

“Pure Grace”
 Genesis 25 & Romans 9
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READ Romans 9:6-21

I want you to imagine a 17 year-old friend of yours.

A couple of years ago you had the privilege of showing that friend, from the Bible, how he could know Jesus Christ personally.

You invited him to trust in Jesus and turn his life over to Him.

Over the past two years you have good evidence that his conversion was real – he was growing in his relationship to Christ and his commitment to Christ’s kingdom.

Now you stand by his bedside in a hospital where he lies dying. He looks up at you and asks you, “Is it true?

“Do I really belong to God?” “

Will he take me to himself when I die?”

“Is it possible that I have failed God in some way that he won’t accept me?”

How would you answer him?

The kid’s too bright to give him “pat” “wishful thinking” answers.

He wants to know the truth – what do you say?

For that matter, if you are a Christian, how certain are you that God will keep you?

In the face of doubts we don’t want fluffy, patronizing, Pollyannaish answers.

We want basic, fundamental truths that bring real assurance.

Are you a Christian?

Is Jesus Christ your saving-Lord?

To use Jesus’ phrase, have you been “born again”?

Jesus also said, “to all who receive him, to them he gives the right to become children of God.”

Are you a child of God?

Will you go to be with Christ when you die? **Are you certain?**

Many would say, “I’m as certain as anyone can be.

As long as I don’t make some really huge mistake somewhere along the line, I think I’ll go to heaven.

I think God will accept me.

I’m trying to believe the right things and do the right things.

Trying to be a faithful follower.”

If you are a Christian, your confidence can be much stronger than that!

We are all familiar with verses in the Bible that clearly state that God chooses who belongs to him.

John 15:16 Jesus said, “You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.”

John 15:19 “You do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world.”

John 17:9 “I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.”

Acts 13:48 “When (they) heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord. And all who were appointed for eternal life believed.”

Romans 8:29-30 “For those God foreknew he also predestined...And those he predestined he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified he also glorified.”

Ephesians 1:4-5 “For God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world... In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons...”

2Thessalonians 2:13-14 “But we ought always to thank God for you...because from the beginning God chose you to be saved...”

And there are many more.

No one who respects the Bible, as God’s word, denies those verses.

The crux of the issue is this: **On what basis** does God choose who belongs to him?

It seems to me as I study the Bible and human nature, that many people throughout history have believed that God chooses those he will save **based on what he sees in them.**

They specifically think that God chooses those who will be saved by seeing beforehand how they will respond to the gospel and live it out and those are the ones he chooses.

One of the problems with that thinking is this:

If my attitudes or actions are even partially the reason why God chose me, then if my attitudes or actions change I'm in deep trouble.

If the basis of God's choice of me is my conduct or thinking, then logically my conduct or thinking must also determine whether I remain his choice.

If, for example, I choose to spend time with someone **because they have Broncos' tickets,** when they no longer have Broncos' tickets I will cease to spend time.

If I choose to own a car **because it is the best looking car available,** when it ceases to be the best looking car I will get another one.

If God's choice of me is based on me, then even as a Christian, my concerns and even doubts about whether I would go to be with Jesus when I die are well-founded.

What if I fail?

How God bases his choice of me on my faithfulness, what if I fail?

But the Bible repeatedly teaches that God's choice of us is not based on who we are or what we have done or will do.

What then **is** the basis of his choice of us, of you?

In our continuing study of Genesis we come again today to chapter 25.

Here God demonstrates the basis of his choice of any of us.

In chapter 25 after briefly writing of the death of Abraham, Moses, the author of Genesis, places the two oldest sons of Abraham in sharp contrast.

In 25:12 we are given the very brief “**account of Abraham’s son Ishmael**”.

But beginning in 25:19 we are given the much longer “**account of Abraham’s son Isaac**”.

First we learn what happened to Ishmael.

Given the customs of that day, we would expect Ishmael to be the next primary character in the on-going story of Abraham’s family.

As the oldest son, we expect him to be God’s choice.

But we already know from earlier in Genesis that God had a different plan – God chose the younger son, Isaac.

And so Ishmael the oldest son is quickly dismissed from view.

At that point we are ready to say that God’s choice of someone is not determined by cultural custom and it’s not determined by birth order.

So on what basis did God choose the younger Isaac over Ishmael?

Many might assume God didn’t choose Ishmael because Ishmael would prove to be a man who lived in hostility toward his brothers – in other words, God foresaw how he would act and therefore God didn’t choose him.

That’s not correct – but more on that later.

And so we move quickly in the passage to Isaac, the second son.

We have already been told that Isaac is the son of promise.

God had already determined that he would bless Abraham, Abraham’s family and the world through Isaac.

Why did God choose Isaac?

Again many assume **God chose Isaac** instead of Ishmael **because** God saw ahead of time that **Isaac would be a man of faith and prayer**, which he was.

Again, that is incorrect, as God will demonstrate in the next event.

When Isaac's wife, Rebekah, becomes pregnant we expect that the oldest son will be the heir to the fortune and future that God promised Isaac.

But immediately God makes it clear to Rebekah (and surely to Isaac) that God's blessings and plans are not determined by our customs or by birth order.

God has a different basis for his choices.

God said to Rebekah:

Genesis 25:23 "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

Again the temptation is to assume that God chose the younger Jacob over the older Esau because saw how these men would act in the future.

Even though Jacob was a tricky man who made many mistakes, he became a man of faith, while Esau early showed his true colors by despising his birthright.

It is easy to assume the basis of God's choice was Jacob's and Esau's anticipated responses.

It's easy to think Jacob proved that he deserved God's choice and Esau proved that he didn't.

And it also easy to assume that is the basis of God's choice of us.

If he foresees that we will believe and behave, he chooses us.

Again **the problem** that poses is this: **How can I be certain that God will continue to choose me if I don't sufficiently live up to His standard?**

If his choice of me is based on me then the certainty I have in my relationship to him is also based on me.

Please don't tell me that when I am dying and thinking about my future.

Unless your 17 year-old friend is a complete fool, he won't want to hear that his relationship with God is based on his actions.

Is that all Genesis 25 proves?

That God will choose those who will prove themselves faithful.

To answer that we must go to a NT commentary on this Genesis 25 passage.

Paul finished Romans 8 with a ringing declaration of the unfailing love of God.

God's love is so great that absolutely nothing can separate us from him - not death, not the circumstances of life, not angels, not demons, not the present, not the future, **not anything** shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jesus made the same declaration: John 6 and 10 "**All** that the Father gives to me will come to me..." "I give them eternal life, and **no one can snatch them out of my hand.**"

Is that true? Are you and Christ inseparable? Or can you lose this relationship if you don't measure up?

Well if the basis of the relationship is what you have done or will do then you know the relationship is rather shaky.

But the Apostle Paul uses the events in Genesis, that we have been looking at, to prove that **the basis of your relationship with God is not you.**

God didn't choose you because he saw something in you that caused him to choose you.

The first comparison Paul draws is between Ishmael and Isaac.

Because of custom, we expected Ishmael to be the son, God would use to bless Abraham's family and the world.

But Paul makes it clear that biology is not the basis of God's choice.

Romans 9:7-9 "Not because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise

was stated: ‘At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.’”

Ishmael was Abraham’s son, even his oldest son, but biology and birth-order were not the basis of God’s choice.

That doesn’t surprise us today because we come from a very different culture where those things are minimized.

We think we are much more enlightened because we know God doesn’t judge a person based on their parents, their race or their birth-order.

But what **do** we think God bases his choice on?

As I have said, too many think God bases it on how they act or will act.

That brings the Apostle Paul to his second conclusion and the one much more difficult for us to accept.

Again referring to our passage in Genesis, in Romans 9:10-12 Paul wrote this, “Not only that, but Rebekah’s children had one and the same father...Yet before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls – she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger’.”

Paul wants to be clearly understood.

Not only is belonging to God **not** a matter of who your biological parents are or which race you belong to **but it is also not a matter of merit.**

God does not choose people and he does not keep people on the basis of them deserving it.

What does V11 say?

When did God choose Jacob over Esau?

“Before they had done anything good or bad”

He intentionally points out that any choice of one over the other was not based on what they would do.

To say that verse only says it is not based on what they had **already done** is silly - obviously they had done nothing yet - they weren't even born. **The point is** that the choice was not based on anything they would **ever** do.

Look at V12.

The choice is not by works - not because of what the person does - the choice is **not even because of faith.**

God's choice of someone is not based on God seeing into the future and choosing the one who would eventually respond correctly.

Some will say God chooses us on the basis of the faith that he sees we will have in his Son.

But that is not logical.

The Bible declares that God gives us the faith with which we believe.

Charles Spurgeon said it like this:

"There were twenty beggars on the street and I determine to give one of them a shilling; but will anyone say that I determined to give that one a shilling because I foresaw that he would have it? That would be talking nonsense. In like manner, to say that God elected (chose) people because he foresaw they would have faith...is absurd... Faith is the gift of God...therefore it cannot have caused him to choose people..."

Then what is the basis of God's choice?

What does V11 say?

"In order that God's purpose in election might stand."

The word "**election**" is used much in the Bible in reference to God's choice and it means God's choice that is uncaused by anything outside of himself.

The point is that God's choices are in **no way** influenced by the people he chooses.

So on what basis did he choose Jacob and has he chosen us?

Look again at V11: "God's purposes."

Paul said essentially the same thing to the Ephesians (1:5)
 “God predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus
 Christ **in accordance with his pleasure and will** – to the
 praise of his glorious grace.”

On what is his choice of us based?

Pure Grace!

I know that is a redundancy but I use it to make the point.

God’s choice of us is completely uninfluenced by
 us.

It is pure unadulterated grace.

Why has God chosen me, why has he chosen you?

Grace!

Again hear it – it’s not grace if it’s reward.

Hear it – it’s not grace if it is earned.

Hear it – it’s not grace if it’s deserved.

On what basis has God chosen you?

Unmerited favor – Grace!

And on what basis will God keep you?

Unmerited favor – Grace!

When we hear that God chose us, not for any good that he saw in us,
but solely on the basis of his own sovereign free will...

then we can take great heart that God won’t fail us because his
 choice of us and his keeping of us are not dependent on us.

If the choice was based on us then we would be in control of
 our destiny and any failure on our part would determine God’s
 failure.

But God won't leave his promises to sinful fallible people.

Praise God that those whom he chooses are kept -

God won’t fail.

But what **ought to be** a message of great encouragement, becomes
 an objection to some.

It’s as if Paul reads our minds.

Look at V14 “What then shall we say? Is God unjust?”

If God chooses some people and doesn't choose others for nothing that he sees in them but solely because of his electing purposes - doesn't that make God unjust - unfair?

And how does Paul answer our question?

God is not unjust at all! “Not at all!”

Now here Paul has a chance to clear up a previous misunderstanding if there is one.

We **thought we heard** Paul saying that God chooses some and doesn't choose others **not** based on what God sees in the people but solely based on God's electing purposes.

We **thought we heard** Paul come dangerously close to saying that God's choice of us was not even caused by his seeing into the future and foreknowing that we would have faith.

If we misunderstood, here is Paul's chance to clear up his message. Surely, we think, it must be something God foresees in those who will be saved or else God is being arbitrary and that would be unjust or unfair.

But what does Paul do?

Does he write, “No, no, God's not unfair. “He knew who would have faith, he knew who would respond, he knew who would be faithful and those are the ones he chose”?

Here's Paul's chance to say that, so what does he do?

He states the truth of God's sovereign, free, unfettered choice of who would belong to him **even more strongly than before**.

Paul will defend God's justice, differently than we would have expected, with two O.T. references:

The first is in Vv15-16:

In V15 Quoting from the O.T. Paul notes God's statement to Moses that God will have mercy and compassion on whomever he chooses.

The first answer to our charge that God is unjust is that **our charge is faulty** - we aren't even focusing on the correct issue.

The issue is not justice the issue is mercy.

Shakespeare wrote,

“Though justice be thy plea, consider this –

That in the course of justice none of us

Should salvation see.” (in Merchant of Venice IV.8i)

Earlier in Romans, Paul made the case that every person deserves eternal punishment and God is in no way obligated to intervene.

If everyone went to hell - justice would be served.

When Paul writes about **God choosing some to have life** - that is not an issue of justice, as if God was being unfair, it is **a matter of mercy.**

God's choices are absolutely uncaused by anything outside of himself.

*Look at V16 READ

“It does not therefore depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.”

If he chooses to have mercy on some who deserve wrath - that is not unjust it is merciful.

***Now the second way** Paul responds to the charge that God is unjust is **not** very satisfying to me. (READ Vs 17)

I wish Paul would say that Pharaoh got exactly what he deserved and therefore justice was carried out.

Paul could have so easily written that and it would have been entirely accurate.

Pharaoh like every other human being deserves God's wrath and if God doesn't choose to intervene, God can't be rightly charged with injustice.

But Paul doesn't take that easy way out - instead **he keeps stressing the truth of God's sovereign freedom to choose.**

V18 “Therefore God has mercy on whom he has mercy and he hardens whom he wants to harden.”

Even though he continues to run the risk of people charging God with unfairness - Paul wants to drive home his point:

God's choice of you, out of all the people of the world, was a matter of awesome mercy –
it was not based on your worthiness or your actions present or future - it was all of grace.

AND because **his choice of you** didn't depend on you - you can have great confidence that **his keeping you** won't depend on you.

Back at the end of Romans 8, Paul wrote so confidently, Romans 8:38-39 "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

How could he say this so confidently?

Because he knew what our relationship with God is based on:
Grace!

Know it, reflect on it, revel in it, and live it out.

But don't ever confuse the results with the source.

You may trust in Christ, you may live an obedient life, you may look forward to an eternal future with Jesus but those are the results.

The source is grace.

You have been chosen and you are kept by GRACE.

What do I say to my 17 year-old friend near death?

Titus 3:5 "When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy."

Do not fear, you belong to him and are kept solely on the basis of his grace – and he will never fail. PRAYER.