
“Chosen by Grace - God's Purpose of Election”

ROMANS 9:6-13

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PASTOR BRIAN SMITH

WILDWOOD CHURCH

EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS

AT A GLANCE

Have you ever found yourself stuck in a ditch? Perhaps a snow storm had you slipping and sliding and all of a sudden your wheels are spinning and you're not going anywhere. Being in a ditch is no fun! When it comes to so-called “ditches” on either side of doctrine, none are as treacherous as those surrounding the doctrine of election. How could God choose to save some but not all? That's a really honest question. It's a good question, but it's not the best question. The better question is how is it that God could save any of us?! Join us as we explore Romans 9:6-13.

INTRODUCTION

Yesterday morning as I was sitting in my home office gazing out over the wintry wonderland that is my backyard, I remember thinking how beautiful it is and wanting to stay in that moment, having my quiet time with the Lord, for as long as possible. I knew that the moment I put down my pen and closed my bible and journal I would have to venture out into the blustery tundra and clear my driveway. I was struck by the dichotomy of the beauty and pain in this dazzling snowscape.

In a similar way, the doctrine of election is beautiful as it brilliantly reflects God's glory but at the same time can be hard to understand and harder still to embrace. What I hope in this sermon is to simply teach what Paul said in Romans 9 and offer a few guardrails to keep us out of the ditches on either side.

Yesterday morning I got stuck in the ditch across the street while clearing my driveway. I hope and pray we can navigate this doctrine humbly and sincerely, so we don't get stuck! I am confident in the power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to help us walk through this together and to fill our hearts with joy that our God is sovereign and merciful!

ROMANS 9:6-13

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. ⁹ For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— ¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

HAS GOD BROKEN HIS WORD?

Paul is explaining how it is that the Israelites, to whom all those blessings of verses 4 & 5 were given, could reject the Gospel and forfeit their inheritance. Has God broken His promise? Has He not kept covenant? No, as Paul asserted in **verse 6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed.**

You have heard me say before, “We are not responsible for fruitfulness, but for faithfulness.” Only God can cause the Gospel to penetrate a person’s heart because only He can bring them to new life. Our task is not to convince people to life but to proclaim the life offered by God through His glorious Gospel and live in the light of the gospel of Christ. It alone is God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes. But it is no failure of the word of God that some who hear it reject it.

Paul continues in **verses 6 and 7 For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”**

This comes from Genesis 21:12, where Sarah demanded that Abraham remove Hagar and her son Ishmael from the home. Abraham was concerned because Ishmael was his firstborn son and should have been his heir. What will happen to my progeny? God assures Abraham, do not fear because the covenant promises I made with you will continue through Isaac, not Ishmael.

BIOLOGY IS NOT ENOUGH

Even in Abraham’s day, not everyone who **descended from** of Abraham was a child of the promise. Not every son of Abraham belonged, so to speak, to Israel. Abraham actually had eight sons, Ishmael, Isaac, and then six more with a concubine. Ishmael was the result of Abraham’s doubt, and Isaac of his faith. Ishmael was the firstborn son of Abraham, yet it was not he through whom the promised blessing would come. Nor was his the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, the promises, and neither did the Christ come through Ishmael. The nations would not be blessed through Ishmael, but through Isaac.

Instead, Ishmael is the father of the Arab peoples and ultimately Islam. About half of the world’s 3.2 billion unreached people are Muslim. Muslims, Jews, and Christians all trace our lineage back to Abraham. Jews and Christians, through Isaac. Muslims through Ishmael.

Tragedy of tragedies that Satan worked through the doubt of Abraham to introduce the world to one of the greatest counterfeit religions on earth, Islam. The mission of the Church today is so difficult because of the false religion proffered through the line of Ishmael. The seed of Ishmael has always warred against the seed of Isaac. That war continues today for the souls of billions of people.

What does Paul mean with the second mention of **Israel? (not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel)** He has told us in Galatians 6:16, that the church is the “true Israel of God” and in Romans 2:28-29 the church is considered the true family of Abraham. However, as Paul goes to great lengths to remind us in Romans 11, Gentiles are grafted onto the olive tree of Israel, not vice versa. Thus, we ought to conclude that what Paul means by the second **Israel**, is everyone in Christ, both Jew and Gentile. But it is only those who believe as Abraham did who are Abraham’s true **children**, not everyone who is his **offspring**.

As he says in **verse 8, This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.** It was not Ishmael, the child of the flesh, the offspring of doubt, who was a child of God. Instead, it was the offspring of Abraham’s faith in the promise of God, namely Isaac.

CHILDREN OF PROMISE

Paul explains what he meant by **children of promise** in **Verse 9 For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.”** This is God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 18:10 and the resultant son was Isaac, which excluded Ishmael from the promise to Abraham. Now, it could be argued that the reason God chose Isaac over Ishmael was because Isaac was the son of Abraham’s true wife, Sarah, so Paul supplied another example. This time of two boys from the same mother, Jacob and Esau.

Verses 10-13 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— ¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

This last quote is from Malachi 1:2-3. The only thing that distinguishes Israel from Edom, or Jacob from Esau was God’s divine choice to love the one over against the other. That’s it. The fact that some Israelites of Paul’s day do not receive God’s grace is nothing new. It is no more of a failure of God’s word than the fact that God loved Jacob in the first place.

The truth is neither Jacob nor Esau did anything to deserve God’s favor. That’s why Paul adds, **not because of works but because of Him who calls.** Jacob was no more deserving of God’s blessings than Esau. But it’s not about deserving, it is about grace. Doriani explains, “Esau was violent and impulsive; Jacob was deceptive and scheming. Neither man deserved the mercy that Jacob received. Jacob defrauded his brother, connived with his mother to deceive his father, tried to exploit his uncle, and showed superficial interest in God’s covenant. Esau was no better. An outdoorsman, he had strong appetites for food and pagan women.”

GOD’S PURPOSE IN ELECTION

If God’s choice of Jacob over Esau was not based on their works, upon what was it based? Paul tells us the reason God chose Jacob was **in order that God’s purpose of election might continue.** It was about God’s purpose and plan in the world. It was about God ordaining that Jacob would be blessed by Isaac and that he would have sons who would become the twelve tribes of Israel and from Israel would come the blessing to the nations, the Messiah, Jesus Christ our Lord.

All human history is unfolding as the Lord ordained. Nothing has gone contrary to His divine plan. No one on planet earth deserves God’s kindness. No one deserves His grace. Yet, those who walk by faith have received it.

So perhaps the better question for us is not why did God **hate Esau**, (and by hate we should note that Jesus says that to be His disciple we must hate our own father and mother. Jesus doesn’t mean we have to despise them, but rather in comparison to our love of Christ and His preeminence in our life, it is as if we hate them. Similarly, God hated Esau in that He chose Jacob to be the recipient of His covenant promises) but rather why did God love Jacob?

God was delivering on His promise in Genesis 3 to send the seed of woman to crush the head of Satan for the sake of the elect, for the sake of those who would receive the unmerited favor of God.

God chose Abraham. God chose Isaac. God chose Jacob. God chose David. God chose Mary. God chose Paul. God chose you in order that His purpose in election might continue. That He may bring to conclusion the finite history of the world, culminating in the infinite victory of Christ over Satan and the resurrection of the saints to eternal life so that for all of eternity He might lavish upon us the immeasurable riches of His grace as Paul so beautifully expounded in Ephesians 2, “*But God,*

being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Ephesians 2:4-9

FOUR POINTS OF APPLICATION FOR US TODAY

1. *Put no salvific hope in your heritage.* The religious Jews said in John 8:39, “Abraham is our father.” By that they revealed that they believed biological connection was enough to save them from judgment. Jesus dispatched with that delusion by telling them that despite being offspring of Abraham, Satan was their true father.

It seems appropriate to draw the corollary between visible and invisible Israel and the visible and invisible Church. If not everyone who belonged to physical Israel belonged to true Israel, we must conclude that not everyone who belongs to the physical, visible church belongs to the true Church.

Daniel Doriani reminds us, “From the beginning there was always an outward, physical Israel and an inward, spiritual Israel...Abraham fathered Isaac and Ishmael. Isaac fathered Jacob and Esau. David fathered Solomon and Absalom. In each case, one son followed God and the other did not.

This warns us that no individual can rely merely upon their heritage, and no local church can rely upon their history. It is not enough to be part of a godly lineage, but one must be godly themselves. It is not enough that the church has a faithful doctrinal statement, they must actually believe the faithful doctrines. It is not enough that a church has a history of proclaiming Christ, each one must personally receive the Christ proclaimed.

Being a member of a church, being the children of Christian parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, having a long heritage of Christian ministry does not mean that you are a Christian. Your heritage will mean nothing on judgement day unless you yourself walk in the faithfulness of your ancestors. The only thing that matters regarding your salvation is your faith. Do *you* believe the Gospel?

Here is the irony. Those who need to hear this today likely won't, whereas those who are saved from God's judgment will be the ones most anxious to have their salvation affirmed. Continue to work out your salvation in fear and trembling, but put no salvific hope in your heritage.

2. *Be slow judge God.* F.F. Bruce cautions, “If God does not reveal the principles on which he makes his choice, that is no reason why his justice should be called in question...The quality of mercy is not strained, and least of all when it is God who shows mercy; for if he were compelled to be merciful by some cause outside himself, not only would his mercy be so much less the mercy, but he himself would be so much the less God.”

One might feel inclined to call God to the witness stand for cross-examination having read what we have just read. This is precisely what Paul predicts and why asks in Romans 9:14, “Is there injustice on God's part?” You might feel rising up in you a righteous indignation over the injustice of divine election. I caution you with the words of the late Charles Spurgeon, “I will not attempt to prove the justice of God in having thus elected some and left others. It is not for me to argue with my Master. He will speak for Himself, and He does so: ‘But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?’”

That is Paul's conclusion, and it is Spurgeon's and it is mine. I pray it is yours lest you hear, like Job, “*Dress for action like a man; I will question you...*” *Job 38:3* Be slow in calling God to the carpet, O man. For it is you who will be found lacking. The Lord can handle your honest questions, even your

exasperated doubts. But lest you face His cross examination, I recommend you be slow to put God on to the witness stand.

Man does not stand before God innocent, but guilty; we are totally depraved apart from Christ. Justice demands that every one of us receives His wrath. That He gives any of us grace instead is abundantly merciful. Which brings me to my third point.

3. *Respond to His grace.* Daniel Doriani advises that a proper response is not to ask, “Am I elect or not?” He says that the fact we even ask that question is “a sign of life.” “The best response,” he says, is, “since I have heard the gospel and have assurances that God is merciful, I should believe in him and find assurance of his love for me.”

Resist the urge to get sucked into a merely academic response to Romans 9. Paul says in *Romans 10:9-10*, “...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”

If you believe this, it is because you have been given His grace and you should respond to it with faith and repentance today. This is, after all God’s purpose of election. That He might show *you* His grace.

4. *Get in the fight.* One of the ditches I have observed among those who have a high view of God’s sovereignty is the ditch of apathy toward evangelism and missions. “Why should I go to the nations if God’s is sovereign over who is saved?” they might ask. The same man who wrote Romans 9 also wrote Romans 10. And in Romans 10 Paul says that unless people are sent to the lost, they will never believe the Gospel.

“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’” Romans 10:14-15

When you realize that mission work is human partnership in divine activity, you’ll never ask that question again. Instead, you will delight that you have the opportunity to call your future brothers and sisters in Christ into the Kingdom of God as you herald the saving Gospel of Jesus. So, get in the fight! Amen?!

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