

99-08-01a

As we continue our worship this morning, turn with me for our scripture reading to Romans, chapter 9. Romans, chapter 9. If you remember anything about Romans, chapter 9, you know that it's not often selected as a scripture reading, often being considered perhaps the most difficult chapter in the Bible to interpret, but we will rush in where angels fear to tread. It has a direct bearing on our passage this morning, having a mention, of course, of Jacob and Esau, love and hate, and it has provided a rich source of material for those who spend a lot of time thinking about predestination and election and foreordination and a lot of the big poly-syllable words in theology. But there is a wonderful truth here that we don't want to lose just because this has been a controversial chapter.

Having been through Romans, hopefully we have at least adequate foundation for placing it in context in the book and in Paul's argument or his proposition that he places before the believers at Rome. He says in Romans 9, verse 1, I tell the truth in Christ. Of course, this strikes me right away.

He's an apostle. You would figure he's telling the truth, but he emphasizes the fact that this is the truth. I tell the truth in Christ.

I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart for I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises, of whom are the fathers, and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all the eternally blessed God. Amen. But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect.

We have a transition here because, first of all, Paul, by emphasizing that he's telling the truth, he's not lying, his conscience is bearing him witness, the Holy Spirit bears witness in verse 1, that tells us that he's going to say something that might be hard to believe on the part of the listeners. Well, Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles, and this idea that relationship with God, blessing and privilege and covenant promise from God could go to someone besides Israelites, in this day, was a radical concept and very hard to swallow on the part of the established religious types, the people who had built their lives on Judaism, being a Jew, observing the law of Moses and all of the accretions and additions that had come down to it, sort of like we have today. We have supposedly New Testament Christianity underway here, and yet we have a lot of accretions and additions and reinterpretation of Christianity from what it was in the first century.

In the first century, they didn't have church buildings, didn't have parking lots, didn't have pews, didn't have baptistries, didn't have an organ and a piano, didn't have a choir,

oftentimes didn't have a board of elders and a board of deacons and an education board and six assistant pastors and ministers of music and so forth. All of this we take for granted. All of it is a standard part of church, quote unquote, today, and yet a lot of times people become caught up in the details and the administration and organization of those things.

Missions committees and koinonia committees and all these other things. The early church had none of those in the sense that we have them today, and yet we take that for granted. When we think church, even those of us who have been meeting in a very nonstandard environment for a while, that's the first thing we think of.

We overhear two people talking and they say, I go to church down at so-and-so. When we think church, we think pastor, building, parking lot, pews, etc. And this is just what has happened in 2,000 years of evolution.

So in Paul's day, when he says, he presents himself, he says, I'm the apostle to the Gentiles. I'm taking the gospel of Jesus Christ. I'm taking the forward movement of God's plan to the pagan, heathen, uncircumcised, Philistine, godless, unwashed masses out here that are not Israelites and not sons of Abraham.

A lot of people had a bone to pick with Paul. They didn't think that was right. They didn't think it was biblical.

And they sure didn't think it matched up with their religion, that they had been schooled and steeped in all their lives. And so these people persecuted Paul, threw rocks at him, said he was illegitimate. What made him think he was an apostle? They made fun of him, not only from a theological point of view.

They made fun of him. They used the ad hominem argument. When you have difficulty countering someone's point of view, you attack them personally.

They made fun of the fact that he was short and bald and had a hooked nose and a squeaky voice and that he didn't have a presence. And Paul makes reference to this in several of his epistles. They refer to the fact that he seemed to be weak and puny among them.

He's real strong in his letters, but when he shows up, he doesn't have an impressive method of delivery. So the Jews, all the people defending the old school type of religion, really had it in for Paul and persecuted him. Some of them rioted and had him imprisoned and whipped in different towns.

So for Paul to turn around and say, I could wish myself a curse from Christ. I would be willing to give up all of the blessings that I have in Christ for the sake of my brethren who are Israelites. Some people might say, you've got to be kidding me.

These people are your enemies. Some of them are your sworn enemies. We use that phrase, they were sworn enemies.

Paul had literal sworn enemies. Remember the men who took a vow, said they wouldn't eat food or take a drink until they had slain Paul over an axe? They were literally sworn enemies. And they thought they were in God's plan.

We're doing this for God. Kind of like the Inquisition and the Crusades and a lot of the other barbaric things that have happened down in history. People say, well, I'm doing this for God.

John Calvin saw to it that a guy got killed because he didn't share the same theology. People do this in the name of God. So, when Paul says, I could wish myself a curse from Christ for the sake of my brethren, I would substitute myself.

Sort of like Moses is willing to do for Israel. Lord, set me aside, but spare the people. So, this is a big deal.

And so Paul is going to explain it. And he says, they are Israelites. They have all of these things from God.

The adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God. It's hard to render this into English from Greek. The Latourgia, the service, the worship service.

And the promises. Of whom are the fathers, the patriarchs that we're studying. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came. Christ is in this number, racially, culturally. The eternally blessed God.

So then when he says in verse 6, but it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. What is he saying? Obviously, Paul thinks there's a huge problem with Israel. For which he would be willing to be set aside from Christ to fix it.

But then he says, well it's not as though the word of God has taken no effect. What word of God is he talking about here? He's talking about the word of God that we have studied. All the way from Genesis 12, Genesis 17, Genesis 20, Genesis 23.

All the way up to where we are in Genesis 26. The promises that God made to Abraham, to Isaac. And will make in our study when we reach there, to Jacob.

I will make of you a great nation. In you all the nations of the earth will be blessed. I will give you a land.

You will possess it. You and your seed after you forever. You will be a light to the Gentiles.

Through you all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed. So what Paul says here in verse 6 is, This great destiny has not been fulfilled for Israel. And of course this doesn't make him any more popular with the Jews.

Saying, well you guys had everything going for you. Look at all this stuff in verse 4 and 5 that you had going for you. And you missed it.

You goofed it up. You passed it by. You let it slip.

And Paul says in verse 6, It's not the word of God that has failed. It isn't that all the conditions were met and everything was right for it to happen. But God messed up.

God made these promises to the seed of Abraham. But God got busy. The world got too large.

Too many people. Too much going on. And God failed in some way.

When you look at Israel and realize that the Abrahamic covenant was not fulfilled. Whose fault is it? Well there are two parties to the covenant. God and Abraham and his seed.

Well, who messed up? If the covenant doesn't get fulfilled, who failed? Paul says here, It's not the word of God that failed. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel. When you see Israel here not being the fulfillment of the covenant, These Israelites that are persecuting Paul, They're not a light to the Gentiles.

They're not a blessing to the nations. They're a curse. They're trying to stop Paul from spreading the blessing of God.

So Paul says, This doesn't mean that God's promise failed. And God's covenant failed. Because this isn't the Israel.

This isn't the seed of Abraham that God was talking about. And we're off from salvation here. We're not talking about whether or not they got saved.

We're talking about whether or not the Abrahamic covenant is fulfilled. This is the word of God that Paul says, Some people might think the word of God has failed. That God's words dropped to the ground as they used to say in the Old Testament.

Remember they would say not one of his words dropped to the ground. Everything that he said came to pass. Well here God said something and it did not come to pass.

And Paul is beginning the explanation. Because the Israel you're looking at is not the Israel God made the promises to. The seed of Abraham that God covenanted with, And that God said would be a blessing and a light.

This isn't them. Nor are they all children just because they are the seed of Abraham. The

fact that they can drag out the family tree and show Abraham down there at the trunk.

And they're out here on the 27th branch. And they can trace an unbroken line all the way back to Abraham. That doesn't mean that the covenant applies to them.

Because if it does, there's only two ways this covenant can fail. Either God is not God. He makes a promise and he can't keep it.

Or these people who are in fact descendants of Abraham. And are not a blessing. And are not fruitful.

And are not a light. Something has disconnected them from the covenant. This is what we have seen isn't it? In the past 14 or so chapters since we started studying Abraham.

We have seen that the Abrahamic covenant is conditional. It is not an unconditional covenant. It is conditioned.

And we've seen every single time. We just saw it reiterated to Isaac. When God talks to Isaac.

And even though we're not even finished with our scripture reading yet. Let me just emphasize that. Go ahead and turn back to Genesis chapter 25.

Because this scripture reading and what it contains is part and parcel of what we're studying today. Go on into chapter 26 of Genesis. It's right at the beginning of the chapter.

When in verse 2 the Lord appeared to Isaac. And he says do not go down to Egypt. Live in the land of which I shall tell you.

Dwell in this land and I will be with you and bless you. Now you get the idea here that if Isaac had disobeyed and gone to Egypt. Would this promise be in effect? No it would not.

God says do not go down to Egypt. Live in the land of which I shall tell you. Dwell in this land and I will be with you and bless you.

There is a condition for this blessing from God. Obey. Do what I tell you Isaac.

God says stay in this land. Don't do what Abraham did and go down to Egypt. I will be with you and bless you.

For to you and your descendants I give all these lands. And I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven.

I will give to your descendants all these lands. And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Because in verse 5. Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my

charge.

He kept my commandments. He kept my statutes and he kept my laws. And Isaac follows suit in verse 6 and he dwells in Gerar.

He does not go down to Egypt. So Isaac has maintained his qualification to receive these promises. That is what is being spoken of in Romans chapter 9. If it was an unconditional promise then the promise got broken.

And there is something wrong with God. But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. These people you are looking at who have not received the fulfillment of the promise.

Are not the seed to whom the promise will be fulfilled. They are not all children because they are the seed of Abraham. But in Isaac your seed shall be called.

Why is it called in Isaac? What are the alternatives? We just saw in the preceding chapter Abraham marries Keturah and has all kinds of other sons. There are sons and grandsons. There were some 18 descendants listed of Abraham through Keturah.

Abraham had a son before Isaac, Ishmael. Why wasn't that genuine first born son the heir of all these promises? Why is it Isaac? God said it before Isaac was ever born. You will have a son from your body.

Sarah will have a son. He is going to be your heir. And so you might think well it is just an arbitrary choice by God.

And when people come to Romans 9 there is looking for evidence that God just elects. God chooses ahead of time. Look what it says on down here.

In Isaac your seed shall be called. Verse 8 of Romans 9. That is those who are the children of the flesh. These are not the children of God.

But the children of the promise are counted as the seed. So what we have to figure out here is or remind ourselves of what does it mean to be a child of the flesh? What does it mean to be a child of the promise? You might notice by the way it says child of promise. It doesn't say child of election or the child of choice or child of predestination.

It says child of the promise. So the two things, the determining factor here in whether or not you are going to be one who inherits the promise and has the prosperity and the blessing and the provision of God, fulfillment of purpose and covenant promise from God, it depends on whether you are a child of the flesh or a child of the promise. So it is really important for us to understand what that means.

This is what the substance of our study is going to be this morning when we get back to Genesis. For this is the word of promise. At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a

son.

So Isaac is the child of that promise. And you remember anytime you have an Old Testament citation in the New Testament, they give you a little small quote. This is like we do today when you write a paper and have a footnote.

And this suggests a lot more than what it quotes. Everybody knew the scriptures. The men in Israel had memorized huge chunks of the books of Moses.

So they wouldn't go back and insult people's intelligence by quoting the whole thing. They would just give the first part or give the primary reference that would suggest the rest of the context. But when you see the Old Testament quoted in the New Testament, you can't ever just stop with that little phrase or that little verse or that little paragraph.

You go back because the people who received this had the rest of it right up front in their mind. And when he says this is the word of promise, at this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son, what does that refer to? That takes us back to Genesis chapter 18 and verse 10. And what is the substance of the promise? Because this is central to understanding Romans 9. Are you a child of the flesh or are you a child of promise? Genesis chapter 18 and verse 10.

God says, I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son. Sarah laughs. And you get down to verse 13.

The Lord said to Abraham, Why did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I surely bear a child since I am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you according to the time of life. And Sarah shall have a son. This is the occasion upon which God emphasizes his covenant with Abraham because he comes and sits down and eats a meal with him.

This is when God is sitting there face to face with Abraham. And everything that God has ever said to Abraham is emphasized at this point. The covenant promise that God made with Abraham is reiterated.

You go down to verse 18. The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him. What? This is Genesis 18 and 19.

That they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has spoken to him. The fulfillment of the covenant promise. The word of God that Paul sends us back to when he says, At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.

What is the content of chapter 18? As with virtually every other statement of the

covenant promise, it is a conditional covenant based on obedience. I have known Abraham, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has spoken to him. And this becomes the issue with Sodom and Gomorrah, because now God is going to make an object lesson out of Lot, in that episode as you go into chapter 19.

So now back to Romans 9. Hang with me here. If we just make it through the scripture reading, the rest of our study in Genesis will be much easier. But here we are.

This is the word of promise. Are you a child of promise, or are you a child of the flesh? The promise is, Sarah is going to have a son. This is the son that Abraham is going to train, to keep the word of the Lord, to keep his commandments, to do righteousness and justice, so that God can fulfill all of the promises God has made to Abraham.

Not only this, Romans 9.10, but when Rebekah also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac. We are going to be looking at that statement real closely this morning. For the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, so that the purpose of God according to choosing might stand, not based on works, not from the source of works, but from the source of him who calls.

It was said to her, the older shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not.

For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whomever I have had mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I have had compassion. And this is another, it's unfortunate that the English of virtually all modern translations blurs this, but if you go back especially to Exodus chapter 33 and verse 19, where this comes from in the Hebrew, it sounds like here, I will have mercy on whoever I want to have mercy on, and I'll have compassion on whoever I want to have compassion on. That this is sort of an inscrutable and arbitrary choice on God's part.

It is not. You go back, when God spoke these words to Moses, he said, and the tense is clear as crystal in the Hebrew, I will have mercy on whomever I have had mercy. You go back and study that in context in Exodus chapter 33, Moses has asked God not for salvation, not for deliverance, he's asked him for a blessing.

He's asked him, he says, Lord show me your glory. Moses, this is Moses. This is the man who saw the burning bush.

This is the man that wrought the ten plagues in Egypt, that stretched out his rod and the Red Sea parted. You would think, well Moses has certainly seen the glory of the Lord. How would you like to be up there? You know, we always get the film version of the Ten

Commandments and so forth, and you see Charlton Heston up there raising his hands, a rod of God is in his hand, and then the wind comes and the waters rush to each side, and you think, boy, if there's ever a demonstration of the glory of God, that's it.

Even for the special effects of the time in which that movie was done, that was pretty good. But Moses, after all these things, goes to God and says, show me your glory. Because Moses wants to know God the way Abraham knew God.

Moses wants to know God the way that David later on is going to know God and be a friend of God. He wants to see his glory. This is the Moses that goes up into Mount Sinai.

It comes down glowing in the dark, literally. And yet, he is hungry for the knowledge of God. He's hungry for relationship with God.

And when he makes this request, you know what God says? I will have compassion on you. I will have mercy on you. I will show you my glory.

Why? Because I will have compassion on whom I have had compassion. Moses was a man after God's own heart. Moses had faith in God.

All of these mighty things that happened through Moses were because Moses believed God. Moses walked into the throne room of Pharaoh with a death sentence on his head. Pharaoh could have said, Guards, this man killed a taskmaster 40 years ago.

Take him out back and slay him. Moses had to believe. When God told him to go stand in front of Pharaoh and perform the signs and lead the people out of bondage, that took great faith.

But Moses was a man of faith. And time and again, when the people were grumbling and complaining and giving up hope and ready to go back, Moses fell on his knees before the Lord. Moses went to God because his trust was in God.

His faith was in God. He believed God would perform his promise. God said, Because I have been able to have compassion on you in the past, I will continue to have compassion on you in the future.

Moses established a pattern of faith. And when Moses makes this request, how many people have seen the glory of God and lived? In the ultimate sense, John says, no man has seen God and lived. But Moses stood in the cleft of the rock.

Moses saw God's hindward parts, the back side of God's glory, if you will. And it didn't kill him. It's the greatest revelation of God to a human being that has ever taken place, is God to Moses on the mountain.

And it is this quote, I will have mercy on whom I have had mercy. I will have compassion on whom I have had compassion. This quote, this reminder of God's fulfilling of promise

and God's grace and God's blessing to Moses, is a reminder to us that this choice is based on response.

Are you a child of the promise, or are you a child of the flesh? Are you going to look to the flesh for solutions? Are you going to look around in circumstances for solutions? Or are you going to fall on your knees in the sand, like Moses does at the edge of the Red Sea, and call out to God? Those who look to God in faith are the children of promise. This is what Jacob is going to do time and time again, and we're about to start the Jacob section of Genesis, which is more than half the book. And it's important for us to understand at the outset, you can think of a lot of mistakes that Jacob makes, and a lot of devious, cunning things that he does, and a lot of deceptions that he pulls, but this is the pattern upon which the promises and the fulfillment of the covenant will be based.

It's his faith, not his failures. And it's a wonderful thing. All of us have failures.

Some of them are more visible than others. Some of them are more memorable than others. But all of us fail.

All of us pull an Abraham. All of us pull Abraham in Egypt, or Abraham with Hagar. All of us pull an Isaac down in Gerar, lying and saying, oh, she's not my wife, she's my sister.

All of us pull a Jacob, conniving and deceiving and running away in fear and making all kinds of bad mistakes. That's not what drives the forward progress of God's plan. It is not the failures.

It's the faith. David commits murder. David commits adultery.

David brings destruction on his country when he numbers the people and when he makes other colossal failures. But it's not David's failures that define him. It's David's faith.

The Lord Jesus Christ, one of his titles of honor is son of David. What? You mean son of the murderer? Son of the adulterer? Son of the bad king? The lousy father? The one whose sons kill each other and so forth? No. David, the man of faith.

David, the man after God's own heart. David, the man that said, wash me and I shall be clean. Purge me with hyssop.

Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. The one who said, after all of these things, that I stand before God in integrity of heart because God has cleansed me. Against thee and thee only have I sinned.

Faith in the promise. Faith in the provision and the blessing of God. That's what makes us a child of promise.

It's so sad that the very chapter in the Bible that is designed to bring this out is the

chapter that's been perverted and twisted. Peter says this. You know over in Peter when he says people take the words of Paul and twist them like they do the rest of the scriptures? Well, this is a classic case.

Romans 9 has been so misunderstood and so twisted up to make a case for election and predestination. Well, God in His integrable will said you're going to be a believer and you're going to go to hell. There is no unrighteousness with God.

God will bless the men of faith. And God knows ahead of time. God doesn't have to wait until you arrive at faith to start blessing you.

I've known many people who have arrived at the place of faith and growth in God's plan, but God started their blessing when they were still an unbeliever. God provided them with their spouse before they understood the things of God. God laid in place the basis for blessing for them before they ever got to that point.

Because God doesn't have to wait. God's not bound by our timing. And so when it says that before the twins were born, not having done any good or evil, so that the purpose of God as according to choosing might stand, God says look, they're not earning it.

I'm not going to wait and see who earns my favor. I'm going to tell you right now, there's going to be a man of faith and there's going to be a man of the flesh. There's going to be a man who values the promise and there's going to be a man who doesn't.

And the man who values the promise, they're not even born yet. But I'm telling you now, the one who is of the flesh is going to serve the one who is of the promise. There is no unrighteousness with God.

Verse 16, It is not from the source of him who wills. You can want all of these things. I've used this example before, but I think it's very apt.

Norman Geiser talks about the fact that faith doesn't produce anything. Faith in and of itself doesn't bring about anything. You can sit in a room with no windows and no door.

Of course, how did you get in there? I guess they have to weld you in. But you can be in a room where there's no furniture, there's no nothing. You're just in an empty room.

And you can wish and trust and pray and sweat and strain for a chair, and no chair is going to appear. You can believe that there's a chair. You can believe so firmly that you visualize a chair, like people visualize world peace.

But when you go to sit down on it, you're going to hit the floor because there is no chair. And your faith and your belief doesn't accomplish anything. And all of this positive thinking and let's agree together and I'll say it and make it so and all of this, you can believe to the point of hypnotizing yourself, it's not going to bring something about.

It is what God does in recognition of faith. It is what God does because someone believes the promise. That's why Paul says, it is not from the source of the one who wills.

Just because you want salvation as a sinner, that doesn't bring about your salvation and it doesn't qualify you for salvation. God still has to do 100% of the work. It is not from the source of the one who wills and it is not from the source of the one who runs.

You can knock yourself out running after something. And this is Israel's great failure. Paul is going to go on in chapter 10 here to say, Israel has a zeal for God and they've sought their own righteousness.

They have been running after it. They've been trying to accomplish it themselves. But they don't get it because they don't understand and they haven't latched on to the idea of faith.

It is not from the source of the one who wills. It is not from the source of the one who runs. It is from the source of God who shows mercy.

Moses didn't make the glory of God appear on the mountain. God revealed His glory on the mountain because of Moses' faith. And you can go on with the rest of that, Pharaoh and everything, but that's a study for another time.

The point here is, if we don't get anything else out of our Scripture reading this morning, it all depends on whether you're a child of the flesh or a child of the promise. Israel, as the physical descendants of Abraham, divides into two camps because they are not all Israel who are of Israel. Some of them are children of promise.

Some of them are children of the flesh. What exactly does that mean? Well, let's return now to our study over in Genesis. We have arrived at chapter 26.

Actually, the end of chapter 25, verses 29 through 34, where the birth of the twins, Jacob and Esau, we saw the grasping of the heel and the significance of their names and so forth. Just review real quickly. Jacob cooked a stew and Esau came in from the field and he was weary.

Esau said to Jacob, Please let me swallow some of the red stuff. This red stuff. For I am weary.

Therefore his name was called Edom. And we saw the word plays on these names for Edom and red and so forth. Adom in Hebrew means red.

But Jacob said, Sell me your birthright as of this day. Esau's request in verse 30, you notice the word please even in the New King James. It's got that Hebrew particle na.

I pray you. Jacob doesn't say please. Jacob gives an imperative.

Sell me your birthright as of this day. Esau says, Look, I am about to die. What is this birthright to me? Jacob says, and again an imperative.

There's no please. There's no request here. Swear to me as of this day.

So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and a stew of lentils. I finally tracked down what color lentil stew is.

It's pale brown or yellow. It's not red. So he ate and drank a rose and went his way.

Thus Esau despised his birthright. What is the birthright? In this family, it's a lot more than sheep and goats. It's a lot more than silver and gold, servants and camels.

The birthright in this family, the birthright of Abraham and the birthright of Isaac is the covenant promise of God. God has already made a big issue of which Esau and Jacob are well aware. Their father is Isaac.

Their father is the one who obtained the birthright even though technically he is not the firstborn son of Abraham. Ishmael is. But Abraham gives everything to their father Isaac.

Why? In Isaac shall thy seed be called. Isaac is the child of promise. Isaac is the one who has faith in God.

Isaac is the one who has relationship with God. Isaac is the child of promise. We need to explore that a little bit, don't we? Because it seems difficult.

It seems like God was sort of arbitrary. What choice did Ishmael have? He didn't get the chance to say, I don't want Hagar to be my mother. I want Sarah to be my mother.

So what is going on here? We're forced back to take a fresh look at the contrast and comparison with Ishmael and Isaac just as we are forced here to look at the difference between Jacob and Esau. We're going to pause here and take our break. And when we come back, we're going to examine this tension that the Word of God sets up for us because if we want to pull anything out of this at all, if we say, well, obviously, it's a good thing to be a child of the promise and not a child of the flesh, well, what is the means? What is the mechanism by which we ensure that we are, before God, children of the promise and not children of the flesh? When we go back and look at Ishmael and Isaac, when we examine Jacob and Esau and the things that God has brought to us in these last several chapters in that light, it's going to be real clear what our calling and what our responsibility is and what this illustration should mean to us as we live our lives before the Lord.

But this is a good place to pause and take our break.