

God's Promises do not fail.

Romans 9:1-13

At the end of Romans 8 we've come to the conclusion of the first section of Romans and Paul main theme in that section of Justification. Justification is the declaration from God that by faith we are made righteous on the basis of Christ sacrifice alone. Consequently we are set free from the guilt power and corruption of sin and as God's adopted children we may anticipate a future wonderful glorification.

Before Paul writes about the Christians response to justification from chapter 12 onwards he digresses and turns his attention to the Jews. He knows that God called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles but his fellow countrymen, the Jews are still very close to his heart. Paul is especially concerned that so many of them rejected Jesus Christ as the Messiah. In fact the rejection of the Christ by the Jews caused Paul a great deal of sorrow and anxiety to the extent that he entertained the wish that he be cut off from Christ rather than his people. It remind us of Moses prayer when he prayed for God to forgive Israel on account of their idolatry with the golden calf, and if not, if God would not forgive them then let God blot Moses out of his book of life." The Lord's response to Moses was whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot out of my book." And so we can confidently reason that God's answer would be the same for Paul, whoever has sinned meaning; the sinner who is not clothed in the righteousness of Christ through faith ,.... will be cut off, not of course the apostle Paul.

Nevertheless it was a sad thing for Paul because the Israelites had so much they were God's chosen nation from whom the Saviour came they had the covenant the law the temple and the promises od God

And so Paul asks the question "Has God's promise failed?" That's the implied suggestion, that God's promise failed or that the solemn agreement God made with Israel of a lasting mutual relationship and everlasting blessings is uncertain and can't be relied upon. People might have similar thoughts today as we look around us and see the decline of the church in the west, or see people who were baptised and once part of the church falling away. It can cause us to ask that same question "has God' promise failed?"

The answer Paul gives here is "No! Because not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." There were physical and spiritual descendants of Israel. There were those who had the physical sign of circumcision but lacked the necessary circumcision of the heart. Paul wrote about this in Romans 2:28 & 29 "he is not a Jew who is one outwardly but he is a Jew who is one inwardly by a circumcision of the heart by the Spirit, not by the letter and his praise is not from men but from God."

To illustrate his point Paul provides two examples the first being Abraham's offspring Ishmael and Isaac. Though Ishmael isn't mentioned we know he was Abraham's descendant, however Genesis 16:12 says that Ismael would be a wild donkey of a man whose hand would be against everyone." In Galatians 4: 29 the one born according to the flesh, (Ishmael) persecuted the one born according to the Spirit (Isaac) So clearly Ishmael, though Abraham's descendant was not a true Israelite but Isaac was.

The second example involves the children of Isaac, Jacob and Esau. Paul shows that just as God chose Isaac to be the recipient of His promise he also chose Jacob rather than Esau. The

point is made in verse 11 that this had nothing to do with the eligibility of either child. They had the same mother and father. They were together at the same in the womb as twins but before either had taken their first breath or done anything good or bad, God had made his choice and revealed it to their mother Rebekah. “The older will serve the younger. Jacob I loved but Esau I hated.

So there you have the answer to the question has God’s promise failed? The answer is NO and the explanation is given in verse 11b “that God’s purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls.”

God’s purpose is clear. It is His choice as to who receives the fullness of God’s promises not ours. God is the one who decides, who chooses and who elects. This is abundantly clear throughout salvation history.

A necessary part of God’s restoration of the world following the fall into sin was that God should choose a people to be those through which salvation would come to the world. Men were never going to do that themselves. The sin which entered the human race rendered all men incapable of seeking God. Ancient world religions proves that, before the advent of Christianity men gave themselves over to ancestor worship, sun worship, poly theism, the worship of man-made images and gods. Abraham was called out of a family of idolaters.

The history of the Bible is a history of God reaching down and calling people to himself, giving them his spirit and enabling them to respond to that call. God in his wisdom and according to his own unsearchable will he has done so incrementally beginning with Abraham and those of Abraham’s offspring whom God chose.

We can’t do this ourselves. Salvation is entirely God’s work! It says in Deuteronomy 7:7 that Israel’s choice as the nation through whom the Christ would come was not because Israel was in any way better than other nations but because God gratuitously loved Israel. And so as we find in Romans 9:6 God selected only a part of the nation Israel; just as he selected only Isaac and not Ishmael, Jacob and not Esau. Paul says about Jacob and Esau that God’s choice of Jacob and rejection of Esau had nothing to do with either man. Jacob’s choice arose out of God’s grace.

So, again, “did God’s promise fail for the nation Israel? NO because God did not chose all of the Israelites. Paul needed to say that in order to refute those Jews who boasted of being God’s elect because they had the law of Moses but who rejected Jesus Christ the Son of God. When the apostles proved from the OT scriptures that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God the Jews refused to acknowledge him. They despised the favour of God just as Esau despised his birth-right and trampled the son of God underfoot to quote Hebrews 10:29.

Not all Israel are Israel God’s promise hasn’t failed at all, on the contrary His promise was fulfilled when salvation came to his people through the Lord Jesus Christ and there for is the promise true for you and for me? Well the answer to that is found in your answer to this question. What do you think of Jesus. Romans 10:9 says if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.

We’ll let’s think about some further implications for the church.

a) Not all who are in the visible church are of the church. Since Israel represented the church in the Old Testament and not all Israel were Israel then (even though all Israelites received the sign of circumcision and covenant membership), it stands to reason (and history bears it out) not all in the church are the true church.

There have been many in the church who received the mark of church membership who were not elect and never born again. Judas was one of the twelve yet became an enemy of Christ and betrayed him. The apostle John mentions Cain and Abel. Cain murdered Abel. John then wrote “do not be like Cain” and then “anyone who hates his brother is a murderer and no murderer has eternal life in him”. So there were those in the churches known to John who hated their brothers in the church. They were in the church for a while but not of the church.

The apostle Paul mentions Philetus and Hymeneus in 2 Timothy 2:17 saying “they denied the resurrection wandered away from the truth and destroyed the faith of some.” These men obviously claimed to be religious, were in the congregation at Ephesus where Timothy ministered but were enemies of Christ. The fullness of God’s promise wasn’t for them either.

The Judaizers in Paul’s day were the counterpart of those Jews who have become true Christians. They insisted on combining Christianity with OT Judaism. They regarded Christ as a mere prophet; a second Moses and denied Christ’s divinity. They argued that circumcision and obedience to the law were pre-requisite for salvation rather than faith in Christ. They hated and maligned Paul. Paul warned the Galatian church that they preached “another gospel”. These Judaizers were in the church but not of the church.

Another example. In the 7th century there was a sect called the Paulicians who claimed to be the true followers of the apostle Paul and the true church. Their fundamental principle was dualism. The good god created the spiritual world and the bad god or demiurge created the sensual world. The good god was worshipped by the Paulicians. The Catholics and Eastern Orthodox worshipped the demiurge. They held matter in contempt, denied the humanity of Christ and rejected the OT and the letters of Peter. They may have looked like a church but were not.

Finally a contemporary example; in latter times Joseph Smith was a Presbyterian who broke away and formed the Mormon cult.

Such sects and cults have troubled the church throughout its history. Little wonder Satan is a deceiver who masquerades as an angel of light deceiving even the elect if that were possible.

Hence the old saying, “where God builds the church the devil build a chapel nearby.”

And Weed will grow up alongside wheat.

So the lesson is not all who are in the church are the church. Those who are divisive in the church and behave like wrecking balls, those who hate their brothers and sisters are according to 1 John 2 antichrists.

Those who make salvation contingent on obedience to the law of God, have *another* gospel according to Paul. Those who deny the Trinity or the deity of Christ or see no need for the atonement have no need of a savior may from time to time find their way in the church try to have influence in the church but are not of the church.

In our own time we've seen some give up on the faith. Others forsake the church for a life of ease and pleasure. Others live with an unrepentant and irreconcilable spirit. They were in the church but left because they were not of the church. We ought not be alarmed by that. Not all Israel are Israel.

God is sovereign in matters of salvation, But we can take comfort in the Gospel that I'm here your here not because of what we've done but because of our faithful Savior Jesus Christ who has paid for all our sins on the cross and because we want to serve and follow him.

b) Now it has seemed harsh to some that God should choose some and reject others for no other reason than God's own will and good pleasure. And the common argument is that surely God rejected Esau because he fore-knew Esau would despise his birth right and surely he rejected Judas because he fore-knew Judas would betray Jesus. This is what Arminianism teaches. Arminianism denies the complete sovereignty of God in salvation and maintains that WE play an important part in our own salvation. They say salvation begins with OUR step of faith rather than God's prior election and grace.

Is that true? Is that even possible? Remember that after the fall into sin, all men were hopelessly lost in sin. Just a few generations after Adam and Eve the wickedness was so great on the earth that (as Genesis 6:6 says) that "the Lord was sorry he made man on the earth and he was grieved in his heart." Well that just underscores the reality that apart from God's intervention all men without exception, make crude caricatures of God or simply ignore God and live for the moment.

But the amazing thing is that **God intervened.** After the deluge he saved Noah and his family and Seth became the father of the Semites. He made himself known to Abraham, gave Moses the law, blessed the nation Israel and brought the Savior into the world. God then poured out his Spirit at Pentecost so that the church would fill the earth with the intent that through the church the wisdom and love of God might become evident.

This is amazing grace. Its amazing that God should include us in that. We are no better than anyone else. On the basis of our own sin we deserve to be rejected by God. If we are numbered among the faithful who believe in Jesus as their Savior than that is only because of God's prior grace and intervention in our lives. He is the creator and redeemer. He possesses the power. We do not. He is the author of our salvation. We are not. God has freely chosen us for reasons beyond our ability to understand, things which even the angels do not fully understand,..... if we believe.

On the other hand those who say God is harsh or election and reprobation are harsh have too high a view of themselves. They say that God foreknew who was going to be good and that's why he chose them. And he foreknew who would be bad and that why he rejected them. But the Bible doesn't say that at all. It says that election is from before the foundation of the world. (Ephesians 1:4) and God chose Jacob before either Esau or Jacob had done anything good or bad. (Romans 9:11) God is sovereign in matters of salvation and the amazing thing is that he should actually have deigned to choose you or me at all! That is the amazing thing and if any thing rather than say the doctrine of election is a harsh doctrine we ought to be humbled and thankful that God should save a wretch like me.

c) Can we be sure of our election? Well we can! Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonians "for we know brothers loved by God that he has chosen you." (1 Thessalonians 1:4) How did

Paul know? Well verse 3 says that they had “faith hope and love”. That was enough for him. Verse 5 -10 also shows how they received the gospel with joy and imitated Paul and his associates. They modelled the Christian life in Macedonia , threw out their idols and they were looking forward to seeing Jesus. But it all hinges on the acceptance by the Thessalonians of the gospel about Jesus Christ and how that changed their lives.

And so e can ask ourselves, “am I one of the elect?” If we believe the good news of the gospel; if the gospel is more than just ‘water off a duck’s back’ for us; if we confess Jesus as Savior and Lord and if the gospel makes a difference in our lives and brings us into communion with Christ and the church then we can confidently say ‘Yes, I am one of God’s elect.’”

However being certain of our election is no excuse for pride or complacency. Peter wrote in in 2 Peter 1:10 “be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure.” Verse 3 of that passage says that God’s divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who has called us by his own glory and goodness. That tells us that God’s sovereignty in salvation works hand in hand with our responsibility as Christians.

That is why God saved us! that we might declare His praises in the world through our obedience. And if God HAS chosen you then you will work out your salvation with fear and trembling. You will be eager to make your calling and election sure.

Well what about someone who does not yet believe, can we confidently say they are not elect?

The answer to that question is No! for two reasons . 1. While the gospel is still being preached there is always the opportunity and the possibility for faith and repentance and for the Holy Spirit to work in an unbelievers heart. 2. We cannot know the secret things of the God or if and when He will work regeneration and conversion in a person’s heart. So you can never tell anyone they are not elect. What we must say is repent and believe the gospel.

Conclusion: So getting back to the question, has God’s promised failed for the OT Jews who turned away from Christ and for baptised children who leave the church today? The answer is No. God’s promises are linked to God’s choice. Jesus himself said I know those whom I have chosen (John 13:18)

To humbly accept this truth is really the “essence of Christian worship”, to be able to say “Not unto us O Lord but to YOUR Name be the glory”.

If we were in any way responsible for our own salvation and say “it was my choice, my leap of faith!” then we could claim some merit and blow our own trumpet in heaven.! But that is not how it is. God’s redeemed will spend eternity worshipping him, adoring him ascribing salvation to God and the Lamb saying to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing, honour, glory and dominion for ever and ever Amen.