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Romans

And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac... Romans 9:10

This is the second instance recorded by Paul concerning his statement in verse 8 - "...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."

First he brought in the promise of a son through Sarah, a woman who had been barren for many decades and who was past her normal child-bearing years. And yet, God opened her womb and gave Abraham a son through her. Now we are reminded of the unusual occurrence of the birth of sons to Isaac and Rebecca.

Details will be given in verses 11 through 13, but knowing the circumstances prior to the conception of these children is enough to show us that God is in control. In Genesis 25:20, 21 we read this -

"Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived."

It was a full 19 years of marriage and still no child was conceived by Rebekah. Like Sarah before her, she remained barren. However, God is gracious and He listens

to the prayers of His people. Isaac pleaded with the Lord and the Lord granted his plea. The line leading to the Messiah would continue and it would do so through this woman who was barren for so long. At the age of 60, after 20 years of waiting, Isaac would become a father.

Life application - In Christ, good things come to those who wait. As the 27th Psalm implores you, "Wait on the Lord; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord!"

...(for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), Romans 9:11

Without jumping ahead to verse 12 (to which this verse is pointing), we can still discern several key concepts. There were two children, twins, in the womb of Rebekah - Jacob and Esau. They were physically formed and fashioned by God before they were born, and God knew how this would affect their development as people (see Jeremiah 1:5, for example). Their physical development will have a bearing on their character as much as their upbringing after their birth does. Therefore, God's purposes will be revealed even through these things. A description of the two is found in Genesis 25:24-28 -

"So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob."

These two children, before they had "done any good or evil," were known to God. Their physical traits were fashioned by Him and these physical traits certainly were translated into their demeanor as well, Esau being a hunter and Jacob being mild and dwelling in tents. However, while in the womb, these traits hadn't yet

been a part of their development as post-birth humans. They had done nothing to merit the bestowing of physical traits which would shape them.

In fact, they had done nothing at all to merit anything. Where they were born, when they were born, to whom they were born, etc. were all solely at the will and predetermined choice of God. Every aspect of who they were or would be came by the foreknowledge of God "that the purpose of God according to election might stand."

This is an immensely important concept for all people, not just Jacob and Esau. We have no right to call into question God's sovereign choices. We are bestowed life, time, and place according to His will. Paul will use this logic later in chapter 9 to explain to each of us that what God wills is right, whether we like it or not. Whether Esau liked or didn't like being born with hypertrichosis is irrelevant; he was. God made the choice and he came out like a hairy red garment.

The reason for his birth in this manner is long and detailed, but it points directly to the work of Christ. God was using these two boys' physical attributes (which would lead to their lifelong development and demeanor) to demonstrate spiritual truths and also to develop pictures of the coming Messiah. These things were purposed by God and His election firmly established His will in the plan of redemption. And because they occurred prior to any volitional choices of Jacob and Esau, they were "not of works, but of Him who calls."

Every aspect of who these two were or would be was determined by God from before the creation of the world. How do we know this? Because Jacob leads directly to Jesus, being His ancestor. And speaking of Jesus in Revelation 13:8 it says that He is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Before the world was created, Jesus' death was predetermined. If this is so, then everything leading to that death was also predetermined. Any minute diversion - whether in the animate or even the inanimate creation could change all of history. Therefore, all things were known from eternity past by God.

Understanding this, we can look at our own lives, and the lives of all people who have ever lived, and see that works have absolutely no part in what our eternal destiny will be. How can we work for that which is granted by God's election? We can only receive it as work already accomplished by Him.

Knowing this though may lead us to view life as fatalistic, but this isn't the intent of these verses. There is nothing in them, or in any biblical passage or concept, which negates free will in accepting the work of Jesus. In fact, the concept of free will is actually upheld by knowing these things. Just because God knows what the choice will be in no way means that the choice we make isn't valid. It merely shows the infinite wisdom and knowledge of God who even knows what we will choose to do before we do it.

Vincent's word studies, quoting Godet, have the following thought on the matter - "Eternal salvation is not contemplated. 'The matter in question is the part they play regarded from the theocratic stand-point.'" Paul is speaking of the election and choices of Jacob and Esau from God's perspective and in accord with the will of God. But what needs to be noted when considering this is Paul's statement of the boys as not yet "having done any good or evil."

If these babies will eventually do evil, which in fact they will, then to deny free will in them would be to ascribe the doing of the evil to God. This is why the concept of free will is actually upheld by what is being discussed. We are free moral beings who make our own choices. God merely knows what those choices will be. He is not the Author of evil, but He is able to use our evil towards a good end.

To understand this better, an example may help. God gave the directive to Noah to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth (Genesis 9:1)." Explicit in this verse is that there is a God. Implicit in this verse is that in the bearing of children in order to fill the earth there is a responsibility to this God. If someone has children and they don't train the child in the way of the Lord, then they are not fulfilling God's will for the children. If such a person procreates and claims they are fulfilling God's mandate while at the same time denying God through their actions, then they are not truly fulfilling God's mandate. The condemnation of those children

came through the free will choice of not acknowledging the very God that they claim they are acknowledging through the procreation. Free will must be, and in fact is, a central part of our relationship with God.

Life application: To deny free will in man ultimately leads to ascribing the evil in the world to God. Calvinist (and other) doctrine will deny this, but it is the logical result of verses such as Romans 9:11. God's formation of us, which ultimately helps determine who we are, doesn't lessen our responsibility to act in a morally right manner.

...it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.” Romans 9:12

This continues what was said in verse 11. Before the twins were born to Rebekah, they struggled in her womb. Children will fight as children do - apparently even in the womb, but this is an unusual occurrence because they actually beat each other up. The Hebrew word in Genesis is yithrosatsu and these two were really punching and bruising each other. Mom was worried about both their safety and hers as well.

Because of this, she went to inquire of the Lord. The account is found in Genesis 25:22, 23 -

But the children struggled together within her; and she said, “If all is well, why am I like this?” So she went to inquire of the Lord.

And the Lord said to her:

“Two nations are in your womb,
Two peoples shall be separated from your body;
One people shall be stronger than the other,
And the older shall serve the younger.”

At a time when the children were not yet born, nor had they done any good or evil, God made His divine election - The older shall serve the younger. The natural order of family life was once again reversed as had already happened several

times in Genesis. The younger was placed ahead of the older. And thus we again see the doctrine of Divine Election introduced into redemptive history.

This doctrine will find its ultimate fulfillment in the work of Jesus and which is so clearly explained by Paul throughout the New Testament. Before they were even born, God elected the older to serve the younger. However this serving and subordination isn't limited to the children. Rather, the verse in Genesis says "two nations are in your womb." It is therefore speaking both of the immediate and the future. In this then is also a picture of the true people of God, the elect.

It is astonishing how much is in this verse concerning the doctrines of the Bible, the foreknowledge of God, and the confusion that results from what is being said. Seminaries have entire courses on concepts which arise from what is being discussed about what the Lord told Rebekah.

What is being stated has led to some of the most heated battles in church history. If you follow what Calvin taught, you can trace it here. If you follow what Wesley taught, you can come here. In the end, and of all of the countless arguments about theology, there is always one right answer. God is clear, but we misunderstand. In the analysis of Romans 8:29, it was discussed which view of election is correct and why.

Although these things may seem tedious or overwhelming, they are actually of the highest importance in the life of the believer. If a wrong view of God's election is considered, then how we perceive our relationship with Christ can be affected in unhealthy ways. It won't change our standing concerning salvation, but it can certainly affect our level of happiness in Christ. To help us solidify why this is such an important issue, we can turn to Malachi where he speaks of these two children at the time before the coming of the Lord in relation to the attitude of the people in Israel –

"I have loved you," says the Lord. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Says the Lord. "Yet Jacob I have loved; But Esau I

have hated, And laid waste his mountains and his heritage For the jackals of the wilderness.” Malachi 1:2, 3

According to His own wisdom, without regard to our merits, God bestows upon us life, time, and place. Some people have been created for noble purposes and some for ignoble purposes according to that placement. However, all who have the opportunity to hear the message are also given the opportunity to respond to it.

In substantiation of this, we can look at the future of these people – the Israelites and the Edomites. They have descended from Jacob and Esau who are named in both Malachi and Romans. After being subject to the Israelites, the Edomites were eventually assimilated into the Jewish society. This is noted by the Jewish historian Josephus. He says that about 129 BC John Hyrcanus -

“subdued all the Idumeans (Edomites); and permitted them to stay in that country, if they would circumcise their genitals, and make use of the laws of the Jews; and they were so desirous of living in the country of their forefathers, that they submitted to the use of circumcision, and of the rest of the Jewish ways of living; at which time therefore this befell them, that they were hereafter no other than Jews.”

After this, the same group was cut off from God’s favor when they rejected Jesus. That lasted for 2000 years, exactly as the Bible predicted would happen. However, the day has come and they are re-gathered and have been returned to their land. The Bible, in both Testaments says that someday Israel will come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and that “all Israel shall be saved.” This includes the Edomite people that were assimilated into Israel before their dispersion.

And even more than that, there are Jews who have accepted Christ since the first century and who continue to do so today. They are provided the same salvation and the same promises as anyone else that comes from any line of the sons of Adam.

Were the verse in Genesis to have said, "Two babies are in your womb, and two children shall be separated from your body. One child will be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger" then people might have some type of argument for an opposing view on what God's election actually means.

But the verse doesn't say that. Instead it says, "Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger."

Every word of God is pure and every word is intended to lead us to a right understanding of who He is and what He desires for His creatures.

Life application: Individual verses, especially those which are citing the Old Testament, cannot be ripped out of context in order to establish theology. If they are, then only confusion and an unhealthy relationship with God results. Keep things in context and verify everything you read and hear.

As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." Romans 9:13

Paul continues to make his argument concerning election directly from the fountain which is God's word. This is a direct quote from a portion of Malachi 1:2, 3 -

Was not Esau Jacob's brother?"

Says the Lord.

"Yet Jacob I have loved;

But Esau I have hated,

And laid waste his mountains and his heritage

For the jackals of the wilderness."

The terminology used in this verse causes undue stress and even anguish among some Christians. "What kind of loving God 'hates' like this?" And so the words of

Paul are often dismissed as being inaccurate and judgmental. He is disregarded and it's back to the beatitudes for a lifetime of sermons which fail to take in the whole counsel of God, not understanding at all what God is saying or why these pictures from the Old Testament were ever used in the first place.

However, there are many such examples to be found in both testaments which speak of love and hate in a comparative sense. First let us turn to the words of Joab which were directed to his king, the great King David -

"Then Joab came into the house to the king, and said, 'Today you have disgraced all your servants who today have saved your life, the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives and the lives of your concubines, in that you love your enemies and hate your friends.'" 2 Samuel 19:6, 7

Joab was commenting in a comparative and ironic manner to show David that his actions were only harming his relationship with his subjects. It cannot be assumed at all that he actually meant that David hated his friends. In the book of wisdom called Proverbs, we read this from Solomon's hand -

He who spares his rod hates his son,
But he who loves him disciplines him promptly. Proverbs 13:24

Again, is Solomon implying that a person who fails to chastise his son truly hates him? The answer is, "No." Instead, the results of what a person's life will be like when they go unpunished can only be miserable. It truly is as if the parents hated them for allowing them to end in such a sad state; the analysis is again comparative. And even Jesus spoke in this manner -

"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:26

Does Jesus expect us to hate in the sense of literal hatred, or is it that our love for Him should be such that any other loving emotion to be found in us should be closer to hatred than this highest love for Him? The answer is obvious. Vincent's word studies explains the sentiment rightly when it states, "The expression is intentionally strong as an expression of moral antipathy. ... No idea of malice is implied of course."

Understanding this, we should now determine who God is speaking about in this quote by Paul from Malachi. The answer is not Esau the person, but Esau the group who descends from the person. As noted, in the commentary on 9:12, the prophecy given to Rebekah prior to the birth of the children was clear in this regard -

“Two nations are in your womb,
Two peoples shall be separated from your body;
One people shall be stronger than the other,
And the older shall serve the younger.”

And not only this, but so is the remaining portion of the prophecy from Malachi. The continuation of verse 3 speaks of "laying waste his mountains and his heritage." Then in verse 4, "Edom" is quoted. In other words, Edom is representative of the Edomite people. Therefore, both "Esau" and "Edom" are referring to the people descended from Esau, not the individual.

Before Jacob and Esau had done anything good or evil, God's election was made. However, it wasn't merely pointing to the election of the individual, but the election of the group who would descend from him. If this is so, then it can be substantiated that "they are not all Israel who are of Israel" as he proposed in verse 9:6. God's election must be based on something other than what we would immediately think.

Life application: The Bible makes it clear that what God looks for in individuals is faith. Our heritage, culture, race, economic status, etc. have nothing to do with

God's favor. He took a harlot from the cursed line of Canaan and brought her into the ancestry of Jesus. He also cut off kings who descended directly from David. He is not looking at the externals, but the internals - and He is doing it with you as well.