



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 9:6–13; Genesis 25:19–26

"Distinguishing Grace"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] This morning we are continuing our exposition of the Epistle to the Romans, and we are turning to Romans 9:6-13. But, since one of the passages around which that section is built is Genesis chapter 25, verse 19 through verse 26, I would like for you to turn there and listen as I read Genesis 25:19-26. And then, we will turn to Romans 9 and read verse 6 through verse 13. In Genesis chapter 25 and verse 19, we read,

"And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham begat Isaac: And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as his wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padanaram, the sister to Laban the Syrian. And Isaac entreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was entreated by him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. (It is rather interesting to me that here Isaac, knowing the promises of God that he would have a child and through that child the promises would be fulfilled, but nevertheless since Rebekah his wife was barren, he did pray about it. Prayer is not contrary to the predestinating work of the Lord God. In fact, it is by virtue of the means of prayer that God's predestination is carried out and we have a beautiful illustration of it here.) And the children struggled together within her; and she said, 'If it be so, why am I thus?' And she went to enquire of the LORD. And the LORD said unto her, (Now this is the prophecy that is

important for Romans 9) 'Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be born of thee; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people. (It is clear that this is distinguishing grace. But, notice the plural, two nations, and then two manner of peoples. But, the prophecy concludes with the singular.) And the elder shall serve the younger.' (That, of course, was contrary to all of the customs of the Near East because the younger should serve the elder, but this was a reversal by the sovereign judgment of God. We read on in verse 24): And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bore them. (Now let us turn over to Romans 9 and read the passage, which is the basis of the message of a few moments later. The apostle writes in the 6th verse of Romans 9): Not as though the word of God hath taken no effect. For they are not all Israel, who are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they 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. For this is the word of promise, at this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac. (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth.) It was said unto her, 'The elder shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.'"

Now if you just take one glance through that paragraph again, there is one thing I would like for you to particularly notice. What the apostle is doing is simply expounding the Old Testament, and he has cited four distinct passages. He has said, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," a citation from Genesis chapter 21. Then he has said in verse 9, "For this is the word of promise, at this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son," that's from Genesis chapter 18. Then in verse 12, he has

cited, "The elder shall serve the younger," Genesis 25, verse 23, which we read in our Scripture reading. And, finally, "Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated," a quotation from the Book of Malachi chapter 1, verse 2. So you see what Paul is doing is simply expounding Scripture. He is giving the word of God to the Romans. Well, may the Lord bless this reading of his word.

[Prayer removed from audio]

[Message] The subject for this morning in the continuation of our studies in the Epistle to the Romans is "Distinguishing Grace or Jacob Loved and Esau Hated." As we have read through Romans chapters 1 through 8, we have noticed that Paul has pictured an election according to grace. Surprisingly, however, Israel is neglected and is not among that number. What of the promises that had been given to Israel in ancient times to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob? The apostle has just said that, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Is it possible that Israel has been able to separate herself from the love of God? It seems, at least to a knowledgeable reader of the Bible such as a Jewish reader might be, that either Paul's gospel is true and the promises made to Israel are nullified, or Paul's gospel is false and the promises are true and, therefore, Jesus Christ is not the Messiah, is in fact an imposter because he claimed to be the Messiah.

Now as we study through the apostle's theodicy of Romans 9, 10, and 11, we shall discover that his answer is not an either/or but a both/and. That is, it is not a question of whether his gospel is true and the promises therefore nullified, but his gospel is true and the promises also are true; both are true. The gospel that Paul preached and the promises that God gave to Israel, they are both true, and Israel shall ultimately enter into the blessings of those promises. Although, at the present time they are not experiencing them as a nation. He will point out that there is a remnant according to the election of grace down through the centuries, but Israel still awaits her glorious future.

Now in the course of Paul's answer to the question, "What has happened to Israel?" he comes to this magnificent section and gives it to us here in which divine election is before us in all of its magnificent goodness. Divine election teaches the divine mercy and grace of God, and it also teaches human humility. One of the greatest of the interpreters of the Bible has said with reference to divine predestination and divine election that, "We shall never be persuaded as we ought to be that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God's free mercy until we come to know His eternal election, which illumines God's grace by this contrast. That he does not indiscriminately adopt all into the house of salvation, but gives to some what he denies to others. Salvation does not come from our works. It is clear that election makes it a necessary inference that our salvation comes about solely from God's mere generosity. Those who shut the gates to this doctrine," he continues "wrong men no less than God, nothing will suffice to make us humble as we ought to be nor shall we otherwise sincerely feel how much we are obliged to God unless we contemplate his election.

Therefore," he adds, "ignorance of this principle detracts from God's glory and takes away from true humility. Those who are blind to the three benefits of the doctrine of election: his free mercy, God's glory, our sincere humility," he continues, "would wish the foundation of our salvation to be removed from our midst, and would very badly serve the interests of themselves and of all other believers." In this doctrine, he expounds the fact that one discovers the very origin of the church of Jesus Christ. The comfort of the doctrine of predestination is not for individuals alone. It's for the whole body of Christ and the communion of believers. He adds, "Let us resort to the election of God whenever we become dismayed or cast down. If we see men fall away, if the whole church should seem to come to nothing, we must remember that God hath his foundation. That is, the church is not grounded upon the will of man, for they did not make themselves, neither can they reform themselves. But, this proceedeth from the pure goodness and mercy of God. This useful doctrine with its pleasant fruits," this interpreter says, "ought to be preached openly and fully. They that think to abolish the doctrine of God's election destroy, as much as possible, the salvation of the world. In fact," (We cannot speak like this in our day because we're too nice to talk frankly. "In

fact," he adds,) "the devil hath no fitter instrument than those who fight against predestination and cannot in their rage suffer it to be spoken of or preached as it ought to be. The devil can find no better means to destroy our faith than to hide this particle from our view."

You know that particular passage from this interpreter reminds me of the section in Luke chapter 4 in which, after the Lord Jesus had delivered the first of his messages following his anointing as the Messiah, we read a message of distinguishing grace from him in which he says,

"I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout the land; but unto none of them was Elijah sent, but only unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. (That is Jesus preaching distinguishing grace) And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian. (And how do you think people responded, when our Lord was here, to the doctrine of distinguishing grace? The same way they do now. They got mad. And so, we read in the 28th verse): And they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath."

Man does not like this because it strikes at the heart of his view that there is something in him which God accepts and makes and accepts as making him acceptable before men.

I have two former students who pastor churches in Houston. One of them is a strong preacher of the doctrine of sovereign grace. The other believes it, but does not preach it very strongly. My friend who preaches it rather strongly told me of an experience that he had a year or two ago, two years ago almost exactly. A couple in his church had been in the church for awhile. He had been there about six or eight months, I guess. He came; they knew what they were having when he came. He had told them his views. In fact, the elders of the church had contacted me and I had told them his views too. I said, "Do you know what you are getting? You are getting someone that

is going to preach the doctrine of the sovereign grace of God." I knew this elder did not believe these things, but so I stressed it with him so he would know.

Well, there was a family in the church that I've known for 25 years. They're good friends of mine. If I said their names, they'd probably get mad that I said it, so I won't say their names. But, they've been friends of mine for years, and we've discussed these things back and forth. They've been members of several evangelical churches in this area not only Dallas but also in Oklahoma. And, finally, they listened to this man for about six months and that was all that they could bear because they are rather strongly Arminian. They are Christians. They are earnest Christians, but they are Arminian. And so, not long after that, the pastor from whose church they had gone met him on the street. They are still good friends. Met him on the street and asked him how he was doing in this new church. And he said, "Well, I'm getting along pretty well." Now mind you both of these men know each other quite well, but their emphases are different. He said, "I'm getting along quite well. Mr. So and So," I won't mention his name, "believes a lot of the same things that you do, but he's not quite so anxious as you are to make them clear." [Laughter] Well, I think that the interpreter of whom I was speaking a moment ago would be rather upset by that because it is important for us to make them clear. And I don't know of anyone, if I have one virtue when I get to heaven it will be, "Well, Lewis, you were a failure in everything else, but at least you made that clear; [laughter] doctrine of distinguishing grace."

Now we want to look at this passage in which the apostle speaks on that topic, and I want you to notice first of all as we look at because the first section, verse 6, 7, and 8 have to do with distinguishing grace and the divine electing purpose, that all Paul is doing is simply reading and exegeting the word of God. What he says in effect is that, "Israel, if they had read the Bible, they would see that what has happened is not contrary to the Bible, but is in full accord with what one finds in the Old Testament." He writes, first of all, of the word of God and the purpose of God. Not as though the word of God has taken no effect, for they are not Israel who are of Israel.

The reason that Israel reading Paul's first eight chapters might say, "Well, what about Israel? They are wanting from this group of elect people that have arisen through the preaching of the Pauline gospel. The reason that this is so, is that God never intended that all of Israel should be saved, "For they are not all Israel who are of Israel." In other words, Israel is not a term like Ammon or Moab or Greece or Rome, but Israel is a term in which there are two classes of Israelites. There are Israelites who are ethnic Israelites, but who are unbelievers. And then there are Israelites who are ethnic Israelites who are believers. And the purpose of God is a purpose that touches only penitent believers. It does not touch the unbelievers. Unbelieving Israelites shall be lost just as unbelieving Gentiles shall be lost. They are not all Israel who are of Israel and the fact that there is very little of Israel in this elect company of people in Paul's day is not something contrary to the Bible. It's in perfect harmony with the Scriptures. It finds its analogy in biblical history because the promises are given to the chosen not the natural seed alone.

In fact, Paul has already hinted at this in chapter 4, verse 12 when he said that, "Abraham was the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised." So Abraham is the father of Israel, but of Israel that walks in the faith that he had when he himself was uncircumcised. So Paul says, "The word of God has not failed." "The word of God does not fail," he might have added, "but the word of God has not failed. This word translated "hath taken no effect" in the Authorized Version is a word that is found a few times in the New Testament and, in one case, it refers to flowers fading . In another case it refers to a sailing vessel that gets off the course that it was intended to have. So the trouble is not with the purpose of God, the trouble is with the passengers who disembarked at the port of scriptural ignorance and unbelief. That is, Israel's failure. They did not respond to the message of God, and because they did not respond they are not in that company of the elect. Except, "There is still a remnant according to the election of grace," Paul will say in the 11th chapter. So the failure is not with God, the failure is with Israel. They've not read the Bible correctly. Oh, if I could just get people to read the Bible, I wouldn't have

to preach. I could just sit around and rejoice as you told me the things that you obtained from the reading of the word of God.

Now Paul labors that point a little more in the 7th verse. He says, "Neither, because they are seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called." Abraham's real children are not simply those who proceed out of him ethnically, but those who exercise faith. "Because Abraham had two children, remember? Paul would say. He had a child named Ishmael and he had a child named Isaac. Ishmael was his firstborn. Isaac was not his firstborn. Ishmael was the child of the flesh and Paul uses that in the Galatian epistle in order to argue that justification is by faith through the promise of God by grace. Hagar and Abraham had a child according to the flesh not according to the spirit.

You know the story, Abraham waited for that child that God had promised him and it was not coming. God was teaching Abraham patience. And so, Sarah suggested that her handmaid go into Abraham and they have a child who would be the heir and that is what happened. But, it was made very clearly known to Abraham that those things that are accomplished through the flesh are displeasing to God. He was going to have a child, but it was going to be from Abraham, and it was going to be from Sarah, and it was going to be a child who would come when Abraham could not naturally have children nor Sarah naturally have children, because this child is to be a supernatural testimony to the grace and sovereign power of God, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called."

Now Paul, I say, he is not looking back and he is not a man who has sat at his desk and has analyzed scriptural things and arrived philosophically at a system of truth. And then has gone back to the Old Testament and tried to pick out proof texts to support what he has arrived at by his rational thinking. Paul's doctrine does not come in that way. All that he has done is to read the Bible. He's read the story of Abraham and Hagar and Ishmael and Isaac and Esau and Jacob, and from the facts of the word of God his theology has grown. It is simply divine inference from the truths that are found there. Sometimes expressed statements. At other times, he infers from the clear facts of the word of God. The underlying principle is set forth in verse 8, "They who are the

children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." That is, "Those who have been by God selected and then called in sovereign grace, these are the children of God." "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." Back of human faith lies the divine sovereign promise and calling. Now we don't learn in actual practice when that takes place, how it takes place, until it takes place. In Luke chapter 19 and verse 9, in the incident in which our Lord Jesus meets Zacchaeus, we read in the 9th verse, And Jesus said unto him, after Zacchaeus has responded, "This day is salvation has come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham." So Zacchaeus is manifested the fact that he's a son of Abraham by faith in the Redeemer who has come to his presence.

Now I say Paul has learned his theology from the study of Genesis. He didn't look for proof texts to support his rational thinking, his construction of theology, he just read the Bible. Now notice what he does. He's going to give us some historical examples of distinguishing grace to show that this is the way God deals with men. He deals with men in distinguishing grace. Notice the first illustration, it's Ishmael and Isaac. He refers to it again in verse 9, "For this is the word of promise. At this time will I come and Sarah shall have a son." So the basic fact is the promise of God. Now promise is compatible with grace. It's not works. It's God promising to do something and doing it.

This morning when I came in and looked on the desk, there was a letter from a man in Oregon who's been listening to your radio broadcast up there from the Portland station. He said, "Yesterday I turned my radio on in the afternoon on KPDG Portland and heard your message dealing with Abraham's experiences and vision of the sacrifice and the (He doesn't write as beautifully as I do, of course, [Laughter] pot of smoke and fire. You explained the significance in terms of the certain assurance inherent in the Abrahamic covenant since it was God alone (he's got that underlined) acting. Hence the fulfillment of the covenant depending on him alone (He's got that underlined). You related this to the sovereignty of God's grace (He's got that underlined). Grace alone in the salvation wrought by the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Indeed, how great! How great!!" [Laughter] I fear and test Arminianism because so much of it is in me. (That was

a marvelous statement I think because there's some of it no doubt lurking in me, "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Askelon; [Laughter] lest those theological students down south of here, hear about it, But, nevertheless [Laughter] it's probably true." [Laughter] He says): 'The ego, arrogance and futility of man's will in salvation seemed to me to epitomize the nature of Satan's downfall. (He goes on, he says): He appreciates the stand of the Chapel and in its proclamation of the grace of God."

Well, the emphatic word is the promise of God and that's grace. Now, but someone might say at this point, "Yes, that's true. It does look like grace, Paul, but after all, Ishmael was not the son of Sarah. Ishmael was the son of Abraham and Hagar. And so, can it not be that the reason that the Bible says, 'In Isaac shall thy seed be called' is because Ishmael was not the son of Sarah only the son of Abraham?" In other words, is this not a problem of complex parentage?

Now the apostle, I say, is a magnificent student of the Bible. I would imagine I could have sat around and thought about this for months and months before I arrived on what he himself hit upon. But listen to the next illustration, verse 10, 11, and 12, "And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, (that's emphasized incidentally in the text, "by one man,") even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, (before they were born, before they had a chance to anything good or evil,) "The elder shall serve the younger.'" A choice is made before they are born. In other words, the law of limitations is contracted still further. There is no problem of complex parentage here because Esau and Jacob were twins, and they were of one woman and, thus, the similarity of origin is complete. Twins of the same father and mother before they are born had no chance to do anything good or evil, a divine distinction was made, "The elder shall serve the younger."

Now, if you had said, "The younger shall serve the elder," well, that's of course the custom. But it was, "The elder shall serve the younger." So Rebecca is the mother of twins by one man and yet the destiny of these men is to be infinitely different. It's a magnificent story in Genesis 25. I wish we had time to turn to it. It's not that God hated Esau. After all, Esau had been blessed far

more than Isaac. Esau had 12 sons. They were princes. Isaac had none. Isaac is the one in whom the seed is to be called. Esau is the prospering firstborn son of Abraham, but in the case of the divine purpose, "It is in Isaac shall thy seed be called." And so, as a result of the prayer of Isaac and the prayer of Rebecca, the son of promise is born.

Now prayer is the means for the accomplishment of the sovereign predestination of God. People often say to me, "If we believe in predestination, if we believe in divine election, then what's the point of praying?" Why, if you read the Bible you will see that it is through the means of prayer, through the means of the preaching of the gospel, through the means of witnessing that divine predestination has been determined to come to pass. And it was determined that Rebecca should become pregnant of Isaac through prayer, the prayer of Rebecca. It was determined, but determined through prayer. And so, there the sons came. One of them afflicted with hypertrichosis, Esau. He came out the hairy one. "Red" was his name. Blessed by God, but nevertheless, not a part of the ultimate purpose of God. And then Jacob the heel holder, the supplanter, the crook, the man who went through those long experiences of sanctification came out last, "The elder shall serve the younger."

Now, of course, there are several and different interpretations that a person might put on these things, historically, as you well know because we've been trying to emphasize this. I hope not overemphasizing it too much, that there are only three alternatives when we think about divine salvation. God elects, first of all, those who are good. That's a possible position that one might seek to maintain. God elects the good people. That I think would probably be the general attitude of the man on the street. You, of course, know enough to know that's not true because the Bible says, "For by grace are we saved through faith and that not of ourselves it is the gift of God not of works lest any man should boast."

Now others have thought, generally associated with the views of Arminians, that God elects believers through divine foresight. That is, he looks down through the years and sees who will, of their own freewill believe, and then elects them. We've said, of course, that's not divine election, but

human election ultimately. We've also said that that is essentially a salvation by grace in essence though, of course, our Arminian Christians do not believe that. There is confusion that exists there, but we do have the exaltation of the human freewill. That is contrary to the sense of the doctrine of foreknowledge as it is taught in the Bible. We've gone over that recently in Romans 8.

Foreknowledge in Romans chapter 8 simply means election in the sense of entering into an intimate relationship with. It's not foreknowledge of what they would do, it's foreknowledge of God of them. He knew them. The Lord knows them that are his. It's election with stress upon the intimacy of that choice.

Furthermore, no man would ever believe without the gift of faith for faith is said to be a gift of God in the Scriptures. No Arminian can consistently say that God foreknew who would be saved, and then preach God is trying to save every man, which is what they seek to do. That's inconsistent. No Arminian can say God foreknew the lost and then say it's not God's will that they be lost. Why did he create them then? Since he did, evidently it was his will that they be lost. No Arminian can consistently say God foreknew who was to be saved and then teach that Christ was punished for the saving of every single man. What human being would make such a useless and needless sacrifice as that? But that's what the sacrifice of Jesus Christ becomes. No Arminian can say that God foreknew who would be saved and then preach that the Spirit does all he can to save every man in the world. That introduces confusion in the Godhead. No Arminian can consistently say God foreknew all things and yet teach that prayer is of any use. Should we pray for the salvation of those whom God foreknows are to be damned? If it is God's will for all to be saved, then, when we pray for all, we pray in God's will, do we not? Does not the Bible say if we pray in God's will, he answers our prayers? Well, if we pray in God's will that all men be saved, why are not all men saved? The Bible teaches that men are not saved, all of them. Therefore, we can only conclude it was not his purpose that all men should be saved.

The only approach to this great question, and it is a great question, is that God elects those whom he has purpose to save by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Is the reason in man or is the reason

in God? It's not grounded in man's will, Paul will make plain in our next section. It's not grounded in man's works. It's not grounded in man's choice. It's grounded in the good pleasure of God. Faith is the effect of the saving election of God not the ground of election. He has said, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called. Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated." Why did he not save Uz and Buz? Well, that is in the inscrutable wisdom of God. No man knows the answer to that. What we do know is what is set forth in Holy Scripture.

I am so grateful that I have the opportunity to preach the unsearchable riches of God's distinguishing grace. I wish I had the privilege of these young men sitting in the first row down here and some of the others are sitting in a congregation where the grace of God, in its distinguishing nature, had been preached. I did not have that privilege. I grew up in a church in which that was supposed to be their doctrine. It's in their doctrinal statement, but it was not preached. Fortunately, I was converted through the preaching of Donald Grey Barnhouse who believed these great doctrines of distinguishing grace. Otherwise, as we study the Scriptures, we have to throw out so many things, we are like people who change our theology constantly. And I wish I had grown up early under these doctrines and then I wouldn't have to change my theology at all.

Constant change of a creed is always a loss. Mr. Spurgeon used to say, "If a tree has to be taken up two or three times a year, you will not need to build a very large barn in which to store the apples." [Laughter] John Newton, and Mr. Spurgeon got his story from him, used to tell a whimsical story and laugh at it of a good woman who said in order to prove the doctrine of election, "Ah, sir, the Lord must have loved me before I was born or else he would not have seen anything in me to love afterwards." Well, that is true. Mr. Spurgeon goes on to say he was talking with an Arminian brother, I love this, I mentioned this before, but it's been a year or two ago. He was talking with an Arminian brother who told him that he had read the Scriptures through a score or more times, and he could never find the doctrine of election in them. He added that he was sure he would have done so if it had been there, because he read the Bible on his knees. Mr. Spurgeon said to him, "I think you read the Bible in a very uncomfortable posture, and if you had read it in your easy chair, you

would have been more likely to understand it. Pray, by all means, and the more the better, but it is a piece of superstition to think there is anything in the posture in which a man puts himself for reading: and as to reading through the Bible twenty times without having found anything about the doctrine of election, the wonder is that you found anything at all: you must have galloped through it at such a rate that you were not likely to have any intelligible idea of the meaning of the Scriptures." The facts, of course, are that on every page of the Bible is the doctrine of distinguishing grace.

Mr. Dunham [ph39:42] had put under his picture the text, "Salvation is of the Lord. That's the epitome of the gospel of the Apostle Paul. That's the epitome of the gospel of the Scriptures. It's the epitome of the gospel of the prophets, "Salvation is of the Lord." That's the essence of the Bible's teaching. "He only is my rock and my salvation," the Scriptures say. Tell me anything contrary to this truth, "He only is my rock and my salvation, and it's a heresy. And bring to me any heresy and by comparing it with, "He only is my rock and salvation," you'll have found out why it is a heresy. The Bible teaches salvation is of the Lord. From beginning to end, it is of the Lord in order that God might receive all the glory of the salvation of such sinners as you and I are.

Now the apostle goes on to say in the proof text of all that's he's been saying, "As it is written, Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated." Now that text in its context from Malachi chapter 1, verse 2, is a text in which the prophet defends, he really is speaking for God. God's defending his love for Israel by reminding them of the definite distinction that he made way back in the birth of Jacob and Esau. "If you will look," he said, "years later at the history of Israel and the history of Edom, you will see that God has blessed Israel and Edom is desolate because Edom has not enjoyed the blessing of God. Jacob have I loved and Jacob and his descendants are the recipients of the blessing of God. Esau have I hated. Esau and his descendants find their history, the history of desolation." That's the context. The principle remains, the principle of distinguishing grace. God's love for Jacob was prenatal, disciplinary. Jacob because he was elect had to pass through some severe experiences. You as an elect child of God will have to pass through the disciplines through God. Others who are not of the elect may have a prosperous earthly existence but, oh the latter end.

The saints elected by God may pass through some bitter disciplinary experiences, but oh the glory of the ages to come, "Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated."

Some have said, "Ah, you see, what Paul is really talking about is the election of a nation as over against the nations." Paul anticipated all of that. That's a stupid thing for a person to say. Paul is talking about the election of a nation as over against nations. He's not talking about individual election. Why, if it is unjust of God to select one man and to pass by another man, what is it of God if he selects a nation and passes by all of the other nations? If in one case it is unjust, the injustice is compounded in the case of the selection of a nation and the rejection of nations. There's never been a more foolish attempt to avoid distinguishing grace than to say something like that. But Paul anticipated that because he said, "The elder shall serve the younger." He went back to Genesis 25:23 and he started to give the whole text, I'm putting the words in the way you understand. Smile on my face, notice it carefully. Somebody will go out and say, "Dr. Johnson changed the text." No, I didn't try to do that. He didn't say, however, "Two nations are in thy womb." He said, "I (You know, somebody might think this is not individual, so he just said, "The elder shall serve the younger." He laid stress on the individual nature of the thing. Now, of course, it is true. It is Jacob and his seed. It is Esau and his descendants, but here he selects the individual aspect, "Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated."

Now I must say this, there is no personal animosity in God. This is the decisive rejection of a rival claim. In the New Testament comparing two passages in which the term hate is used, in Luke the Lord Jesus speaks about hating father, hating mother otherwise you cannot be a disciple. But in Matthew, in a parallel passage, he speaks about loving more. For really this expression to hate is an Hebrew idiom. It really means, "I prefer Jacob to Esau so far as my plan and purpose is concerned." And in Genesis 29, in the context of this very story, the word hate is used in that sense. In ancient times, if a Hebrew man went to adopt a son out of a family in which there were two sons, and he adopted only one of them, he was said according to Hebrew idiom to love one and to hate the other. So when we read here, "Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated," he means nothing more than,

"Jacob have I elected in my sovereign plan and purpose. Esau I have not elected in my sovereign plan and purpose."

Now that's a difficult text. I acknowledge it's a difficult text. I've thought about it a lot, but I must confess it's a plain text, "Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated." That's very plain. I attended a theological meeting in which a whole theological faculty was discussing this, and all sorts of explanations were given about the harmonization of the sovereignty of God and the human responsibility. And they were taking attack in which the sovereignty of God was suffering. One faculty member occasionally would say, "But what about Romans 9:13, 'Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated.?' " There was a moment of silence and they went on with their explanations. He went on, he said, "But what about Romans 9:13, 'Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated.?' " There was a moment and then they went on with their explanations. And, finally, I was sitting behind him, I said, "It's no use. They don't hear you, but it's there. Reminds me of King Charles II who had a bunch of philosophers around him one day and he said, "Why is it that if you will take a pail of water and weigh it, and then put a fish in it that pail with the water will weigh the same thing?" Well, the philosophers began to give reasons. A number of reasons were suggested. And, finally, one of the wise philosophers said, "But is it a fact?" And, of course, it's not a fact, for the pail of water plus the fish weigh exactly more than the pail of water, the weight of the fish. So it's always good to ask, "Is it a fact?"

Now the text is a fact, "Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated." It's a fact, and so we are responsible to believe the fact, "Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated." No use to talk about various theories by which you may explain it away. Here it is, "Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated." Biblical students frequently say, "The biggest problem in Romans 9:13 is not "Esau have I hated," but, "Jacob have I loved." That's probably true because Jacob was the supplanter. He was the crook. Esau was the kind of man that we tend to respond to because he's so much like we are, a good old hardy sinner. [Laughter] But, Jacob is a same class, but he's a sneaky kind of sinner, [laughter] Sneaky kind of sinner. The other day we were in the garden in Charleston, South Carolina,

America's most historic city, [laughter] holy city. [Laughter] We were walking along in the garden and here comes out a big snake about this big around. And there were some Yankees there and they said, "A snake is in the garden!" [Laughter] I didn't stop to pay too much attention to it. [Laughter] Well, it is probably true the most difficult thing is, "Jacob have I loved."

You know, we are inclined to forget some of the great things of the word of God. There have been two great rebellions in history. There was first a rebellion in heaven when the angels fell. And then there was a rebellion on the earth when man fell. The angels are condemned to the everlasting fire of hell. Now the glorious Son of God is going to come and offer redemption. For whom does he come? Does he come for angels? No, he does not come for the angels that fell. In fact, specific statement is made to that effect. He did not take hold of with a view to helping the seed of Abraham of the angels, but he took hold of with a view to helping the seed of Abraham, and so he passed by the non-elect angels. Offered no redemption for them, but offered redemption for men who have sinned.

The Bible is full of distinguishing grace. In the final analysis, the issue is not so much Jacob and Esau, but you and God. It's not inconsistent to leave angels to die in their sin. It's not inconsistent for God to leave men to die in their sin. Perhaps you are sitting here and you have been like those in the city of Nazareth when the Lord Jesus mention that it was not to any widow, but the widow of Zarephath that help came. Or in the days of Elijah that it was only Naaman the Syrian who was cleansed of his leprosy, and perhaps you have been in your heart raging against the doctrine of the word of God.

Let me suggest this to you as we close, it is possible for you to settle the question of your relationship to the Lord God. The atonement has been offered. The blood has been shed. The sacrifice is a sacrifice that has been made for sinners. The forgiveness of sins is preached to all. It is preached to you. To you, individually, it is preached that sinners may be saved by fleeing to the cross of Christ. If you do not respond to that message, and do not want to be saved from your sins, what

complaint shall you have in the day of divine judgment? What shall you say when you have neglected the invitation to come?

We invite you to come. Come put your faith by the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who shed his blood for sinners, and receive the gift of everlasting life and discover in that fact that your name has been written in the Lamb's Book of Life from ages past. Come to Christ, come to him. Don't leave this auditorium a stranger to the grace of God. Do not allow your rage, perhaps even just failure to comprehend, stand between you and salvation. Come to Christ, "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God. They're foolishness unto him: no man can know them." They can only be taught you by the Spirit. Come by the grace of God to Jesus Christ, receive everlasting life, join the company of the saints, the beneficiaries of distinguishing grace: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Isaiah, John the Baptist, the apostles, the church of Jesus Christ. Come to Christ. Shall we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee that Thou hast in wonderful grace brought us to Christ. There are so many things, Lord, that puzzle us. But one thing no longer puzzles us, the grace of God through Jesus Christ, and how well suited it is for sinners...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]