

**GOD'S SOVEREIGN MERCY, PT. 1**  
**ROMANS 9:6-9**

Several years ago, [Alexis Gould](#), a 15-year-old in Magna, Utah was fighting nerve cancer. The family was trying to figure out how to pay Emily's significant and growing medical bills when an anonymous local businessman stepped up with a \$40,000 donation to help pay those bills. It seemed too good to be true. It was. When the treatments for Emily were to begin, there was no money in her account to pay her bills. The promised payment was never made. The businessman was a fraud.



Who does that? Who makes those kinds of promises to a suffering family and then doesn't keep them? It's maddening. Until we realize that we also are promise breakers:

It is human nature to break promises. Governments make and break promises. Advertisers and politicians make and break promises. Employers and employees, preachers and church members, parents and children, husbands and wives, and friends and relatives all make promises to each other which often are broken. Some are made with the best of intentions, and some are made in order to deceive and exploit. But all of us find ourselves both making and receiving promises that, for whatever reason, do not materialize. [MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 28.]

Because we are the regular recipients of broken promises and because we are so prone to break promises, it is tempting to make the assumption that God also breaks promises. Especially when we consider that God made a promise to Abraham several thousand years ago about a redeemed nation and that promise is still unfulfilled, it is tempting to think that God also is not faithful. He also is a promise breaker.

Don't succumb to that temptation. As Paul explains in Romans 9-11, God *is* faithful. And His faithfulness is demonstrated in His salvation plan for Israel and us. That plan reveals that —

**SALVATION IS ALWAYS THE RESULT OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN, MERCIFUL, AND FAITHFUL CHOICE.**

If you are saved from God's wrath, you are saved as the result of God's sovereign kindness to choose you. Everyone you know that is saved from God's wrath is saved by that same sovereign, merciful choosing.

In verses 6-18, there are five demonstrations of God's faithfulness; we will look at the first two today:

- 1. God is Faithful — His Promises Don't FAIL (v. 6a)**
- 2. God is Faithful — His Election Doesn't FAIL (v. 6b)**
- 3. God is Faithful — His Election of Isaac is TYPICAL (vv. 7-9)**
- 4. God is Faithful — His Purposes Will STAND (vv. 10-13)**
- 5. God is Faithful — His Non-Election of Pharaoh is JUST (vv. 14-18)**

## 1. God is Faithful — His Promises Don't FAIL (v. 6a)

- Verses 1-5 are Paul's personal lament for the nation of Israel and her unbelief.
  - ✓ It is a message he will repeat later in this letter (10:1-2ff)
  - ✓ This lament is also an acknowledgement of Israel's rebellion against God (2:1ff).
  - ✓ She was chosen as God's special people; He made a covenant with them and promised that they would be His people for eternity. And she has rebelled and forsaken God and the promises made to Abraham have been unfulfilled.
  - ✓ She has not only rebelled, but she rebelled in spite of tremendous privileges (9:4-5).
  - ✓ Because she has rebelled, some might ask, "Has God been unfaithful to keep His promises to her and will God keep us (Gentiles) in the salvation He has promised to us (4:23-25; 8:34-35)? If the nation of Israel is not justified and if she is condemned, do we have any hope of escaping wrath?"
  - ✓ Those are the questions Paul is asking in chs. 9-11 — is God faithful and trustworthy?
- Paul's immediate answer to this anticipated question is an unequivocal, "No!" — ***But it is not as though the word of God has failed.***
  - ✓ When he says, "But," he is introducing an adversarial thought — "yes, Israel had advantages that seem to be unused and misappropriated, *but* that doesn't mean God failed..." We should take this contrast to mean that something else is going on in Israel's life.
  - ✓ Specifically, Paul says that in contrast to Israel's unbelief and special position, God's word hasn't failed. The word ***failed*** is used one other time by Paul, in Gal. 5:4 — "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have *fallen* from grace." If one attempts to be justified by works, he will inevitably fail. He can only fail in that attempt. There is no victory in justification by works. And Paul's point in this verse is that God's word *does not* fail in that way. When people fail — even when God's people fail — God doesn't fail and His word doesn't fail.
- It is also essential to understand what Paul means by ***word of God*** in this verse. Typically we think of it as a synonym for the Bible, and to say that Scripture doesn't fail is certainly true.
  - ✓ But Paul appears to mean something more specific in this passage.
  - ✓ Paul appears to be using it similarly to the ***oracles of God*** in 3:2. Israel was given the OT Word of God and Israel was given covenantal promises from God about her relationship with Him.
  - ✓ Those covenantal promises have not failed. The promises cannot fail because God who spoke them cannot fail in following through on His promises: Num. 23:19; Is. 31:2; 55:10-13.
  - ✓ Israel may not have believed God and may have rejected the Messiah, but that doesn't mean God's promises have failed. There is still time to fulfill those promises (11:1, 26, 28-29).

- It is tempting when we don't receive what we believe we should receive, or we don't receive it in what we think is a timely manner, to think that God has failed and God is a promise-breaker.
  - ✓ God cannot fail. God has not rejected His people. He will save His people.
  - ✓ And if the nation of Israel can be confident of His salvation of her, then we can be confident of His salvation of us. He is faithful in all His ways. He has promised salvation to Israel and to us, and He will fulfill His promises (1 Thess. 5:24).

## 2. God is Faithful — His Election Doesn't FAIL (v. 6b)

- In the middle of v. 6 Paul places the word *for* to provide a reason that God's Word has not failed. And the reason quite simply is that *they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel*.
- With that statement, Paul is making a statement about the nature of the term *Israel*. There are two uses for the term *Israel*.
  - ✓ *Israel* can refer to the national identity of someone — to their physical lineage and heritage.
  - ✓ But *Israel* can also refer to a spiritual heritage and spiritual identity. That is, there are promises that were given to the nation, but not everyone believes in those promises the way Abraham did, and thus not everyone who has the national identity has the spiritual identity.
  - ✓ This is the same principle that Paul taught in 2:28-29 — to receive the spiritual promises to Abraham, one must be circumcised in the heart through the work of the Spirit. It is necessary to believe in Christ as the Messiah to be a genuine and true Israelite (cf. also 10:3-4, 8-9ff).
  - ✓ No Israelite can look to their physical identity as a source for his salvation (2:17ff, 25).
- When Paul says *they are not all Israel* he is also introducing the idea that some are excluded from "spiritual Israel." Not all national Israelites have been saved and not all national Israelites have been individually chosen and elected for salvation. Paul is introducing a theological concept that is going to dominate the rest of this chapter and section (chs. 9-11) — the theme of divine election; he uses several terms to refer to that truth.
  - ✓ He particularly focuses on the concept of God's call to salvation (9:7, 12, 24, 25, 26; also 4:17; 8:30). When we speak of God's calling (9:7) and election of individuals, what does that mean? (Cf. sermons on 8:30; Eph. 1:4)
    - There is an outward general call to all men that they must repent and believe in Christ (Acts 17:30; Mt. 11:28; 1 Pt. 2:9). Not everyone will believe (Mt. 22:14).
    - There is an inward specific call that compels those who receive it to repent and believe (Rom. 4:17; 9:25; Gal. 1:6, 15; Eph. 4:1, 4; 1 Thess. 5:24; 1 Pt. 5:10).
    - Both calls are essential, for it takes an outward call to hear the message of Christ (Rom. 10:14). But it also takes the inward call to have the ability to believe (Rom. 9:11ff). Without the inward call, it is impossible for someone to respond to the outward call.

- What is particularly important for us to understand is that when God calls someone to salvation, it is a call that cannot be resisted. It is a gracious and compelling call. It is a call that lovingly draws us in. We who didn't love Him, have been overwhelmed by His love and thus love to come to Him for our salvation; when He sovereignly calls, we want Him because we know in that moment that nothing else will satisfy us. His call is a powerfully compelling call (1 Cor. 1:23-24).
- ✓ But he also uses the term "chosen" or "elect" (9:11; 11:5, 7, 28; cf. 8:33; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Pt. 1:10). The emphasis of this term is that God has chosen and selected us, not that we chose Him.
  - Some examples of how it is used in the OT (and particularly of Israel):

- 1 Sam. 16:10-13 *Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the children?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he."*
- Deut. 7:6-8 *"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. [Also Deut. 4:37]*
- Deut. 14:2 *"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."*
- Ps. 33:12 *Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, The people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance. Cf. also Hag. 2:23*

... There is awareness of all available options, and a specific choice is made in light of the options

... In relation to Israel, God's choice is emphasized to be out of love and without merit of Israel

- Some examples of how it is used of NT believers:

- Luke 6:13 *And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and **chose twelve** of them, whom He also named as apostles: [emphasis on His knowledge of the options]*
- John 15:16 *"You did not choose Me **but I chose you**, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. [emphasis on His choosing]*
- John 15:19 *"If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but **I chose you** out of the world, because of this the world hates you."*
- 2 Tim. 2:10 *For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.*

- *1 Thess. 1:2-4 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren **beloved by God, His choice of you;** [emphasis on His love demonstrated in the choice]*
- *Titus 1:1-2 Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of **those chosen of God** and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, [emphasis on eternity of His choice]*
- *1 Pet. 1:1-2 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.***

- God is generally the subject — He is the One who does the choosing; the verb appears 22x in the NT — 17x God is the subject (1x Jesus is the object of God’s choice).
  - ... Man is never said to “elect” God (**Jn. 15:16**); when used of men, it is only in the sense of making temporal choice.
  - ... God chooses; and all who belong to Christ belong because of that choice (**Jn. 6:37-40ff**).
  - ... God acts independently of man in His choice of us — He did not choose because He knew we would choose Him... (cf. 1 Pt. 1:1-2, 20 — we are foreknown in same way as Christ)
- God elected in light of all the known options — God did not choose blindly, without knowing the full range of options (e.g., Jesus chose the Twelve out of all the followers)
- God elected out of love for the ones chosen; the vb. is always reflexive — “for Himself” — indicating personal interest and desire. The act of God’s choice is an act of love (**1 Thess. 1:4**; 1 Pt. 2:9; cf. also Dt. 7). It is His infinite mercy to sinners (**9:16**).
- God did not fail to love those whom He did not elect (He loved/loves those not chosen) Jn. 3:16
- God’s choice does not remove man’s responsibility and God’s righteous judgment (**1:20; 2:4; 9:29**)
- Is God’s choice unfair? (**vv. 14ff**).
  - ... If God had not acted, no one would have been saved, because no one chooses God.
  - ... The real problem is not why He chose some and not others, but why He chose *any* at all.
  - ... He chose us; we did not choose Him. “If God had not chosen them, they would never have chosen God.” [Eadie]

*Definition — “[Election is] that act of God whereby He, in His sovereign good pleasure, and on account of no foreseen merit in them, chooses a certain number of men to be the recipients of special grace and of eternal salvation. More briefly it may be said to be God’s eternal purpose to save some of the human race in and by Jesus Christ.” [Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 114.]*

- ✓ Notice also the uses of the terms “purpose” (**9:11; cf. 8:28**) and “will” (**9:19**).
- ✓ The theme of election has already been introduced in this letter: **8:30**.

- ✓ **An implied example of divine election:** The covenants and promises to Israel are mentioned in v. 4, they are implied in this verse, and Abraham is mentioned in v. 7. And this doctrine of election is evident in Abraham's life: God chose Abraham when Abraham did not know Him. God initiated the relationship and God compelled His response of faith (**Gen. 11:31 – 12:4; 15:6**). Abraham believed, but it was God's choice and God's work that brought Abraham to sonship.
- Remember that this statement by Paul is designed to address the anticipated question, "Is God faithful to keep His promise (particularly to Israel and for salvation)?"
  - ✓ Paul's answer is "Yes, God is faithful to His promises." If some aren't saved, it doesn't mean God has failed in any way.
  - ✓ Everyone who has been chosen for salvation will be saved. If God has made a promise, He will keep it; if He has made a promise of sonship for anyone, that one *will* be made His child.
  - ✓ God's elective plan is a provision of mercy for those who deserved His wrath (**9:23**).
  - ✓ What follows are three illustrations of God's elective work: Isaac, Jacob, and Pharaoh.

**3. God is Faithful — His Election of Isaac is TYPICAL (vv. 7-9)**

**4. God is Faithful — His Purposes Will STAND (vv. 10-13)**

**5. God is Faithful — His Non-Election of Pharaoh is JUST (vv. 14-18)**

**CONCLUSION:**

Before the creation of the universe God thought of me. He fixed his gaze on me and chose me for himself. He did not choose me because I was already in Christ of my own doing, but that I might be in Christ. He did not choose me because he saw me as a believer, but so that I might become a believer. He did not choose me because I chose him, but so that I might choose him. He did not choose me because I was holy or good but so that I might become holy and good.

Everything I am and all I hope to be is rooted in God's freely choosing me. My faith, my hope, my work are not the ground of electing grace but only its effect. And so there is no ground for boasting except in God. [Piper, "God Has Chosen Us in Him Before the Foundation of the Earth."]

That choice is designed, as Piper notes, to elicit our praise and worship. It is also designed to stimulate our faith and our trust in Him. He is a faithful God who will keep us in our salvation.

**BENEDICTION:** **Romans 11:33-36**