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Challenges to Unconditional Election (Part 1)



God's Sovereignty and Man's Salvation - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg addresses the challenges to unconditional election in Calvinism. He argues that the concept of monergism, where God alone does the work, is at odds with the idea of synergism, where man has a role in his own salvation, which was believed by Christians in the first four centuries. Gregg also suggests that while scripture favors unconditional election, it does not say whether it is unconditional or not. He concludes that the focus on unconditional election in Calvinism is limited and that there is no evidence of individual choices leading to heaven or hell.

Transcript

This is Challenges to, the second of the five points of Calvinism, Challenges to Unconditional Election. Now remember, this is not only about the fact that God has chosen to save some people, but it's the affirmation that he's chosen the ones he did without them having anything different about them than the ones he didn't choose. So it's unconditional.

You see, we would say, if we're not Calvinists, we might say, well, yeah, God has set certain conditions. Those who humble themselves, those who repent, those who believe, you know, they'll be saved. God chooses to save them on the basis of their having done that.

But Calvinism is very adamant. This is not because of anything they've done or could do, and, in fact, it's almost irreverent and man-glorifying, rather than God-glorifying, to say that there are conditions. For example, James White, in the book, *Debating Calvinism*, he said, indeed, all non-Calvinist answers must at some point be, quote, because I was better than those who did not believe.

That is the vast difference between man's religions, by which he means Arminianism, and the Christian faith, by which he means Calvinism. One is focused upon man and his abilities, the other upon God and his. Now, these words, synergism and monergism, he inserts in parentheses, these are important words to the Calvinists.

To most other people, probably not so much, but Calvinists talk a lot about monergism

and synergism. The latter part of those words is from the word ergo, or work, the Greek word for work. Mono means one, one person working.

Syn means together, syn in Greek means together. Obviously, two or more people working. So, monergism speaks of one party doing the work.

Synergism means more than one party doing the work together. And these are very important words, because to Calvinism, unless you believe in monergism, that is, salvation is only God's work. There's no cooperation from man at all.

God just does what he determines to do and no one else is involved in the decision but him. It's all him working. No one else does anything in the process.

That's called monergism, and that's, to the Calvinists, that's the essence of orthodoxy. That's the essence of Christianity. Notice, he characterizes Arminianism as man's religions and Calvinism as the Christian faith.

He doesn't note that all Christians for the first four centuries believed in synergism, which he considers to be man's religion, and none of them believed in monergism, which he considers to be the Christian faith. So, the Christian faith, by that reckoning, didn't exist for the first four centuries until Augustine came along and created the Christian faith by bringing Greek philosophy in and mixing it with the Bible. This is the way Calvinists view things and they often talk this way.

So, if you ever hear the word monergism or synergism from a Calvinist, they're saying monergism is the only God-glorifying view of salvation. God did it all, everything. Synergism gives too much or a part of the glory to man because it means that man had to contribute something, even if it's only faith.

But that's too much as far as they're concerned because a man who has faith, if he believes that he had faith and it wasn't God doing it to him, is suggesting that there's something about him that he did right that someone else didn't do right. Two people hear the gospel, one person believes it, the other doesn't. If faith is something that I did, then I'm saying I did something right, the other man didn't do right, and that's grounds for boasting, they say.

It's, in a sense, they would even go so far as to say it's a form of salvation by works because they would argue that faith is a work. If it's a condition for salvation, it's a work. Now it isn't, and Paul makes it very clear that it isn't, but that's nonetheless what every Calvinist I've ever read or talked to argues.

And the fact that they have to argue that, and they all seem to feel like they must, tells you something about the strength of their position. If you have to make arguments like that, which don't make any biblical sense at all, because the Bible says that being saved by faith is the opposite of being saved by works. And they say no, faith is a work, and

therefore if you're saved by faith, you're saved by works.

They actually say that. That's, if you need to make arguments like that to support your position, your position must be hurtin', must be, you know, kind of desperate. And to tell you the truth, an awful lot of these arguments that Calvinists give, they are sort of desperate, I believe.

Dave Hunt, who co-wrote that book, Debating Calvinism, with James White. James White was the Calvinist, Dave Hunt was the Arminian. Dave Hunt said, "...Of course salvation is all of God, but to be able to accept it by faith or reject it, no more gives any credit to the believer than accepting a gift of a million dollars gives the recipient credit for earning the money." And that is a much, I think, more accurate statement, not only the Arminian view, but simply reality.

To say that somebody offers you a fortune, offers two people a fortune, and one says, okay, and the other says, no, okay, I'm not going to do it. That doesn't mean the person who said yes was a better person. It's obviously they valued what was being offered more.

And they acted on what they thought was a good deal. The other person, for some reason, didn't see it as a good deal, so they didn't. Neither person is the better person, but one certainly has made a better investment.

One's made a better choice that's going to work out better for him. It's still God who gives the million dollars. There's no credit due to the person who says, okay, I'll accept that.

If someone writes me a check for a million dollars, I might say, ah, I could never endorse this or I could endorse it. But if I endorse it, I'm not doing something I can brag about. I'm not going to go out and tell people, hey, I earned a million dollars today.

No, I'd say, wow, some amazing person just gave me a million bucks. Well, did you endorse the check? Yeah. Well, then it's to your credit, right? Well, endorsing a check isn't earning money.

You don't earn money by writing your name unless you're selling autographs and you're real famous. So anyway, Dave Hunt, I think, speaks pretty much a little more sensibly on this matter, but James White in this comment is saying what virtually all Calvinists say. Now, let's re-examine the positive case.

The scripture is in favor of unconditional election. A couple of verses that are brought up are similar. John 1 13 and James 1 18.

We saw this. John 1 13, they were born, the Christians have been born again, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, but nor of the will of man, but of God. And James 1 18

says, of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth.

That we might be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. The emphasis here is we're born of God, we're born again because of God. Because of God's will, of his own will he brought us forth.

This, I think, we have no problem agreeing with. If God didn't want to offer salvation to us, we couldn't have gotten it. If God didn't want to, by his own will, send Jesus to redeem man, it wouldn't be available to us.

If God didn't sovereignly allow that we had the opportunity to hear the gospel, we couldn't have believed it. Our salvation and the consequent being born again, it's because God willed it. It doesn't mean we didn't also will it, but our will would have done nothing to save us if God hadn't willed it.

The first and important thing is that God willed to save sinners. He didn't have to. What's more, he also willed that upon saving them, he would do something more.

He would regenerate them. I mean Abraham was saved in the sense that he's justified by faith, but I don't think he experienced what the new covenant offers, which is regeneration, being born of the Spirit of God. I don't think Old Testament saints had that.

Calvinists do, but I think the Bible would support the notion that we're born again by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 1 Peter 1.3. I think regeneration is only a phenomenon of the new covenant. So it's one of the new features of the new covenant. Salvation in the sense of being okay with God, forgiven of your sins, that was in the Old Testament.

That's justification. It's a different phenomenon. We are both justified and regenerated.

In fact, Paul said in Colossians, we saw last lecture, that God brought us to life or regenerates having forgiven us all of our trespasses. So he justified us first and on the basis of that justification, he then regenerated us. But the point here is to say that God regenerated us according to his own will.

Now, we didn't regenerate ourselves. And although our will was involved, it wasn't that. It wasn't our will that made us come alive.

It was God's grace that made us come alive. But it was not without our approval. It wasn't without our agreement.

It wasn't while we were still rebelling. It's when we changed our mind, that is repented, and thought, you know, I want to be saved. I want to be in a relationship with God.

Before I didn't, but I do now. That's being willing. And James and John in the particular context that they're speaking are just pointing out God has graciously allowed some

people to be born again.

It doesn't say whether this was unconditional or not. It could have been. I mean, if the Bible teaches unconditional election elsewhere clearly, then one could import the concept of unconditionality into these verses, but there's no reason to without that because the passages don't say what made God regenerate this man and not that man.

The Calvinist says, well, it was his sovereign will not taking anything else into account. Well, these passages don't say that. They don't affirm that.

So although a Calvinist can say this is true and these passages agree with our position, I could say, well, I guess they could agree with your position or not. They could agree with mine, too. So you don't really gain any points for these verses.

They can go either way. But here's a very important passage for Calvinism and very important for us to look at and understand correctly. Because in John 6 verses 37 through 40, it talks about those that God has given to Jesus.

Jesus said, all that the Father gives me will come to me. And the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out for I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. This is the will of the Father who sent me that of all he has given me I shall lose nothing but should raise it up at the last day.

And this is the will of him who sent me that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have everlasting life and I'll raise him up to the last day. Now, twice here it talks about God giving people to Jesus. In verse 37, all that the Father gives me.

And then in verse 39, the will of God is that of all that he has given me I should lose nothing. Now, how the Calvinist understands this is that to be given to Jesus is the same thing as being one of the elect. That God unconditionally elected some people to be saved and he gave them to Jesus.

And all that the Father gives will come to him. That's sort of an irresistible grace kind of passage too. The point is so that the people who come to him come because God gave them to Jesus.

Now, technically one could argue that this is in fact talking about election, but it still doesn't say why he gave these ones not others. But we do know why. Because there's another reference in the Bible to why God gave these people to Jesus.

It's also in the Gospel of John. In John chapter 17 and verse 16. I mean verse 6, excuse me.

John 17, 6. Jesus is praying. He says, I have manifested your name to the men whom you have given me. Okay, the same group.

In John 6, Jesus talks about people that God has given to him. What does he say? I have manifested your name to these people that you've given me. We're talking about the same people.

He says, they were yours and you gave them to me. Notice who these people were before God gave them to Jesus. They were God's people.

They weren't the devil's people. It's not talking about God taking some of the devil's people and giving them to Jesus as if these were corrupt people who hated God, who were totally depraved, and God just decided I'm going to just kind of make a difference in these people and give them to Jesus and they'll become saved. He says, no, these people you gave me, they're the ones who were yours.

Well, who was God's? Once again, we're talking about people like Lydia. She was a Jew. Before she heard the Gospel, she was faithful.

She was a part of the faithful remnant of Israel. There was always a group like that in Israel. Mostly the nation was apostate, but there was always a faithful remnant.

When Jesus came, it was no different. The faithful remnant in the old days before Jesus always were faithful to God and proved it by listening to his prophets and being obedient. When Elijah came, there were 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

The people of God who were true faithful remnant Israelites, they heeded the law. They heeded the prophets. Lydia, as we found out from Acts chapter 16, was one of those people.

She was a Jewish woman who was worshiper of God. She's part of the faithful remnant. God opened her heart to hear the Gospel and receive it.

Similarly, when Jesus came to Israel, there were faithful Jews there. They were God's people. God said, okay, these people who are mine, I'm giving them to you now, Jesus.

That is, they've been followers of John the Baptist. They've been followers of the law. They've been faithful.

Now, I'm taking them in the next step in their relationship with me. I'm letting them know about Jesus. I can hand them over.

They're God's people. They're now going to become Jesus's people. Jesus does talk about those that God has given him, but he's not talking in this context.

He's not discussing, once again, a category in a theological textbook about election. He's simply making a statement of fact. In the day he was living in, there were people who were God's people and God was giving them to him.

He said, all the ones that my father gives me, he's going to come to me. Well, of course they are. They're already obedient.

They're already followers of God. Why wouldn't they come to him? This is already their disposition. This is the commitment they've been living by already.

God says, listen, this is my son. Hear him. So they do.

These verses don't tell anything about unconditional election. The people in question already had met the conditions of faith. They already were God's faithful people.

Therefore, giving them to Jesus was not an unconditional thing. We don't read that God took any of the devil's people and gave them to Jesus, and though he might have done so, there might indeed have been some people who weren't of the faithful remnant, like Zacchaeus, who was a crook. But he also came to Jesus, but he's not listed as one of those that was given to Jesus.

God gave to Jesus what was already God's to give. Jesus also was able to reach people who were not already God's people. Eventually Gentiles, pagans, and even apostate Jews, some of them came to him, but that's not what he's talking about.

Jesus isn't talking about God taking unbelievers and unconditionally handing them over to Jesus so that they now become Christians almost against their own wishes. I say almost because Calvinists don't believe it's against their own wishes. But there's another aspect of these verses.

One of the verses in the Calvinist entourage is John 15, 16. Jesus said, you did not choose me, but I chose you. That sounds like it's saying I did all the choosing, you didn't do any.

This, however, is again a limited negative. It should be understood to mean you didn't simply choose me. That may be how it seems to you.

But I also, and more importantly, chose you. In fact, in a limited negative, in many cases, the second part is the more important part. Don't labor for the food that perishes, but labor for the food that endures to eternal life.

Don't lead us into temptation, but deliver us. In this case, certainly, when he says, you have not chosen me, I've chosen you, he's saying, you haven't simply chosen me, as much as it may seem from your point of view that you did. More importantly, I chose you.

Both are true, though. Certainly, the disciples made a choice. Jesus called them.

They had their fishing nets. They had their job. They had to choose.

Am I going to stay here with my nets? Or am I going to go with this guy who's calling me to go? They made a choice. A Calvinist, if they wish, can say, well, that choice was inspired by God or by, you know, irresistible grace, and fine. We'll let them have that for the moment.

But even saying that, they've made a choice. They did, in fact, choose Jesus. If we give all the credit for that to God, that's okay.

If we don't, that's okay. The point here is that he's not saying, you didn't choose me. He's simply saying, you didn't.

It's not just a matter of you choosing me. It's also, and more importantly, I chose you. He's not, although it sounds like it, if you took it as an absolute negative rather than limited, he's not saying they didn't choose him.

Of course they did, but more importantly, he chose them. And more importantly still, he says, I chose you and appointed you. He is speaking to them not as sinners who became Christians, but as disciples who became apostles.

This is talking about his choosing them to the apostleship. If you read in the Gospels about this event, we read in Luke 6, for example, that after Jesus spent a night in prayer on the mountain, he called him all his disciples, which were very numerous apparently, and says, from them he chose 12 whom he called apostles. These are the guys sitting in the upper room with him right now.

He says, I've chosen you and appointed you to go out and produce some fruit. He's basically saying, I've called you to a ministry. I've appointed you to do a task.

This is a vocational, that is, they're called to do something as a vocation, namely preach, namely be apostles. This is not a statement with reference to them being sinners called to be believers, though he could have spoken about that too, because that happened as well. But his choice of these men was a choice to go out and bear fruit as apostles.

And so it'd be impossible to argue from this that he's making a general statement. About unconditional election for salvation. This is more of a vocational calling, and there are many like that.

God called Jeremiah from his mother's womb. Well, that was to be a prophet. You know, God calls certain people to certain ministries.

This call is not the same thing as the call to be saved. Generally speaking, people are called to be saved and get saved first, and then God calls them to a ministry, or they might recognize it before they're even saved. God had a call on their life, which is now realized when they go to in the ministry.

The point here is this verse doesn't do what it's supposed to do for Calvinism. Now I mentioned that, and I don't give all the verses because it'd be irrelevant. There are lots of verses in the Bible that talk about God choosing or electing people.

The question is not did God choose to save any? The question is why? Did he do it unconditionally? Or because these people were different in some way, because they believe or or were humbler or whatever. Some state of the heart, they had a good and noble heart, or they were more noble-minded than the Thessalonians. Did God see something in some people and choose to honor that by bringing them to Christ? Or did God just find people who are all equally, seamlessly evil, uninterested in him, wicked, and he just said, okay, you, you, you, and you, you're in.

The rest of you, you're out. I mean, is it unconditional or conditional? Now, essentially, every verse in the Bible that talks about chosen leaves that element out. That is, does not mention.

There's many times we're told that people are chosen, but the question is this conditional or unconditional is usually not mentioned. But there is one place where it is, and that's Romans 9. I believe for, for the purpose of establishing unconditional election, there's no scripture that Calvinists appeal to more often and for good reason than Romans 9. We read this somewhat. This begins by talking about Jacob and Esau when they're in the womb.

And God, when they were in the room, it hadn't done one thing good or bad. So it wasn't based on their works. It was based on God's sovereign election.

He chose Jacob over Esau. He announced the elder, that's Esau, shall serve the younger. Jacob was favored over Esau while they're in the womb and neither of them had deserved a single thing.

This is unconditional election. God chose Jacob. Jacob was not any different than Esau.

God just said you, not you. And then it says, he quotes, he also quotes, Jacob I've loved, Esau I've hated. From this point some Calvinists say, well the non-elect then God actually hates.

He doesn't love everybody. He only loves the elect. The others, like Esau, he hates.

So it's wrong to say that God loves the world if by that we mean all people in the world. He only really loves the elect of the world and never loved anybody else. He hates the others like he hated Esau.

But then notice here in verse 14, what shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not. For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whomever I'll have mercy. And I will have compassion on whomever I'll have compassion.

Now, before we go further with this, because every, almost every line is one that the Calvinists enjoy commenting on, we need to ask ourselves, are they on the right track in interpreting this whole section? Now you may be aware of the book of Romans in general and its general layout. I mentioned earlier when we're talking about the early chapters, I think the Calvinists are on the wrong track. They're trying to see Romans a certain way and Paul's doing it something different than they know about.

They think he's trying to lay out a gospel track for all sinners. And I think he's talking to the church about the problems between Jews and Gentiles and particularly in those chapters about the Jewish arrogance that makes them think that just because they have the law and their circumstances, they're better than people who don't. And Paul dresses them down in the first four chapters of Romans.

But what about this section? What is this section of Romans about? Well, to hear Calvinists talk, it's apparently about Calvinism. It's about unconditional election. But to hear Paul talk, it doesn't seem to be so because in chapter 9 he begins by lamenting the fact that his countrymen, the Jews, are not believers and for the most part are not saved.

He says he could wish himself a curse from Christ if that would help the situation, if that would save them. Obviously, he says they're not saved. But Paul knows this is going to be problematic for some people.

For one thing, because just prior to this in Romans 8, he has said all things work together for good to those who love God and who are the called according to his purpose. Could anyone deny that Israel was called of God? Weren't they a chosen elect people called of God? And yet Paul says all things work together for those who are called of God. But what about these Jews? They were called and they're not doing too good.

They're far from God. In fact, in Paul's day, the Jews were the main enemies of Christianity. At a later time, the Romans kind of took up that role.

But in the early days before the Romans persecuted, the Jews, the synagogue, the Sanhedrin, they were the ones who everywhere Paul went tried to kill him. The enemies of Christianity in the early days were the Jews and that didn't fit very well with the idea that they were God's chosen people. What does it mean chosen people? Who are these called? How come these Jews were, how come Israel was promised certain things, not least there's promises in the Old Testament like that in Isaiah that says Israel will be saved in the Lord.

But here they are not saved. What's up with that? That's the issue that Paul raises and desires to address. And he begins in Romans 9, 6 by saying, well, it's not that God's word has failed to come true.

What word? I believe he's referring to the word of the Old Testament that says Israel will

be saved. And the reason I think so is because he goes on to a three chapter long discussion and finally concludes, and so all Israel will be saved in Romans 11, 26. So the subject here is, is God going to save Israel like the prophets said? The prophets said Israel will be saved and Paul ultimately at the end of his discussion says, and so all Israel will be saved.

But at the beginning he raises the question, how come they're not saved now? How come they reject the Savior? Doesn't the prophecy say they'll be saved? And look, they're not. And Paul's answer is, it's not that the word of God has failed to come true, for they are not all Israel who are of Israel. Now, he sounds like he's using double talk there, contradicting himself, but he obviously knows what he's doing.

He's thinking of the promises of the Old Testament that are made to Israel, which do not appear to be true. Because Israel hasn't been saved. Israel has not received Christ.

The Messiah has come, but it hasn't helped the nation of Israel much because they've just stayed alienated from God. So he says, well, what? Have the promises of God not come true? He says, no, they have come true. It's not as if they haven't, but you have to understand what we mean, what God means, by Israel.

When God says Israel will be saved, when God makes promises to Israel, you need to realize that not all are Israel who are of Israel. Now, he's using the word twice, two different ways. Of Israel means of the nation of Israel, of the race of Israel.

Not all those who are of the race of Israel are Israel, the remnant to whom the promises apply. So Paul's saying, it may seem to you that God hasn't kept his promises to Israel, but he has. But you have to understand what he means by Israel.

He doesn't mean everyone who's Jewish. He doesn't mean everyone who's part of the nation of Israel. He means an Israel that is a subcategory of the nation of Israel, the remnant.

Now, how do I know that Paul's talking about them? Well, you can only look a little later in the chapter, and he quotes Isaiah. Verse 27 and 28 here. He's quoting Isaiah 10, Romans 9, 27.

Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel, what? Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea. In other words, an innumerable number of children of Israel. He says, the remnant will be saved.

Oh, okay. Israel will be saved, but that's meaning the remnant will be saved. The overwhelming majority will not.

He's pointing out that, yes, the Bible says, even Isaiah says, Israel will be saved. But he says, but Israel, Isaiah also says, well, Israel as a nation may be multitude, but only a

remnant of them will really be saved. So Paul is saying the promise doesn't apply to the whole nation, but to the remnant.

Not everyone who's in the nation of Israel is part of that remnant. They are not all Israel, namely the Israel that God said he'd save, who are of Israel, that is of the nation of Israel. Now, what Paul is introducing is a radical thing, again, to the Jewish snobbery of his day.

There's a lot of things that are addressed against Jewish snobbery in Romans. Because again, they just thought they were chosen because they had the right ancestors. And Paul's saying, no, you can have the right ancestors and still not be the Israel that God's talking about.

In fact, you may think you're Israel and special because you're descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Well, you know what? Abraham had more than one son, but only one of them was chosen. God made promises to do something through Abraham's seed, but not all of his kids were his seed.

Abraham had Isaac, he had Ishmael, and by the way, he had six other sons too by Keturah. Abraham had a total of eight sons. Arguably, all of them could be called Abraham's seed, but not all of them are the chosen seed.

True, God said that Abraham's seed would be chosen, but not everyone who is the seed of Abraham was chosen, only Isaac was. And that's what Paul points out in the next verse after he says, not all are Israel who are of Israel. It's very interesting.

He says in verse 7, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham, but in Isaac your seed shall be called. He's saying they are not all the heirs that God's talking about, the children of God or the children of Abraham. Just because they're descended from Abraham, because God said only Isaac is.

What Paul's saying is if we're going to start talking about ethnic advantages based upon your ancestors, well, we're going to go all the way back to Abraham because that's your boast, your children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But there were eight children of Abraham, seven of them were nothing. Seven of them were Gentiles.

Only one, Isaac, was the seed that mattered. So you've got already God's dividing in the family saying you're in and you're not. Now we have to understand too that when God said I'm choosing Isaac, your seed will be called in Isaac.

He's not saying all the other kids are going to hell. This is not choosing someone to go to heaven versus to go to hell. This is what people don't understand.

When God chose Abraham, it wasn't like Abraham was the only guy who's going to heaven in his generation. He chose Abraham for a purpose. What? To bring forth a seed,

which is Christ.

That's what Galatians 3.16 says. Galatians 3.16 says, Now to Abraham and his seed, the promises were made. And then Paul gives his commentary.

He says it doesn't say seeds as many, but to your seed, which is Christ. Abraham's seed, the promised seed, is Christ. So what Abraham was chosen for is not to go to heaven, though he did go to heaven because he was justified by his faith.

There were probably others in the world who may have been justified by their faith too, but only one family was going to bring forth the seed, the Messiah. Likewise of Abraham's sons. He had, you know, eight sons.

They're not all going to be the ancestor of the Messiah, only one, Isaac. Now it's a great privilege to be the ancestor of the Messiah, but it's not the same as the privilege of going to heaven versus going to hell. It's an earthly calling.

You see, Jesus had many ancestors who were in hell. I mean, lots of the kings of Judah were evil, wicked men who served Baal and died apostate, and yet they were in the lineage of Jesus. To be a physical ancestor of Jesus doesn't mean you were personally saved.

That's a different issue. What God has in mind for a person in eternity is a separate issue than what he's going to do with them on this planet. And the earthly purpose of God was to bring forth through Abraham's line the Messiah.

That's an earthly calling. It has to do with having babies. It doesn't have to do with going to heaven or hell.

It has to do with having babies. Some of the people in Jesus' line were believers. Some were not.

Some of the people that brought Jesus in the world are in hell, perhaps. Some are in heaven. But the point is they had an earthly calling to do an earthly thing, namely bring a Messiah into the world through a family line.

Isaac was chosen for that. The other seven children of Abraham? No. Did they go to hell? We have no idea.

There's no reason to assume it. But they weren't chosen to be the ones through whom the Messiah would come. And then, then he brings up Isaac, who was the chosen one, but he had two sons.

Which of them is going to carry on this promise? And that's what he says here in in verse 10. Not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even our father Isaac. In other words, both these sons had the same father.

They're both sons of Abraham and Isaac. That sounds like either one could qualify to be the next generation of the line that's going to bring the Messiah. It was said, it says for the children not 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.

It was said to her the older shall serve the younger. And Jacob I've loved, Esau I've hated. Now these two statements were not made at the same time.

The first was made in Genesis 25 and the second was made in Malachi. So Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. Genesis is the first, so from beginning to end God has declared that he favors Jacob, not Esau.

But what does that mean? You see, this is very important to Calvinists. They believe this is saying Paul is discussing how God has chosen some people to go to heaven and some people to go to hell. Well, if he is, he hasn't raised that subject yet.

Not in this chapter he hasn't. He's talking about which of the seed of Abraham is chosen by God to the exclusion of the rest of the family, to carry that banner of the Messianic hope another generation forward. That's what was decided about Jacob and Esau.

We don't know that Jacob went to heaven and Esau went to hell. The Bible never tells us that. Paul doesn't suggest it.

The Old Testament doesn't tell us that. What we do know is that Jacob was chosen to be the next generation to pass the baton forward into history to carry on the Messianic hope to bring the seed of Abraham to the world. Esau, his line, was not chosen.

Now, it's interesting that Paul quotes two scriptures. Calvinists often do not pay attention to what scriptures he's quoting because the first one is the older, meaning Esau, shall serve the younger. Now, it's interesting that that scripture would be quoted if Paul's talking about salvation because, frankly, what does one man serving another man have to do with being in heaven or hell? This is talking about their earthly relationship with each other.

It's not talking, I mean, so far we haven't found anything in the passage that is talking about the afterlife or salvation in that sense at all. What we do find is earthly vocations that who's going to really, who's God going to use for this? And if you turn to Genesis chapter 25, we find the verse that Paul quotes. Rebecca had twins in her womb and they were fighting among themselves and she said, what's up with that? And so she went and inquired of God and God gave her an oracle, a prophecy about her twins.

Notice what he said, Genesis 25, 23, two nations are in your womb. Two peoples or people groups shall be separated from your body, two ethnic entities. One people shall be stronger than the other and the older shall serve the younger.

That last line is the one that Paul quotes, but there's lines before that that tell us what it's talking about. This isn't talking about the personal destiny of Esau and Jacob, either eternal or otherwise. This is saying that God's choosing one nation and not both to carry out his purposes.

He's going to choose Jacob's nation. There's two nations in your womb. We're not talking here about human individual destinies.

We're talking about God's choice of which nation, the one that comes from Esau or the one that comes from Jacob. It's going to be the one that carries on the promises. Well, the one that came from Jacob, Israel.

Israel would be not the Edomites who came from Esau. This is not the choice of one man to go to heaven and another man to go to hell. This is the choice of one man of two possible candidates to carry on an earthly mission by being the progenitor of a nation through whom God's going to bring the Messiah into the world.

Esau wasn't chosen. But hey, lots of people weren't chosen. Everyone in the world wasn't chosen except Jacob in that generation.

It's not like God did a special mean thing to Esau. It's not like God said, I'm sending that guy to hell because he's not you, Jacob. I'm going to send your brother to hell because that's all I do.

I just send people to heaven and hell. I don't have anything else in my mind. No, God had something else in his mind.

He had an earthly purpose of bringing the Messiah into the world. And this Paul is discussing the history of the Messianic promise. Not all are Israel today who are of Israel, but that's always been the case.

Not everyone who's descended from Abraham was the chosen seed of Abraham either. Not everyone who's chosen from Isaac was the chosen, only Jacob, not Esau. But chosen for what? That's the question.

Paul has not yet in this passage introduced the idea of eternal destinies. And we have no evidence from scripture that these sons were chosen for separate eternal destinies. We don't know what happened to them in eternity because the Old Testament is silent and doesn't tell us.

Esau might be in heaven too for all we are told. Now what we see here is that Calvinists are using a passage to prove that throughout the world God has one group of people he selected to go to heaven unconditionally because it's true that Jacob was unconditionally chosen over Esau. But not unconditionally chosen to go to heaven whereas the other guy's unconditionally chosen to go to hell.

The choice is something that was not a penal choice. It's not as if Esau suffered anything for this. It's just that he didn't get the privilege and nor did anyone else in the whole world.

Only Jacob got it. You can only have the family line come through a narrow part of the human race. And Jacob became his sons to the 12 tribes of Israel and Jesus came through one of those, Judas.

So this is what God was doing in choosing Jacob over Esau. Now it's not even the man Jacob. It's the nation of Jacob.

Two nations are in your womb. You know when it says the older shall serve the younger? If that's talking about the individuals, first off it's saying that Esau the man will serve Jacob the man rather than Edom the nation will serve Israel the nation. Now that did happen by the way.

The Edomites were subjugated by Israel later on. But if it's talking about the men and not the nations as Calvinists think, then it's saying that Esau will serve Jacob. That turns out to be a false prophecy.

Esau never served Jacob in any way. Jacob bowed seven times to Esau on one occasion. But you never see Esau bowing to Jacob or in any way being subject to Jacob.

They didn't really have a close relationship in their adult life. They didn't really hang out. There is no sense in which Esau served Jacob.

But Esau's nation did and that's what the prophecy is about. The nation of the older shall serve the nation of the younger. These are two nations in your world we're talking about here.

And interesting Israel as a nation was often called Jacob and Edom as a nation was often called Esau. You just read it in the history of the Old Testament and the prophets often. The Edomites are called Esau.

The Israelites are called Jacob. These men were in their persons the the wellspring of two nations that bore their names. God chose Jacob not Esau.

That means he chose Israel not Edom. For what? Well from what he said Edom will serve Israel. That doesn't sound like it has much to do with going to heaven or hell.

It has to do with what's going to happen in this planet. And it does. It was fulfilled in this planet.

The idea here is that God's reversing the birth order privileges because ordinarily the firstborn would kind of govern the family including the younger sons. Jacob was not the first one. Esau was but God's reversing their privileges.

And that means that whereas Esau if God had not done this would naturally be the one through whom you'd expect Abraham's promises to be fulfilled in the world. God said no I'm doing it the other way around and this is for no particular reason except I want to. But this is not a choice of sending people to hell because he just wanted to.

This is just saying I'll do it through him not through him. Okay, there's no big punishment involved here for either party. But then Paul says Jacob I've loved Esau I've hated.

That isn't stated when they're in the womb. That's stated in Malachi. Long after these men were dead and we're talking only about their nations.

When God said I have hated Jacob and loved Esau he means the nation. How do we know that? Because Malachi makes it clear. Malachi is writing after the Babylonian exile at a time when God had brought Israel back from exile, but Edom was gone.

They weren't brought back from exile. And God is saying to the Israelites I have loved you and they say well, how have you loved me? He said well look Jacob and Esau were brothers, right? And I loved Jacob and not Esau and it says about Esau and I laid his mountains waste. Esau had mountains? Well the Edomites did.

The Edomites had mountains. Esau is the Edomites. Jacob is Israel.

God has loved Jacob, that is corporate Jacob, the Israelites by bringing them back from Babylonian captivity. He hasn't shown that same favor to Edomites. They have not been restored.

They were wiped out by the Babylonians too, but they didn't come home. So these verses that Paul quotes do not discuss salvation in the sense of eternal destinies. They do not discuss the fates of individuals.

Jacob and Esau represent two nations. This is not talking about unconditional election in the sense that the Calvinists are wanting to. It is unconditional, but it's the choice of one nation unconditionally over another nation to do something here on this planet.

That's all that has come up in Paul's discussion so far and to make it anything else is strictly eisegesis, not exegesis. Because you can't find anything other than that in the passage. Now John Piper wrote an entire book, a scholarly book called *The Justification of God*, and it's all talking about this very thing.

And he brings up for consideration what I've just said. He just kind of rejects it out of hand, but he rejects it not because the exegesis requires rejecting what I said. The exegesis requires what I said.

We're just looking at what the passages say. We're not adding more to them or taking anything from them. We're just looking at what they say.

He has his Calvinism. He insists this is talking about individual election for salvation. But where you get that in the passage is a mystery to me.

Because I've read it very carefully too. I've taught through Romans 20 times or more verse by verse and I haven't found anything in this passage that suggests that Jacob was chosen to go to heaven and Esau was chosen to go to hell. That's not the meaning of the verses Paul quotes and presumably Paul quotes verses that mean something like what he's trying to establish.

If you say what I'm saying is true like it says here in the scripture, then you're probably quoting a scripture that's saying pretty much what you're trying to prove to be true, not something that says something different. So, you know, Paul has not done what Calvinists think he has done here. He's not established anything regarding unconditional election for salvation.

Now going further in verse 14, what shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not. For he says to Moses, I'll have mercy on whomever I will have mercy. I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. Now by this it is not of him who wills or him that runs. It's not impossible.

See this is a limited negative also. It's not just of the person who wills but it's also of God that shows mercy. But whether we take it that way or not the point he's making showing mercy here isn't the mercy of salvation.

It's the mercy of selection of Jacob over Esau for a privilege. Now in making that choice unconditionally he says is God unfair here? Well, no. God has the right to choose whichever one he wants.

He can't choose them both. You can't have Jesus come through the Edomites and the Israelites unless maybe someone from the Edomites down the line is going to marry someone from the Israelites. I guess it could be done that way.

But God has every right to say, okay, I'm going to pick one of these nations. I'll do it through this one. This is not a penalty to the other one.

This is just you know, I'm going to do it through this agency, not another. Is that unfair? No, God can show the special mercy on whoever he wants to show mercy. Isn't that his privilege? Okay, I mean you pick your friends.

Can't God pick his friends? God has the right to give special privileges if he sees fit on some and not on others, but those he doesn't give the special privileges to he's not being particularly unkind to them. It's not like saying because I'm not giving you the special privilege, I'm sending you to hell. Now that'd be something.

If it's either you just get this privilege or you burn in hell, then God is kind of unfair. Of course, Paul's not talking about that subject. But I mean if everyone's going to hell and God says, you know, I'm going to show special mercy on a few and they won't go to hell, but the rest are going to send to hell.

That doesn't sound very fair because people's fates, their conscious eternal fates are being played with like they're pawns in a game. But that's not what's going on here. We're just talking about which nation is going to have a more important role in history than another nation is going to have.

And that's what Paul's discussing so far. He says, for the scripture says to Pharaoh, for this very purpose I have raised you up that I may show my power in you and that my name may be declared in all the earth. Therefore he has mercy on whom he wills and whom he wills he hardens.

Now he's made a distinction here. God shows special mercy on Jacob or Israel over Esau, his brother. What's more, God also can show special harshness toward some nations like Egypt.

And he hardened Pharaoh so he can harden someone if he sees fit or he can show special mercy. Both of them are special actions. Most people apparently aren't shown the special mercy that he showed to Jacob and most people aren't hardened like he did to Pharaoh.

These are instances of God showing what he has the right to do when he wants to govern the nation. They don't have to do with salvation. They have to do with how geopolitics plays out.

Pharaoh by all predictions would have been the king of a more important nation than Jacob. Because Egypt was bigger and more powerful, but God had the power to reduce Pharaoh and bring Israel up. He could harden Pharaoh and judge Egypt and he could elevate Jacob.

This is what God chose to do. But this is national. Now when Calvinists hear this kind of talk, they say, wait a minute, how can you say this is about nations? You've got people's names throughout here.

You've got the name of Jacob. You've got the name of Esau. You've got Moses.

You've got Pharaoh. God is, I mean, Paul is talking about individuals. Think a little more clearly.

We already are told that Jacob and Esau represent nations. It's not hard to see that Moses also represents Israel as the leader of that nation and Pharaoh represents Egypt. The judgment that came on Pharaoh by hardening his heart was a judgment on Egypt.

He just happened to be the king through whose, you know, activities this judgment would become on the nation. God didn't just strike Pharaoh. He struck the nation of Egypt.

All the 10 plagues, they totally destroyed the economy, the livestock, the agriculture, everything of Egypt. It wasn't just Pharaoh. And in fact, God said in Exodus 12, 12 that these plagues were sent because he was going to judge all the gods of Egypt, Pharaoh being one of them.

And so what we're talking about here, we're still looking at cases where God judged nations. So he hardened Pharaoh. The question is, is Paul saying Pharaoh's heart was hardened so he'd go to hell? I don't think God had to harden Pharaoh's heart to get him to go to hell.

God had to harden his heart to keep him from caving in under the pressure of the 10 plagues so that the whole nation's judgment could be carried out uninterrupted. Moses, God chose him to be the leader of the nation. In fact, when God said, I will have mercy upon whom I'll have mercy and I'll have compassion on whom I'll have compassion.

This is a quotation from Exodus where God had told Moses, I'm going to destroy the Israelites because they made the golden calf. I'm going to make a better nation out of you. And Moses interceded for them.

Don't do that. What will people say about you? And God said, okay, because you asked, I'm not going to destroy them, but I will have mercy on whom I'll have mercy and so forth. In other words, I'm choosing to have mercy on Israel, the nation, because you interceded for them.

I could have shown mercy on you and made a great nation out of you, but it's my choice. I'm granting your request, but it's still my decision to do so or not. I still will show mercy on whom I will have mercy.

I was offering it to you, but you want me to give it to Israel, so I'll give it to them at your request. The point here is that all through this discussion, none of the scriptures that Paul quotes are scriptures that have anything to do with people's afterlife experiences or fates. Nor necessarily of individual fates.

Jacob, Esau, they're heads of nations. Pharaoh was a head of a nation. Moses was a head of a nation.

There's no one mentioned in these illustrations except people whose fates had to do with the fates of nations. Now the reason for that is because he's talking about why it is that God's salvation hasn't come to all the nation of the Jews. He's saying not all who are of that nation are included in Israel, the remnant who will in fact be saved.

You might think they are, but you've got to think about history. All through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, God's not choosing the whole family. He's choosing individuals within the family.

Not in that case necessarily go to heaven or hell because we're not sure. For instance, Jesus came through Judah. Does that mean the other 11 sons of Jacob all went to hell? Because he didn't choose Benjamin or Issachar? No, that's not the issue here.

The issue is that God is not required to accept every Israelite on the same terms simply because of their ancestry. Ishmael and Isaac had exactly the same ancestry, but they weren't accepted on the same term. Jacob and Esau had exactly the same ancestry as each other, but one was accepted.

The other was not. Now in those cases the choice was for something very significant, but not necessarily eternal life. What I think Paul is saying now is Israel as a nation was chosen, but even in the larger nation God selects within them to carry out his eternal purposes.

And in this case, it's those who believe in Jesus. The remnant of Israel who believes in Jesus. They are the Israel.

Not all are Israel who are of Israel, but they are. There's a remnant as he quotes Isaiah, though the children of Israel will be the sons of Isaac, a remnant shall be saved. So Paul here is talking about, again, he's addressing Jewish snobbery.

They believed we have Abram, Isaac, and Jacob as our ancestors. We're in. We're Israel.

We're in. And Paul's saying that's never been the case. It's never been the case that everybody descended from Abram, Isaac, and Jacob was in.

There's always been a remnant and there is now. And that's just the way it is. It's never been the case that who your grandparents are, great-grandparents, whoever's going to determine your relationship with God, it's God's choosing.

And but he's not initially focusing on God choosing anything about salvation, just pointing out that he doesn't owe the same privileges to all the people descended from Abram, Isaac, and Jacob. He never gave the same privileges to all of them. And he doesn't now.

Because some of them he has called his vessels for honor and some not. But that's not unconditional. Yeah, the choice of Jacob over Esau to be carrying on the family line, that was an unconditional choice.

But there's no evidence that later choices God made about individuals going to heaven or hell. I mean, that's a different category of choosing. So this doesn't prove what it's

supposed to prove for these people.

But notice it says in verse 18, Therefore he has mercy on whom he wills and whom he wills he hardens. This is chosen as a verse to prove unconditional action because it says how does God decide to show mercy on someone? Just whoever he wants to. Fair enough.

But does he tell us anywhere else who he wants to? He'll certainly show mercy to whoever he wants to. But that doesn't mean he'll show it without conditions. Jesus said, blessed are the merciful.

They shall obtain mercy. That sounds like a condition. James said, they shall have judgment without mercy who've shown no mercy.

If you're merciless, you'll be shown no mercy. If you're merciful, you'll receive mercy. God shows mercy on who he wants to and who he wants to, he wants to show it on the merciful, not on the unmerciful.

And there's twice, actually three times in scripture, once in Proverbs, once in James, and once in first Peter five, where God says God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Sounds like being humble is a qualification for receiving grace. God gives grace to whoever he wants to, but he wants to give it to the humble, not to the proud.

You see, to simply say God gives mercy to whoever he wants to, that leaves the major question unanswered about election and conditional. Okay, does he want to do it unconditionally? Does he want to do it conditionally? According to scripture everywhere else, it's conditional on the humble, the merciful, those who believe. He's got special privileges for them, not for others, those who seek him.

But the Calvinist wants this to be a statement that God just kind of, for no evident reason at all, just shows mercy on these people just randomly as he wishes. It almost sounds arbitrary, though they don't like that term. Now verse 19 and following is very important.

Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, Why have you made me like this? Does not the potter have power over the clay from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God wanting to show his wrath and to make his power known endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he has prepared beforehand for glory? Now here we have somebody reacting to what Paul has said up to that point and saying, wait a minute, how can God find fault with anyone who has resisted his will? Now there's two possibilities. This person is right or wrong in their suggestion that no one has resisted God's will. They're clearly understanding Paul to say that, but are they understanding or misunderstanding? That's the question.

Now throughout the book of Romans, Paul sometimes says, someone will say and then he'll raise an objection that he anticipates someone making to something he's just said. Ordinarily, he points out they're misunderstanding him. The objector is usually raising what might sound like a valid objection, except they're misunderstanding the premise.

And this appears to be one of those cases. Here's another case. Someone's going to say this.

How does God find fault for who has resisted his will? Now, of course, you recognize these are intended as rhetorical questions. And a rhetorical question really, really functions as a statement. Say, how can he find fault is a rhetorical question means he really shouldn't be able to.

God really can't justly find fault. And who has resisted his will is rhetorical. It means no one has.

No one has resisted God's will. So how so God can't find fault is essentially what the objector is saying. He's saying it in the form of rhetorical questions and Paul's going to answer in the form of a rhetorical question too.

Who are you? But the point here is the objection that he's answering many people have misunderstood. You see the objector thinks that if no one has resisted God's will, that is if everybody whatever they do is whatever God sovereignly willed and decreed as Calvin say, then God really can't find fault with them because they didn't make the decision. It's not their responsibility.

They didn't have any choice. Now that's what the objector clearly is arguing. Nobody does anything but what God ordains.

So God really can't find fault, can he? And Paul disagrees. But which part does he disagree with? You see this is all the the objector is thinking logically, but how is he thinking? He's got a premise and a conclusion. His premise is no one has resisted God's will.

They all do whatever God ordained for them to do and they can't do anything else. The conclusion is if that's true, then God can't find fault. That's the reasoning that Paul's addressing.

Now the Calvinist thinks that the mistake the objector is making is in the conclusion. The Arminian thinks the mistake the objector is making is in the premise. You can reach a wrong conclusion two ways.

You can have a good premise and argue illogically to a wrong conclusion. Or you can have a bad premise and argue very logically from that premise to a wrong conclusion. Obviously the objector has a wrong conclusion.

What is flawed in his logic? The Calvinist says his premise is good. It's his logic and conclusion that's wrong. The premise is no one has resisted God's will.

That's what the objector thinks Paul has said. And therefore they say, okay, if that's true, then God can't find fault. Now what the Calvinist believes is Paul agrees with the premise.

No one has resisted his will. What he disagrees with is that we have any right to find fault and say God can't judge us for that. And Paul says, who are you to answer against God? Essentially what Paul is saying according to the Calvinist is your logic is human logic.

It's like you're accusing God of unfairness and even though it may seem like he's unfair, we may not understand why this is fair. Who are you, a human being, to even raise such an objection to God? Just sit down and shut up and deal with it. That is exactly what the Calvinist thinks Paul is saying.

He says, who are you, a man, to answer against God? Now, of course, there's another possibility. It may not be that their premise is right and the conclusion is wrong. It may be that the premise is wrong.

When they say no one has resisted God's will, that might not be correct. If it is correct, then perfectly logical to say he can't find fault. The logic of the reasoner is not bad.

His premise is bad. He's saying no one has resisted God's will. The Calvinist says that's right.

No one has. Paul says, wait. Who told you no one has resisted his will? You're going beyond what I've said.

I've said that God makes choices that are not left to man to make. God has prerogatives to choose Jacob over Esau. He's got lots of prerogatives.

And we may not like his choices, but that's his prerogative. But if you're thinking that I'm saying that no one ever resists God's will, let me ask you something. Who are you to resist his will? You're answering against God.

Who are you to answer against God? Now, of course, Paul's rhetorical question is also making a statement. You've got you're answering against God. Therefore, that answers your question.

Who has resisted his will? How about you? Aren't you? You're answering against God, aren't you? Isn't that resisting his will? In other words, Paul's pointing out you think no one resists his will, but you disprove it yourself. You're resisting it right now. So let's not talk nonsense about no one resisting God's will.

God makes sovereign choices about things that he wants to make sovereign choices about, and that's his business. But I've never suggested that no one can resist his will, and you're proving it yourself because you're resisting right now. Who are you to answer against God? And the who are you, I believe, is Paul's smart alecky kind of echoing of their question.

Who has resisted his will? Who are you who are doing that very thing? Now, most commentators don't see this this way, as far as I'm concerned, too bad. Most commentators are Calvinists, as a matter of fact, but even non-Calvinists may not always see it this way. But this is the way Paul's argument is going.

He said God makes choices. He has the right to make choices, but he has not yet said anything about God choosing someone go to heaven and someone go to hell. Those are not the choices he's talking about, and he has not argued for meticulous providence, although his objector thinks he did.

And so Paul comes out and says, no, you're hearing me wrong. He says, look at this. Indeed, oh man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, why have you made me like this? Does not the potter have the power of the clay from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? Again, the Calvinist thinks this is a generic statement about the elect are the vessels of honor, the reparator of the vessel of dishonor, and God is the potter who makes these decisions, has the right to do whatever he wants with people's eternal destinies, unilaterally and without conditions.

Well, maybe God has the right, but Paul isn't saying that. He's using the potter clay analogy that comes initially from Isaiah, but also from Jeremiah. In Isaiah and Jeremiah, there's reference to God being the potter and Israel the clay.

And he picks that up. Okay, we're talking about Israel here, right? What is my thesis? My thesis is not everyone who is of Israel is the remnant of Israel. Let me give you an illustration from the Old Testament.

God is the potter. Israel is a lump of clay. The potter can take that one lump of clay and make two different things from it.

One, a vessel for honor that he intends to use for important honorable purposes and another for no particular honor, for dishonor. God has the right to do that. He can take the nation of Israel, the one lump, and make two categories.

One that he's going to use and one that he's not going to use, just like he did with Abraham's children. He did with Isaac's children. He can take that family, one family, Israel, he can take part of it and say, this is the one I'm going to do something special with.

The rest, no. Now again, this isn't even talking about heaven and hell. This is talking about essentially why God can identify a portion of Israel rather than the whole lump as the elect or as the ones he's going to use, the ones that are not like the rest.

Has God forsaken his promises to Israel? No. His word has not failed to come true. Not all are Israel who are of Israel.

Some of them are in the vessel of honor. Some are the vessel of dishonor. Basically, he's talking about these vessels as two different options that one lump of clay, Israel, has been divided into.

Again, Paul's not talking about Calvinism here or salvation even at this point, although this does get us into the subject. This overlaps the subject of salvation for the first time because the people that God has chosen to call Israel now happen to be people who are saved. They just happen to be the people that have come to Christ, which also includes them in salvation.

The earlier choice of Jacob and Esau, there's been no suggestion of eternal salvation in those choices, but now he's saying, listen, God has never been obligated to save everyone in the nation of Israel or to give them the same status. God has the right to have different statuses as he always has in Israel. He does now.

There's these people who are Israel. There's the others who are another Israel of which not all of them are this Israel because God has made one lump into two different ones and he's got the right, like a potter, has the right to do that. And then he says, of course, what if God, wanting to show his wrath and make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath? What do I mean endured? I thought he ordained.

According to Calvinism, God ordained certain to be vessels of wrath. Paul says God endured them. That's a really different thing than sovereignly decreeing them.

He doesn't like them. You endure things you don't like if you have to. God wanted to show his wrath and make his power known on those that deserved it.

He endured with much longsuffering, much patience, the vessels of wrath, prepared for destruction. Now prepared for destruction doesn't mean predestined to go to hell. The Jewish people who were not in Christ were under the judgment of God and came under destruction.

The Jewish nation, the Jewish state, the temple, the priesthood, all were destroyed shortly after this. Paul wrote this around 58 AD, 12 years later. The Jewish nation come under destruction.

They were destroyed, obliterated, gone. That was the milieu in which Jesus and the apostles preached. They knew that God was soon going to judge Israel, but he was

calling a remnant out to follow Christ.

Who would escape that? Because they did. The Christian Jews did not. They were not in Jerusalem when the Romans came.

They were warned and left, history says. So here there's God saying, okay, there's the nation of Israel. For a long time I've been treating them as if they're a homogenous group.

Now something different has happened. The nation's about ready to come under judgment. But I, God, had taken that lump of clay and found a portion of it to make into the the portion I'm going to continue my purposes in the world through.

Happens to be the people who are saved. Happens to be the people who are following the Messiah. The others are going to be wiped out.

Israel as a nation is not going to be used by God anymore. But this remnant, the remnant who follow Jesus, they will be. Just like he used Isaac and Jacob to carry out his purposes, he's going to use the church, the true Israel, those who follow Jesus Christ.

They are now the segment of the family that are going to carry on God's purposes in this earth. To carry the gospel and so forth. Yes, they are saved too, but that's not the focus of what he's arguing here.

And the wrath and destruction is not about, I don't think, a person is free to disagree. I don't think he's talking about hell here. I think he's talking about the wrath that was frequently spoken of that was coming upon the apostate Israel very shortly after this time historically.

But one vessel for honor was going to be received the mercy of escaping that wrath. The vessel that was the apostate Israel was not going to escape that. They were doomed to destruction because of their own actions, their own rejection of Christ.

And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which would be the church, which is prepared before and for glory. And the next line, although I didn't include it, is not only of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles. The vessels of mercy are not only of the Jews, but also the Gentiles.

So he's saying the Israel that was made into this vessel of honor is now going to include Gentiles as well as Jews in that Israel. And you'll find two chapters later when he's talking about the olive tree. The olive tree is also Israel.

He says the unbelieving branches have been lopped off. Gentile branches from another tree have been grafted in by faith. The ones lopped off were cut off because they didn't believe.

Still making the distinction. Israel is that tree. But that tree doesn't involve all the branches that were once on it.

Those that didn't believe, they've been removed. Some Gentiles who did believe, they've been added. We call that the church, the believing branches, Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ.

They are the olive tree now. They are the true Israel, Paul says. And so this is what Paul's discussing.

Now you'll see if I'm right, then everything in this passage is talking about something entirely different than Calvinism. It's talking about the same thing that the previous context and the following context are talking about. Israel.

How do we understand Israel? How do we understand the promises God made Israel that don't seem to come true? How have they in fact been fulfilled? How has God justified having this large number of Jews not included? And only a small remnant included. Well, this is how Paul argues it and he argues it quite well. The point is that the Calvinist knows that Romans 9 through 11 is about Israel, but they kind of feel like God, Paul takes sort of a sidetrack because he gets really interested in the Calvinistic doctrine of unconditional election.

So he stops talking about Israel for a while to talk about generic election. I don't think he does that. I think he's right on topic.

From the beginning of chapter 9 to the end of chapter 11, he's on topic. He's talking about Israel and there's no reason to see it otherwise unless you have a doctrine you want to support and this turns out to be the only serviceable passage that says anything about unconditional. You see all the other things about election don't say anything about unconditional.

Predestination, we're about out of time, aren't we? We're coming to a turning point. Let me real quickly give you this last segment if you'd be so tolerant. Acts 13.48 Now when the Gentiles heard this they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

This is considered to be a passage about predestination. Why did these people believe? Because they had been appointed to eternal life by God presumably before the world was created. Well, that might be true, but it doesn't say any of that.

First of all, if appointed means appointed, we need to talk about the meaning of that Greek word tasso is the word in Greek. If appointed is a good word for that, if that's a good translation, and it sometimes is, tasso can mean appointed. It doesn't say when they were appointed.

It doesn't say they were appointed before the world began or unconditionally. What if, and this is just a suggestion to show that there's other possibilities. I'm not arguing that this is what it means.

What if when Paul preached there some people happened to be God lovers, God seekers. And so when they heard the gospel God appointed at that point to grant them faith as he opened Lydia's heart to hear what Paul said. It's like he finds those who are meeting the conditions of faith and humility and love for God and reverence and there were people like that.

They weren't saved yet, but they were that way. And we could argue that because they were that way God appointed that they would believe and therefore they did. Now if we took it that way we're doing no violence to the will because frankly they already had chosen to be God's people.

We don't know anything. We're not told anything about these people before they believed except that God appointed them. But it doesn't say he did so in eternity past.

He might have done at that moment. There's no reference to an eternal decree of predestination here. Now, there's something else to consider and that is that *tasso* also is a word that can mean to be disposed toward.

It could be argued that he's saying those who are disposed toward eternal life believe. Which would of course not have anything to do with predestination necessarily. It would have to do with their state of mind.

Before they believed they were disposed toward eternal life. They were interested in it. Now, let me look show you the context of this to see if that's a good idea as a suggestion.

Acts 13. That is verse 48. But these are contrasted from some other people mentioned in verse 46.

Two verses earlier. Acts 13 46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first. He's talking to the Jews in the synagogue.

But since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. What do you say about them? They judge themselves unworthy of eternal life. Two verses later those who are disposed to eternal life believed.

There were two different attitudes among the people in synagogue. Some judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. Others were disposed toward eternal life.

One group rejected. The other believed. Predictably enough.

So there's nothing here that necessarily speaks of predestination. Let me show you another support for this idea. In 1 Corinthians chapter 16 and verse 15.

The last chapter of 1 Corinthians chapter 16. Verse 15. Paul said, I urge you brethren, you know the household of Stephanas that is the first fruits of Achaia and that they are devoted.

They have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints. This word devoted, same word, taso. It's in our Bibles.

It's translated appointed as many as were appointed to eternal life in Acts 13 48. In this verse the same word is these people have devoted themselves. To ministering to the saints.

What if we translate it consistently in the other passage? These people whoever was devoted to eternal life believed. Now who devoted them? We could say God devoted them or they devoted themselves. These people had devoted themselves to ministering the saints Paul says.

Now James White responded to my comments about this and no that can't work because in 1 Corinthians 16 15 it specifically says they've devoted themselves. The word themselves is there to suggest that it's something they did themselves. But in Acts 13 48, it doesn't say those who had devoted themselves to eternal life.

It just says those who were devoted to eternal life. Okay. It doesn't say they had devoted themselves.

It doesn't say who did. It doesn't say those that God had devoted to. Maybe they were devoted through their temperament.

Maybe they're devoted through their upbringing. Maybe they're devoted through some experiences they've had. It doesn't say what force caused them to be inclined toward eternal life.

All we're told is that when the gospel came it found them disposed toward accepting it. It might have been themselves. It might have been their parents.

It might have been their rabbis. It that's the passage doesn't commit to one of those options. All it says is when Paul preached in the synagogue some people judged themselves unworthy of eternal life and others were devoted or disposed toward eternal life.

Or appointed is a possible meaning. And if it's appointed it sounds like God is the one appointing. But that's not the only meaning of the word.

We don't know because God isn't mentioned in this passage. It doesn't say those that

God appointed. That'd be helpful for the Calvinists and hurtful for the Arminian perhaps.

But even then it wouldn't be say from eternity past or unconditionally. It still would leave open the question of whether this is unconditional election or not. Okay.

We're just about done. I'll try not to comment on these verses. Oh, I can't not.

Okay. We're going to have to stop right there. We're going to have to hold off on the rest because I just can't.

I can't keep you any longer. It's been an hour and a half and so I'm going to be fair and cut it off here.