

## **God's Merciful Election (Romans 9:6b-16)**

- 1) God alone elects
- 2) God elects according to his mercy

While I was going to elementary school in Rapid City, South Dakota, I remember how we used to do tornado drills. My teacher would give the word and we would all go downstairs to a room without any outside windows. It's important to seek shelter like this because if you're caught in the tornado's path without appropriate shelter, it's bad news. If you've seen pictures then you know what I mean. But what's always interested me about those pictures is how focused the damage is. You have a few completely destroyed houses, neighbors with some damage, and then houses untouched a few hundred feet away. Why is it that some homes were destroyed while others remained untouched? Maybe it was a pocket of hot air affecting the tornado's path. Maybe there was a pack of butterflies flapping their wings in East Asia to change our weather patterns at that exact moment. It's probably something else, but chances are we won't find out. Or when there is a bug going around work and school and people are getting sick, do you notice how it seems like be random? Two people are in the same environment, but only one gets sick. Why one and not the other? Maybe it was improper handwashing technique. Maybe it was something else. But again chances are we won't learn the answer. There are a lot of times in life when things happen for random reasons.

In many ways, God's merciful election can seem to be the same. Why are some saved but not others?<sup>i</sup> Why do some receive God's forgiveness but others die in unbelief? There are many unanswered questions when it comes to this teaching. But there's also a lot we do know from Scripture to comfort our doubting minds. And that's what the Apostle Paul teaches us in Romans chapter 9 where he uses 3 case studies from the Old Testament to show us how God's election is merciful.

Paul starts off our verses this morning by identifying 2 different kinds of Israel.<sup>ii</sup> First there is the physical Israel – those who trace their family line back to Abraham whom we call Jews. Second there is the spiritual Israel – those who trust the same promises as Abraham did whom we call believers. He brings up this distinction to show that God's election to salvation doesn't depend on a person's actions or heritage. It depends solely on God. The first case study is between Abraham's two sons – Isaac and Ishmael.<sup>iii</sup> When Abraham was 75 years old, God promised to make him into a great nation and send the Savior through his family line.<sup>iv</sup> But 10 years later Abraham still didn't have any children. So Abraham, at

the naïve request of his wife Sarah, slept with her maidservant, Hagar. Hagar then gave birth to Ishmael.<sup>v</sup> But God didn't choose Ishmael to be the child of the promise.<sup>vi</sup> It would be Isaac whom Sarah would later bear when Abraham was 100 years old.<sup>vii</sup> After Isaac comes the next generation and our next case study – Jacob and Esau.<sup>viii</sup> Isaac and his wife Rebekah were going to have twins, Jacob and Esau.<sup>ix</sup> And yet, as Paul writes in Romans chapter 9, **“before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad...[Rebekah] was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’”**<sup>x</sup> They had the same parents! Yet God chose Jacob, the younger, over Esau, the older. As the Apostle Paul shows us with Isaac and Jacob, God had elected them before their births to be the children of the promise, to be counted among the spiritual Israel.<sup>xi</sup> It had nothing to do with what Isaac and Jacob did or came from.

Why does the Apostle Paul go to such great lengths to prove that God's election doesn't depend on us?<sup>xii</sup> It's because of who we are. When we see our membership in the spiritual Israel, who gets the credit? We want to point to ourselves. This is what the Jewish people of Paul's time did. That because they were part of the physical Israel they were somehow grandfathered into the spiritual Israel. What ended up is that they had a false sense of security to their spiritual doom.

As you consider your salvation, where is your sense of security? Don't let it be in your Christian heritage as if you're grandfathered in somehow. Is it the case in your family that you can count back the believers to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> generation? If so, that's a wonderful blessing! But don't let your mind fool you into a false sense of security because of it. Maybe you're the first one in your family to treasure the light of Christ. Wonderful! Glory to God for bringing you to the spiritual Israel! But be careful that you don't think you're better than lifelong Christians. It's easy to get a false sense of security thinking that our faith is more legitimate than others' because we weren't born in a Christian family. Because when the day of reckoning comes, it won't matter if our names on a church membership list. God's looking for a repentant heart that trusts in Christ alone. No matter what happens, the Apostle Paul's message still stands – God is the only one who elects people to salvation. It doesn't depend on us in any way.

It's always been God's choice when it comes our salvation. He chose Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants to be the cradle for the Savior. He chose Jesus to be born to Mary and Joseph when the time was right.<sup>xiii</sup> Jesus, who is God, in turn chose to be our substitute by living the life we cannot. He kept every law that

the physical Israel failed to obey. He submitted himself to the injustices carried out by Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest, and his cronies. He chose to die on the cross for our sins so that there may be life for those who believe.

And you know whom God chose to receive his love and forgiveness? You and me. That's right. Out of all the people the people in the world, he handpicked you, me, and every believer to be his child through faith. You and me who, quite frankly, don't deserve to be counted among the spiritual Israel at all. We see the laws that Jesus kept and wonder, *"How could he do that? Honoring and respecting God's name in thought, word, and action all the time?"<sup>xiv</sup> Never desiring the possessions of others<sup>xv</sup> or telling a little white lie?<sup>xvi</sup> That's impossible!"* Jesus in fact obeyed these laws and every other. He alone is the confidence of our salvation in whom we have our true security. Because when we trust in Jesus, we don't have to worry if we really are saved. The law has been obeyed and the promise of the gospel is already yours. In no way does it depend on us. It depends on God and the choice he made to call you his child. And that means that our salvation can never fail us.

It's in God's election that we see his mercy to sinners like you and me. What's our first impression when we see the results of God's election? We think he's being unfair and unjust! The Apostle Paul asks and answers this thought with our 3<sup>rd</sup> case study. Paul writes **"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 man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."**<sup>xvii</sup> God spoke these words to Moses shortly after the Golden Calf incident.<sup>xviii</sup> In this shameful account, the Jewish people openly worshiped a golden idol shaped like a calf while living at the base of Mt. Sinai. God had performed wonders before their eyes with the 10 Plagues, crossing the Red Sea on dry ground, giving them manna and quail among other things. How quick they were to forget God! As Moses came down Mt. Sinai to the idolatrous worship to the Golden Calf, God could have easily abandoned the Jewish people just as they abandoned him. But he stood by them. Why? Because of his unfair mercy. Even though the Jewish people didn't deserve it, God chose them to be his.

Why has God chosen you and me to be his children? For the same reason – his unfair mercy. We don't deserve it and yet we receive it. How great is that? Before the creation of the world, he elected us to salvation.<sup>xix</sup> While we were still slaves to

sin, he ripped us out of Satan's clutches and placed us among the spiritual Israel. He continues to stand by us when we fall into sins and temptations. And you know why he'll stand by you? Because God's election depends on his mercy shown through Jesus Christ. And that's something that will never change. Trust in it and never take it for granted. Don't listen to sinful reason that tries to put in your works or background in the mix. God alone decides who will receive faith because of his great mercy for sinners like you and me. May we never forget that. Amen.

## End Notes

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<sup>i</sup> This sermon will not exhaustively cover the doctrine of election. If you are interested in further reading on this comforting teaching, read: Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article XI concerning election. It can be found online at <http://bookofconcord.org/sd-election.php>.

<sup>ii</sup> Romans 9:6b.

<sup>iii</sup> Romans 9:7-9.

<sup>iv</sup> Genesis 12 is the first time God made this promise. He would reaffirm it subsequent times.

<sup>v</sup> Genesis 16.

<sup>vi</sup> In Genesis 21:8-21, Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael away. Although God did not include Ishmael in Jesus' earthly family line, he did bless Ishmael. His descendants would populate the Arabian Peninsula. Interestingly enough, Muslims trace their heritage to Ishmael and rewrite biblical accounts between Isaac and Ishmael to favor Ishmael in the Quran.

<sup>vii</sup> Genesis 18:1-15 and 21:1-7 have the details on this.

<sup>viii</sup> Romans 9:10-13.

<sup>ix</sup> Genesis 25:19 is the start of Jacob's and Esau's lives.

<sup>x</sup> Romans 9:11a,12b. All biblical quotations are from the 1984 edition of the New International Version unless otherwise stated. Historically the descendants of Esau formed the nation of Edom which contributed to the regional geopolitics of Israel's early days as a nation.

<sup>xi</sup> Notice that the author never says that God elected people to damnation. The Bible never blames God for a person's unbelief and neither will this author do so intentionally. For more information on what the Bible says and does not say about God's role in the doctrine of election, look into the already mentioned Article XI concerning election.

<sup>xii</sup> Romans 9:12a,16.

<sup>xiii</sup> Galatians 4:4.

<sup>xiv</sup> This is a summary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment.

<sup>xv</sup> This is a part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment and summary of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Commandments.

<sup>xvi</sup> This is a part of the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment.

<sup>xvii</sup> Romans 9:14-16.

<sup>xviii</sup> Exodus 32.

<sup>xix</sup> Ephesians 1:4-6.