

Revelation 14:6–13

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[0 : 0 0] Our scripture reading today is taken from the book of Romans, chapter 9, verses 1-29. Once again, the scripture text is Romans 9, 1-29.

Please stand for the reading of God's word. I am speaking the truth in Christ. I am not looking. My daughters are obedient.

flesh is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

But it is not as though the word of God has failed, for not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham, because they are his offspring. But through Isaac shall your offspring be named. This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. For this is what the promise said, About this time next year I will return and Sarah shall have a son. Not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born, and had not done anything either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works, but because of him who calls. She was told, The older will serve the younger, as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? There's no means, for he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So then, it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed for all the children. So then, it has mercy, and he has mercy on whom he will, and he hardens whoever he wills. He will say to me then, Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will? But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Well, what is molded, say to its molder, Why have you made me like this? Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump, one vessel for honorable use, and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath, and to make known his power, has endured with much patience, vessels of wrath, prepared for his destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory, for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory? Even us, whom he has called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles, as indeed he says in Hosea, Those who were not my people, I will call my people, and her who was not beloved, I will call beloved. And in the very place where it was said to them,

You are not my people, there they will be called sons of the living God. And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved. The Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth, fully and without delay. And as Isaiah predicted, If the Lord of hosts has not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

[4 : 1 5] Well, before we begin the message today, I just want to say what a wonderful week it has been, and what a wonderful next week it will be. And of course, I'm not referring to the weather.

The next week I was working at a preaching workshop, and I was reading a pastor in the Chicago area, just going to work on our word work. And I came home from Kazakhstan, Costa Rica, Brazil, Africa, literally all over. I did have to tell the guy from Kazakhstan, although he invited me to come to this country. I told him I didn't think I would make it anytime soon. But what a wonderful thing to see.

84 men just wanting to be working in the gospel. And then I think of the week that we have ahead of us, you know, the scriptures are pretty clear, don't neglect the sacraments. And this week we have both sacraments in our own local family. Jade's baptism and Charles' baptism on this next week. I hope the waters of Lake Michigan are warm by the time you go under. But we praise God that you have begun following Christ and your son. And that is going to be a treasure. So if you're in town, able to be a wonderful place to be.

And this Thursday, celebrating the Lord's Supper together, right here, I hope you all can make it. And invite others to come with you. Well, we've arrived at Romans chapter 9.

Real life has a way of keeping your feet on the ground, doesn't it? John Lennon knew it. It was at the height of his musical power and the rising fame of the Beatles amidst great fortune that he was honest enough to see that his heart's desires for a world that would bask in peace would never really come to fruition.

[6 : 21] And that is when he proclaimed that this great moment on the mountaintops, the dream is over. We gotta, I mean, I gotta, personally get back to so-called reality.

Real life has a way of keeping your feet on the ground. Lennon knew it. You know, hard-fought, mountaintop moments are always followed by an all-too-quick descent of the soul into the valley of what can be really nothing else but the real world.

With real problems and ongoing agitations. Interestingly, if you've ever found yourself in a spiritual mountaintop experience, just in a life-altering moment where everything seems to be going your way, there's almost something in that moment that triggers your heart's descent.

You realize that God, as great as this is, and you turn just immediately into the light, and you can clarify the air, and you can relax the air.

Paul, I didn't do it. You know it. Paul, he's very, he's very, he's very, he's very, he's very, he's very, he's very, he's very, the way chapter 8 closes, I mean, he has been rising throughout chapter 8 on great ascent, praise, love, love, and he has for us, and Christ, and life, and his moment where it is almost in his mouth, and he is sure that either death or life or angels or rulers, president, if he didn't want to invest in heaven or anything else if all creation should be separated from us.

[8 : 32] The love of God, until Christ's power, Lord. All in our lives have fresh feelings and affection that rise as he considers God in this grace and he is exalting him in the heavens from the clouds of nothing from heaven.

Separating him from that, from his own sense of his eyes and his eyes are up. And something in his own voice begins to trigger the effect of the sense of the world.

And we are in the world of life, most of our lives, nothing is separated. Not being able to separate us and have to put in Christ's praise.

And it's reminding that his love and his life are purgatory and separated from heaven. And so he says, I am speaking of truth in Christ.

I am not lying. My conscience cares me. This is the Holy Spirit. Notice this to me. Oh, praise this. I'm speaking of truth. I'm not lying.

[10 : 00] My conscience cares me. This is the Holy Spirit. I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake.

Of my brothers, my kinsmen, according to the flesh. People have often wondered, what's chapter 9 doing?

They almost feel like it's this complete disconnect from chapter 8. And I read it and I go, are you kidding me? This is life as we know it. Real life has a way of keeping your feet on the ground.

What was Paul's reality? The reality was this. Paul, at this point in his life, had become well aware that his allegiance to Jesus had been the cross of great pain for many of his fellow Israelites.

Let me put it differently. He'd lived long enough to disappoint the people he loved most. That's what he did. He had been an aspiring youth, incredible, unlimited promise within Judaism.

[11 : 22] Schooled in the best of schools. And not only studied with the best. He advanced beyond his peers. And this young man with excelling promise, unmatched potential, at a moment in his adult life, turned and had been drawn by the light on the road to Damascus.

And he had gone with an understanding that the gospel of God was not only for Israel, but for the world. And he gave himself to the world. And in doing so, drove on in Christ.

And therefore was driven out. Among the people he loved most. That's part of the apostolic message for Paul.

And interestingly, it's not just, well, in this text, it's strictly related to the Jew and the Gentile. But for Paul, this kind of anguish was even deeper.

It related to his own love of the Christian church. I think continually of the Corinthian correspondence. Second Corinthians in particular, where he's actually explaining his own itinerary to his own congregation.

[12 : 43] Because he knows that they feel that he's left them. He says, I have great sorrow.

Not ceasing anguish in my heart. You see, Paul had been considered by some Israelites to almost be anti-Jewish.

He'd turned. He'd gone to the dark side. Some slanderously even charged that. He speaks in his Thessalonian correspondence of having been driven out by his own.

To put it differently, he had been misrepresented. And his language here is strong, isn't it? I mean, what a thing to say.

Not that he actually could desire or wish this, verse 3, for I could wish that I myself were accursed or cut off, as if he is offering himself as an exchange for the Israelites coming to faith.

[13 : 51] But that is where his heart was. And it almost sounds like Moses of old. At the time of the golden calf, when Moses says before God, in the midst of the great rejection of God by the people, God, forgive them or block me out.

Amazing heart. Think of all the things that bring sorrow and unceasing anguish to your heart. How many of them relate to the family of God or those who are yet not in relationship to God?

So it was for Paul. Gave himself to the world. And as a result, caused great pain.

The anguish is rooted in tragedy, isn't it? I mean, a tragedy is, I guess in literature, rightly a tragedy when the heroes of the story are walking headlong into this inescapable problem that you can't believe they're going to experience, and yet they don't see it?

They don't see it coming? I mean, that's the tragedy of the Israelites' lack of faith in Christ. Look what it says in verses 4 and 5.

[15 : 15] This litany of phrases. They are Israelites. And to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.

To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race according to the flesh is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. It's like with each phrase, the tragedy is greater.

They had it all. They don't see it. It causes them great pain. Well, in light of it all, then, he has to square his gospel with their rejection, and evidently some of the accusations that came back toward him and his own person.

And the question is simple. Take a look at it there in verse 6. Has God's word failed? Does Israel's rejection of Jesus of Nazareth as the anointed Christ promised in the pre-proclamation era of the scriptures mean that God's word literally falls?

Did it fall? Did it fail? He sets out to say, of course. No. Their rejection does not mean God's word is failed.

[16 : 47] He lays out a principle, the beginning of verse 9, followed by two illustrations. Here's the principle. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring.

That's the principle. Now, I couldn't think of an exact replica. It would be impossible to illustrate this. But this reminds me of the kind of thing when a child would come to a parent and say, but you promised me that I would get this or I would get that.

The parent says, no, no, no, no. What did I say? What did I say? You're misrepresenting what I said. What I said was, and the parent lays out the answer.

The implication is the same here, that God's word has not failed, but they have misread the promise. And so he says that not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, not all are the children of Abraham because they are his offspring.

He's already argued this for us back in the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of verse 3 and chapter 3. That the circumcised are the ones who are circumcised of the heart.

[18 : 04] Here it is. They are the ones of the promise. And notice the two illustrations that he brings. First, from the life of Abraham, that the promise was going to come not to all of Abraham's children, all of his offspring, but through the one son, the son of promise, namely Isaac, not Ishmael.

That's his argument. It's very clear. He says, for this is what the promise said about this time next year, I will return and Sarah shall have a son.

That's the real promise. That the ones who come into relationship with God are the children of the promise, not strictly of the flesh. To be a son of Abraham was to be a son of the heart, a heart holder of the promise.

And then he goes even further. This extraordinary thing that moves beyond promise to actually saying that God has done something in electing his own children that even moves to be beyond prior to their birth.

Look at verses 10 through 12. The second illustration comes from Isaac's children through Rebecca. And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born, and had done nothing, either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works, but because of his call, she was told, the older will serve the younger.

[19 : 39] As it is written, Jacob, I have love. Esau, I have hate. It's not just children according to the promise. It's the children according to the call. And the call to be a child of God actually extended to differentiating children before they had been born.

This is not hard to understand, Romans 9. It might be hard to receive. It's a very simple text in regard to what it says. And of course, then we're left with being able to respond in one of two ways.

We either begin to recoil with a sense of resistance at this doctrine of election that actually moved to the selection of children and separation of them prior to their birth.

We recoil at that or we humbly receive it. This is really a great test, isn't it? How do you receive God's word?

I was looking for hunting and found because I'd read it many years ago something that Charles Spurgeon had said on the doctrine of election.

[20 : 52] Listen to what he says. I believe the doctrine of election because I am quite sure that if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen him. He goes on.

And I am sure that he chose me before I was born or else he never would have chosen me afterwards. And he must have elected me for reasons unknown to me for I never could find any reason why he should have looked upon me with special love.

That's a response to the doctrine of election. It's the right response to the word of God. The doctrine of election is simple, clean, straightforward, and not ambiguous.

I think of my own life. why would God elect to explain his special love upon me and having me understand the things of Christ?

Certainly not anything in and of myself. I was born into a Christian family, thank God, but was of no great advantage to loving him on account of it.

[22 : 02] Rather, I continued to rebel all the more. Were I to tell you of my junior high years, well, you sit up and you probably never forget.

I would tell you of the way that I wandered from God, walked from him, continually sought my own way.

Clearly, he must have chosen me before I was born. I have given him no reason to choose me. And any good that dwells within me or any good that dwells within you is certainly a sign of his special love.

grace, all grace, all grace. Isn't this an amazing truth for not only me, or Spurgeon, but for you?

Isn't election actually something for which we are to be grateful? And this is amazing. And this is amazing. And this is the Christian Institute on Christian Religion.

[23 : 10] It does not deal with the subject of election under soteriology or how one comes to faith. He deals with it under the section of Christian life and his ecclesiology.

So the doctrine of election is actually a doctrine of comfort to those who believe. It's not to be set forward in the midst of a debate with non-believing people that somehow God is arbitrarily electing some and not others.

I love how Calvert treats it. And that's the way it ministers to my heart. So here we come upon what looks to be one of the most difficult and hard truths in all of Scripture and what I find rising in my heart is that receptivity which Spurgeon so eloquently put that I believe this.

I have no other reason to consider why I would have come under the love of God had He not initiated with me. I love Him more for I never would have loved Him at all.

And so here we are. Does God's word fail? And all of a sudden we are rising in our heart in gratitude to God for His grace.

[24 : 24] The second question of course is an implication of the first. It's not has God's word failed but is God Himself therefore fair?

You see it there don't you? Said a little differently at the beginning of verse 14. What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? Can God be considered fair?

That He would elect some according to the promise and call them even before birth? Is that fair? Notice His answer.

It's quite striking. He doesn't appeal to God's will as like His decision. He appeals what? To God's mercy.

It's fascinating. What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's heart? Verse 14. By no means for He says to Moses I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.

[25 : 35] So then it depends not on human will or exertion but on God who has mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh for this purpose I have raised you up that I might show my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

So then He has mercy on whomever He wills and He pardons whomever He wills. The principle is clear. Is God fair? Is He just?

He's merciful. Two illustrations. He gave the word to Moses and we have the example of Pharaoh.

Indeed when you read the Old Testament it's very clear the Bible talks about God hardening Pharaoh's heart. There's no sense in trying to get around it. I mean it says it so repetitively. Exodus 421 7 3 9 12 10 1 10 27 20 11 10 14 8 God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

It also says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Does this mean that God is somehow arbitrary?

[26 : 47] Because if He's arbitrary in His dealings with us that would be evil. But He's not. If God was somehow adjudicating between people that all stood neutral before Him that might be the case.

Imagine a lineup of people before you and they are all neutral and you demonstrate mercy on some and wrath on others but no one had actually been implicated for any cause of justice before your bench.

Well that would be arbitrary and if it was arbitrary that would be evil and if it were evil that would certainly not be fair. But that's not the case with humanity. We are all set against God.

The question is not so much anymore why this one and not that one but why anyone at all. is merciful.

Let us not press too hard on God to defend his fairness. Remember Job's presumption that he would stand in the presence of God based upon his own righteousness and his own fairness.

[28 : 07] I'm not sure you or I would stand in the presence of God God are! On God and it's based upon his fairness. No, they're better off going into his presence and pleading for his mercy, which is not against his justice.

For Christ, we see both him being the just and the justifier. The penalty has been paid, and you are able to know that it is completely an act of grace and mercy.

No, you don't want God to be fair with you. Or if you do, you're a self... You're going to be in trouble when you talk about it later.

I think of Luke 18. The two people come in before God. The one guy, God, I'm glad I'm not like that guy. I do this, I do this, I do that. The other guy just goes before God.

He's a tax collector, right? He's like messed up his whole life. And what does he say? He just stands in the presence of the assembly. He says, Lord, have mercy. And Jesus says, which one went home just in mind?

[29 : 24] You can know the mercy of God. It can be yours. The Bible says he will extend mercy to those who call out for it.

Don't harden your heart. Ask for his mercy, and he will certainly give it to you. Can there be mercy yet reserved for me?

The answer in the gospel is yes. Attracted by faith. Interesting, isn't it?

The work of salvation is evidently the work of God from beginning to end. And so we looked at whether or not his word had failed, and what actually began to emerge was our hearts began to rise with his grace.

And we asked the question, is he fair? And what happens is we begin to have a deeper appreciation for his mercy. Thank God he's not fair with me, but in Christ he has mercy upon me.

[30 : 27] Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Wonderful thing. The lingering question, then, is what takes up the rest of it.

You will then say to me, verse 19, why does he still find fault? So if the first question is, did the word fail? The answer is no. Is he fair? Well, he's merciful.

Why does he find fault with me? Interestingly, Paul's already taken two swings at this question. In chapter 1, verse 18, he leveraged his whole weight behind God's fault-finding ways of wrath with us, based upon our movement away from him with our heart and with our mind.

So he levied the charge against us. He finds fault with us because of our injustices. His wrath comes because our hearts are turned. Our minds won't receive his way.

Every one of us. And then in chapter 5, he made a second argument, but this time he didn't blame all of us. He blamed Adam, in a sense, you might say. God finds fault with us because we all come from one race.

[31 : 39] Here he leaves all of those things aside. He doesn't make any of those arguments. Instead, he turns to these two illustrations. Really, a fascinating line here.

Verse 20, But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Another bitch says, well, let me take a third swing at it. Human? God. Okay, we're going to argue fault.

Human? God. Great distance. Maker?

Molded. That's it. That's his argument. Potter. Clay.

I am sovereign, he says. Has the potter no right over the clay to make of the same lump one vessel for honorable use of another for dishonorable? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience?

[32 : 47] I love that little phrase because it's so true. God in his wrath, God in his wrath, even in his wrath endures with great patience.

In order to make known the riches of his glory, he brings these vessels of mercy for, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, even us.

Even us. His sovereign ways, his ways, his ways, his ways are sovereign. And really, I think it leads to silence.

That's the point of this kind of argument. No more talking. God is in his temple, all within keep silence, humbly kneel with deepest reverence.

He alone, on his throne, is our God and Savior, praise his name forever.

[34 : 16] He didn't abrogate his fairness.

He could find fault with us all. Thanks be to God for the gift of life that comes in Christ.

It's amazing, this chapter, isn't it? When we heard it read, didn't he just want to fight it? And then it opens up, and my heart wants to receive it.

God is enlarged, and I am great, comes in him for his love. And look how he closes. He actually then comes all the way back full circle to the Jew and the Gentile, 24 to the end.

Again, just as he gave us two illustrations from the Old Testament through the life of Abraham and Isaac, one showing one way, one the other way, and two quotes, one of Moses and then one of Pharaoh.

[35 : 23] So, too, you have this sequence of quotes about the Gentiles who were to receive the promise, and then a sequence of quotes about the Jews who would only in remnant be receptive toward them.

And so he says, as indeed, he says in Hosea, those who were not my people, I will call my people. And her who is not beloved, I will call beloved. The very place where it was said to them, you are not my people, they will be called sons of the living God.

In other words, God's promises to be loving and gracious and merciful and saving extend to all the earth.

How could we ever read this chapter and get some kind of restricted understanding of the extent of his love? It's beautiful.

We heard a song today in German, indicative of the gospel taking the whole world.

[36 : 32] Every tribe, language, people, nation, and God. That's how big his love is. What a tragic irony when you think that Pharaoh stood as a symbol in history at the time when God adopted Israel for himself as a people.

By the time of this writing, Israel stands almost like a Pharaoh as God has chosen to call sons of the living God, adopting people all the way to the ends of the earth.

And as a consequence, I don't know how many ethnic Jews are here today. As a consequence, I'm guessing most of you are Gentiles. As a consequence, you get in. You get in because the great, gracious, merciful promises of God were from the very beginning meant to go to the whole world.

People like you get in? I mean, do you get that? Do I get it? Does it grab our hearts?

And so then you have that little phrase at the end where the two quotes of Isaiah concerning Israel, though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant will be saved, for the Lord will carry out a sentence upon the earth fully or without delay.

[38 : 00] As Isaiah predicted, if the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like. God's gospel is global.

And Paul, who had been accused of almost being anti-Israel, anti-Jewish, had actually grabbed hold of that idea that God's gospel is global.

When he gave himself to the world, it caused this reeking of reality in his life, misrepresentation toward his soul.

It caused a great anguish. How about you? How about me? The gospel came to the Jews first, but thank God it was also the Jews.

Are you receptive to his word? That is the posture of the true Christian. A receptivity to the Lord.

[39 : 09] Are you humbled by his electing grace? Are you grateful for his everlasting mercy? Do you fall silent before his sovereignty?

And are you connecting yourself to his global cause? May he be so blessed.

Thus far, God's glory. Heavenly Father, we come to you today, and our hearts, hearts made tender by the deep truths of your word.

May we love you better for having heard this today. In Christ's name. Amen.