

Sam Storms
Enjoying God Ministries
Romans #39
November 7, 2021

**It is All because of Him who Calls
Romans 9:6-13**

Today, unlike most Sundays, I'm going to forego any form of introduction to the sermon. The depth and complexities and challenges of our passage today requires as much time as possible. So let's jump into the deep end of the theological pool right from the start.

Let me briefly remind you once again, that of all the doctrinal differences that divide Christians today, none is more volatile than that of predestination. And no biblical text speaks as explicitly on this subject as does Romans 9:6-23. As you know, here at Bridgeway we do not avoid such texts. We devote ourselves, in humility, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, to understand what God has said through the apostle Paul. So today, and in the next sermon, we will examine this passage.

The Problem that Romans 9-11 Solves

As I told you the last time we were in Romans 9, the primary purpose of chapters 9-11 is to answer the question posed by Paul here in v. 6. It is less a question than an assertion, as Paul declares: "But it is not as though the word of God has failed" (v. 6a). Our immediate response to this is to ask the question: "What could have happened that would lead anyone to think it has? How could any of us be led to question the integrity of God's word and his promises to us?"

The answer to this question was first given in Romans 3:1-6 and then again in Romans 9:1-5. The nation of Israel had been adopted by God and given the Law of Moses. Multiple promises had been made concerning the blessings God would grant to Israel. But as Paul clearly lamented in vv. 1-3, most Jewish people in his day had rejected Jesus as Messiah. The problem this posed is unmistakable. If most Jewish people, at least in Paul's day, were in unbelief and thus unsaved and unredeemed, what does this mean for the promises God has made to us? If God's promises to Israel do not hold true, what reason do we have to be confident that his promises to us will? Israel's widespread unbelief appears to call into question the integrity and truthfulness of God's word. Again, if God does not keep his promises to Israel, will he keep the promises he makes to us?

Paul is quick to deny that God's word has failed. He will be energetically adamant that God's promises to Israel will in fact come to fruition and complete fulfillment. He does this initially in the second half of v. 6. There he says that "***not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel***" (v. 6b). That is to say, simply because one is a physical descendant of Abraham does not mean one is a spiritual descendant. There is a physical or ethnic Israel and there is a spiritual or elect Israel. And God quite simply never promised to save all Jewish people. The promises were always for the spiritual Israel within the larger ethnic Israel.

But v. 6a is only an assertion. Paul can declare that God's word has not failed. But an assertion is not an argument. What proof does Paul bring to demonstrate that this is true? That is what he will do in vv. 6b-13. Paul's answer takes the form of a *proposition* (vv. 6-7) which is then followed by several *proofs* (vv. 8-13).

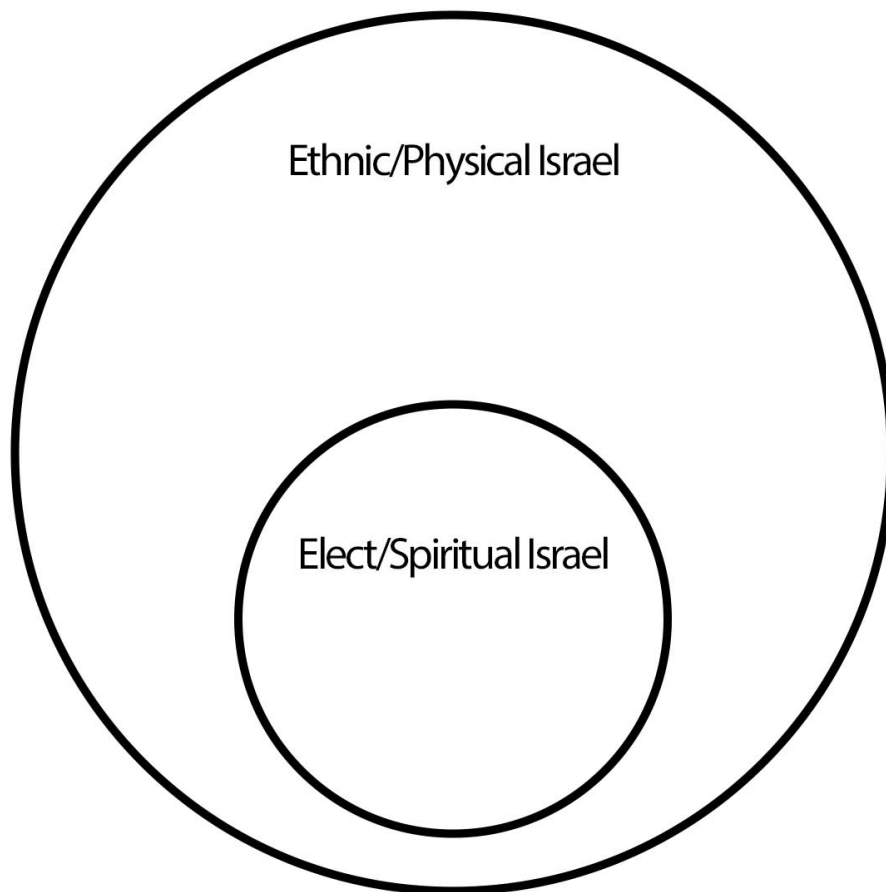
The Proposition (vv. 6-7a)

It's all well and good to say, as Paul does in v. 6, that the word of God, the promises of God, have not failed. But how do we know this is true? We know it because "***not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel***" (v. 6b). If God's word of promise and covenant is that all *ethnic* Israelites, i.e., all those

who are physically descended from Israel, are to be saved, then clearly his purpose *has* failed and his word *is* void and not to be trusted. But Paul denies that God *ever* intended to save all ethnic Israelites. His purpose has always been to save a **remnant** within, but not the entirety of, ethnic Israel. Later in Romans 9 Paul quotes from Isaiah who said:

“Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved” (Rom. 9:27b).

Clearly, there is an *Israel* within Israel. There is a *spiritually elect* remnant within the physical nation. Paul is using the word “Israel” in two different senses. Try to envision two concentric circles.



The outer circle encompasses and includes all who have physically descended from Abraham. They are “Israel” according to the flesh. The inner circle points to those who are also chosen by God to inherit eternal life. They are “Israel” according to the promise. They constitute what Paul refers to as the “remnant” (9:27; 11:5). Paul’s point is that the unbelief of those in the outer circle does not jeopardize the

redemptive purpose of God, for that promise applied only to the inner circle, the elect remnant within the nation as a whole. That is why Paul will conclude in v. 11 by saying that “God’s purpose of election” will not fail. Simply put: ***Not every person who is a physically ethnic Israelite is a spiritually elect Israelite.***

If we were to discover that the OT teaches that merely being a physical descendant of Abraham guarantees that a person is a part of God’s true, redeemed, saved people, then Paul’s gospel is in jeopardy. Our salvation is in jeopardy. God’s “word” would have failed. But that is not the case. Paul will make it clear in vv. 6-29 that belonging to God’s true spiritual people has always been based on God’s sovereign and merciful will and never on the basis of one’s ethnic identity. God’s ultimate purpose has never been to save every individual ethnic Israelite. That is why their unbelief is not threat to the integrity of God’s word.

You may recall the stinging words of rebuke issued by John the Baptist to the Jewish religious leaders of his day. They had come to John, ostensibly to be baptized by him. But John said to them: “Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham” (Matt. 3:9).

The same religious leaders answered Jesus, saying: “Abraham is our father.” To which Jesus replied, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God” (John 8:39-40). Jesus isn’t denying that they were descended physiologically from Abraham. He is denying that this alone guarantees that one is a true, spiritual child of Abraham. ***Ethnicity alone is no guarantee of anything.***

Paul said much the same thing back in Romans 2. He couldn’t have been any more explicit than this: ***the true Jew, the true Israelite, is not that man or woman who has Abraham’s blood in his veins but the one who has Abraham’s faith in his heart.*** The mark of being a citizen of the kingdom of God is not circumcision of the flesh, but of the heart. One’s ethnic heritage is not decisive in determining who is among the covenant people of God. One’s personal faith is.

It’s also important to note here that Gentiles who are called by God are granted the blessing of becoming the children of promise no less so than Jews who believe in Jesus. Paul makes this clear in Galatians 3:16, 28-29 where he declares that if one is in Christ by faith, he/she is counted among the “seed” of Abraham and co-equal heirs with believing Jews of all the promises of God. Likewise, in Ephesians 2, believing Gentiles “are no longer strangers and aliens” but are “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19).

*The Proof:
The Family of Abraham (vv. 7b-9)*

To prove his point, Paul appeals to the families of Abraham and Isaac. In God’s dealings with each of these patriarchs we see the principle of v. 6b in operation. Ishmael was just as much a physical descendant of Abraham as was Isaac. He would have displayed a physical resemblance to his father no less so than Isaac. But, although both Isaac and Ishmael were Abraham’s physical descendants, Isaac alone is a true or spiritual *Israelite*.

The assertion that Paul made in vv. 6-7 is now proven in vv. 8-9. The proof is found in the example of Abraham’s sons, Isaac and Ishmael.

You may recall that God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation (Gen. 12:3; 15:5). But as Abraham and Sarah grew older, they had long passed the age for bearing children. So Abraham decided to make things happen on his own, in the power of his flesh. It’s as if he decides that

God needs a little help in bringing his promise to pass. So he took Hagar, one of Sarah's handmaids, and had sex with her. She conceived and gave birth to Ishmael.

Abraham wanted Ishmael to be the child of promise, the one through whom the covenant blessings would be fulfilled. He cried out to God in Genesis 17:18, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him" (Gen. 17:19). God is making it clear to Abraham that genetic or ethnic descent is no guarantee that one will inherit the covenant blessings. It is a matter of God's sovereign choice, not human effort or physical descent.

*The Proof:
The Family of Isaac (vv. 10-13)*

But Paul doesn't stop there. Not only does he appeal to the example of Isaac and Ishmael, but also to the example of Jacob and Esau. Again, let's try to remember the OT story. Isaac, through whose line God said the promises would come, married Rebekah. She conceived twins, Jacob and Esau. Although Esau was the first born and thus should have been the recipient of the blessing, God chose Jacob instead.

Paul strongly emphasizes that there was nothing in either Jacob or Esau that moved God to choose one over the other. They were both sinners, deserving of nothing from God but judgment.

Notice first of all that they were twins, conceived by "one man" (v. 10a), Isaac. Someone might try to object to what Paul is saying by pointing out that although both Isaac and Ishmael had the same father, they had different mothers. Isaac's mother, Sarah, was Jewish, whereas Ishmael's mother, Hagar, was a Gentile. To that, Paul would push back by saying, "Consider Jacob and Esau. They had the same father, Isaac, and the same mother, Rebekah." The point he's making is that the difference between them wasn't of their own doing or that of their parents. It was all of God.

If that were not enough, in v. 11 Paul makes it unmistakably clear that God's choice was made before they were born. More than that, God's choice was made before either one had done anything good or bad. And if that weren't enough, we must not forget that Esau was the first born. In that culture the first born was always more highly regarded and was the primary recipient of the inheritance. But God chose the younger. In v. 12 we read that God told Rebekah, "The older [Esau] will serve the younger [Jacob]."

God's election of Jacob was unconditional. It was based solely on the sovereign, merciful purpose of God. There was nothing in the birth or behavior of either Jacob or Esau that accounts for God's choice. Jacob no more deserved to be chosen than did Esau.

Thus, whereas both Jacob and Esau were the physical seed of Isaac (being twins), only Jacob was the spiritual seed whom God purposed to save. Thus, Ishmael and Esau would fall within the orbit of the outer circle, because they are ethnic, but not elect, Israelites. Isaac and Jacob, on the other hand, fall within the orbit of the inner circle, being both ethnic and elect Israelites. [See the end of these notes for this configuration.]

Let's go back for a moment to v. 7. There Paul says that a person is not a child of Abraham simply because he/she is Abraham's physical or genetic offspring. There is a world of difference between being among "the children of Abraham," on the one hand, and being only the "offspring" or "descendant" of Abraham, on the other. The promise of God's word holds true for the spiritual children of Abraham but not for all his physical descendants. Not all the ethnic "children" of Abraham are the spiritual "children" of Abraham.

To be a physical descendant of Abraham does not guarantee (contrary to the belief of the Pharisees; see Matt. 3:9; John 8:37-40) that one will be a child of God, i.e., saved (cf. Rom. 8:16,17,21; Eph. 5:1; Phil. 2:15). The line of the covenant will proceed through Isaac, not Ishmael, even though Ishmael is as much a physical descendant of Abraham as Isaac (see Gen. 21:12).

Notice also in vv. 8-9 how Paul contrasts "**children of the flesh**", i.e., physical descendants of Abraham whom God has not sovereignly chosen, and "**children of the promise**," i.e., physical descendants of Abraham whom God *has* sovereignly chosen to be the recipients of the covenant promises. Furthermore, the phrase "**children of God**" (v. 8) in Paul always refers to people who belong to God and are thus partakers of salvation (see Rom. 8:16,17,21; Eph. 5:1; Phil. 2:5).

Clearly, then, something more must be true about a physical descendant of Abraham if he/she is to be an heir of the covenant. In other words, **not all of Abraham's children are God's children!** As N. T. Wright put it: "What counts is grace, not race" (*Climax of the Covenant*, 238).

On what basis, then, did God choose Jacob but not Esau? Paul tells us in v. 11c – it was "**in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls.**" Jacob no more deserved to be loved and called than did Esau. Jacob was just as sinful and wicked and deserving of eternal damnation as his brother. If God had decided to reject both of them, no one could have protested that he was treated unfairly.

In saying this, Paul has ruled out any and all foreseen or foreknown good deeds by Jacob and any and all foreseen or foreknown bad deeds by Esau. God's election of one but not the other is the result entirely of God's sovereign and altogether free choice so that his saving grace might be seen and praised as glorious.

Thus we see proven once again that not all *ethnic* Israelites are *spiritual* Israelites. Jacob and Esau, twin brothers born to Isaac and Rebekah, were both ethnic Israelites. They were both the physical descendants of Abraham. Yet Jacob was the object of God's electing love whereas Esau was rejected in order that it would be clear that the final determination was based on the sovereign election of God's undeserved mercy.

Some have acknowledged that whereas "works" are excluded as the basis for election, "faith" is not. Couldn't God have chosen Jacob based on his foreknowledge of Jacob's faith and rejected Esau based on the absence of faith? There are two immediate obstacles to this position.

First, the whole point of Paul's argument is the contrast between human activity and God's activity and his desire to base election in what God does and not in anything that any human being does. But second, and more important, if Paul believed that faith was the basis or condition for God's election, he would have pointed this out when he raised the question in v. 14 about the fairness of God's election. "All he would have needed to say at that point was 'of course God is not unjust in choosing Jacob and rejecting Esau, for his choosing took into account the faith of one and the unbelief of the other.' Paul's silence on this point is telling" (Douglas Moo, 583).

"Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated"

What is the meaning of this baffling and controversial statement? Some contend that the word *hate* is comparative in force. That is to say, God loved Esau “less than” he loved Jacob (see Gen. 29:32-33; Deut. 21:15; Matt. 6:24; 10:37-38; Luke 14:26; John 12:25). So, God didn’t “hate” Esau in any sense of the term. He simply loved Jacob more. Others argue that the word *hate* is privative in force, the point being that God did not love Esau at all, as he did Jacob. But he didn't hate him either. This view differs little from the previous one.

Another option is to understand God's “love” of Jacob to be equivalent to his choice of him, thus making God's “hate” for Esau a reference to his decision not to bestow this privilege on him. “It might best be translated 'reject'. 'Love' and 'hate' are not here, then, emotions that God feels but actions that he carries out” (Moo, 587).

Perhaps *hate* does indeed have a positive force. God not only did not sparingly and redemptively love Esau, as he did Jacob, but he actively rejected him and manifested his displeasure and disfavor by means of retributive justice. It is not merely the absence of blessing that Esau suffers, but the presence of judgment (see Ps. 5:5; 11:5; Prov. 6:16; 8:13; Isa. 1:14; 61:8; Jer. 44:4; Hos. 9:15; Amos 5:21; Zech. 8:17; Mal. 2:16). If this view is taken, we must never think that the way God “hates” is the way we do. Our hatred of another is usually, if not always, characterized by malice and vindictiveness and bitterness and wounded pride. But that is not how God “hates.” His hatred is always holy and just and in the interests of his own glory.

And let me repeat myself yet again and say that Jacob did not deserve to be “loved” any more than did Esau. It is entirely unmerited, free grace and mercy that Jacob was loved. It was entirely righteous justice that Esau was hated.

Reasons why Paul is describing Individual/Personal Salvation

Let me give you several more reasons why I believe Paul is talking about individual, personal salvation [See Thomas Schreiner, “Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election Unto Salvation? Some Exegetical and Theological Reflections” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (36/1 [March 1993] 25-40).

For example, the phrases “children of God” and “children of the promise” always refer in Paul to those who are the saved children of God (see especially Romans 8:16,21; Phil. 2:15; Gal. 4:28). We should also note that Paul says God's election is not based “on works but on the one who calls” (v. 11). When Paul typically refers to “works” he is arguing that no one can be saved or justified by them (cf. Rom. 3:20,27-28; 4:2,6; 9:32; 11:6; Gal. 2:16; 3:2,5,10; Eph. 2:9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5). It would seem, then, that the burden of proof rests on those who contend that Paul is using the language of “works” in a non-salvific way.

We should also take note of the parallels between Romans 9:11-12 and 2 Timothy 1:9. In this latter text we read this:

“[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” (2 Tim. 1:9).

Everyone acknowledges that this text is referring to personal or individual salvation. In both texts Paul refers to the “call” of God and asserts that it is not based on “works.” In both texts Paul refers to God's saving “purpose” and says that this salvation was determined or predestined in eternity past.

Although you will have to wait until we get to Romans 9:22-23, we should note that there Paul also speaks of eternal salvation and eternal condemnation. He contrasts “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” with “vessels of mercy which he has prepared beforehand for glory” (vv. 22-23). Schreiner points out that the word for “destruction” (*apoleia*) and that for “glory” (*doxa*) frequently are used by

Paul to refer to eternal condemnation and eternal salvation (see Phil. 1:28; 3:19; 2 Thess. 2:3; 1 Tim. 6:9; Rom. 2:10; 8:18; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:10).

Everyone acknowledges that the wider context of Romans 10-11 is concerned with the *salvation* of Israel. If Romans 9-11 is a literary unit, as most argue it is, the burden of proof rests on those who insist that chapter 9 is dealing with an entirely different subject from chapters 10-11.

After reading this explanation, most are prepared to accuse God of being unrighteous and unfair. This objection is anticipated by Paul and answered by him in vv.14-23, a passage we will look at next week.

Conclusion

Nothing in Romans 8-9 contradicts the urgency and necessity of a person responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ with faith and repentance. If Jacob was to be saved, he had to believe God and his promise of redemption in a coming Messiah. If Esau is finally condemned, it is because of his own unbelief and sinful repudiation of God's promise. To be finally saved a person must have believed. And to be lost a person must have remained in unbelief.

The doctrine of divine election in Romans 8, 9, John 10, Ephesians 1 and elsewhere in the NT simply says that if someone comes to saving faith in Jesus, he/she does so by God's merciful and sovereign grace working in them to regenerate their hearts and draw them to Christ. If someone does not come to saving faith in Jesus, they have no one to blame but themselves.

It is also important that we ask the question: ***Why did God orchestrate the world in this way?*** We must let God himself answer this question. He does so in Romans 9:11 – “in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls.” And what precisely is that “purpose”? Paul tells us in a parallel passage in Ephesians 1. We begin with vv. 11-12 –

“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be ***to the praise of his glory***” (Eph. 1:11-12).

Paul mentions yet again at the close of v. 14 that we were saved and sealed by the Holy Spirit “***to the praise of his glory***” (Eph. 1:14). We see this identical theme earlier in vv. 4-6 –

“even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ***to the praise of his glorious grace***, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Eph.1:4-6).

All that God does in his sovereign election and predestination of otherwise hell-deserving sinners is so that his glory and his grace might be praised. *That* is his ultimate and decisive *purpose*.

What I'm going to say now, by way of conclusion, may sound inconsistent with everything I've just said about Romans 8:28-9:13. But what may strike you and me as contradictory is perfectly true and consistent in the mind of God. And he is asking us to trust him with this mystery.

(1) Anyone and everyone who wants to embrace Jesus Christ in faith to receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life may do so. Jesus himself said in John 6 that whoever comes to him he will never turn away or cast out.

(2) No one can come to Christ in faith unless the Father sovereignly draws or calls him/her.

(3) If you do not come to Christ in faith, you have no one to blame but yourself. No one is preventing you from believing in Jesus for salvation. No one is hindering you or coercing your will to say No to Christ.

(4) Therefore, no one goes to hell except those who deserve to. No one goes to heaven because they deserve to.

(5) God owes no one anything. That anyone should be elected to eternal life and called to faith in Christ is due entirely to the sovereign mercy and grace of God. If anyone is not elected to eternal life and not called to faith in Christ, they have not been treated unfairly or unjustly. God has simply chosen to leave them to their just deserts.

No one deserves to be foreknown, predestined, called, justified, and glorified. The only thing we all deserve is eternal damnation in hell. That any are foreknown and predestined is due entirely to the sovereign mercy of God. That some are left to themselves and suffer eternal damnation is entirely their own fault.

