

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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GOAL OF GOD'S
SELECTION —
VESSELS
TO EXPRESS HIM

WITNESS LEE

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THE GOAL OF GOD'S SELECTION— VESSELS TO EXPRESS HIM

God's selection is our destiny. Our eternal destiny has been fully established by God's selection. This selection and destiny are of the very God who calls, not of those who work. Our selection is absolutely of God who calls. In order to grasp this point we need to read and comment on [Romans 9:1-13](#).

GOD'S CALLING

“In Christ I speak the truth, I lie not, my conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit” ([v. 1](#)). This verse proves that the conscience is a part of the human spirit. We know that the Holy Spirit witnesses with our spirit ([8:16](#)). However, in this verse we are told that our conscience bears witness in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, since the Holy Spirit witnesses with our spirit and our conscience witnesses with the Holy Spirit, our conscience must be part of our spirit.

Paul’s conscience testified that he had great

grief and unceasing pain in his heart ([v. 2](#)). This was the pain Paul suffered for his kinsmen that they might be saved.

“For I was praying that I myself would be a curse, separated from Christ for my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh” ([v. 3](#)). This is a serious prayer. Paul prayed in such an earnest way because of his desire for Israel to be saved. To pray that Israel be saved was necessary, but to pray that he be a curse was too extreme. Regardless of how spiritual we may be and how much in our spirit we may be, it is still possible for us to utter a prayer in a way that is not of the Lord. When Paul was praying that he might be a curse, separated from Christ, I do not believe that it was of the Lord. Do you believe that the Lord compelled Paul to pray that he become a curse, separated from Christ? I do not think that the Lord required this of him. Then what motivated him to pray this way? Paul’s intense desire. He prayed this way because of his great love for his kinsmen.

Many times we have an intense desire for a certain thing and that desire causes us to utter a prayer in an extreme way. A brother may pray for his wife who is seriously ill, praying desperately in every way, even with fasting. The Lord

may answer his prayer, but not according to his way. Such was the case with Paul’s prayer in [verse 3](#). He prayed with a great desire that God would put him aside and make him a curse that his brothers might be saved. God answered his prayer, but not in Paul’s way.

“Who are Israelites, whose are the sonship, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service, and the promises” ([v. 4](#)). Sonship means the right of inheritance. What is the glory mentioned in this verse? The glory of God was manifested at least twice to the people of Israel: in the wilderness when the tabernacle was erected ([Exo. 40:34](#)) and in Jerusalem when the temple was built and dedicated ([2 Chron. 5:13-14](#)). On both occasions the Israelites saw the glory of God. The covenants are those God made with Abraham ([Gen. 17:2](#); [Acts 3:25](#); [Gal. 3:16-17](#)) and with the children of Israel at Sinai ([Exo. 24:7](#); [Deut. 5:2](#)) and at Moab ([Deut. 29:1, 14](#)). These covenants are treasured by the Israelites ([Eph. 2:12](#)). The giving of the law refers to the law ([Deut. 4:13](#); [Psa. 147:19](#)), which is precious to the Israelites. The service mentioned in this verse is undoubtedly the priestly or Levitical service, for all the service related to the tabernacle was under the hand of the priests

and Levites. The promises are those God gave to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David ([Rom. 15:8](#); [Acts 13:32](#)).

[Verse 5](#) says, “Whose are the fathers, and out of whom according to flesh is the Christ, Who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.” The fathers were Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others. Also, according to His human nature, Christ came out of the children of Israel. Paul says that Christ is “over all, God blessed forever.” When Paul came to this point in his writing, he was so filled with the glorious Person of Christ that he poured out what was in his heart—“Christ is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.” We all have to be deeply impressed with and fully realize and appreciate the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ is the very God who is over all and blessed forever. Though He came out of the Jewish race in flesh, He is the very infinite God. Thus, [Isaiah 9:6](#) says, “Unto us a child is born...and his name shall be called...The mighty God.” We praise Him for His deity and we worship Him as the very God forever.

“Not, however, as though the word of God has come to naught. For not all are Israel who are out of Israel” ([v. 6](#)). In [verse 3](#), Paul prayed out of his desire for his kinsmen to be saved. As he came to [verse 6](#) he spoke of God’s economy.

In verse 3 he uttered a prayer out of his desperation, even willing to be “a curse, separated from Christ.” In verse 6 he said, “Not all are Israel who are out of Israel.” God’s economy is that not all who are out of Israel, that is, all who are born of Israel, are the true Israel. All Jews have been born of Israel, but not all of them have been selected by God. All of them are of the Jewish religion, but not all are saved even though outwardly they have all the good things, including Christ, promised by God in His Holy Word.

“Neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children, but, In Isaac shall your seed be called” (v. 7). In verses 6 and 7 Paul is in the light of God’s economy and sees things clearly. Only that part of Abraham’s seed which is in Isaac is called. Besides Isaac, Abraham had another son named Ishmael. Though Ishmael was born of Abraham, neither he nor his descendants, the Arabs, have been selected by God. They are the children of the flesh and cannot be reckoned as the children of God. Only Isaac and a part of his descendants are selected by God and reckoned as the children of God.

Verse 8 continues, “That is, Those who are the children of the flesh are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as

the seed.” According to God’s economy, it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise who are reckoned as the seed. Not all the seed of Abraham are the children of God. The natural birth is inadequate to make them children of God; they need to be born again ([John 3:7](#)). The phrase “children of the promise” denotes the second birth, for it is only by the second birth that they can be the children of the promise and thus be reckoned as the seed.

“For this is the word of promise, About this time next year I will come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only so, but Rebecca also having conceived of one, Isaac our father, the children not yet being born, nor having done anything good or bad, (that the purpose of God according to selection might remain, not of works, but of Him Who calls,) it was said to her, The greater shall serve the less; as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” ([vv. 9-13](#)). These verses unveil to us the fact that God’s selection is not according to man’s work, but absolutely according to His choice. We are told that of the one man, Isaac, Rebecca conceived and brought forth two sons, Esau and Jacob. Before the children were born and before they had done either good or bad, God told

Rebecca that the greater, who was Esau, would serve the lesser, who was Jacob. This proves that God's selection depends upon His likes and dislikes. Thus, God said, "I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau" ([Mal. 1:2-3](#)). This word is very strong. We think that God only loves and that He never hates, but here it says that God hated. "I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau." Only those who are loved and selected by God are reckoned as the seed. God's selection depends upon Himself who calls according to His likes; it does not depend upon man's works. Though God said, "in Isaac shall thy seed be called" ([Gen. 21:12](#)), yet only one of Isaac's two sons was selected by God. This reveals the fact that God's selection is also not according to man's birth. God does not select people according to anything other than Himself.

GOD'S MERCY

"What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" ([v. 14-15](#)). When God says, "I will," we should not argue with Him. We are not God, and we do not have His sovereignty. We may reason with Him, asking, "Why do you

love Jacob and hate Esau?” God may reply, “Don’t argue with Me. I will to do it. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. Everything depends on My will.”

What is the difference between mercy and compassion? It is difficult to distinguish. Although compassion is very close to mercy, I would say that compassion is deeper, finer, and richer than mercy. Putting compassion together with mercy in this verse strengthens the fact that God is merciful.

“So then, it is not of the one who wills, nor of the one who runs, but of God, the One Who shows mercy” ([v. 16](#)). Mercy goes farther than grace. If, when I am in a good condition and my standing matches yours, you give me a gift, that is grace. However, when I am in a poor condition and my standing is far removed from yours and you give me something, that is mercy. If I come to you as your dear friend and you give me a Bible as a gift, that is grace. However, if I am a poor unclean beggar, unable to do anything for myself and you give me ten dollars, that is not grace, it is mercy. Thus, mercy reaches farther than grace. Grace only extends to a situation that corresponds to it, but mercy goes much farther, reaching into a situation that is poor

and unworthy of grace. According to our natural condition, we were far removed from God, totally unworthy of His grace. We were only eligible to receive His mercy. Thus, [9:15](#) does not say, “I will have grace on whom I will have grace.” No, it says, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.” You may think that there was nothing good about Jacob, that he was altogether a subtle, crafty person, and that Esau was much better than he. You are right. That is how God has shown His mercy. Jacob was pitiful, but God had mercy on him. God’s mercy does not depend upon man’s good condition; rather it is shown in man’s pitiful condition. It reaches beyond His grace.

It is God’s mercy that has reached all of us. None of us was in a condition that corresponded to His grace. We were so poor and so pitiful that there was the need for God’s mercy to bridge the gap between us and God. It was God’s mercy that brought us into His grace. How we need to realize this and worship God for His mercy! Even now, after being saved and having participated in the riches of His life, we still, in some ways, are in a condition that needs God’s mercy to bridge the gap. This is the reason that [Hebrews 4:16](#) says that firstly we need to obtain mercy and then we

can find grace for timely help. Oh, how much we need His mercy! We must treasure God's mercy as much as we appreciate His grace. It is always God's mercy that qualifies us to participate in His grace.

"So then, it is not of the one who wills, nor of the one who runs, but of God, the One Who shows mercy" (9:16). Our concept is that the one who wills will get what he wills to get and that the one who runs will gain what he runs after. If this were the case, then God's selection would be according to our effort and labor. But it is not so. It is altogether of God who shows mercy. We do not need to will or to run, for God has mercy on us. If we do know God's mercy, we will not put our trust in our effort; neither will we be disappointed by our failure. The hope for our wretched condition is God's mercy.

"For the scripture says to Pharaoh, For this very thing I have raised you up, that I might show forth My power in you, and that My name should be proclaimed in all the earth" (v. 17). In Pharaoh God showed forth His power, not His mercy, that His name might be proclaimed in all the earth. This shows that even God's enemies are useful to Him in fulfilling His purpose. "So then," verse 18 says, "He has mercy on whom He

wills, and He hardens whom He wills.” What should we say with regard to this? We should say nothing, but worship God’s way. Everything depends upon what He wills to do. He is God!

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

Paul continues, “You will say to me then. Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His purpose? But, O man, who are you that replies against God?” (vv. 19-20). We all have to realize who we are. We are God’s creatures, and He is our Creator. As His creatures we should not say anything to Him, the Creator. So, Paul asks, “Shall the thing formed say to him who formed it, Why did you make me thus? Or has not the potter authority over the clay, out of the same lump to make one vessel to honor and another to dishonor?” (vv. 20-21). God is the potter, and we are pieces of clay. As the potter, God has authority over the clay. If He wills, He can make one vessel to honor and another vessel to dishonor. It does not depend on our choice—it depends on His sovereignty.

Romans 9:21 discloses God’s purpose in creating man. This verse is unique in its revelation of God’s purpose in the creation of man. Without this verse it would be difficult for us to realize

that God's purpose in creating man was to make man His vessel to contain Him. We all must thoroughly understand that we are God's containers and that God is our content. [Second Corinthians 4:7](#) says that "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." We are earthen vessels, and God is the treasure and the content. God has sovereignly created us to be His containers according to His predestination.

[Second Timothy 2:20-21](#) conveys the same thought, saying that we are vessels unto honor. So, we need to purge ourselves from dishonorable things that we may be sanctified and suitable for the Lord's use. However, being vessels unto honor is not the result of our choice; it originates with God's sovereignty. It is of God's sovereignty that He make His glory known by creating vessels of mercy to contain Himself. This is a deep word. God's sovereignty is the basis of His selection. His selection depends upon His sovereignty.

"What if God, willing to show forth His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted for destruction?" ([v. 22](#)). What should we say about this? We have nothing to say. He is the potter, and He has the authority. Human beings are simply clay.

“And what if He should make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He had before prepared unto glory, even us, whom He has also called, not only from among the Jews, but also from among the nations?” ([vv. 23-24](#)). All depends upon God’s authority. God has the authority to make us, whom He has selected and called, not only from among the Jews, but also from among the Gentiles, vessels of mercy to contain Him, that the riches of His glory may be made known, that is, manifested. According to His sovereign authority, He before prepared us unto this glory. We were predestinated by His sovereignty to be His containers, vessels of honor to express what He is in glory. That is not only a matter of His mercy, but also of His sovereignty.

THE GOAL

God’s selection has a goal—to have many vessels to contain God and to express Him eternally. So many of us have missed the mark of God’s goal, thinking that it was simply to show His love in saving us. Yes, He loves us. However, His love is not only shown to save us, but to make us His vessels. God created us in such a way that we are able to take Him into us and contain Him as our

life and life supply, to the end that we be one with Him to express what He is, and that He be glorified in us and with us. This is the eternal goal of God's selection. It is also our eternal destiny.

This portion of the Word also unfolds the climax of our usefulness to God, which is not to be used by Him as servants, priests, and kings, but as vessels to contain Him and express Him. If we are to be used as God's vessels, surely He has to be one with us. We are His container and His expression; He is our content and our life. He lives in us that we may live by Him. He and we, we and He, eventually will be one both in life and in nature. This is the goal of His selection according to His sovereignty. It is also our destiny according to His selection, a destiny which will be fully revealed in the New Jerusalem.

Verses 25 and 26 are quotations from Hosea which confirm the fact that some Gentiles have been selected and called by God to be His people.

Verses 27 through 29 are quotations from Isaiah which confirm the fact that not all Israel was selected, but that only a remnant of them, a seed kept by the Lord, was saved.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH

God's selection is also by the righteousness of

faith. “What shall we say then? That the nations who did not pursue righteousness have attained righteousness, but righteousness which is out of faith” ([v. 30](#)). The nations, meaning the Gentiles, have obtained righteousness, although they did not pursue it. This righteousness is not the righteousness of the law, but that which is out of faith. The nations have shared in God’s selection by the righteousness of God which is out of faith.

“But Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because it was not out of faith, but as it were out of works; they stumbled at the Stone of stumbling, as it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a Stone of stumbling, a Rock of offense, and he who believes on Him shall not be put to shame” ([vv. 31-33](#)). We can never arrive at righteousness by pursuing the law of righteousness. The Israelites sought to establish their own righteousness, but stumbled at the “Stone of stumbling,” which is Christ, the “Rock of offense.” Nevertheless, “he who believes on Him shall not be put to shame.”

In this connection we also need to read the first three verses of [chapter ten](#). “Brothers, the delight of my heart and my supplication to God for them is for their salvation. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not

according to full knowledge. For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, did not submit to the righteousness of God." It is possible to be exceedingly zealous for God while lacking the proper knowledge of His way. The Jews have missed and continue to miss the mark of God's selection because they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, have attempted to establish their own righteousness by trying to keep the law and have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God, which is Christ Himself. Hence, they have missed God's salvation. Any attempt to keep the law or to do good to please God, being man's efforts to establish his own righteousness, will cause people to miss the way of God's salvation.

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