

Paul in this part of Romans is still talking about the problem of Israel not believing in Jesus. And he said, first of all, in chapter 9, they didn't believe because God didn't choose all of them to believe. God's choice is what saves someone, not who we are or what we have done. But now he goes on to say that Israel has also failed. They did not believe in Jesus. They wanted to be justified by their works rather than trusting in Christ, and therefore God rejected them. And so it's both things: that God did not choose all of them and also that they did not believe. But how do those two things work together? How can we say that God chooses those who believe, while at the same time saying that we also need to believe in Jesus? How can God's choice and our faith fit together? That's the question that we need to answer from this reading.

And to answer that question, what we don't want to do is to take things out of context. To rip passages out of the Bible and think that we can come up with the answer just from that passage all by itself. As if we were going to draw a box around Romans chapter 9 and assume that that's everything that God has to say about the matter, without thinking about anything else in the Bible. If we do that, we're going to come to some wrong ideas. Because you don't want to read the Bible in a way that would make it contradict itself. You don't want to read the Bible in a way that you have to exclude things or try to explain them away because they don't fit, so to speak. We need to take everything together to understand what God is saying.

So, for example, we rightly say that God chooses us. We do not choose him. And we rightly say that God's choice doesn't depend on our faith or anything that we have done. And we also rightly say that God's choice is his alone. No one's going to influence him in that. Those are all true statements. They all come very clearly from here in Romans chapter 9. But if we were to take that all by itself, we might come to some weird ideas. Like we might come to the conclusion that faith has nothing to do with being saved at all, because it's all God's choice. But that's clearly against other passages in the Bible. In fact, it's against what Paul himself says in the book of Romans. For example, in chapter 3, verse 28, he says: "We hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law." So we've got to take this all together, hold them all together, and see how they work together, and then we will understand what Paul is trying to say.

So the first thing that we need to do, then, is to see that faith and God's choice go together. Faith and election are always together. They're never separate from one another. But we also have to see how they relate to each other. In other words, which one of them comes first. Because faith is not the cause of election. Our faith is not the reason why God chooses us. God did not look forward in time, and say, "Okay, that one's going to believe, and that one's going to believe, so I choose them." That's not how election works. Paul makes that very clear here in Romans. God's choice is his alone, apart from anything in us. So faith does not come first. Rather, election is the cause of faith. God's choice is the reason why we believe. Because God chose those who would believe in him. He chose them to believe in his Son. We would not believe at all if God had not chosen us first. God's choice comes first.

And we see that in other passages in Scripture too. In Ephesians 1, for example, verse 4, Paul says: "He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." And the only way to be holy and blameless is through faith in Jesus. So God chose us before he even created the world to believe in his Son. God's choice comes first, and faith comes out because of it.

But the two are never separate from each other, either. It's not like God said, "This person's going to be saved, whether they believe in me or not." No, he said: "This one is going to believe in my Son and will be saved." And because of that choice, we become Christians and are delivered from our sins. So that God's choice and our faith always go together. That's the first thing that we need to see.

The second thing that we need to see is that God did not only choose who would be saved, he also chose how they would be saved. God chose the way that we would come to believe in him. And Paul talks about this all throughout Romans chapter 10. For example, in verse 9 we hear: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." So we need to confess faith in Jesus. We need to confess him as our Lord and Savior, because if we don't do that, we can't be saved. If we never say "Jesus is my Savior," especially when it costs us something to do it, how can we even say that we are Christians? We need a firm faith in Jesus. We need that unwavering confidence in him, holding onto him despite all opposition from the world. As Jesus himself says, Matthew chapter 10: "Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven." So we need to believe in Jesus. And everyone who calls on his name will be saved. And God chose to save his elect, to save those whom he chose for himself through this faith. There's no other way. Faith in Jesus is the only way that we're going to get into heaven. And God gives us this faith. God is the one who chose us, after all. But it is only through this faith that we can be saved. Without it, we have no hope.

But God also chose the way that we would come to faith in Jesus. He chose the way by which we would believe in him. In other words, God chose the work of the Church, the work of preaching to be the way that Christians become Christians. This is what Paul means when he says in verses 14 and 15: "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'" Now, Paul actually puts the order backwards here, because he's trying to make a point. But if you were to turn that all around and go forward instead, it would go like this. God sends preachers to proclaim the Gospel, to preach the good news of Jesus Christ to a sin-filled world. And those who hear that Gospel, those whom God has chosen for himself come to believe because of that preaching. And those who believe call on his name. And those who call on his name will be saved. So the work of the Church is part of God's plan, part of God's choice for salvation. This is how he brings us to himself. As verse 17 says: "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." Because when someone preached the word of God to you, Christians, God gave you faith in that way. He gave you faith through your hearing in your ear, and that's how he brought you to himself. This is all part of his plan, his choice for salvation.

I do also want to say quickly in passing that we should not be afraid of praying for the salvation of other people. Paul does it for Israel in the first part of Romans chapter 10. And we also shouldn't be afraid of witnessing to Jesus to all people around us either. Because God has chosen these things for himself too, Christians. God uses these things as a way of bringing others to

faith. In fact, God answers the prayers of his people. Your prayer for someone else's salvation may be the reason that God has chosen to give that person faith. It may be that he said: "I will bring that person to myself because of the prayers of my saint." Or it may be that he said: "I have chosen to bring that person to myself because of my holy one witnessing their faith to them." God chooses these things, Christians. It's not fruitless or pointless. This is how he has chosen to work. And it all goes together, both who is going to be saved and how they are going to be saved. That's the second point.

And the last thing to see is that God chose to save his elect through faith in Jesus alone. Jesus is not one option among many. It's not like there are many ways to get into heaven. All religions do not lead to God. Those are lies that we hear, unfortunately, far too often in our world today. Jesus is the only way to heaven, the only way that God has chosen to save us. Jesus himself says in John chapter 14: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." And we also hear in Acts chapter 4, verse 12: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." So the Bible is clear. Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. He is the only way that God has chosen to save those he calls to himself.

And so he's not going to take it very lightly if someone rejects that. He is not going to take it lightly if someone hears the Gospel of Jesus Christ and says, "No thanks. I'd rather do things my own way." That's a terrible sin that's going to be held against them, to reject Jesus as the only way of salvation. And that's exactly why Israel was rejected. They rejected Jesus. They didn't want anything to do with him. They stumbled over him, and as a result, they were held responsible for their sin. And it's not like you can say that they didn't hear the Gospel. They did! In fact, Paul quotes four Old Testament passages to prove exactly that. They did hear the Gospel, but they rejected it. And for that reason, God held them responsible for their sin. They had no excuse, and they were cut off from God as a result. Because Jesus is the only way by which we may be saved.

But for those who do call on Jesus by faith, those who do turn to him with trusting hearts, they will be saved. Even the Gentiles who have never heard of God. Because this is how God has chosen them. He has chosen them to believe in him through his Son, Jesus Christ. It is all part of his plan, his choice, even from all eternity.

So Christians, we can see then that God's choice and our faith do go together. Because God chooses those he's going to save. And God chooses to save his people through our faith. And when God calls the ones he has chosen to believe in him, they will turn to him in true faith. They will turn to him and call on Jesus Christ and be saved. Because this is God's plan. This was always his choice. So for us today, then, let us turn to Jesus. Let us believe on his name, and we will be saved. Because this, Christians, is God's plan. This has always been his choice from all eternity. Turn to Jesus and believe in him.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have chosen us to believe in your Son, Jesus Christ. Strengthen our faith so that we may always trust in him, knowing that you will give us all things that you have promised in him. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.