

Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 9:6-13 – Our Sovereign Lord

Sermon Notes



Background

As we go through this chapter, keep this in mind: God is absolutely sovereign. His choices are His alone, and He always does what is right!

We have been going through the book of Romans. We are currently in the 9th chapter where, Paul finds himself in a difficult position with regard to his fellow countrymen, the Christian Jews living in Rome. You see, as descendants of Abraham, and more specifically, descendants of Jacob (Israel), they expected special dispensation from Yahweh. So, in Paul's day, they practiced strict adherence to the Law believing that it made them righteous in God's eyes. However, back in chapter 8 Paul taught that not only does obedience to the Law not make anyone more righteous, it actually makes our sinfulness more obvious.

So - Paul must now explain the significance of God's rejection of the Jews and do so in a way that will persuade his countrymen that everything they have believed about the Messiah is part of God's plan. Paul's difficult task is to reconcile the rejection of the unbelieving Jews with God's promise and the external tokens of the divine favor which had been conferred upon them.

It may have appeared to his Jewish Christian believers in Rome that what he has said in the previous chapters implies that Paul does not believe the promises made to the Jews and that the Word of God is not true. So, he starts off this section with a statement affirming that the Word of God is sound and can be believed completely. It is effective in securing righteousness.

Romans 9:6-9

But *it is not* as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's seed, but: "Through Isaac your seed will be named." That is, the children of the flesh are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are considered as seed. For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son."

Paul is going to be talking about the promises to Abraham and his descendants. So, what are these promises. God made many promises to Abraham, but the following are some of the more significant ones.

And Yahweh said to Abram, "Go forth from your land, And from your kin And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you,

And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

Then Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, “To your seed I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to Yahweh who had appeared to him. (Genesis 12:7)

And Yahweh said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your seed forever. “And I will make your seed as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your seed can also be numbered. (Genesis 13:14-16)

After these things the word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.” And Abram said, “O Lord Yahweh, what will You give me, as I go on being childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “Since You have given no seed to me, behold, one born in my house is my heir.” Then behold, the word of Yahweh came to him, saying, “This one will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.” And He brought him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your seed be.” Then he believed in Yahweh; and He counted it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:1-6)

Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no *children*, and she had an Egyptian servant-woman whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, “Now behold, Yahweh has shut my *womb* from bearing *children*. Please go in to my servant-woman; perhaps I will obtain children through her.” And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. And after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram’s wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant-woman, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. Then she saw that she had conceived, so her mistress became contemptible in her sight. (Genesis 16:1-4)

Now it happened that when Abram was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; Walk before Me and be blameless, so that I may confirm My covenant between Me and you, And that I may multiply you exceedingly.” Then Abram fell on his face, and God spoke with him, saying, “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, And you will be the father of a multitude of nations. “And no longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. “And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will go forth from you. “And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your seed after you. (Genesis 17:1-7)

And He said, “I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door which was behind him. (Genesis 18:10)

Now, back to Romans. Since the Jews believed that the promises were made to Israel and his descendants, Paul is pointing out that it is not the descendants by the flesh that are inheritors of the promises but the descendants who believe God’s promises (the chosen ones). That’s what he means by “*they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.*” Just because one has the right lineage doesn’t mean one is a child of the promises.

There is a direct analogy to this in today’s Christianity. Just because you are a member of a church and perform all the prescribed rituals and ordinances, does not mean you are a Christian. Just because you have Christian parents and were brought up under Christian teachings in a Christian home, in a Christian

country doesn't mean that you are a Christian. You are only a Christian if you believe that you are a sinner destined for hell, that Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sins, and you have now submitted your will to God accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. In other words, you are only a Christian through faith.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. (Ephesians 2:8)

Now back to Paul's comments to the Jews. He continues his explanation of why ancestry is no guarantee of righteousness. He just said that not all the people of Israel are spiritual descendants of their father Israel. He started with Israel because he is the one from whom the nation got its name. Now he will cover the other two of the three main patriarchs.

Since the calling and the promises for the nation started with the calling of Abraham, Paul now addresses this part of their lineage. Just because they are descendants of their father Abraham doesn't mean that they are considered children of the promise. Remember that the first child of Abraham was Ishmael not Isaac. By the laws of primogeniture (oldest son inheriting the prime blessing and a double portion or all of the estate of the father), Ishmael should be the one through whom the lineage of Abram is recognized. However, God chose Isaac, the son of promise, to be the blessed one. Also, note also that Ishmael is the father of the Arabs. The Arabs to this day dislike the Jews partially because of this transferring of the blessing from Ishmael to Isaac.

Isaac is the son that God promised to Abraham and for whom Abraham had to wait 25 years. When Isaac was born, Ishmael was a teenager, and the jealousy of Ishmael and his mother Hagar (the personal maid servant of Abraham's wife Sarah) caused them to be cast out from the clan. As Abraham wrestled with sending his first son away, God told him;

So God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and your maidservant; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her voice, for through Isaac your seed shall be named." (Genesis 21:12)

It was not Abraham's choice to place Isaac above Ishmael. It was God's choice. Isaac was the promised son, not Ishmael. Isaac was God's chosen one and Ishmael was not! As a result, the seed of Isaac (through Jacob) became God's chosen people. It may not seem fair to us that God chose Isaac above Ishmael, but He did! God chose Isaac; Isaac did not choose God.

A few chapters back Paul told us that our righteousness is not earned; rather it is imputed, or credited to us, by a stroke of God's pen in his personal record book of our lives. He does not do it because we deserve it or because of anything we have done, but because it was His choice. Because Abraham believed God's promise, righteousness was imputed to him:

For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." (Romans 4:3)

In the same way Paul is telling his Jewish brothers that they are not considered God's children simply because they are the descendants of Abraham, since that privilege should have gone to his first-born son, Ishmael. Instead, Paul tells them, and us, that the children of promise are reckoned, as the inheriting children.

The point is that God chose Isaac to be a "child of Abraham," not Ishmael. Ishmael was the child by natural process. He was the result of Abraham's (and Sarah's) own efforts. Their works of the flesh produced the first child, but Isaac was the result of faith. Long after Abraham and Sarah were past the age of producing a child by their own actions, God brought forth Isaac because Abraham believed the promise that God had given him. Isaac was the child of promise, and he came as a result of faith.

But that's not fair, is it? Ishmael was the first born, so he should have received the inheritance. He should have been Abraham's heir. But it wasn't up to Abraham, Isaac, or Ishmael to choose, it was up to God. He chose Isaac just as he chooses those who are to be His spiritual children today.

So, you see, in the final analysis it is God's choice that matters, not ours. That's election! And it's not the only example of it given to us in the Bible or even here in the book of Romans. Paul will give us more examples as we move on.

Paul is explaining that even though the Jews had all the special privileges as the children of Israel (Jacob), they were not all righteous. This is because that righteousness does not come from lineage but from the imputation of righteousness by God's own choosing. The children of the flesh are not the children of God, the children of the promise are. Paul now reminds his countrymen of the promise that was made to Abraham.

And Yahweh said to Abram, "Go forth from your land, And from your kin And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; (**Genesis 12:1-2**)

In keeping with the promise to make the name of Abraham great and to make him a blessing, God later promised Abraham a son. That son, however, was not to come for nearly twenty-five years. After twenty-four years, God again told Abraham that he would have a son (in addition to Ishmael) and Paul quotes this promise from **Genesis 18:10** which says;

And He said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son."

It was about a year later that Sarah gave birth to Isaac. A living son brought forth from a dead womb. As a result, we see that the child of Sarah (conceived through faith), not the child of Hagar (conceived through works), was the one God promised Abraham he would have. Abraham was about one hundred years old when this promise was made and Sarah about ninety. She was past the age of childbearing, and he was too old to produce offspring himself. But - God is able to fulfill his promises to us even when it seems physically impossible. He can do the impossible, like saving condemned sinners like you and me.

Romans 9:10-13

And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that the purpose of God according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Paul has just told us that Isaac was the son of the promise whereas Ishmael was not. Ishmael, the first born of Abraham, should have received the blessing and should have been the heir of Abram, but God chose Isaac; He did not choose Ishmael.

It could be argued, however, that Ishmael was not the son of Abram's wife but of her maid servant. Since he wasn't the first son by Abraham's wife, God choose to reject him. That is, his rejection was based on lineage after all. It could also be argued that perhaps God chose Isaac because Ishmael displayed jealousy and mocked Isaac when he was circumcised. We read about this in Genesis chapter twenty-one:

And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing *in jest*. (**Genesis 21:8-9**)

So, we see that some could argue that God saw what kind of a person Ishmael was going to be and therefore did not choose him.

To counter these two potential arguments, Paul now highlights another situation among the patriarchs in which not only did God choose contrary to natural lineage, but He chose while the two were still unborn and had not demonstrated their character yet. This example will be of Jacob and Esau who were twins. Esau was the firstborn and, therefore, the rightful heir of the line of Isaac, but as we are about to see, God chose Jacob.

Paul has been talking about who the real “children of God” are, that is, who the ones are that are chosen for righteousness. This choosing is based on God’s decision and actions, not on ours. Paul is now talking about Jacob and Esau, the twin sons of Isaac. In this and the following verses Paul will make it clear that God chose Jacob and not Esau (**Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated**). But, so that the argument can’t be made that the choice was due to Jacob’s obedience and Esau’s disobedience (which certainly is not the case since Jacob was clearly the more deceptive of the two), Paul declares here that the choice was made before either of them was born. Not only does Paul point out that God’s choice occurred before they were born, but he makes a special point of the fact that neither one of them had done any good or evil. The major point in this verse is that God’s choosing of Jacob over Esau was according to God’s election, and it was not based on obedience or any other thing that either of them did.

Paul says that it was God’s purpose to choose Jacob, not based on his works. There are Christians who believe that God “foreknew” who would accept Christ as Lord and Savior and, based on this, chose them to be saved. But, according to Paul in this verse, this cannot be the case because it says that the purpose of God in His election is not based on a person’s works but on God’s calling. He says that it was God’s choice not Jacob’s actions that resulted in his being chosen.

That’s God’s sovereign election! He chooses us. We do not choose Him. As hard as this is to accept by many of us, it is exactly what the Bible teaches!

In today’s verse, as well as the Old Testament passage that is quoted, the language that is used indicates that the greater of the two (Esau) will be a slave to the lesser (Jacob). Age does not appear to be the distinguishing characteristic as much as power and importance (from a human perspective).

While they were still inside Rebekah, God declared that Esau would serve Jacob. This reference is not specifically to the persons of Esau and Jacob, but to their descendants, for Esau never was a slave to Jacob; rather, it is a reference to their posterity. While the descendants of Esau (the Edomites) were a larger and stronger people than the descendants of Jacob (the Israelites), they were defeated and finally subjugated by Israel.

When we read the Old Testament accounts in **Genesis 25, 27, 29, and 30**, we see that Jacob tricked Esau out of his birthright and out of his parental blessing from their father Isaac. We also see that Jacob conspired against his father-in-law Laban to gain the stronger and better of Laban’s sheep. Jacob was constantly scheming to get the better of others. But all along, his success was not because of his cleverness; rather, it was because God chose to bless him.

Paul now quotes another Old Testament passage for his Roman Jewish Christian readers to consider. It is quoted from **Malachi 1:2, 3**

“I have loved you,” says Yahweh. But you say, “How have You loved us?” “*Was* not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares Yahweh. “Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau, and I have set his mountains *to be* a desolation and his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.” (**Malachi 1:2-3**)

Now, I can just hear some of you saying, “But that’s not fair! God is love, according to **I John 4:8, 13**, so how can He hate anyone?” Perhaps from our human perspective it does not appear fair, but we know that God is righteous, that is, He always does what is right. Therefore, if He says that he loved Jacob and hated Esau then we have to accept that it is righteous love and righteous hatred.

So ... even though we don’t understand how or why He chooses some to righteousness and not others, we have to believe that His choosing is right, and just, and holy!

Remember - God is absolutely sovereign. His choices are His alone, and He always does what is right!

So What?

You cannot secure a place in heaven through obedience or family influence. You can only do so by God’s declaration of your righteousness, and that only happens through faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ as payment for your sins. The Bible is truth, and it says you will be saved if you submit your will to God and accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior!

We all have a hard time accepting the fact that God chooses some to be saved and not others. That’s why Paul is going through this thorough discourse on God’s choosing.

Unfortunately, there are many who call themselves Christians today who have achieved that status through works of their flesh. In God’s book, however, only those who have believed His promise that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses them of their sin are declared to be His children. These are the children of the promise. and they are saved through faith and faith alone.

God has made many promises to us in the New Testament such as: “... if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (**Romans 10:9**) and “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,” (**Hebrews 13:5b**). Like Abraham, we can trust His word because God keeps His promises. Always!

God is sovereign and He answers to no one; that is, He has supreme power and authority. He doesn’t have to answer to us and He doesn’t have to play by our rules because He makes all the rules. He always does what is right and that which will bring praise and glory to Himself no matter what we think is right. If He chooses to bless one person over another, there’s nothing we can say or do about it. God is sovereign above all!

The really incomprehensible part of God’s election is His reason for choosing some unto blessing and not others. It is reasonable to believe that God has some basis for his choosing, but we are never told what it is. What we do know about this election is that it is based on God’s choice, not ours. That’s Paul’s point throughout this entire passage in the book of Romans.

Paul is very clear in his teaching that God had a love for Jacob that He did not have for Esau. And he already made it clear that this distinction was made independent of the actions of either of them. God’s choice is always right and without sin. Who are we to argue with Him?

Remember - God is absolutely sovereign. His choices are His alone, and He always does what is right!

Let’s pray