

Romans 9:6-18

Who receives the blessings of God's Promise?

- Why has God chosen the plan of salvation that is presented in the Bible? Could He have not chosen a different plan? Is this the best, fairest, most reasonable plan?
- Paul is arguing for God's choice of "faith and Christ" as the means of grace in the Gospel. He uses individuals in Israel's history as symbols to illustrate his point.
- This passage is perhaps the central passage in Scripture in the "sovereignty of God" debates. Is Paul speaking of individual election to salvation on the basis of His sovereign choice or is Paul speaking about His choice of Christ and the church as a part of His plan - leaving individual participation a matter of human "free choice?"

Election

(three views)

<p>God has chosen the nation Israel.</p> <p>Salvation is the result of being a part of the Jewish covenant family and under its Law.</p>	<p>God has chosen the Body of Christ.</p> <p>Salvation is the result of being "in Christ" through each person's free choice (faith).</p> <p>I Pet.2:4,6</p>	<p>God has chosen each individual believer.</p> <p>Salvation is the result of being chosen by God onto faith in Christ.</p>
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All three positions have Scriptural support.

The question is – Where is the emphasis to be placed?

- While the passage can certainly be read as a proof text of sovereign election of individuals to salvation, its context suggests that Paul is addressing a question about God's plan for a nation or group. The O.T. quotations come from contexts that address God's calling to roles in this life (not eternal life). For example in Rom.11:28 we read "From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for he sake of the fathers;" **Israel is chosen of God and yet an enemy of the Gospel. Election does not always imply "to salvation."**
- There are two questions that a Jewish reader would ask upon reading chapter 1-8.
 - (1) How are we to understand God's promise to the Jews stating that they were His chosen people? How can they be chosen and yet not saved.
 - (2) Is God's plan fair to the Jews?

a. Principle: (9:6-7a)

⁶ But {it is} not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are {descended} from Israel; ⁷ neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants,

- Paul is addressing a question every thoughtful Jew would ask - Did not God promise the Kingdom blessings to Jews? Was not a Jew defined by racial ancestry and commitment to the Law? Was Paul suggesting that the promises were not true?
- Paul reveals a key principle here - true Israel is defined not by the bloodline of Abraham but by the faith-line of Abraham.
- This chapter deals primarily with the nation Israel not with individuals. It is tempting to see in this chapter powerful proof texts for a strong Calvinist view of individual election but that is not Paul's purpose in this chapter.
- There are some who are of the bloodline that also are of the faith-line.
- **Point:** The Blessings of God's Promise are not for those with a limited or faulty interpretation of Scripture. Are the promises of Scripture true in your experience? Where have your expectations been misplaced in YOUR reading of Scripture?

Have we found all the promises of Scripture that we have liked to be true to our experience? How do we react or feel when things don't work as we expected or thought they should?

b. Examples: (9:7b-18)

1. Isaac (9:7b-9)

but: *“through Isaac your descendants will be named.”* ⁸ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. ⁹ For this is a word of promise: *“At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son.”*

- Isaac is an illustration of this point. Abraham had two sons (Isaac and Ishmael) but only one carried the promise. The promise was given to Isaac (from Sarah) not Ishmael (from Hagar). The blessings passed through the promise not the physical bloodline.
- The implication is that Isaac represented “true Israel” while Ishmael did not. The focus is upon the lineage of the nation.
- It was the promise of God that determined the faith descendants of Abraham (not the blood line of Abraham).
- The notion of corporate election (in Christ) is not foreign to Paul - Eph.1:4 “Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.” The repeated reference to “in Christ” in the first chapter of Ephesians suggests to many that Christ is the context of God's choice and we are united with Christ as we believe.
- **Point:** The Blessings of God's Promise are not for those who place faith in outward fleshly associations. Isaac illustrated the fact that it was not the **bloodline** that defined the blessed. Is there a spiritual “blue blood” class in our Church culture?

Pride of orthodoxy, spirituality through association, membership in respected organizations, etc. can give us a false sense of security or entitlement.

2. Jacob (9:10-13)

¹⁰ And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived {twins} by one man, our father Isaac; ¹¹ for though {the twins} were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to {His} choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, ¹² it was said to her, "*The older will serve the younger.*" (Gen.25:23) ¹³ Just as it is written, "*Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.*" (Mal.1:2-4)

- Jacob provides a similar illustration in that he was chosen by God over Esau his brother.
- The choice here was of God not by man. It had nothing to do with their personal moral record.
- Isaac illustrated the fact that it was not the **bloodline** that defined the blessed. Jacob illustrated the fact that it was not the **moral merit** that defined the blessed.
- It should be noted here, that Paul is not addressing the question of personal salvation but rather of the validity of distinction between a true and false Israel. He is answering those who have wrongly identified the bloodline of Abraham with the sense of entitlement in the Kingdom of God.
- It was not Esau (the individual) who served Jacob but the Esau's bloodline (Edom) that served Jacob's blood line (Israel). Gen.25:23 "Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples shall be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger." The quote from Malachi (six hundred years after Jacob's birth) makes it clear that Jacob and Esau are euphemisms for two nations.
- **Point: The Blessings of God's Promise are not for those who place confidence in personal moral merit. Jacob illustrated the fact that it was not the moral merit that defined the blessed. Have we felt that we earned a place at God's table by virtue of our moral discipline?**

It is natural to feel that moral discipline will bring increased blessing and love from God. This often leads to a sense of entitlement, bitterness, and pride.

3. Moses (9:14-16)

¹⁴ What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! ¹⁵ For He says to Moses, "*I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.*" (Ex.33:19) ¹⁶ so then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy,

- Paul's readers are going to next ask - How can this be just?
- The quotation from Exodus 33 is from a context where God's ongoing care of Israel as a nation is in question. Individual salvation is not the issue in Exodus 33.
- The point seems to be - Man does not make the rules, God does. It is not man's plan but God's plan that is paramount.

- **Point:** The Blessings of God's Promise are not for those who place hope in strong human volition. Moses illustrated the fact that it was not the **volition** of man that defined the blessed. Our strong zeal or desire for God's blessing does not secure it.

We often hear misleading statements like: "We can expect whatever we have the faith to expect." "Where there is a will there is a way." "God will grant us whatever we ask in faith."

4. Pharaoh (9:17-18)

17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "*For this very purpose, I raised you up. To demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.*" (Ex.9:16) 18 so then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

- Pharaoh's hardened heart is a two way street. Pharaoh is said to have hardened his heart (Ex.8:15,32), God apparently, sealed Pharaoh's fate by turning him over to the consequences of his choices (Rom.1:24,26 ,28; 2:5).
- Again, the primary issue is not the individual fate of Pharaoh or Moses but rather what they illustrate about God's plan for the nation Israel.
- The Jews are hardened because of their unbelief. Compare Rom.9:32 "Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as through it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone."; Rom.11:30 "For just as you once were disobedient to God., but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience."
- Isaac illustrated the fact that it was not the **bloodline** that defined the blessed. Jacob illustrated the fact that it was not the **moral merit** that defined the blessed. Moses illustrated the fact that it was not the **volition** of man that defined the blessed. Pharaoh illustrated the fact that it was the **free choice** of God that defined the blessed.
- **Point:** The choice of God defined the blessed as all those who are "in Christ" by faith. God's choice for the blessings of the promise is Christ. All who are "in Christ" by faith are blessed.

Pharaoh illustrated the fact that it was the **free choice** of God that defined the blessed. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart (and ours) is not arbitrary but linked to Pharaoh's (and our) choices. No one can say, "I could not but disbelieve and disobey because God had ordained it so."

While it is important to know that God is our strength and that His love abides with us, it is also important to realize that the blessings of a relationship with God are inseparable from a living faith in Christ. Our choices do make a difference. Gal.3:16 "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as referring to many, but rather to one, 'And to your seed.' That is, Christ."

In the parable of the king's wedding feast (Matt.22:1-14) we find these words "For many are called, but few are chosen" (vs.14). It is clear in the parable that those who were not chosen had made a decision not to come "unwilling to come" (vs.3) and were "not worthy"

(vs.8). Compare Rom.9:32 “Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as through it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.” Rom.11:30 “For just as you once were disobedient to God., but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience.”

Framing the tension between Predestination and Human freedom

- Christians continue to debate the nature of God’s sovereign choice and human responsibility. A few preliminary observations need to precede our looking at one of the key texts in this debate. For more information see apptoteach.org theology file #702
 1. We all act as though we are responsible for many things in life – we lock our doors at night, etc. If actions reflect beliefs then no one really believes that God is in control of all details of life in such a way that we do not have a role. The teaching of absolute sovereignty does not fit easily with out experience or common sense.
 2. We are constrained by many external and internal factors – environment, genetics, personality, etc. No one seriously believes that humans have perfectly free volition. The more we know about the power of our internal and external environments to shape our lives, the more we recognize that we are constrained.
 - **In Matt.18:6** Jesus warns those who cause a little one to stumble. “but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.”
 - **Rom.7:15** suggests that we are conflicted in such a way that we do not always act as we would like. “For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate”
 - **Rom.14:13-23** suggests that someone can cause me to stumble by their example. (See I Cor.10:32 also.)
 - **I Jn.2:10** speaks of a cause for stumbling that is in those who do not walk in the light. “The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.”
 - **In Matt.26:31** we read that when the shepherd is struck the sheep flee as a result. “You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.’”
 - **Gal.5:17** indicates that because of internal tensions between the flesh and the spirit we cannot do as we please. “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, for these are in opposition to one another; so that you may not do the things that you please.”
 - **Ex.20:5** The sins of fathers often bring an effect on offspring. Ex.34:6-7; Lev.26:39-40
 3. God is sovereign in at least some aspects of life. No one who takes the Bible seriously questions the fact that God is in control of at least some aspects of history and human behavior. God chose Israel as His people. God chose the tribe of Levi to be priests. The question is – How much does God control? And Is God’s election to salvation corporate (Christ is the elect) or individual (each believer is elect)?
 4. It should be observed that many of the texts that seem (at first) to teach absolute predestination may upon careful examination not demand such an interpretation.

5. The Scripture speaks of God's sovereignty and human responsibility without clearly explaining how they relate to each other. Christians tend to explain one in terms of the other claiming that one is clear and the other is a mystery.

In speaking of God's will there are three aspects that must be equally respected.

1. **God's Will is Determined.** (Is.14:24; Acts 4:27-28; Rom.9:19)
 - a. Much of this aspect of God's will cannot be known by us until after the fact. (Prov. 25:2; Is. 55:8; Deut. 29:29)
 - b. God's sovereignty is in one respect absolute and cannot be thwarted by man's carnal will.
2. **God's Will is Directive.** (Col.4:12; Rom.12:2; Eph.5:17; Is. 48:17; Psalms 32:8; 37:23; 73:24)
 - a. We will receive all of the revelation that is necessary to meet our responsibilities to God. (II Pet. 1:3-4)
 - b. Our problem is never one of not having revelation, but rather one of not responding positively to the revelation we have. (John 7:17; 9:31; Rom.12:1-2)
3. **God's Will is Dynamic.** (Rom.8:28, Lk.18:1-8)
 - a. Sin is never the will of God, but it can be worked into God's plan for good. (Gen. 50:19-20)
 - b. Man cannot thwart the decreed purpose of God, though he can disobey the directive will of God. (Acts 4:27-28)
 - c. God's directive and determined will may appear to be at odds in some instances (Matt.18:14; II Pet.3:9). It is at these points that the dynamic aspect of His will is realized.
 - d. Prayer does change things and God does "change" His plans in response to man's posture. (Gen.6:6-7; Ex.32:14; Judges 2:18; I Sam.15:11,29,35; II Sam.24:16; Jer.18:7-10; 26:3,13,19; 42:10; Amos 7:3,6; Jonah 3:9,10; 4:2)

Election passages often refer to "corporate" identity

- The NT does speak of election that can be understood to apply to a community of individuals. The idea of "corporate personality" is more common in Eastern cultures than in the West. Corporate personality means for us the treatment of the family, the clan, or the nation, as the unit in place of the individual. It does not mean that no individual life is recognized, but simply that in a number of realms in which we have come to think individualistically, and to treat the single man as the unit, e.g., for punishment or reward, ancient thought envisaged the whole group of which he was a part. This is seen often in the Bible.
 1. Identification of a group with its ancestor (Gen.13:15-17; Isa.41:8; Hos.11:1; Mal.1:3-4)
 2. Punishment of the group for an individual's offense (Jos.7; Num.16; Ex.20:5-6)
 3. The high priest on the Day of Atonement represented the nation (Lev.16:15,19,21)
 4. Corporate guilt (Nehemiah 9:33; Dan.9:5-19)
 5. Israel was often treated as a unit (Isa.5:1-7; Jer.12:10)
- **Messiah is the chosen one in some passages.**

Luke 9:35 "This is my Son, **My Chosen One**; listen to Him!"

Luke 23:35 "And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One'"

Isa.42:1-7 “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; **my chosen (choice or excellent) one** in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. . .and I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes,. . .”

Eph.1:4 “just as He chose us **in Him.**” Note that we are chosen “in Him” not chosen “to be” in Him.

- **Christians (as a group) are elect in some passages.**

I Pet.2:4,6 “**an elect** (“choice” as in I Pet.2:4,6; Rom.16:13; Lk.9:35) **race**, a royal priesthood, a **holy nation, a people** for God’s own possession, that you may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: who in time past were no people, but now are the people of God.”

Rom.11:5 “In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time **a remnant** according to God’s gracious choice”

Rom.11:7 “What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but **the elect obtained it**, and the rest were hardened”

- **Christians (as individuals) are elect in some passages.**

Jn.6:37 “all that the Father gives Me shall come to Me . . .”

Jn.6:44 “No one can come to me unless the Father . . .”

Jn.17:2, 6, 9 “All whom thou has given Him (the Son). . .”

Rom.8:29-30 “Whom he foreknew he also predestined. . .”

Rom.16:13 “. . . chosen in the Lord . . .”

II Thess.2:13 “. . . chosen . . . for salvation . . .”

I Pet.1:2 “. . . chosen according to the foreknowledge of God . . .”

Col.3:12 “. . . those who have been chosen of God . . .”

I Thess.1:4 “Knowing . . . His choice of you . . .”

Acts 13:48 “. . . as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”

II Thess.2:13 “. . . God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation . . .”

Rom.9:11 “. . . for though {the twins} were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God’s purpose according to {His} choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls. . .”