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Sermon Notes

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Jacob, Esau, and Unconditional Election

Romans 9:10-13

Introduction

I. The Crisis of Confidence: Has God's Word Failed?

- A. Why This Issue Has Arisen
- B. Why This Issue is a Crisis for all the world
- C. Review: How Paul Resolves It
 - 1. "Not all Israel are Israel"
 - 2. Paul's answer: An Israel within Israel
 - 3. Paul's First Proof: Isaac and Ishmael
 - 4. Doctrine:

Romans 9:6-9 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ⁸ In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. ⁹ For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

- a. Biology does not determine destiny
- b. Physical descent from Abraham does not guarantee salvation
- c. God had made a promise to Abraham: "So shall your offspring be"
- d. Abraham saw that his wife was barren and that he himself was getting older
- e. He decided to help God out of his predicament!! He used his own plan, his own effort, his own approach to get himself a son
- f. He slept with Hagar, a concubine, and she became pregnant

- g. This was Ishmael... and Abraham consistently tried to get God to accept him
- h. God's answer: NO! Ishmael is a child of the flesh
- i. This time next year I WILL COME, and Sarah will have a son
- j. "I WILL COME" = my supernatural power will form Isaac, call him into existence
- k. "I WILL COME" = Isaac will be a child of God, a child of the promise
- l. Ishmael then becomes the paradigm, the example of an ordinary person, a child of the flesh
- m. Isaac then becomes the paradigm, the example of a supernatural person, a child of the promise
- n. The Israelite unbelievers were no different than Ishmael, even though they had Abraham as their father
- o. Therefore, God's word has not failed because God never promised all the biological descendants of Abraham a thing... His promises were always meant for the true Israel, the chosen ones, the elect, the Israel within Israel
- p. Application to all ages: you must be born again!

John 1:11-13 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

John 3:3-8 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." ⁴ "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" ⁵ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

- q. In explaining why the Jews were so adamantly opposed to the gospel, Paul spoke to the Gentile believers in Galatia... using the same ideas as here

ESV Galatians 4:28-29 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹ But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.

- r. Different terminology all explains the same thing
 - i) John 1: “born of God”; John 3: “born again” and “born of the Spirit”; Galatians 4: “children of the promise”, “born according to the Spirit”
 - ii) God chooses His own children, not on the basis of who their father is; God creates them physically, then calls them spiritually by the hearing of the Promise; when they hear the promise, the Spirit supernaturally gives them birth and they are
- s. Romans 9 goes deeper, though... it explains how people are in one group or the other... what is the ultimate origin of the children of the flesh and the children of the promise

II. The Second Example: Jacob and Esau

Romans 9:10-13 Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-- in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

A. Closing the Loophole: Why Paul Uses a Second Example

1. “Not only that”... the second example
2. Why is it even needed? Has not Paul made his case sufficiently with the Isaac & Ishmael case
3. No... there is a gaping loophole, and it concerns the mothers
4. He knows very well that a hard-core Jewish opponent will say, “Of course God chose Isaac and not Ishmael, because Ishmael’s mother was a GENTILE, an Egyptian... but Sarah was Abraham’s real wife, the mother of Israel
5. This is a weighty argument, but it totally misses the point

B. Why Jacob and Esau Are a Better Case Study

1. Reason #1: Unlike Isaac and Ishmael, they had one mother
2. Reason #2: Unlike Isaac and Ishmael, God called them before they were born or had done anything good or bad
3. Overall lesson: UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION... God chooses who will be His children with absolutely no recourse to their deeds or anything in them... His only point of reference was His own free, sovereign will

C. The Facts of the Case: How Jacob and Esau Were Conceived

1. Rebekah was barren, just as Sarah had been
2. Unlike Abraham, however, Isaac simply resorts to prayer

Genesis 25:21 Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.

3. Paul zeroes in on the conception... one act of marital relations produces two sons... one of them a child of the flesh, the other a child of the promise
 - a. The Greek is very striking, mentioning (**evx e`no.j koi,thn**) “out of one act of intercourse”
 - b. Paul is absolutely removing any distinction whatsoever between Jacob and Esau
 - c. At one moment in time, Israel’s forefather Isaac lay with his wife Rebekah... in that one act of marital relations Rebekah got two sons
 - d. One of them was chosen and one was not
4. Notice also that Paul identifies himself with the Jews here... “Our father Isaac” he says... he is doing everything he can to be winsome while teaching the truth
5. Furthermore, Rebekah had great difficulty because the twins were struggling within her

Genesis 25:22-24 The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. ²³ The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

6. This prophecy is the focus of Paul’s meditation here
7. Esau was the father of the Edomites, the bitter enemies of Israel... every Jew knew very well the history and development of the rivalry and hatred between them

Genesis 25:25-26 When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. ²⁵ The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. ²⁶ After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob.

8. YET their origin could not have been more indistinct... they could not have been closer at conception, closer at birth... one act of intercourse, one moment in time, one womb... God doing everything imaginable to say THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE

9. Paul's point: The prophecy showed God's predetermined role for each of them

vs. 11-12 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-- in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger."

D. Determined Before Birth

1. Paul's point is clear: the choice of the one (Jacob) over the other (Esau) had nothing to do with their performance
2. America a Meritocracy... you get ahead by achievement, by deeds, by skill and accomplishment
3. But this was directly the opposite situation... the twins had not done anything yet
4. YET contrary to all custom and expectation, "the older will serve the younger"
5. More than that, the reversal of order spoke to a deeper issue: God had chosen Jacob but not Esau... and Jacob, not Esau would be receiving the richness of God's blessings

E. The Doctrine of Unconditional Election

1. Paul's overall point is clear: God chooses and makes the final decision, not man
2. And His choice is absolutely unconditional, not based on achievements or merit of any kind
3. If anything, God's choice runs directly counter to what we would have done or would do
4. No human quality, or achievement ever comes into play in any way
5. This is the thrust of Paul's argument:
6. The whole election is rooted in God not in man

"Before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose in election might stand, not by works but by him who calls she was told, the older will serve the younger."

F. Human Responsibility Not Decreased in Any Way

1. Romans 9 does not in any way contradict the clear teaching that both Jacob and Esau made choices in their lives for which they were held accountable
2. If Jacob is to be saved, he will be saved by faith in the promises of God, just as his forefather Abraham was
3. If Esau is to be condemned on judgment day, he will be condemned by the fact that he committed actual sins, and never believed in the promise of God
4. Unconditional election does not contradict human responsibility
5. AND while election is unconditional, final salvation and final damnation are NOT unconditional
 - a. To be finally saved, you MUST believe the gospel of Jesus Christ
 - b. To be finally condemned, you MUST sin and also not believe the gospel of Jesus Christ... and it will be your sins that will sink you
6. I can assure you that no one will be able to say before being thrown into the lake of fire, "I don't deserve this!"

Romans 2:7-8 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

7. Unconditional election does not mean you don't have to believe the gospel to be saved; neither does it mean you don't need to commit sins and reject the gospel to be condemned
8. What unconditional election does is remove forever the ground of boasting from those who are saved... we know full well God chose us irrespective of anything we have done
9. The will to believe the gospel saves your soul; the will to reject the gospel condemns your soul... but underneath both is the unconditional election of God
10. Therefore, we are NOT autonomous beings, making final decisions

In 1894, William Ernest Henley (1849-1903) lost six-year-old daughter Margaret. "Invictus" means "I have not been conquered":

OUT of the night that covers me,
 Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
 I thank whatever gods may be

For my unconquerable soul.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

11.

G. A Great Mystery Accepted

1. Mystery: How does God guarantee that each individual person will believe or not believe without in any way undermining our responsibility
2. No one can fully answer this question, or fully understand it
3. Piper quote: **DON'T REJECT IT JUST BECAUSE YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT FULLY**

“If this stretches your mind to the breaking point, better that your minds be broken than that the scriptures be broken. And better yet would be to let your mind and heart be enlarged rather than broken, so that they can contain all that the Scriptures teach.”

4. Martyn Lloyd-Jones quote: **DON'T GIVE UP ON THINKING ABOUT IT JUST BECAUSE IT'S DIFFICULT**

“This is one of the most difficult statements in the whole of Scripture, so do not be discouraged or blame yourself if you have found it difficult to swallow. But, on the other hand, do not give up and say that because it is difficult you cannot be bothered with it. You should never say that about any portion of Scripture. Christian people who do not apply what mind and understanding they have to a passage of Scripture because it is difficult are sinning grievously.”

5. Evidently God wants you to know this!! It is GOD who wants you to know that He chooses His people unconditionally, without any reference whatsoever to their works good or bad... it is not Paul, nor is it your pastor who ultimately wants you to know this... it is GOD ALMIGHTY, your Creator and Redeemer who is speaking this truth to you

III. Jacob I Loved

A. Paul's Second Scriptural Support: Malachi 1:1-5

1. Best to turn there yourselves to see what is there
2. Deep question: what did Paul see in this Old Testament quotation that helped support his presentation of the doctrine of unconditional election?

3. Paul's understanding of the Old Testament deeper than any man in history except Jesus Christ

B. Understanding Malachi

Malachi 1:1-4 An oracle: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi. ² "I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?' "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" the LORD says. "Yet I have loved Jacob, ³ but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals." ⁴ Edom may say, "Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins." But this is what the LORD Almighty says: "They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD.

1. Opening statement from God to Israel: "I have loved you"
2. Israel did not understand the love of God... frankly none of us do

"It's very hard for a man to grasp that God is gracious to him. The human heart can't grasp this." Martin Luther, 1531

3. Used to a wrong understanding of love... it is essentially conditional
 - a. Because I see this in you, I love you
 - b. Because you do this for me, I love you
 - c. BOTH KINDS are insecure!!...
 - i) In the first case, if your love for me is based on something you see in me, what if I cease being that way... Will you still love me
 - ii) In the second case, if your love for me is based on something I do for you... what if I stop doing it... Will you still love me?
4. Paul says to know and understand the love of God for us requires supernatural power

Ephesians 3:16-19 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

5. How has God loved Israel? God asks a simple question

“Wasn’t Esau Jacob’s brother?”

- a. Unconditional election is the basis of love!!!
- b. Esau was as close to Jacob as you could get... yet

“Was not Esau Jacob's brother?” the LORD says. “Yet I have loved Jacob, ³ but Esau I have hated

Genesis 28:10-15 Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. ¹¹ When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. ¹² He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ There above it stood the LORD, and he said: “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. ¹⁴ Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. ¹⁵ I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

- 6. Jacob and Esau had equal claim on God’s electing love...that is, none at all!!!
YET God chose Jacob and not Esau

THAT IS HOW I LOVED YOU, JACOB!!

- 7. WHY? Why did God love Jacob?
 - a. Not for anything God saw in him... “Before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad”
 - b. Jacob was a conniver and a bargainer his whole life
 - c. His horrible behavior with his brother was clearly depicted... taking advantage of Esau’s hunger to swindle him out of his birthright
 - d. His even worse behavior with his father was clearly depicted: deceiving his blind father to steal Esau’s blessing
 - e. Amazingly, after God revealed himself to Jacob at Bethel, Jacob made a bargain with God:

Genesis 28:20-22 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear ²¹ so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God ²² and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.”

“IF...”????? “If God will bless my journey, and give me food and clothing, and get me safely home, THEN (and only then) the Lord will be my God”??????? What position is this camel-trader con-artist in to make such a bargain with the eternal God? Was not the promise of God enough? Should he not merely have believed the promise of God, and walked humbly with God?

f. In his life with Laban, he behaved as badly as his conniving uncle... swindling him out of his flock's next generation of young... Jacob took much of Laban's wealth with him when he fled, he deceived him again by fleeing without telling Laban he was leaving

g. When faced with news that his brother Esau was riding to meet him with 600 men, Jacob sought to bargain with him and sent a bunch of livestock bribes ahead of him while he cowered behind, hoping that by the time Esau reached Jacob he would be bribed into receiving him well

Ezekiel 36:32 I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, O house of Israel!

God's love for Jacob is unconditional, and not based upon anything He saw in him. It is based on something totally in Himself.

8. If you think that God's love for you is in essence His making much of you, celebrating you, finding attributes of yours and praising them, cherishing something in you, **YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND HIS LOVE**

John Piper: “God love for us does not consist in His making much of you, but in enabling you to make much of Him.”

God isn't loving you because of something He keeps seeing in you... rather, He loves you in Christ by His sovereign will

“Before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad...”

If you look at God's love some other way, you will never grasp it...

IV. But Esau I Hated

A. Jarring Words

1. Most conceptions of God do not allow this statement
2. God is “all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving”... but is He?
3. “Hate the sin, love the sinner”... but here, it seems God hates the sinner
4. Need to put aside human understanding and simply submit to the Bible

5. Malachi points to two ways to understand this hate... a passive and an active

B. God's Passive Hate

1. Aspect #1: Passing over Esau and not choosing him

"Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" the LORD says. "Yet I have loved Jacob, ³ but Esau I have hated

2. Aspect #2: Giving Esau Up to Wickedness

Romans 1:24-26 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator-- who is forever praised. Amen. ²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.

C. God's Active Hate

1. Pouring out wrath Esau deserves for his wickedness

Malachi 1:2-4 "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" the LORD says. "Yet I have loved Jacob, ³ but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals." ⁴ Edom may say, "Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins." But this is what the LORD Almighty says: "They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD.

2. Concerning Esau himself, is his wickedness not clearly depicted in the text?

- a. Did Esau not despise his birthright and sell it to Jacob for a bowl of lentil stew?
- b. Can Esau say to God, "You forced me to sell, God!" Can not God say to Esau, "I gave your birthright to Jacob by decree, but you sold it freely because you despised it."
- c. And after that, someone might say, did not Esau repent? Yes, but what kind of repentance?

Spurgeon: "You know he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage; and he thought he would buy it back by giving his father a mess of pottage. 'There,' he says, 'I will go and hunt venison for my father. I have got over him with my savoury meat and he will readily give me my birthright again.' That is what sinners say: 'I have lost heaven by my evil works: I will easily get it again by reforming. Did I not lose it by sin? I will get it back by giving up my sins.' 'I have been a drunkard... now I will be a teetotaler. I have been an awful swearer; I am very sorry for it, indeed, I will not swear anymore.' No sinner, you may sell heaven for a few carnal pleasures, but you cannot buy heaven merely by giving them up."

See the nature of Esau's "repentance" after Isaac died:

Genesis 27:41 Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob."

God hated Esau's wickedness, judged him most severely on earth

3. Ultimately, this active wrath of God means eternal condemnation in hell

Spurgeon: "If God deals with any man severely, it is because that man deserves all he gets. In hell there will not be a solitary soul that will say to God, O Lord, thou hast treated me worse than I deserve! But every lost spirit will be made to feel that he has got his deserts, that his destruction lies at his own door, and not at the door of God."

4. Key difference

God's love for Jacob was totally of His free grace, totally contrary to what he deserved.

God's hatred for Esau was totally deserved, totally in concert with what he truly deserved.

Spurgeon's summary of his own doctrine: "He preaches salvation all of grace, and damnation all of sin."

V. A Loving Warning: Let God Be God in Salvation

A. Do Not Tell God How He Should Save Souls

1. So many sinners, born yesterday who know nothing, think to tell God what He may or many not do!
2. Who are we to question what God does?
3. Do not tell God how He must save or what He should do
4. Our wisdom is like nothing, or perspective so low as to be below the worm compared to God

B. The Ultimate Freedom of God is His Glory Alone

C. The Secret Things Belong to the Lord

Deuteronomy 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever

D. Be Conformed to God's Word... Don't Try to Change It

1. Illustration: Stamping a coin with a die... image on die must be made of ultra hardened metal, the coin must be soft and malleable... the entire process will

fall apart if at the moment the die strikes the coin, the coin causes the die to smooch, to mold, to conform to it, rather than the other way around

2. The universe would be infinitely worse off if God's word was forced to conform to our preconceived notions... it can never be and it must never be
3. The most unchangeable entity in the universe is God and His Word
4. We are designed to be malleable, to mold to His way, His will, His understanding, His Word

Charles Spurgeon: "Take care, my dear friends, how any of you meddle with the God's Word. I have heard of folks altering passages they did not like. It will not do, you know, you cannot alter them; they are really just the same. Our only power with the Word of God is simply to let it stand as it is, and to endeavor by God's grace to accommodate ourselves to it. We should never make the Bible bow to us, in fact we cannot, for the truths of divine revelation are as sure and fast as the throne of God. If a man wants to enjoy a delightful prospect, and a mighty mountain lies in his path, does he commence cutting away at its base in the vain hope that it will ultimately become a level plain before him? No, on the contrary, he diligently uses it for the accomplishment of his purpose by ascending it, well knowing this to be the only means of obtaining the end in view. So must we do; we cannot bring down the truths of God to our poor finite understandings; the mountain will never fall before us, but we can seek strength to rise higher and higher in our perception of divine things, and in this way only may we hope to obtain the blessing."

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.

E. Next Week: Why God Saves in this way... verses 11-12

Romans 9:11-12 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-- in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger."