does God show mercy at all, and as the giver of mercy, the choice is entirely His.

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You want to walk around with your thumbs under your suspenders saying, “Wooo God, You’re lucky to have me.” That’s not the way it works. God isn’t lucky. You’re no great shakes, and neither am I. And so if we’re going to be selected as Jacob was, it’s going to be by the sovereign favor and mercy of God, not because of some good thing we have done or promised to do.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Predestination and Human Responsibility

Correlating this passage with other passages protects us from extremes and helps us separate truth from error quickly. Although Abraham had many children, God chose Isaac (*Genesis 21:9–12; Romans 9:7–8*), and from Isaac’s twins, God chose Jacob (*Psalms 135:4; Malachi 1:1–3; Romans 9:11–13*). Think about Jesus’ declaration to the disciples (*John 15:13–16*) and Moses’ remarks to the people of Israel (*Deuteronomy 7:6–9*). What do these passages say about God’s character and His choice?

The reason God chose you: He loves you. Why does He love you? Beats me. Why does He love me? That really beats me. Why would He ever, ever, ever want me? It’s called grace. Thank God He didn’t number my bad stuff against my good stuff because I’d always come out on the losing end. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Take time to compare *Romans 9:19–33; Titus 1:1–2; James 1:13–18*. What lessons can we learn about God’s character and our sins and temptations? What can God not do?

“When I am selfish, God’s responsible because He made me like I am.” No, it says, “God cannot be tempted by evil, He Himself does not tempt anyone.” The bait is dropped; you’re drawn to it. The lust—the “evil desire”—is yours. You’re carried away, you’re tempted, and you yield. You sin. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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See how passages such as [John 3:16–18](#) and [1 Timothy 2:1–6](#) balance out our passage. What does Scripture say about human responsibility—a subject we'll tackle in the next *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study?

You make a choice whether or not Jesus Christ is going to be Your Lord and Savior. You've got to make that decision. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Rest in God's Plan!

Romans 9 provides a lot to absorb! How can we make the doctrine of predestination practical? Most importantly, we need to find a balance between two extreme responses. The first erroneous extreme lies in thinking that salvation rests entirely in our hands. But if this were true, then salvation is ours to keep, if we do enough good works . . . or lose if we sin too much or our faith weakens. What has the Holy Spirit communicated with you in this passage that will help you rest better in God's plan, that salvation cannot be lost?

In God's sovereign plan, through all the mystery of His will, He's working it out for His glory and for our good. Rest in that. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The second erroneous extreme involves the notion that God does it all and we have no responsibility in living a life pleasing to Him. What are some practical ways you can avoid skirting your responsibilities?

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The Jews' rejection of the Messiah did not impugn the character of God. He was and will always be gathering a people to Himself by faith, not by law-keeping. We can be certain that those who believe in Jesus as their Savior "will never be disgraced" (Romans 9:33). We can't tell by looking whom God has chosen for salvation. That is why we preach the gospel to everyone, everywhere, knowing that the Good Shepherd will call and those who are His own will hear His voice and come running to the Savior who will never let them go.



A FINAL PRAYER

Lord God, You are in charge of it all! Thank You for being my all-wise, good, and merciful Father! Thank You for showing me Your mercy in the sacrifice of Your Son. Infuse my choices with Your wisdom. Help me find rest in Your sovereign plan! In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen!

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Romans*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 6 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 207–208.
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2007, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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