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Sermon Notes

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The Justice, Mercy, and Freedom of God in Election, Part 3

Romans 9:14-16

Questioning God's Justice

Lord Acton's Famous Dictum: **"Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."**

Seen again and again in human history... the more powerful a man becomes, the more it tends to corrupt him and make him cruel and arbitrary

The question here is, has God's absolute power corrupted Him?

Paul has been teaching the doctrine of unconditional election...

Romans 9:10-13 Before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-- in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

He does this to answer the grievous question, "Why are so many of God's chosen people, the Jews, rejecting Christ?"

Paul's stunning answer is

Romans 9:6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.

God has an elect group of Jews, and they alone are receiving Christ... the rest are hardened

And this seems unjust

1. God's ways soar above ours... and our perspective is self-serving and limited
2. Job questioned God's justice

Job 19:6-7 ... God has wronged me and drawn his net around me. ⁷ "Though I cry, 'I've been wronged!' I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice.

Job felt that God had dealt unjustly with Him... it was for this and other hard attitudes toward God that Job later repented

Elihu spoke the truth:

Job 34:12-17 It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice. ... ¹⁷ Can he who hates justice govern? Will you condemn the just and mighty One?

Even more pointedly, God speaks:

Job 40:6-10 Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm: ⁷ "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. ⁸ "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? ⁹ Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his? ¹⁰ Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty.

a. People in suffering question God's justice

- i) Perhaps they lost a precious child to cancer
- ii) Perhaps their spouse was killed in a car accident
- iii) Perhaps they have a lingering and painful illness
- iv) Perhaps they look at massive events in history, like the holocaust in WWII and question how a God of justice could allow something like that to happen

How much more do people question the justice of God in unconditional election, where the issue is not temporary suffering in an earthly concentration camp by eternal suffering in the fires of hell.

b. The devil comes in to insinuate that God is unjust in this or that action

c. His goal is clear: to tap into our limited perspective in an assault on God's character, including His justice

3. The issue here: is unconditional election unjust?

II. Romans 9: Six Reasons Why God is NOT Unjust

A. Six Reasons Paul Gives

Question: "IS GOD UNJUST (UNRIGHTEOUS) for unconditionally electing people to eternal life?"

Paul's unequivocal answer: MAY IT NEVER BE!!!

Six Reasons:

- 1. The Nature of God
- 2. The Nature of Justice

3. The Nature of Mercy
4. The Nature of Sovereignty
5. The Nature of Self-Revealed Glory
6. The Nature of Humanity

Two weeks ago, we looked at these six questions in a quick overview... this week, we desire to look more carefully at each

III. Reason #1: The Nature of God

God is not unjust in unconditional election simply because God can never be unjust in anything He does. God's actions are by definition just, because He is the standard of justice in the universe. Also, this argument is powerful because God demonstrated His passionate commitment to justice in the sacrifice of His Son for the sake of displaying His justice.

A. Literal Question: Expecting the Answer "No!!"

Romans 9:14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!

^{NASB} Romans 9:14 What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!

1. Greek construction: expects the answer No
2. Paul's Emotional Answer... not just no, but **NO!!!!!!!**
 - a. "God forbid" or "May it never be!!"
 - b. A sense of impossibility... it is inconceivable that God could be unjust!!

B. God's Awesome Passion for Justice throughout Scripture

1. Proved by His statements through the prophets

a. Declarations of God's justice

Psalm 9:7-8 The LORD reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. ⁸ He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice.

Psalm 11:7 For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face.

Psalm 36:6 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep.

b. Commandments from God to exercise justice as He does

Deuteronomy 16:18-20 *Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly. ¹⁹ Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. ²⁰ Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you.*

Micah 6:8 *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

c. Prophetic warnings and assessments of God's justice

Isaiah 10:1-3 *Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, ² to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. ³ What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches?*

d. Especially concerning judgment day... a day of perfect justice

Acts 17:31 *For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.*

God will prove His perfect justice on Judgment Day when every single sin will be accounted for according to His perfect laws and perfect justice:

Romans 2:5-6 *But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God "will give to each person according to what he has done."*

2. Proved by His actions in history

- a. God flooded the entire world and killed every sinner on earth as a plain display of His justice
- b. God crushed Sodom and Gomorrah as a display of His justice, as He hated their sexual perversion and oppression of the poor

And in the middle of it, He patiently listened to Abraham intercede for the righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah on the simple basis of His justice: he would NEVER sweep away the righteous with the unrighteous

- c. God judged the whole land of Egypt for their wicked oppression of Israel in hundreds of years of bondage... ten plagues and the destruction of Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea was God's justice for their sins

- d. God exiled both Israel and Judah because they violated His covenant by their wickedness and by their oppression of the poor and needy

Throughout history, God's powerful actions in judgment for violating His laws and in protection of the poor and innocent proves His perfect justice

- e. Conversely God was not unjust and did not fail to keep His covenant promises to all who trusted in Him... if they obeyed His commands, He blessed them...

C. God's Highest Display of Justice: Christ on the Cross

1. Christ came to **DISPLAY** justice:
 - a. Justice is the scepter of Christ's Kingdom
 - b. Justice was perfected in Christ Himself: He always said and did what was perfectly just and righteous
2. Christ came to **DECLARE** justice to the nations... Matthew 12:18
3. **ESPECIALLY**: Christ came to **DIE** for justice for the elect... this was God's highest display of justice in history
 - a. Basic issue: the elect are wicked sinners, and ALL SIN DESERVES THE DEATH PENALTY
 - b. It appeared UNJUST for God to forgive their sins and allow them into heaven
 - c. Clear example: David's terrible sin with Bathsheba
 - d. The cross was a perfect display of God's justice

Romans 3:25-26 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Some say the cross is the greatest display of God's love in history, and so it is... they say God loved us so much that He would rather die than live without us

But the cross is also God's display of justice... He loved justice so much that He would rather die than let us into heaven without the just payment of the death penalty our sins deserved

God's credentials in the arena of justice are impeccable, His reputation earned by millennia of perfect justice and by His incredible display of justice at the cross

Human beings have a concern for justice... like Abraham, we want to be sure that the judge of all the earth will do right

But our concern for justice is like a lit match compared to the raging inferno of the sun... God's love for justice and His absolute determination that justice will be done is infinite.

Summary: Unconditional Election is Not Unjust Because it is Impossible for God to Be Unjust

IV. Reason #2: The Nature of Justice

- A. A Question of "Righteousness"
- B. How God Defines Righteousness
- C. God Himself is the Standard of Righteousness

- 1. God alone is the ultimate standard of righteousness

Illus. **National Institute of Standards and Technology**, Gaithersburg, MD is a federal technology agency that aims to develop and promote measurement, standards, and technology to enhance productivity, facilitate trade, and improve the quality of life. For \$10,000 they will measure any object for length, comparing it to their standards

Their word on length is final and authoritative

At a much higher level: God is the standard of all righteousness

Good example in Revelation 16: Seven bowls of wrath poured out on the whole earth

- First bowl: painful sores; Second bowl, sea turned to blood and every living thing in the sea died; Third bowl: all fresh water (rivers, streams, springs of water) became blood

Revelation 16:5-7 Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged;"⁶ for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."⁷ And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments."

- 2. First Statement by the Angel: You are just because you have so judged!!
- 3. Second Statement by the Angel: The punishment fits the crime

D. Level One: "Because I Said So"

- 1. Frequently spoken by the parents

"Because I'm the daddy, that's why!"

2. Underlying assumption: I do not need to explain my reasons; you must learn to trust my judgments
3. Ultimate issue: can you trust God's justice even if you don't understand everything?

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

E. Level Two: "Because They Deserve It"

1. God's justice is so consistent that it lines up with actual responses to actual occurrences
2. The angel notes this: they shed the blood of the saints and prophets, and God has given them blood to drink **AS THEY DESERVE**
3. God explains some of His judgments so that we can learn His patterns, His way of thinking, His logic, His rationale
4. He is training our minds and souls, and by the time we are fully saved, we will be able to understand fully
5. In the meantime, while still in the flesh, we must merely learn to trust Him

F. The Essence of God's Righteousness: Relentless Pursuit of His Own Glory

1. Deeper issue...what is justice itself?
2. God's righteousness = His relentless pursuit of His own glory

Exodus 33:18-19 Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." ¹⁹ And the LORD said, "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.

God's "justice", His "righteousness" is His commitment to His name and His sovereign freedom to be God

3. All justice is based on a scale of value... the more valuable something is, the more it should be properly esteemed by human beings
 - a. There is a difference between petty larceny and grand theft... the more valuable thing that is stolen, the greater the crime
 - b. There is a difference stealing someone's possessions and hurting their body... as the body is worth more than possessions, so assault is a greater crime than robbery

- c. There is a difference between hurting someone's body and taking their life; as a life is worth more than a part of the body, so murder is a greater crime than assault
- d. There is a difference between murdering a private citizen and murdering a police officer... many state laws look on the willful killing of a police officer as an attack on the badge itself, and it meets the criteria for the death penalty

Thus, all justice is based on a scale of values... the more valuable something is, the more justice must value it. All law and all courts are based on this scale

- 4. A truly righteous man is the one who esteems all things properly based on their worth
- 5. The most valuable thing in the universe is the glory of God
 - a. For God to be righteous, He must value His own glory above all things
 - b. For man to be righteous, He must value God's glory above all things
 - c. The essence of sin is that we DO NOT value God's glory

Romans 1:21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

- d. To value anything more highly than God's glory is to be an idolator
- e. God is not an idolator... He values His own glory above all things
- 6. THEREFORE: God must save us from sin in such a way that His glory is central above all things. THAT IS JUSTICE!!!

Summary: The nature of justice proclaims that Unconditional Election Upholds God's Glory... simply because whatever He does is righteous, and because justice itself is valuing God's glory as God above all things

V. Reason #3: The Nature of Mercy

A. Not a Question of Justice But One of Mercy

- 1. Imagine going to God and saying: "I don't want any grace, any handouts, anything free...JUST GIVE ME WHAT I TRULY DESERVE!!!"
- 2. Anyone rightly instructed by the law knows that will only bring wrath

Romans 1:29-32 *They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

3. God's righteousness here is AGAINST US... and we deeply do not desire what we truly deserve
4. Our only hope is one thing: God's mercy, expressed in the forgiveness available in Christ...that God would NOT give us what we truly deserve!!

Luke 18:13 *"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'*

B. What is Mercy?

1. Mercy is God's commitment to alleviate the suffering that sin brings onto us, and to treat us better than our sins deserve
2. Essential to this is freeing us from the ultimate penalty for our sins... eternal separation from God in hell
3. This Mercy is only given us in Christ
4. The greatest mercy God can ever give us is to show us His glory... to span the gap there is between Himself and us... to bring us close to Himself
5. Moses begged the mercy of seeing God's glory... Moses cannot demand this, for Moses is a sinner
6. BUT God has the sovereign freedom to give it as a gift

C. Mercy Cannot Be Demanded

1. It's not unjust because God doesn't owe this to anyone
2. Rebels cannot demand mercy

Illus. Imagine in the Middle Ages, if a man lead a peasant revolt against the Emperor, and in that revolt, the ringleader assassinated the Emperor's only son

Imagine if the revolt was put down and the ringleader was brought before the Emperor for justice; now imagine the rebel falling on his face before the Emperor and begging mercy... we can see that, although it would be a shock if the man received it

BUT imagine the arrogant rebel standing with his legs spread and his hands on his hips, a defiant sneer on his face... and DEMANDING the Emperor show him mercy! Even worse, imagine this rebel saying he deserved mercy because the Emperor had been merciful to other rebels in the past.

NO NO NO... mercy can never be DEMANDED... it is not a matter of justice, what is owed, what is righteous for the king to do

D. "All Have Sinned"... Is It Really Justice You Want?

Illus. Civil War, a soldier in Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia committed a crime and was brought trembling before Lee. Lee saw how afraid he was and said quietly, "Don't be afraid, son... I'll see that you get justice." The soldier answered, "General, that's exactly what I AM afraid of!"

Is it really justice you want? Do you really want to live in a world in which every person you've ever hurt in your life will stand up and accuse you and press for your conviction?

Dorothy Sayers: **"WHEN WE DEMAND JUSTICE, IT IS ALWAYS JUSTICE ON OUR BEHALF AGAINST OTHER PEOPLE! NOBODY, I IMAGINE, WOULD EVER ASK FOR JUSTICE TO BE DONE UPON HIM FOR EVERYTHING HE EVER DID WRONG. LET'S FACE IT, MOST OF THE TIME WE DO NOT WANT JUSTICE, WE WANT REVENGE."**

1. The Bible makes it clear that the entire human race is sinful, both through original sin in Adam and through actual sins committed against the laws of God
2. All of us are deserving the ultimate penalty of justice... the justice of God has every right to hunt us sinners down like dogs and slaughter us
3. Can you imagine standing on judgment day and saying "I don't want any handouts... just give me what I truly deserve!!"
4. Our one great hope is this: the mercy of God

Psalm 103:10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

E. Unconditional Election is Not Unjust Because it is a Display of Mercy

Romans 9:14-16 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 man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

VI. Reason #4: The Nature of Sovereignty

A. God's Glory Consists in Sovereign Freedom

1. A King is not a king if he must check with His subjects first before rendering a decision
2. The glory of a King is his sovereign freedom to do as he chooses
3. This is especially true of God: He has sovereign freedom to do what He wants with His possessions
4. God's name = His freedom

Exodus 3:13-14 Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

"I am who I am" = no outside force defines me, controls me, dictates to me... I am, and there is no one like me; I am and there is no one before me or after me; I am and no one can resist me

Also, a sense of "I will be what I will be" and "I will do what I will do"

At the core of this sovereign freedom is the freedom to chose those to whom He will show mercy

B. Clear Statement 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 man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

This plainly means: "I will choose my children according to my own purposes, and nothing outside of me will control that choice."

C. Paul's Later Elaboration: The Freedom of the Potter

1. Furthermore: not only does God have the right to have mercy on whomever He wants
2. God also has the right to harden whomever He chooses to harden
3. Paul sums this up as the freedom of the potter

Romans 9:21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

Summary: unconditional election is not unjust because it upholds God's sovereign freedom

VII. Reason #5: The Nature of Self-Revealed Glory

A. Moses on Sinai: An Intimate Experience with God's Glory

1. Moses ascended Mt. Sinai to beg God to go with Israel
2. At a key moment, Moses made an amazing request: show me your glory
3. BUT God is not going to show it to ALL the Israelites... only to those He chooses to show it to

B. God's Personal Glory is His Own

1. It is God's unique privilege to show His glory to whom He chooses
2. This is not a matter of justice, but it is intrinsic to the nature of personal relationships
3. God chooses whom He will draw near to Himself

Matthew 11:27 No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

C. No Person Can Demand Self-Revelation from Another Person

1. Imagine if a total stranger came up to you and said: "Reveal yourself to me!"
2. You probably would call the police
3. Even acquaintances and casual friends cannot demand to be closer to you than you are willing to give
4. How Much More Does God Retain this Freedom

Unconditional election is not unjust because it accords with self-revealed glory

VIII. Reason #6: The Nature of Humanity

A. Two important aspects of humanity

1. First, we are created beings... shaped and formed by the Creator like a potter shapes the clay
2. Second, we are sinful and corrupt, with minds polluted by sin

B. Therefore, we are in NO POSITION WHATSOEVER to bring a charge of injustice against God

Romans 9:20-21 *But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" ²¹ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?*

1. Even if we were sinless and pure, we would have NO RIGHT WHATSOEVER to impugn God's justice, for His ways are so much higher than our ways and His thoughts so much higher than our thoughts

Isaiah 55:8-9 *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. ⁹ "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

2. However, we are corrupt and sinful... whatever vestige of the original image of God is left in us is perverted and twisted and corrupted by sin... therefore, we are like drunk people trying to judge the straightness of a line

Illus. "Armchair quarterback":

Witnessing with Elijah Ipole, a native of Nigeria... a man who'd read some about the history of Africa told Elijah he knew more about Nigeria than Elijah did... even though Elijah was born there and had lived his whole life there; so also sports spectators arrogantly think they can coach better than the man who's actually walking the sidelines; they can critique the judgments made by experts in fields they've never studied; the armchair quarterback has never taken a hit from an NFL linebacker or tried to memorize 846 separate offensive plays, or had to make a critical throw late in the fourth quarter... but he will arrogantly judge the quarterback for throwing that key interception

BUT none of that come close to us judging the motives intentions and justice of God!!!

3. We are like blind people judging the beauty of a painting... we are unjust every day, and yet we presume to judge God's justice!!
4. We are radically impaired in our judgment, and God is flawless and righteous in everything He does
5. Thus we are in no position to bring any charge against God's justice
6. Case is thrown out of court!!

C. Unconditional Election is Not Unjust Because It Deals Properly with Human Nature

IX. Applications

A. Summary:

Unconditional election is NOT UNJUST because

1. The Nature of God: God could never do anything unjust... His track record puts that beyond dispute
 2. The Nature of Justice: God defines what is just and unjust by His person... if God does it, it is by definition just; and we learn that justice is whatever best displays and upholds God's glory as a sovereign, free King
 3. The Nature of Mercy: Salvation is not a matter of justice owed to sinners, but of mercy shown to sinners... no one can demand to be chosen, for it is a mercy God gives freely, or He doesn't
 4. The Nature of Sovereignty: God is sovereign, therefore He is free to do whatever He wants in this matter of salvation
 5. The Nature of Self-Revealed Glory: No person can demand as a matter of justice that we reveal ourselves to another person... how much less can sinners demand self-revelation from God
 6. The Nature of Humanity: We sinners are in no position to judge God's justice, since we are so unjust and so limited; furthermore, our arrogance demands that we be saved in such a way that we are humbled completely in the process
- B. Never Question God's Justice Again! Rejoice in it!!
- C. Delight in the incredible grace God has shown to you... far beyond anything you deserve