

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE
(LESSON TWELVE)

THE ELECTION OF GOD
(PART THREE)

Perhaps, the most forceful passage of scripture in the entire Word of God relative to the doctrines of predestination and election, as well as the sovereignty of God, is found in **Romans 9**. In this Lesson, we will consider verses **6-24** of the chapter and attempt to extract from them, a few precious nuggets of truth.

ROMANS 9:6-24

6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:

7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.

8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

9 For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son.

10 And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac;

11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)

12 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.

13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.

18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?

20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

22 What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:

23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

In verses **6-9** of our text Paul writes, “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son.”

The **New Living Translation** offers the following translation of the verses: “Well then, has God failed to fulfil his promise to Israel? No, for not all who are born into the nation of Israel are truly members of God’s people! Being descendants of Abraham doesn’t make them truly Abraham’s children. For the Scriptures say, ‘Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted,’ though Abraham had other children, too. This means that Abraham’s physical descendants are not necessarily children of God. Only the children of the promise are considered to be Abraham’s children. For God had promised, ‘I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.’”

Paul is informing his readers that in spite of the inward agony he was experiencing because of the widespread rejection of God's salvation through Jesus Christ by the Jews, he was not of the opinion that the Word of God had come to nothing. He explained that not everyone who was of Israel were the true people of God. The fact that an individual was a descendant of Abraham did not necessarily mean that he or she was a genuine child of the promise. God from the very first made a distinction here, and definitely announced that the seed of Abraham to which the promise belonged should come in the line of Isaac, not Ishmael, though he also could call Abraham father.

The failure of the Jews to respond to the gospel of Christ did not mean God's Word had failed. Instead, this rejection was simply an example of the principle of God's sovereign choice established in the Old Testament. Paul is reminding his readers of a truth he had presented earlier, the truth that not all the physical descendants of Israel are spiritual Israel.

This, of course, is merely an application of our Lord's words found in **John 3:6**: "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*" These words, addressed by our Lord to Rabbi Nicodemus, are true throughout all generations. Paul informs us that while there are many persons who are descended from Abraham, not all of these descendants are the genuine children of Abraham. There is a vast difference between the children of the flesh and the children of the Spirit. It is not what we get from our fathers and mothers, but what God does for us that ensures our place in the family of God.

This truth is stated emphatically in **John 1:12-13**: "*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*"

The **New Living Translation** renders the verses as follows: "*But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn — not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.*"

This is not merely a question of human genealogy; this is a question of eternal salvation. In **Romans 2:28-29**, Paul writes, "*For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*"

The **New Living Translation** renders the verses as follows: "*For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision. No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by God's Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.*"

In **Philippians 3:2-3**, we read the following: "*Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*"

The **New Living Translation** provides this translation of the verses: "*Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort.*"

The Greek word translated "dogs" was a term of reproach among both Greeks and Jews. It is a reference to the mangy, flea-bitten, vicious, starved scavengers of the oriental streets. The persons, whom Paul referred to as dogs, were the Judaizers.

The Judaizers were the supreme legalists of the first century. They believed and taught that, in order for a Christian to truly be right with God, he or she must conform to the Mosaic Law. They insisted that all new converts be circumcised and observe the Law. The doctrine of the Judaizers was a mixture of grace and works. This was false doctrine and it was dealt with at the Apostolic Council at Jerusalem recorded in **Acts 15**. Paul strongly condemned the doctrine of the Judaizers in his letter to the Galatians.

Brothers and sisters, there have always been and there always will be those who oppose the idea of God's salvation being offered freely to those who believe. They oppose it because they reason that such a wonderful gift as the forgiveness of sins from such a holy God **must** require some kind of payment from those who receive it.

They are persuaded that human beings must do something to pay off the debt we owe to God. They, therefore, teach a combination of God's grace and human effort.

Paul also calls them "evil workers." The term implies, not merely evil doers, but those who actually worked against the gospel of grace. He speaks of them as "the concision." The Greek word which Paul uses is a play upon the Greek word "circumcision." Paul characterizes those who were not of the true circumcision as merely mutilated themselves and mutilators of others. Heathen priests mutilated their own bodies. The Judaizers mutilated the message of the gospel by adding law to grace, and in so doing they mutilated their own spiritual lives and the lives of their converts.

The Judaizers had a settled confidence in the flesh, as all legalists inevitably must have, while Paul repudiates such a thing in relation to himself. He had a settled confidence in Jesus Christ alone and what He had accomplished on the Cross.

In verses **10-13** of **Romans 9**, Paul writes, "*And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.*"

The **New Living Translation** renders the passage as follows: "*This son was our ancestor Isaac. When he married Rebekah, she gave birth to twins. But before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad, she received a message from God. (This message shows that God chooses people according to his own purposes; he calls people, but not according to their good or bad works.) She was told, 'Your older son will serve your younger son.' In the words of the scriptures, 'I loved Jacob, but I rejected Esau.'*"

The words in the **King James Version**, "And not only this" at the beginning of verse **10** is a reference to what Paul had written in verses **6-9**. Paul's thought process is as follows: "Not only have we an example of the election of a son of Abraham by one woman, and a rejection of another son by another woman, as is the case with Isaac and Ishmael, but also of the election and the rejection of sons born of the **same** woman as is the case with Jacob and Esau."

As we have seen, Abraham had begotten both Ishmael and Isaac. God had refused one of the sons, Ishmael, and had acknowledged the other son Isaac. The Jews who were members of the Roman church would not have been surprised by God's choice of Isaac over Ishmael based on the supposed worthiness or unworthiness of the mothers. One of the mothers was Hagar, an Egyptian slave girl, and the other had been Sarah, Abraham's wife and the princess of the whole line of promise. These Jews might take pride in such an ancestry and reject Ishmael with contempt. But Paul now destroys this logic by informing them that when God made His next selective, elective choice, He did it between two sons who were still in the womb of the **same** mother — twin sons! Jacob and Esau had one father, one mother, and were twin sons; the only ground on which either could have been preferred was that of priority of birth, and this was disregarded by God; Esau, the elder, was rejected, and Jacob, the younger, was made heir of the promises.

There are no human values here. It cannot be said that one of the boys was superior to the other. The pronouncement by God was made before the children were born. Neither of them had done any good or evil. The authority for the election lay in the heart of God. There is no possible human way to account for it!

The text clearly states that the choice of God was not dependent on their birth or their character. The choice was in the heart of God and based entirely on His sovereign authority. He decided that Jacob was the child who was to carry the line of Messiah and be the heir to blessing, and in the same way, He determined that Esau was not to carry the line nor inherit the blessing. How foolish are those who try to limit God to time and make Him dependent upon the actions of men! The election of those who have been chosen by God is not governed by the foreseen superiority of a Jacob to an Esau. This simply is not true. Jacob had done no good that could recommend him to God and Esau had done no evil that could have disqualified him. Before these twins came from their mother's womb, the sovereign God of the universe who decides all things had determined that the elder should serve the younger. This was God's divine purpose.

The works and characters of the individuals had nothing to do with the choice. In fact, they were explicitly excluded so that all of the reason for the call rested in God Himself, who is the One who calls. This is always the case!

Paul specifically states that the choice of Jacob over Esau was made for no other reason than that *“the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth,”* or as the **New Living Translation** renders it, *“(This message shows that God chooses people according to his own purposes; he calls people, but not according to their good or bad works.)”*

The Greek word translated *“purpose”* means, “to set before one’s self, to propose to one’s self, to purpose, to determine.” The word speaks of the action of an individual setting before himself a proposed action. Thus, it presupposes deliberation upon a course of conduct, and then the determination to carry that course of conduct through. The word *“election”* is the translation of a Greek word which means “to select out from a number.” It refers to “the act of picking out, choosing.” Paul is intentional in conveying the idea that nothing other than God’s own good pleasure informed His selection of Jacob over Esau.

God’s purpose to save men and women and make them heirs of His kingdom is not determined at all by consideration of such claims as descent and works. In forming and carrying out His purposes, God acts with perfect freedom. In the case in question, the distinction between Jacob and Esau can be traced to nothing but God’s sovereignty. It is not of works, but of Him who effectually calls men. No parentage, no heritage, no legal works, can give a man a claim which God is bound to honour. The **Message** renders the clause as follows: *“What God did in this case made it perfectly plain that his purpose is not a hit-or-miss thing dependent on what we do or don’t do, but a sure thing determined by his decision, flowing steadily from his initiative.”*

Brothers and sisters, it is necessary for us to emphasize that in verse **11**, Paul makes the point that Jacob was selected over Esau **before** either of them had done any good or evil, in fact, God’s choice was made while they were still in their mother’s womb! This statement raises the question of God’s foreknowledge. The understanding of predestination that many persons have is that God, in eternity past, looked down through the corridors of time and saw that persons would either accept or reject Him. Based on this prior knowledge, He elected those persons who would accept Him in the future and did not elect those who would not accept Him. But that is not Paul’s argument at all in this verse! Paul does not say that God’s choice was based on what He foreknew that Jacob and Esau would or would not do in the future. Paul’s argument is that God made choice of Jacob over Esau *“that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth.”*

The **Complete Jewish Bible** renders the clause as follows: *“So that God’s plan might remain a matter of his sovereign choice, not dependent on what they did, but on God, who does the calling.”* Beloved ones, the Bible clearly states that God’s choice was not dependent on what they did! God’s choice is dependent on His sovereignty alone!

Brothers and sisters, if Paul had wanted to convey the idea that God’s predestinating, electing choice was, or ever is, based on His foreknowledge of the future decisions and actions of people, this would have been the ideal occasion for Him to say it. But he does not say so. Paul never says so anywhere in any of his letters. The truth is that there is not one verse of Scripture that supports this view. When he is presented with the perfect opportunity to state clearly that it is his opinion that God elects persons based on His foreknowledge of their future acceptance of Him, Paul intentionally and deliberately avoids giving any credibility to such a view! Instead what Paul calls attention to regarding election is the sovereign purpose of God and that alone!

Paul is incandescently clear here; his words are carefully chosen; his argument is precise: *“Not of works;” “Not dependent on what they did.”* In **Romans 11:5-6**, Paul highlights this point. He writes, *“Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace . And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.”* Human effort, whether present or future, has no bearing whatsoever on God’s elective choice!

If we are honest brothers and sisters, we will have to acknowledge that the position of those who believe that the election of God is based on His prior knowledge of who will accept or reject Him, inevitably makes the final decision of salvation to rest upon a human choice and not on the divine initiative of God. It is clear that Paul is arguing against such a position as forcefully as he possibly could.

Paul tells us that God's action in regard to Jacob and Esau agrees with His word in **Malachi 1:2-3**, "*I loved Jacob, And I hated Esau.*" We must be very cautious in going further than this.

This passage has been the centre of much controversy, but its implications are so obvious that it is difficult to see why persons have rejected the truth revealed therein. Perhaps those who reject the clear implications of this truth do so because they are so filled with prejudices that they do not wish to accept anything that will challenge what they have been taught to accept as truth.

Brothers and sisters, both Jacob and Esau were born in sin; they both had the nature of Adam. They both grew up in sin. They both were children of wrath, disobedient by nature. If there had been any righteousness in these two sons, God would have been unjust in not rewarding that righteousness. The choice of one deserving man over another deserving man would have been favouritism. Everything that is said in the entire Bible about the nature of fallen man must be said about both Jacob and Esau. God determined, for reasons that are to be found in Himself alone, to show favour to Jacob. This is grace and grace alone. It is sovereign grace, amazing grace, the grace of God!

We will continue to examine **Romans 9:6-24** in our next Lesson, God willing.