

# Keener Romans Session11 Podcast

Alright, ready to dive into some deep theological waters? Always up for a challenge. Today, we're tackling predestination, God's sovereignty, and the inclusion of Gentiles. Heavy stuff.

Yeah, straight from Romans chapters 9 through 11, as presented by Dr. Craig Keener. You know, it's fascinating how Dr. Keener frames these concepts. He doesn't just present them as abstract theological ideas.

He connects them to how God works in history and in our lives. Okay, so let's start with predestination. It's a concept that can really trip people up.

I mean, it kind of sounds like our choices don't even matter. It can seem that way, I know. But Dr. Keener really emphasizes that predestination isn't about God playing favorites.

So it's not about him picking who gets saved and who doesn't. Exactly. It's about his grace.

It's about him choosing to love us and call us to himself. And not because we earned it. But simply because he's a God of grace.

Right. So where does free will fit into all of this? If God's already chosen, what's the point of us even making choices? That's where things get interesting. Dr. Keener uses the example of Pharaoh to show how God's sovereignty and human free will can coexist somehow.

God knew Pharaoh would resist, yet he still raised up Pharaoh to show his power to everyone. So even Pharaoh's stubbornness was part of God's plan. Yeah.

And think about it. God wasn't just focused on Pharaoh. Right.

He wanted the Egyptians, the Israelites, everybody to know who he was. It's like in history when something big happens that forces people to say, hey, there's a power bigger than us at work here. Yes.

You know, like when the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant and thought they had defeated the God of Israel. Exactly. And then what happened? Well, their goddagon kept falling down before the Ark, and then they were struck with plagues.

Talk about a demonstration of power. It really shows how God asserts himself. Yeah.

Even when people are openly defying him. Absolutely. It's a good reminder that even when we can't see it, God is always orchestrating things to reveal himself.

You got it. But this whole hardening of hearts thing, it's a tough concept to swallow, don't you think? It definitely is. But the story of Saul, I think it's helpful here.

Oh, yeah. Good point. He was just looking for his donkeys.

And then boom, God chooses him to be king. Yeah. So Saul's choices mattered, but God was at work using those choices.

It's like those times when you look back on your life and see how all these seemingly random things actually led you down a specific path. Right. Like it was all meant to be.

But didn't Pharaoh harden his own heart too? Right. How does that fit in? And that's the mystery. The Bible tells us both that Pharaoh hardened his heart and that God hardened it.

Okay. Dr. Keener doesn't try to overexplain it. He acknowledges that both God's sovereignty and human responsibility are involved.

So it's okay to admit we don't have all the answers. Exactly. And this leads us to another tricky concept.

The idea of vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy. Here we go. Right into another tough one.

Why would a loving God create some people for wrath and others for mercy? It's a common question. What about free will? Doesn't that seem unfair? Absolutely. Those are important questions.

Dr. Keener leads us away from seeking easy answers. Instead, he proposes that perhaps suffering is allowed because God wants as many people as possible to become vessels of mercy. And he points out that judgment will ultimately be necessary for true justice to prevail.

So God allowing suffering isn't about him being cruel, but about giving us chances to turn to him. That's a good way to look at it. God sees the big picture, the eternal perspective.

We're often stuck in the here and now. It's like trying to understand a movie by only watching a few minutes at a time. Makes sense.

It reminds us that we have a limited view and we don't have all the pieces. So how does the inclusion of Gentiles fit into all of this? Oh, that's a major theme in Romans. And Dr. Keener, he emphasizes that this inclusivity isn't a new idea in the New Testament.

He points to Old Testament figures like Rahab, Ruth, and Uriah the Hittite. They weren't ethnically Jewish, but they're still considered part of God's people. So the Old Testament was hinting at this idea that God's love goes beyond ethnicity, right? Yeah, exactly.

And Paul uses Hosea's prophecy to drive that point home. What prophecy was that? The one about those who are not my people becoming my people. Right.

To show that Gentile inclusion is part of God's plan. Yes. That must have been a radical idea for some of Paul's Jewish contemporaries.

Oh, for sure. It challenged their whole understanding of who God's chosen people were. Yeah.

And then there's Isaiah's prophecies too. About? About Gentiles streaming to Zion and God's house becoming a house of prayer for all nations. It's such a beautiful picture of unity.

It is. But what about the law? Didn't that create some tension in the early church, especially with Gentiles coming in? Absolutely, it did. And Dr. Keener faces that tension head on.

Paul argues that trying to earn God's favor through the law misses the whole point of grace. Yeah, it's not about checking off boxes. It's about surrendering to God's love.

You got it. So we're all in need of grace, Jew and Gentile alike. But what about that word *telos* that Paul uses in Romans 10.4? What's he getting at there? That's a good question.

See, *telos* is often translated as end, which leads some to think Paul is saying Christ is the end of the law. Okay. But Dr. Keener points out that *telos* can also mean goal.

So instead of abolishing the law, maybe Paul is saying Christ is its fulfillment, the goal of it all. That's a really insightful way to look at it. And it definitely changes how we see the law today, both in our relationship with God and with each other.

So far we've covered predestination, God working even through rebellion, and the inclusion of Gentiles. Where do we go from here? Well, Paul goes on to talk about how the inclusion of Gentiles can actually provoke Israel to jealousy, leading them to Christ. And then he dives into this fascinating image of Christ as the cornerstone, drawing on some powerful Old Testament parallels.

Okay, I'm ready. Unpack that for me. This idea of provoking Israel to jealousy, it can be tough to grasp.

Yeah, for sure. It's not about trying to make them envious, you know. It's more about demonstrating the gospel so powerfully that it awakens a longing in their hearts.

So it's about being such a strong example of following Christ that it makes them say, hey, I want in on that. Exactly. Paul thought that when Jewish people see Gentiles embracing their God through Jesus, it might lead them to reconsider their rejection of him as the Messiah.

He even quotes Deuteronomy, where God says, I will make you jealous by another nation. Wow, that's a pretty bold statement. It is.

It really highlights how important it is for us as Gentile believers to live in a way that reflects Christ's love and grace. But looking back at history, I have to say it seems like the church hasn't always done a great job at that, especially with how we've treated the Jewish people. Yeah, it's a painful truth we have to face.

Yeah. You know, this inclusion that was supposed to draw Israel to the Messiah, it often became a reason for division and even persecution. Right.

It really twists the message of the gospel. It does. It reminds us that we need to check our own hearts and get rid of any pride or prejudice.

So how can we do better? I mean, how can we as Gentiles show God's love to the Jewish people in a way that might actually draw them to Christ? That's a question each of us has to grapple with, I think. Maybe it starts by building bridges, you know, by looking for opportunities for real, honest dialogue and trying to understand each other better. Right.

And it means challenging anti-Semitism wherever we see it. It makes me think about all the great work being done to reconcile Christians and Jews. Yeah.

There's so much potential for healing when we focus on what unites us, on our shared love for the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Absolutely. And speaking of shared foundations, let's move on to Paul's imagery of Christ as the cornerstone.

Dr. Keener makes it clear that this idea isn't something Paul invented. Right. It's rooted in Jewish tradition.

You mean like in Psalm 118? Yes. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. And didn't Jesus quote that same Psalm when talking about himself? He did.

That's exactly right. And Dr. Keener points out how Paul connects several Old Testament passages, like Isaiah 28, where it talks about trusting in the cornerstone that God has laid. Even the Greek translation of Isaiah uses the word pistion, believing, which links it directly to faith in Christ.

So all these Old Testament texts were pointing toward Jesus, just waiting for him to come and fulfill them. It's like they were hidden messages waiting to be decoded. But just knowing about Jesus as the cornerstone isn't enough.

Right. It's not enough to just know about it. We have to build our lives on that foundation.

Exactly. That's where faith and proclamation come in. Dr. Keener delves into Romans 10, where Paul emphasizes that faith comes from hearing the message of Christ.

And this is where Paul's background as a rabbi really shows. Oh, yeah. He uses this technique called midrash to connect Deuteronomy and the gospel.

Hold on. Remind me. What's midrash again? Sure.

It's a way of interpreting scripture by finding deeper meanings and connecting it to other texts and ideas. Got it. So Paul takes the verses in Deuteronomy about the word being near you, in your mouth and in your heart, and he applies them to sharing the gospel.

He says that confessing Jesus as Lord is like having the word in your mouth and believing in his resurrection is like having it in your heart. He's taking this familiar text and using it to explain what it means to truly believe in Christ. Yes, exact.

But does that mean everyone who hears the message automatically believes? I wish it were that simple. Paul himself admits in Romans 10, quoting Isaiah, that not everyone who hears will obey. Even when the truth is clear, some will choose to reject it.

So here we are again, back to that tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. God makes salvation possible, but we still have the choice to accept or reject it. That's right.

And that's why proclaiming the gospel is so crucial. We can't force anyone to believe, but we are called to spread the good news. And that doesn't just mean street preaching, right? Of course not.

There are so many ways to share the gospel. Our words, actions, art, music, even social media. You got it.

And this is where that idea of provoking Israel to jealousy comes back in. Oh yeah. How so? How can we as Gentiles share the message of Christ in a way that resonates with the Jewish people? What would it look like to really embody Christ's love and grace in our interactions with them, both as individuals and as a community? It's a big challenge.

It is. But it's also a chance to be part of something amazing. Exactly.

Speaking of something amazing, Dr. Kiener highlights this fascinating connection Paul makes between the future turning of the Jewish people and the fullness of the Gentiles. Okay, now unpack that for me. What does fullness of the Gentiles even mean? Good question.

Is it about a certain number of Gentiles becoming Christians? Or is it about the gospel reaching every corner of the world? We don't know for sure. But it does make you wonder, what part do we as Gentile believers play in bringing about this turning? You're suggesting that our efforts to spread the gospel might actually be part of God's plan to bring about this ultimate reconciliation. It's an interesting thought, isn't it? And it should encourage us to be even more dedicated to the Great Commission, knowing that our actions could have an impact far greater than we can imagine.

That's incredible. But even as we look ahead to the future, we need to remember that God is at work right now, in the present. He is.

He's drawing people to himself from every corner of the earth. And I keep thinking about that doxology at the end of Romans 11, where Paul just bursts out and prays for God's wisdom and sovereignty. It's so powerful.

It reminds us that no matter how complicated or confusing things seem, God is in control. He's working everything out according to his plan. It's comforting to know that.

It is. That even when we mess up, even when things don't make sense, God is still at work. That's right.

Like that line from the doxology, to him be the glory forever. It's a perfect way to wrap up this section of Romans. It fills us with awe at God's grace.

But Dr. Kiener doesn't just leave us there basking in the beauty of it all. He challenges us with a question. All right.

What's this question that Dr. Kiener leaves us with? He asks, if God can orchestrate history to fulfill his purposes, even through disobedience and resistance, how might he be using your life, your experiences, your choices to contribute to his grand plan? Whoa, that's a big one. Makes you stop and think. It does.

He's saying that even those little things, things we might think are insignificant, could be part of something huge. It's kind of mind-blowing. Where do you even start with a question like that? I don't know that there's one easy answer, but I think maybe it starts with understanding that we're not just watching the story God is writing.

We're part of it. Exactly. We have choices to make.

And those choices, they matter. They have consequences for us, for others. So it's not about just figuring out God's plan for us.

It's about how we respond to what he puts in front of us. Yes. And maybe it's not so much about trying to solve the mystery of God's plan as it is about surrendering to his will, trusting that he can use anything, even our mistakes, to do what he wants to do.

That's encouraging. It is. Especially when you feel like you've messed things up.

It makes me think of Joseph, his brothers. They sold him into slavery. But God used that awful betrayal to save their lives later.

Talk about turning things around. It shows us God's ways aren't our ways. What we see as a disaster, he might be using for good.

And it's not always the big dramatic stuff. Maybe God is using the quiet moments too. Yeah.

The small choices. So it's not just about figuring out what our big purpose is, but about being open to how God is working right now, even in the messy parts of life. That's a beautiful way to put it.

It's about surrendering, trusting, letting God work through us, even when we don't get it. This deep dive has really given me a lot to think about. We've talked about God's sovereignty, predestination, what it means for Gentiles to be included, and this idea of Christ as the cornerstone.

We've only scratched the surface. But hopefully we've sparked your curiosity. Maybe challenged some of your ideas.

Maybe even left you with more questions than answers. That's what I love about digging into these deep theological ideas. There's always more to learn.

Yeah. And maybe that's the point. It's not about having it all figured out.

It's about asking questions. It is. Seeking understanding.

Yeah. And trusting God. Even when we don't understand everything.

To everyone listening, keep wrestling with these ideas. Keep digging into scripture. Keep talking to others who are searching for truth.

And above all, keep your eyes on Jesus. He's the author of our faith. The one who makes it all come together.

He's the cornerstone. The foundation we can build our lives on. He is.

Thanks for joining us for this deep dive into Romans chapters 9 through 11. We hope this has been a meaningful journey for you. Until next time, keep seeking.

Keep exploring. And keep trusting in the one who holds it all together.