

96-10-18b

Okay, we're back now from break. We've had a very lively discussion about the things that are actually coming up here in our next session because we are looking at this idea that you can be a believer and yet by failing to recognize the calling, this covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, was a call to the descendants of Abraham. They were called basically at birth.

The circumcision that took place for the males in that line, including Ishmael and I'm guessing these other six sons of Abraham that are recorded in Genesis 25, 1 and following, was an opportunity and it was a reminder that God had made promises and that those promises were available. And they had physical life and they had a physical relationship with Abraham and that corresponds in comparative fashion to our life in Christ at the point of salvation. We have a relationship with God.

We are technically brethren of Jesus Christ. We are technically sons of God. We have the authority to be called sons of God when we accept Christ as our Savior.

But, like these Old Testament characters, we can lose out on the benefits. As we saw in our first session, when you look at the stipulations of this covenant, this is not a salvation covenant. This is a function in the plan of God covenant.

Do you want to function as the people of God? Do you want to live on the land? Do you want to be fruitful and multiply and become many nations? Do you want to, as you come on down forward in the history of Israel, do you want to have a Davidic heir as your king? Do you want to worship at the tabernacle and so forth? These were privileges and these were responsibilities that were a part of the function of the nation of Israel as God's chosen people. They are purposes of God in calling them out as a special people, a peculiar people for himself. But that calling, it is for the saved, but it is not to salvation.

It is a calling after salvation. You can be saved and not respond to this calling. We mentioned Naaman the Syrian last time.

He continued to live in Syria. He didn't come to the nation of Israel and claim an inheritance in the land and so forth. He didn't marry into one of the tribes and so on.

So there's an analogy here. In the same way that you can be Israel in the physical sense, but not be Israel in the child of promise sense. This is where a lot of our confusion has come up in interpreting Romans.

We think that being a seed and being a child of promise means salvation, but it doesn't. Look at Ishmael. God hears Ishmael's voice and God is with Ishmael throughout his life.

Yet Ishmael screws up. Ishmael goes to Egypt to get his wife. Ishmael goes out of the land of

promise and lives elsewhere.

The same thing is going to happen as we move forward. What we're basically seeing here is that in the same way that all Israel represents all believers. Remember our rule of thumb in interpreting the Old Testament? It's Israel that comes out of bondage under the blood of the Passover lamb.

But many of the people in Israel never enter the promised land. They drop in the wilderness. What's the difference? Why did some of the Israelites go in like Caleb and Joshua and the others drop in the wilderness? Well, what's the difference between Caleb and Joshua and the ones that dropped? It's not physical descendancy.

It's not what tribe they're from or who was their great, great, great grandfather. It was their attitude toward God. You read the words of Caleb when they start crossing the Jordan and portioning out the land and he says, give me the mountains.

Give me the place where the enemies are that I can go fight and drive out. He's the oldest guy in Israel. It's his attitude, his faith in God.

God foresaw that. Why did God preserve Caleb and Joshua alive? Because they're great symbols of righteousness by faith. As we're going to see, that's what Paul is talking about here in Romans 8 and Romans 9 when he says, whom he foreknew he predestinated to be conformed to the image of his son.

This gets around the argument that is made by people such as a lot of folks that are in Reformed theology. What is that argument? They say, well, you don't want to believe in God's sovereignty and in God's predestination of son to salvation and his effectual calling and his election and that he pre-chose people in eternity past for salvation and then he effectually moves them to salvation and that's a manifestation of his sovereignty. You're just uncomfortable with that.

When you start bringing in this free will business, you're participating with God. You're cooperating with God and God is responding to you. You're initiating by your faith and then God is responding to your faith with salvation and with all of these other things, redemption, reconciliation.

You're putting God in either a partner position or even a subordinate position by saying, well, it's my sovereign human will that determines what God does. That's a valid argument because God is certainly not trying to react to what we do. Paul answers that argument and that, in fact, is not the case.

If somebody in Reformed tradition says, well, you, you're an Arminian and you're controlling God with your decisions and God is jumping when you decide one way or another and God is sort of on the end of a string that you're pulling with your volition, you say no. That's what Paul's arguing

against in Romans 8 and Romans 9. Before anybody does anything good or bad, God already knows whom he foreknew, he pre-designated, he marked out. So God is not waiting around to see what you're going to do and then reacting to your decisions or to my decisions.

God is God and he is just as omniscient as he is sovereign and he is just as omnipotent as he is loving or any of his other attributes. And so in eternity past, God saw what he was doing and he saw what kind of response any particular individual soul was going to have. And we, if you stop and think about this logically, Scripture doesn't belabor this point, but if you think about it logically, your volition, my volition, the volition of any human being, our choices would have been the same in any circumstance.

We could have been born in Africa, we could have been born a thousand years ago or three thousand years ago, we could have been born X number of years in the future in a completely different family, different country, different environment, different heredity, but your human soul has that ability to choose that is free from any of those influences. You look at it from experience. People come out of the worst environments, the worst homes, the lousiest gene pool you can imagine and choose God.

Other people come out of that same, maybe their brother or their sister, very same environment, very same heredity and choose against God. Some people are born with the silver spoon and the wonderful circumstances, Christian heritage going back X generations, son of a pastor, son of a pastor, son of a pastor and so forth, choose against God and his brother will choose for God. And really that's necessary when you think about the justice of God.

It cannot be that by accident of birth, if you will, your choice can be determined because now we're a victim of circumstances. Well, if God had just had me be born as Moses' son or if God had just had me be born in a Christian home, I would have chosen differently. And it's not true.

And the beauty of that is that we understand that every soul is going to respond to God. You could be standing in the very presence of God and choose against him. It's not a matter of how much light you got in this life.

And Scripture states that. Look at Satan. Satan stood in the throne room of God, staring God in the face, if you will, and chose against him.

God came down and walked in the Garden of Eden and Adam chose against him. So it's not a matter that, well, the degree of light is going to determine the choice. And this should give us a great sense of relief as well because there is an absolute level of communication of God's righteousness and the problem of sin and the standard of God's justice that the Holy Spirit communicates to every single human being at some point, whether it's at the age of accountability or it's at a point later in life or what about the babies and so forth.

The point is every single human soul will be witnessed to by God, the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ

said the Holy Spirit, when he comes, he will convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. That's everybody.

And we are without excuse. Romans chapter 1. Everybody knows about the eternal deity of God. It's a ministry of God, the Holy Spirit, to communicate that information.

Regardless of race, circumstance, generation, or any other factor, that knowledge is going to produce a response in the soul, either positive or negative. Nobody can blame their circumstance. Nobody can blame their heredity, their environment.

You could put a human soul out in the vacuum of space and the Holy Spirit would minister that truth to that soul and that soul is going to choose exactly the same way as if it had been born in any circumstance of life that you want to think of. And I would submit to you, if you want to think about infant salvation, that that same truth holds true. If you did take all of the Canaanite babies that the Israelites killed when they invaded the land at God's command, those souls show up in heaven, they're going to make the same decision about God when they get to heaven that they would have made about God on earth.

The fact that they go to heaven isn't going to change their mind. If it does change their mind, you've got big problems with the justice of God. If God reveals enough of Himself, I'll choose the right way.

So my choice is now based on how much revelation I get from God. And I can blame God. Well, if you'd have just brought me up there and showed me your face, I would have believed.

Not so. You can be staring in the face of God and reject. And everybody gets the same level of revelation and it's sufficient revelation to make that choice.

But you have not solved the problem of infant salvation by simply saying all babies go to heaven when they die if you understand volition and if you understand the human soul and the freedom that God has built into the human soul. So it's something to think about. And how does that apply here in what we're talking about? We've gone back and we've looked because at Paul's suggestion he has brought up the issue of Abraham and God's statement to Abraham, in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

And if you go back to Genesis 21 and see when God makes that statement, this is before Isaac has grown up to the point where he can make a choice. He hasn't demonstrated himself to be a man of faith over a lifetime of service and prayer and sacrifice and so forth. And God makes this statement and it's just like what Paul said in Romans 8. Whom he foreknew he pre-designated.

Now in Isaac's case, in the seed of Abraham case, in the Abrahamic covenant case that pertains in the Old Testament, whom God foreknew he pre-designated as partakers in the covenant. What is that covenant? It's the blessings promised to Abraham, fruitfulness, multiplication of offspring,

becoming nations, possessing land, specifically possessing the land promised to Abraham and being blessed, being blessed from God and being a blessing to the world. Those are the specifics of the Abrahamic covenant.

If you study it in Genesis 17 and the other three or four places that God states it, nowhere in there is there a statement about eternal damnation or deliverance from eternal damnation. Salvation is not the issue. This is a covenant for people who already believe in God and they make a choice about God.

Obviously if you're an unbeliever and don't trust in God for anything, Hebrews 11.6, he that comes to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him. That was the Old Testament standard of salvation. That's what Hebrews 11 talks about, are the faithful in the Old Testament days.

So what's the point? You can be a believer and miss out on the covenanted blessings in the Old Testament. You can have all of the advantages. You can be born in Abraham's family, circumcised on the eighth day and grow up like Ishmael.

You go get your wife in Egypt, that's just symbolic of his lifestyle. God knew that ahead of time and God said he's the firstborn son but he's not going to be my choice because God knew ahead of time that that's the kind of man that Ishmael would be. Now there are people who will tell you that God determined that Ishmael would be that kind of man and that God determined that Isaac would be a man of faith by this decree in eternity past or by this foreknowledge that because God knew that, that made it a certainty.

I am not going to spend breath trying to argue someone out of that. If you study the scriptures and if that's the view of God that you come out with, heaven help you. The whole point of God's revelation to us is that we have to make a choice, not that God made a choice for us in eternity past and that we're simply running down predetermined tracks.

It is a very limited, shallow, narrow view of God to say that if God knows something, it's like the Midas touch and because he knows it now it has to happen. God's knowledge determines our choices and therefore we couldn't choose something because God's already known something else in eternity past. It's just an unfortunate and limited view.

It is a much greater God who is able to accomplish his purposes with millions of these little free agents running around making their independent choices and God knowing those choices ahead of time making provision and having people that he knows are responsive and diligent seekers of him and his truth, planting them in appropriate places in history. The Apostle Paul was born in his generation for a reason. Moses and David and the others were born at the right place and the right time to fulfill God's purpose just like Pharaoh.

God knew what kind of soul Pharaoh had, what kind of choices he would make and so God put

him in the royal line of Egypt and had him be the Pharaoh that knew not Joseph and that line of Pharaohs that came down there 400 years later that he would be a stubborn, obstinate man and that this would give God the occasion to revenge that 400 years of slavery on the nation. God says for this purpose have I raised you up that I might show my glory in you and by his obstinacy it allows God to put the plagues on Egypt and to execute vengeance on not just Pharaoh but his entire nation. The issue for Pharaoh is not salvation, is it? But we'll be getting to that later in Romans 9. So with that background now let's forge onward in Romans chapter 9. It is not that the word of God has taken no effect.

It isn't that God made a promise but it just didn't hold true and now Israel is no longer the people of promise. It is not that the word of God didn't have an effect, that there weren't people who believed it. What is the issue? They are not all Israel who are of Israel.

It's not nor are they all children because they are seed of Abraham but in Isaac your seed shall be called. That is those who are children of the flesh, these are not the children of God but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. The promise is the word of God.

You can draw a circle around promise in verse 8 and tie it right back up to word of God in verse 6. That's the issue. That's the decider. Upon whom does the word of God have an effect? Isaac or Ishmael? And is it possible that God knew that ahead of time without determining it? The answer to both of those questions is yes.

The word of God was the object of faith for Isaac. It was not the object of faith for Ishmael. God knew that ahead of time and even though Ishmael was younger, God said it's going to be, I'm sorry, that Isaac was younger than Ishmael, God said the younger son is going to be the heir because he's a man of faith.

And God purposely, God could have had Ishmael be born second and Isaac be born first, couldn't he? God could have arranged that. God could have had Hagar be barren or whatever. Why did God allow Ishmael to be born first and then have Isaac be the heir? It makes a point, doesn't it, that you can't count on your physical birth to automatically receive blessing from God.

It points out for us, it underlines and emphasizes the fact that faith is the issue. It's your attitude of heart toward God that determines where you stand in God's plan. And that lesson applies to us today because many of us as believers are born into the family of God and it is a widespread assumption in Christianity that by virtue of that birth, we possess all things.

We have the inheritance. We're all going to glory. We're all going to walk with Christ.

We're all going to sit down and partake of manna all around. We're all overcomers. That is the common orthodox understanding of many of the reward passages in the New Testament is that that's for all of us.

And it's a sad thing because look at the Old Testament pattern. You can't claim that your simple fact of birth qualifies you. And God pointed that out.

He said, look, I'm going to reverse the order here. The pattern is that the eldest inherits, but look, I'm going to deny it to the eldest. Ishmael doesn't get it.

Esau doesn't get it. Reuben and Simeon and Levi don't get it. It comes all the way down to Judah.

And it's going to go all the way down to brothers and a double portion is going to go to Joseph. The second to the last of the twelve brothers is going to get the double portion. And God emphasized that in the roots of the nation.

He said, look at this. You can't count on your birth. Ishmael was first and he didn't get it.

Esau was first and he didn't get it. And they were born in the line of Abraham and they had the potential. They started out, they had the circumcision.

Well, it's the same thing today. It's a perfect parallel. In this age, you can be born into the family of God and lose your inheritance.

You can sacrifice it for a mess of pottage. You can go down to Egypt to get your wife and you can miss out on all of these wonderful things that fulfill God's purpose. The covenant in the Old Testament was not a covenant of salvation or it would be salvation by works.

Get circumcised and you're saved. It was a covenant of calling. It was the calling for believers.

It was the opportunity to fulfill the purpose, a specific purpose in God's plan as a believer. Some believers did and some believers did not. Balaam did not.

Ishmael did not. Esau did not. Many of the Israelites, in fact the entire generation except for Caleb and Joshua, did not.

They all missed out because the promises of God were not mixed with faith in them that heard it. Turn to Hebrews chapter 2. Lest there be any doubt or if you think that I'm just spinning this out of my own mind, remember again the two little circles we drew in Romans 9. It is not as though the word of God has had no effect. Now if this was the way the Reformed theology people would like it, that verse would say it is not as though the sovereignty of God had no effect.

But Paul makes the issue the word of God. It is the children of promise that are counted as the seed, the ones who know and claim the promise. The word of God is the issue.

Look at Hebrews 2. Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard. What do you suppose those things are, the things we have heard, specifically in the mind of this author? It's the word of God, the things we have heard. It's the record of God's dealing with the

Old Testament saints.

Lest we drift away. Can a believer drift away? We must take the more earnest heed to the things we have heard lest we drift away. So there is an explicit statement of the possibility of a believer drifting away in chapter 2, verse 1. And he goes on to talk about the word of God, this word of God that was spoken through angels in verse 2. It proved steadfast.

It didn't fall. It didn't fail. Every transgression and disobedience received a just reward.

How shall we escape if we neglect a so great salvation? It's possible for us to neglect our salvation. It first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God bore witness with signs and wonders, miracles, gifts of the Holy Spirit according to his own will.

So look at chapter 3, verse 1. Therefore holy brethren, who are we talking to, believers? I think so. Therefore holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our confession, Christ Jesus. Look at verse 12.

Beware brethren, this is the same holy brethren, beware lest there be in any of you an evil heart of apistia, unbelief. The very same word that's over there in Revelation 21.9, those people that are outside the gate, those people that have their portion, their inheritance in the lake of fire, which is what we discussed on the tape, in case someone listening on tape thinks that came out of the blue. Lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

Exhort one another daily. Is this a possibility that can creep up on us at any moment? We have to exhort and encourage each other every single day. Don't let this evil heart of unbelief crop up through the deceitfulness of sin.

Look at verse 14. We have become partakers of Christ, if we have been steadfast to the end. Now that we is the holy brethren, that we includes the author.

We have become partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end. This is why this whole discussion is so important, and this understanding is so important, because we often come to passages like this and people say, you know, you can lose your salvation if you don't persevere. Or maybe you never were saved if you don't persevere.

These passages are addressed to believers, and they're talking about not loss of salvation, they're talking about loss of opportunity, loss of participation, loss of the fulfilling of the function to which we have been called. That's why he talks about the calling in 3.1. We're partakers of the heavenly calling, but we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end. Now what do you think is going to happen if we don't hold that confidence steadfast to the end? We don't partake.

We lose our portion. We lose our meros, which is the Greek word for part in Revelation 21.9. If

you live a lifestyle that is no faith, you're going to be a murderer, an idolater, a sorcerer, a liar, and so forth. And your portion, your part, you're not going to have the portion of Christ that belongs to those who partake of the covenant.

You're going to be those who get a portion of smoke. It's going to be the smoke and cinders rising up from the lake of fire. Notice 21.9 in Revelation does not say that the people are in the lake of fire.

It says that's their inheritance, that's their portion, is the lake of fire. They missed out on fulfilling that function. Is Ishmael going to be a descendant of Abraham forevermore? Yes, he is.

He's Abraham's firstborn son. But what's his portion? It's not the land of Canaan. It's not the chosen people.

It's not the oracles of God. It's not the tabernacle and the throne of David and all of those other wonderful things that are part of God's purpose. He missed out on all of that.

He has some things. He has the presence of God. He has God's ear.

God hears him. And that's true of believers today. We have a certain level of privilege that comes just by virtue of salvation.

But the purpose of God, why did he call us? What is our calling? We are partakers of a heavenly calling. We are partakers of a holy calling. We've been called to holiness.

We've been called in conformity to Christ. Many of us as believers don't fulfill that calling. What's going to be the result? We're going to be like Ishmael.

We're going to be like Esau. We have some things. Esau prospered.

Ishmael prospered in an earthly realm. But they're not numbered amongst the children of promise, are they? In Isaac shall thy seed be called. Jacob, rather than Esau, is the child of promise.

What is the promise? The promise doesn't have to do with salvation. The promise has to do with blessing and reward and reflecting the glory of God by fulfilling his purpose. So that's why the author of Hebrews brings this stuff up and he says, Beware lest there be in you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

We have become partakers of Christ. We can have that portion that belongs to the calling of this age that we just saw in Romans 8, 28 and following, the declaration of righteousness, the glorification, being the many brethren that Christ is the firstborn of, if we hold fast our confidence, if we maintain our faith. Look at verse 15 of Hebrews 3. It is said, Today if you will hear his voice.

That's the word of God, isn't it? It's not as though the word of God has failed. It isn't that God is not speaking. It's not that he hasn't made a promise or offered an opportunity.

Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. That's the issue. Who is hard hearted? Who is motivated to pursue the plan of God? Look at verse 16.

Who having heard the word of God rebelled? Indeed was it not all who came out of Egypt? What does it mean to come out of Egypt? It's a picture of salvation. You come out under the blood of the Passover lamb. What's the point here? This is strong stuff from the author of Hebrews.

He's saying who do you think rebelled in the wilderness and missed out, never saw the promised land? Harden their hearts. They were the ones that came out of Egypt, led by Moses. With whom was he angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned whose corpses fell in the wilderness? To whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest? But to those who did not obey.

These are believers and they never entered the rest. They never fulfilled the culmination of those promises that God gave beginning with Abraham. And verse 19 sums it up.

So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. They are believers but they are unbelievers. They express faith in Christ for salvation but they don't express faith, living faith.

They don't move forward. They don't respond to the call. Chapter 4 verse 1, Hebrews.

Therefore since a promise remains, there's still the word of God out there that does not fail, of entering into his rest. Let us fear lest any of you should seem to come short of it. It's possible to come short.

Verse 3, we who have believed do enter that rest. As he has said, I swore in my wrath they shall not enter my rest although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. Sounds like Romans 8.28 doesn't it? He foreknew and he foreordained conformity to the image of Christ as our particular heritage.

God had pre-designated the land of promise at the foundation of the world. He knew that he would be promising this particular area to Abraham and to his seed. The works were finished from the foundation of the world but these people that came out of Egypt didn't get it.

And this entire section of Hebrews is very eloquent on this subject. Verse 9 of chapter 4, there remains therefore a rest for the people of God. And verse 11, let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

The author of Hebrews is making an explicit comparison to the things we're looking at. You can be an Ishmael in this age. You can be an Esau.

You can be a first generation exodite and drop in the wilderness and miss the rest and miss the

promise. By comparison, what does that mean? We can lose our portion in Christ, not lose salvation. It's inheritance.

It's living in the city. It's walking with Christ in white. It's the white stone and the hidden manna and the secret name and all of those wonderful pictures in Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3. That's what's on the line in our daily life and our daily decisions.

It's not a matter of winning the world for Christ as far as going out in a works-based evangelism effort. It's not a matter of how busy can you get at a church. It's faith.

It's the Word of God. The Word of God does not fail. The Word of God is the object of faith.

And it's trusting the Word of God, trusting while we're doing the daily tasks of life, trusting when we face decisions, trusting when we are tested in the area of people. People will fail. People will fall.

God does not. Who are we trusting? Do we put our reliance and our security in people? Do we base our self-esteem and our estimate of our own worth on what other people think? Is that what our standard is? Is that where our trust is? We're going to drop in the wilderness. We're going to lose our portion in Christ if we think that our righteousness comes from what people think because that's going to get us into works.

We're going to try to do something to impress them. We're going to try to dress or to appear or to talk or to act in a way that impresses them. And that's, you might as well go be Ishmael, go down to Egypt.

You might as well be Esau and eat some stew. That's exactly what we're being told here. Now, many, many of us have this verse in our soul by heart, Hebrews 4.12, the Word of God is living and powerful.

What is the context that this verse sits in? He's talking about the Word of God as the object of faith. God had ordained these things before the foundation of the world for Israel and they missed it. God ordained it and they missed it.

Now, that flies in the face of the Reformed argument that says if God ordains it, it's going to come to pass. God ordained the land of promise for Israel before the foundation of the world and they missed it. They dropped in the wilderness because of unbelief.

We have been pre-designated in this age to be conformed to the image of Christ so that He can be the firstborn among many brethren and we can miss that. We can miss that the same way the Israelites missed it. Let us therefore be diligent, in verse 11, to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

For the Word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the

division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, as a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account. What are we going to give an account about? We're going to give an account about the Word of God.

We're going to give an account about whether we were diligent to enter that rest by mixing the promises of God with faith. It goes on in the soul, not in the world. It is our thoughts and intents of the heart, not our activities per se, that determine where we're going to stand in this regard.

And that's why He says in verse 13 that there's no thing hidden from His sight. You can put a facade on and fool people, but you can't fool God because God's looking at the thoughts and intents of the heart. We have a great high priest who sympathizes with us.

In verse 15, we can come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Why would we do that? Why would we come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace? Because we believe that that's where it is, right? That that's where the solution to a problem is, that that's where the comfort is, that's where the answer is, that's where we need to be when we're in distress, is at the throne of grace, claiming the promises, the compassion of God. And this possibility of falling away that has been spoken of in chapter 2 and chapter 3 and chapter 4 is talked about again in chapter 6, which we have looked at several times.

And I will just remind you that 6, 1 through 12, if you end up there talking about the field that receives the rain falling many times upon it and bears only thorns and thistles, it is fit only for rejection and near to being cursed whose end is to be burned, that's the product of one's life. We are confident of better things concerning you. Verse 11, we desire in chapter 6 of Hebrews, we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end.

That's what he started talking about in chapter 2 and in chapter 3 and in chapter 4. And he culminates that here again in chapter 6. He's going to return to it in chapter 10 and chapter 11 and chapter 12 in this book. This book of Hebrews is all about faith, what happens if you live the life of faith, achieve righteousness by faith, what happens if you follow the pattern of the Israelites who sought their own righteousness, did not mix the promises of God with faith, and missed out on participation in the covenant blessing, the covenant purpose of God. Now when we come back to Romans 9, what are we going to find Paul concluding here? In verse 9 of chapter 9, this is the word of promise, at this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.

Not only this, but when Rebecca had conceived by one man, even by her father Isaac, the children had not yet been born, had not done anything good or evil, so that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him who calls. What's he talking about here? He's saying God didn't wait and react to Isaac or to Jacob or to Esau. God knew these things at the foundation of the world and God pre-designated those who were men of faith to this

calling and he altered the normal pattern of circumstances.

Normally Ishmael would have been the heir, normally Esau would have been the heir, but so that God's purpose in election might stand. What is God's purpose in election? Well, what's election? Election is choosing, right? God's purpose in choosing. What is God's purpose in choosing? Why does he choose Jacob and not Esau? Why does he choose Isaac and not Ishmael? What's God's point? What's he trying to prove? How would you answer that question? I would say the point God is making in that choosing is I will honor those who honor me.

I will arrange for their honor before they're even born to remedy the allegation that I'm somehow at their disposal and that I'm reacting to their choices knowing that they're men of faith. I foreknow them. I will pre-designate them for whatever my purpose is.

And God chose certain people and he did not choose other people not for salvation but for blessing and reward and the fulfillment of his purpose. Well, who did he choose? Who was the man of faith, Isaac or Ishmael? Who was the man of faith, Jacob or Esau? Doesn't mean they were perfect. Jacob did just as many wrong things as Esau did, but Jacob was a man of faith.

Jacob was the one building the altar. Jacob was the one wrestling with God until morning saying, I will not let you go until you bless me because Jacob believed that God would bless him. He believed it was his right and he put a claim on it and he was willing to wrestle for it all night and be crippled for the rest of his life to get it.

That was the extent of his faith. And God chose him for that faith. God chose David because he was a man of faith over all of his elder brethren who from the human eye might have been better qualified.

So the key here in this section is twofold. The first part is to recognize that the Word of God is the issue. That's what he introduces this section with.

It's not the Word of God that has failed. The children of promise are the seed, the ones who respond to the promise. Why does the promise enter into it? You could just say God's sovereign purpose in election stands and whom he chooses is going to get it.

It wouldn't be a matter of promise, but it takes faith to claim a promise. And God chooses the man of faith every time. It doesn't matter where he's born, how he's born, what order he's born in.

If he's a man of faith, God chooses him. And God's purpose according to choosing stands. It's not based on works.

It's based on him who calls. It's not what these men did. It's what they chose.

God called. Some of them responded and some did not. It's not from the source of works.

It's from the source of the one who calls. God calls and who's going to respond to that call? That's our decision today. God calls us.

We have a calling whom he foreknew and pre-designated. He called. What is our calling? We're already saved and yet we have a calling that we're partakers of.

We're partakers of a call to holiness. We're a call to conformity to Jesus Christ. And that's an inner conformity that begins in the heart through faith.

If we are responsive to that, God knew it in eternity of the past and God has designated us for glory. We are partakers of Christ and we will partake of those things that are promised to the overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3. We will have privileges that are promised to the faithful in Revelation 20 and following. If we ignore that calling, if we get caught up in the affairs of this life, if we worry about people, worry about circumstances, worry about ourselves, take our eyes off of Christ, we're going to miss that opportunity.

And we're going to be like Ishmael, we're going to be like Esau, we're going to be like the Israelites who were descendants of Abraham and they have salvation. They'll be in the eternal future but they're going to be on the outside looking in when it comes to glorifying God, when it comes to reward and blessing. Why are there orders of angelic creation? Why are there different orders, different levels in the heavenly beings? There's some basis for it and there's going to be a similar regime in the eternal future and there's going to be a basis for that as well and the Bible tells us what it is.

So the point here is this is a consistent pattern with God. This is the way God dealt with Old Testament saints. They had a different calling, they had a different covenant than we have, but the pattern of God's righteousness and justice, His love, His mercy, all of His attributes combining together to make these resources and possibilities available to us, but He conditions participation and partaking and inheriting those things on our response.

And He's God, He knew ahead of time who would respond and who would not and He pre-designated the responsive ones to glory. But it in no way limits our ability or responsibility to make those choices and to pursue those things. It is not a foregone conclusion until we end this earthly life and at any point if we decide that we want to be heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, we need to get in the crowd that is mentioned in Romans chapter 2, those who by patient endurance and well-doing seek for glory, honor and immortality.

God will grant the eternal life package that includes all of these things, that's our calling. And when we continue here in Romans 9 next time, we'll start with verse 11 and go through the Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated section here. And verse 14, is God unrighteous to make this distinction? Is God unrighteous to put this possibility out there and reward those who respond to it and reject those who do not? That's what we will address from the Word of God next time, but

let's close here in prayer.

Father, we thank you for the beauty of the truth that is contained in your Word. We thank you for the revelation of your person and your plan that we find there. We thank you for your provision to enable us to obtain just a glimpse of the eternal and infinite things of which we are only beginning to partake.

We pray that as a result of seeing these things in your Word, we will have that truth in our soul that will divide to the center of our being, will enable us to see where our thinking and our priorities need to change. We pray that it will motivate us and encourage us to be on the positive side of your plan and be on the side that reflects your glory both now and in the eternal future. We know that this is not only for our benefit, but that it brings glory to our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We ask these things in his name. Amen.