

KEEP THY HEART

A Bible-Based Devotional

Turn to: **Romans 9:1-16**
“**God Elects on the Basis of Faith**”

Election is the doctrine of whom God chooses to save. Does He elect the rich, the powerful, the talented? Does He choose to save people based on who their parents are, the color of their skin, or their ZIP code? Does He elect on the basis of good works, penance, or desire? No; instead, the Bible teaches that God elects to save only those who place their *faith* in Jesus Christ. Thus, if you repent and believe in Jesus, you will join God's elect!

1: God grieves at the death of the wicked (v1-5). Paul is writing in the power of the **Holy Ghost**, as is the case with all Scripture; and so his feeling toward the wicked, **(v2)** which is a **great heaviness and continual sorrow** for their coming death in hell unless they repent, is a reflection of how God feels toward them. **(v3)** Paul loves the non-elect as much as he loves himself (Matthew 5:43-44 vs. 22:39), so far that he **could wish** he were **accursed from Christ** if that meant **his kinsmen according to the flesh** would be saved. Do we share the heart of Paul, and of the Holy Spirit, for the lost?

In passages which God foreknew would be especially misinterpreted, God often erects "guard rails" as a warning. For example, He takes pains to include wording in Genesis 1 to combat the day-age theory. In the passage Catholics use to over-exalt Peter as their first pope, God immediately follows up with one of the harshest *rebukes* to Peter by Jesus, partly as a warning against popery. And here, God "bookends" the discussion of election with His love and concern for the non-elect (v1-5; 10:1), as a warning against a Calvinistic interpretation, which would subvert this love.

2: God does not elect by physical lineage (v6-7). As a Gentile myself, I am very thankful that I can be saved, too! In Paul's day, many Jews thought that since God chose Abraham, and since they were physically

descended from Abraham, they were also elect (Matthew 3:9). Yet not all who are *physically Israel* are *spiritually of Israel*. **(v7)**

Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac; the one by a bondwoman, and the other by his wife, Sarah. Yet God chose only one, saying **In Isaac shall thy seed be called**, teaching us, by analogy, that that no one is elect simply because of who his physical father is.

3: God elects on faith alone (v8-9). The analogy of Abraham's sons is discussed further in Galatians 4:22-31. Ishmael represents **the flesh**, since his birth came about through the unbelief of Abraham and Sarah. Isaac represents the **children of promise**, **(v9)** since his birth came about by the promise of God, through the faith of **Sarah** and Abraham as they trusted this **word of promise** (Hebrews 11:11). As an allegory, God chose Isaac to show that election is not by physical lineage or by works of the flesh, but by being born after the Spirit, through faith in God's promise (summed up in Romans 9:30-33). We should note that these are only *allegories*. For instance, of course God does not elect people just because they are children of freewomen. And He doesn't exclude children of bondwomen from salvation. And Isaac was likely a toddler, at the oldest, when Ishmael persecuted him, and so he *represented* the children of faith even though he hadn't personally placed his faith in God yet (Genesis 21:8-9 vs. Galatians 4:29). It's simply a physical allegory of a spiritual truth. The same is the case with the account of Jacob and Esau below; it is also an allegory, not a *literal* description of election unto salvation.

4: God does not elect by works (v10-13). Paul points out that the allegory of Ishmael and Isaac has a sequel with Jacob and Esau ("**and not only this**"; cf. Genesis 41:32), and God elected Jacob. Again, election isn't of lineage, since both twins had **one** physical **father, Isaac**; and further, this time they also had one *mother*, **Rebecca**. Election isn't by birthright, since they were **not yet born**. It is **not of works**, as they had not **done any good or evil**. Paul's point is that the *timing* of God's statement on election is crucial, and everything that comes *after* this statement does not factor into His decision, by analogy. If we

flip back to Genesis 25:22-23, what comes *before* God's statement on election? We read about a violent struggle between the twins in the womb, bad enough for Rebekah to be afraid that something was going wrong with her pregnancy. In fact, this unusual struggle is what prompts God's statement on election in the first place. And this struggle sounds familiar! It parallels the persecution of Ishmael against his step-brother Isaac (Galatians 4:29). In other words, the timing of God's statement on election excludes everything from consideration *except* for a difference in the attitude of the *spirit*, representing genuine and humble faith in Jesus Christ, the kind that draws instinctive animosity from the world. It is a beautiful picture of election by faith alone.

(v12) God elects Jacob by saying that **The elder shall serve the younger**. Yet Esau never *personally* served Jacob. In fact, Jacob called *Esau* his "lord" or boss when they met later on, even comparing seeing Esau's face to seeing God's face (Genesis 33:8-11). This further confirms that the allegory is not referring to *unconditional individual* election, but to conditional *group* election on the basis of faith. The entire statement in Genesis 25:23 refers to Jacob and Esau as representing *nations* and *manner of people*. Physically, the Israelites (from Jacob) would subdue the Edomites (from Esau); and spiritually, the children of faith will ultimately subdue the children of bondage. Real Christians have been persecuted throughout history, but in spite of the way it might look, some day **the elder shall serve the younger**, so to speak; or, as Jesus said, the *meek* shall inherit the earth!

(v13) God's **love** and **hate**, at this point in time, may simply refer to a strong preferential choice (as in Luke 14:26). But in any case, God *does* hate the workers of iniquity, in that He has wrath and anger against them, just as any loving father would have for someone who tries to harm his child. Yet while man's hatred can have a morbid pleasure in the pain and death of the wicked, God's hatred is perfect and complete, balanced with a *grief* at the death of the wicked, and even including a genuine desire that they sincerely repent rather than perish (v1-5, cf. Ezekiel 33:11).

5: God has a right to elect only those of faith (v14-16). Because God elects on faith alone, and not physical lineage or works, **Is there unrighteousness with God?** In Paul's day, many Jews would think so (Luke 3:8). In our day, the question might go like this: "You mean to say, the thief on the cross can live his entire life in open rebellion against God, stealing and lying and cheating, and in the last hours of his life can simply repent and believe in Jesus and go to heaven; yet I spend my *entire life* trying to play by the rules, living right, being a good neighbor, giving money to the poor, maybe even going to church faithfully, and yet I will go to hell just because I don't trust in Jesus? How is that fair?" **(v15)** Yet **mercy**, by definition, is not an obligation. How could our feeble works ever make up for our wickedness against God? We can't demand salvation, as though God owes it to us. He isn't obligated to save anyone. **He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy**; that is His call, not ours. If He decides to elect on faith alone, He is entirely within His rights. It is **God's will**, **(v16)** not **our will**, or our desire, that counts. Paul is probably alluding to Esau, who shed tears in sorrow for the consequences of his sin (Hebrews 12:17), likely wanting the birthright even more strongly than Jacob did in the end, at least in some respects. Yet his sorrow was worldly and selfish, not the humility of faith that God required. As the hymn says, "Could my tears *forever* flow," that would not save anyone, just as it did not save Esau. God's will is to save only those who truly place their faith in Jesus Christ; and if we do not come to God humbly on His terms, we cannot come at all.

Conclusion. In summary, God's election is on the basis of faith, and on faith alone. Anyone who meets God's condition becomes a spiritual child of Abraham (Galatians 3:7). And that's great news! It means that the gospel is for *all*. God wanted to provide *everyone* with an opportunity of salvation, whether rich or poor, black or white, Jew or Gentile, educated or uneducated, drunkard or church member, if they will repent and believe!