

# Sermon Growth Guide

Author: Jeff McCrory

## Other Sheep | Romans 9:14-29

June 7, 2026

**Key Verse:** Romans 9:16 “It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”

**Big Idea:** Our salvation does not depend upon our desire or effort but upon the mercy of God.



### Foundations

In Romans 8:29-30 Paul puts forth what we now call the doctrine of election, that God’s choice always trumps our choice. This doctrine has frustrated many. John Calvin in his Institutes of the Christian Religion follows the logical end to the doctrine of election that God elects some to salvation and others to perdition.

While this may be logical to a lawyer like Calvin, it does not follow the theological thinking of the Bible. In fact Calvin puts the emphasis in the wrong place, God’s perdition instead of God’s mercy. God’s choice does trump human choice, but our choice does make a difference. The motivation for Paul writing Romans 9-11 is in fact the conundrum between God’s choice of Israel and Israel’s rejection of God’s choice in Jesus. This is the central focus of these chapters.

### Understanding God’s Word

Romans 9:14-29 locates the issue between God’s choice and Israel’s/our choice in the pages of Scripture. Paul quotes from Exodus, where God hardens Pharaoh’s heart, from Hosea, where God declares a non-people to be his people, from Isaiah, where God saves only a remnant, and from Jeremiah and Genesis, where God the potter chooses to shape one article for destruction and one for saving.

Why all these quotes? Paul builds an argument that God’s choice always trumps human choice. Six times in this passage Paul proclaims God’s mercy to emphasize that it is God’s merciful choice that saves, not our desire or effort. There is nothing we can do to earn God’s mercy. All we can do is give thanks for the gracious gift of God.

### Applying God’s Word

The true Christian life is characterized by gratitude for God’s merciful choices. “We are God’s workmanship (poema) created in Christ Jesus for good works,” Eph 2:10. God’s choice means that we cannot will (Greek word used in 9:16) or run (Greek word used in 9:16) to earn our standing with God. This frees us up from striving to give thanks and proclaim God’s grace upon others.

### Witnessing God’s Word

The simple truth of Romans 9:14-29 is that God’s mercy trumps all else. We are accepted by his mercy and can proclaim that to others. Our life and our new life are God’s merciful gifts.

What did the Presbyterian say after he fell down the stairs? “I’m glad that’s over with.” Predestination. It is all foreordained. Actually, that joke demonstrates the very problem we face with predestination. We tend to think of it as predeterminism, as if our whole lives and every event in them are preplanned. I’m just a wind-up toy spinning out a series of events I have nothing to do with but to suffer. That’s not what this passage is about. That’s not what the reformed doctrine, the presbyterian view, of predestination is about. So, we are going to try to get a few things on the table as Romans 9 addresses us today, and, we know, we will not solve this in twenty minutes of preaching. Salvation belongs to the Lord. There is only so much we can understand. But what God has allowed us to see and to know and to believe is sufficient, and is glorious, and is grounds for great joy.

This is the part of Romans where The People of God are characterized. Who are they? What are they like? What are they doing in the world? God claims a people as his own. This goes back to Abraham. God gathered the descendants of Abraham and set them apart as a people to be a demonstration of his own character. The way God dealt with his chosen people let the world know just what kind of God this is. And all along the way, there were outsiders folded in: Ruth the Moabite, Rahab the Canaanite, and others. If you don’t know those names, don’t worry, but they are part of the genealogical line of Jesus. Outsiders folded in. God told his chosen people they had been brought into his blessing so that they could be a light to the Gentiles, a blessing to others, a way for God to reach and include Other Sheep. That’s the title of our message today. Other Sheep. Jesus said, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” (John 10:16) God is bringing in other sheep, surprising additions, unexpected brothers and sisters. You and I are among them.

“What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.” (Romans 9:14-16) Salvation hangs, depends upon, grace alone, not merit. Paul has just thrown Jacob and Esau up on the table. God accepted Jacob’s sacrifice, but despised Esau’s. Does that seem unfair? Who is to judge? The big question hanging in the air behind this of this part Romans is this: why didn’t Israel accept Jesus as Messiah? That’s a big question. Weren’t they set apart and trained, weren’t they marinated in God’s grace and covenant, weren’t they given prophecy to expect the Messiah? Many believed, but why did this falter? So, we are going to dip into all it means to be chosen, elected, set apart as the People of God. It seems that it is more complicated than simply being in the genetic line of Abraham.

When we bump up against passages about election or predestination, we can find ourselves back in gym class, shifting our weight nervously, waiting to be picked for dodgeball. Am I picked? Am I rejected? This is very different. There is so much more going on here. To try to sketch it out, think of a range. On one end are those who say God creates and determines both the saved and the damned. We call this double predestination. Then predestination—we all stand condemned, but God graciously elects to save some. Then there is the Arminian school which talks about a free-will choice we make with the help of grace. Then finally those who see the Gospel as a presentation of information about which a person says yes or no and bears the consequences. I encourage you to study and measure Scripture and draw what conclusions you can, but also to know there is a tendency to get too confident. Many mysteries remain in the doctrine of election, the understanding of salvation, and we are unwise to systematize it to the point of eliminating the unanswered questions.

That's why I myself am a Neo-Calvinist, Evangelical, Protestant-Augustinian, Reformed, Christian Existentialist—as you should be too. And if you aren't, we can't be friends. I joke, but we must resist being certain about what we cannot be certain about, just as much as we must resist being uncertain about what God has revealed. God is God. We are not. God is in charge. There is only so much we can understand.

When God says, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion," this is good news. Why? Because our salvation does not depend on our performance, our desire, or our effort. God does it. It depends on God. So, what is this bit about Pharaoh? God did not create Pharaoh in order to destroy him, but God also did not allow Pharaoh's disobedience to frustrate his sovereign purposes. Pharaoh hardened his own heart before God pressed it further to produce the exodus. Remember, God loved Pharaoh. Jesus said, love your enemies. This is the same God. But God's purposes are never thwarted by human disobedience. God used Pharaoh's hard heart to produce the moment when the people of God were made free. "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." (Romans 9:18) The Puritans had a saying, "The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay." The same gospel, the same grace, that softens a repentant heart will make an unrepentant heart more rigid, more resistant, more rebellious.

"One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?'" (Romans 9:19) If this is just about getting picked for dodgeball, God picks some and rejects others, then why are we held responsible? Again, it's more complex than that. We are always responsible for our disobedience. But more importantly, we are in no position to judge God. Paul now reminds us where we stand. We are like clay and God is the potter. Will we stand up and judge God? How? "But who

are you, a human being, to talk back to God? 'Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" (Romans 9:20) That's from Isaiah 29. Remember who you are. God is God and you are not. "Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?" (Romans 9:21) Just to try to be clear, some people read that and say that God created a class of people for destruction. Not only are we standing in line waiting to be picked, but God created the picked and the unpicked and then threw the unpicked into hell just to show the picked how special it is to be picked. I understand the logic, but that requires tossing out a lot to other verses revealing who God is—that God loves all he has made; that God made all people in his image; that God does not desire than any should be condemned. So, there is more to be understood here than that simple analogy.

The main point is to keep us in our place. We are too quick to rise up and judge God, in this area and many others. What if? Says Paul. What if God did that? What of it? He is addressing Romans, many Roman citizens, who would readily accept the judgments of Caesar or the Governor or the Generals of Rome. Will you give God the same honor and glory? What if God made some for glory and some for damnation? "What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory." (Romans 9:22-23) Paul is demonstrating an extreme to make the main point. You should be ready to accept it. Whatever God does. God is worthy of trust. God is good to the end. God is loving beyond all measure. God is not ours to judge.

Now we are just going to scratch the sermon topic. Other sheep. God's plans to save are bigger than we thought. We thought we had it all figured out. Line up for dodgeball. Children of Abraham, you are in. Outsiders, you are out, unless you get some special pass and slip in the back door. No. God's plan is much, much bigger than that. What if God planned for other sheep to be in the fold of salvation? Even us. "Even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As he says in Hosea: 'I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one,' and, 'In the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'children of the living God.'" (Romans 9:24-26) I thought we had it figured out. The in are in and the out are out. God's plans are bigger. Romans, Paul says, you are not guests in another man's house. Church, you are not guests. You are not here by accident. You are not here because you slipped in the back door when no one was looking. If you believe in Jesus Christ, if Jesus Christ is your Savior and Lord, you belong here as much as the first, as much as the people of God, as much as Abraham himself. It has always been God's heart to have you home, adopted, and in his family.

Back when the Citadel Mall was new and fresh, I rode my skateboard to the bus station, got out to the mall for 35 cents and spend the whole day basking in the glory of waterfalls and atriums and arcades, Orange Julius and Sbarro pizza. Glorious. And there were movies. Buy a ticket, enjoy the air conditioning, take in a great story. One time we didn't like the movie, we snuck out and into another theater. I know. I understand if you have to leave now and find another Pastor. I remember sitting there just waiting. I couldn't enjoy the movie. I don't belong here. I'm not supposed to be here. At any moment the usher is going to turn the hot beam of that flashlight right on my face! "Get out! You don't belong!" People feel like that in church. Paul wanted the Roman believers to know, you belong here.

I want you to know, God wants you to know, you belong here. It has always been God's heart to make a place for you right here at his table. Jesus was rejected so you could belong. Come to the table of the Lord and know, this is where you belong.