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Children of the Promise

Romans 9.6-8

Series: The Pure Gospel

Rev. Andrew Hawkins, Ph.D.

The Village Church

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I. Introduction

- A. As a university professor I had the good fortune to work with a wide variety of graduate students from different countries
 - 1. A few came from other western countries, like Great Britain or western Europe
 - a. Or from places which had strong origins in western Europe, like Australia
 - 2. But most came from non-western countries
 - a. From Asia, including China, India, Singapore, and Vietnam
 - b. Or from Latin America, including countries like Brazil and Colombia
 - 3. And most notably, from the Middle East
 - a. From Israel
 - b. But also quite a number from Muslim countries, like United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia
- B. And one of the most consistently expressed perspectives by those graduate students was that the United States was a Christian nation
 - 1. And, in their view, essentially everyone who lived in the United States was a Christian
 - a. That if you were an American, you must be a Christian
- C. That viewpoint is complicated by the fact that there are many, many people in the United States who never attend church or engage in any particular religious practices which are distinctively Christian
 - 1. But who nevertheless would, if they had to fill out a form asking for their religious preference, or answer a survey question, would say they are “Christian”
- D. That’s in spite of the fact that only a minority...
 - 1. A minority that has been growing smaller by the year in the last decade or two...
 - 2. Only a minority actually attend Christian churches at least twice a month
 - a. Which is usually the standard for social scientists in identifying who are actually practicing, committed Christians
- E. That, of course, leads to incredibly misleading conceptions about Christianity
 - 1. As international students and others come into this country, they are struck by the immoral lifestyles of their fellow students

2. Struck by the onslaught of media that reflects gross immorality
3. By a kind of immorality that is anything but Christian
- F. So, I found myself having to disavow such wrong notions that America is a Christian nation to my international friends
 1. I found myself repeatedly having to tell them, “Yes, there are Christians in America; but America is hardly Christian”
 - a. That only a small minority are serious, practicing Christians
 - b. Who are deeply devoted to biblical teachings about God and about how we might be related to Him
 2. Those misperceptions are most notable among Muslims
 - a. Islam is a moralistic religion
 - b. One’s relationship with God, and with their community, is determined by legalistic standards which are quite strictly held
 - c. So, when a Muslim comes to America, and sees the rampant immorality displayed in media
 - d. And practiced by so many of their colleagues
 - e. They conclude that, since this is a Christian nation, they don’t want to have anything to do with Christianity
 - f. Which they conclude must be where such immorality originates
- G. A good chunk of the problem arises from true, evangelical, Bible-believing Christians
 1. Who fail
 - a. Whose lifestyles fall short of biblical standards
 2. Or Christian leaders who compromise with worldly lifestyles and support lifestyles that ignore biblical teaching
- H. But a significant part of the problem comes from what we might call “cultural Christians” or “nominal Christians”
 1. Those who actual make no pretense about a commitment to Jesus Christ
 - a. Don’t attend church services – except for maybe Christmas and Easter
 - b. But would nevertheless call themselves Christians
- I. So the underlying question would be, what constitutes a genuine Christian?
 1. And how do you determine who are the true followers of Jesus Christ?
- J. Our text this morning will prompt us to ask – and hopefully answer – that question
 1. For a similar problem existed in the first Century
 2. Only in that case, the question was, what constitutes a true Jew?
 - a. Who are the genuine Israelites?
 - b. Does natural ancestry determine who are the true Jews?
 - c. Or are there other, more relevant criteria?

II. **The Glories of the Gospel**

- A. We return to our series **The Pure Gospel** this morning, and continue in our study of Romans Chapter 9
 1. We began Chapter 9 last week

2. And as you have probably figure out, Chapter 9 follows Chapter 8!
 3. And Chapter 8 is perhaps the climax, the peak of the crescendo, of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ
 - a. The gospel that Paul is describing in this, his magnum opus
- B. And a glorious gospel it is!
1. Paul, as you will recall, began by describing the need for the gospel
 - a. How human beings – both Jews and Gentiles – are by nature separated from God
 - b. Indeed, God is angry with human creatures because they suppress the truth about God in unrighteousness (**Romans 1.18**)
 - c. They are under the wrath of God, he says
 2. And the sinfulness of humanity, Paul writes, is both universal and pervasive (**Romans 3.10-20**)
 - a. **Universal** – that sin affects every human being, Jew and Gentile
 - b. “None are righteous; no one seeks for God; no one does good, not even one”
 - c. **Pervasive** – that sin affects every human faculty – mind, will, emotions, body, soul
- C. That is a horrible predicament to be in
1. As a creature – created by God
 - a. And yet, to be under His wrath
 - b. Overwhelmed by a sinful condition in which there is no escape
 - c. No contrived human enterprise than can remedy the situation
- D. But there is an escape!
1. God has created the only way out from this predicament
 2. He has sent His Son, the incarnate Son Jesus Christ
 - a. Who lived the righteous life you and I could never live
 - b. And who died on the cross, taking upon Himself the just punishment for our sin
 3. So that righteousness – that which we so desperately need in order to be in a right relationship with God – God’s own righteousness
 - a. Is provided for us in Jesus Christ
 - b. Through faith in Him
 4. **Romans 3:21–25** (ESV) —
 - a. 21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—
 - b. 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:
 - c. 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
 - d. 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
 - e. 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

- E. All the elements of the gospel of grace are enumerated in that wonderful passage
 - 1. We have no righteousness
 - a. So the **righteousness** provided is the righteousness of God
 - 2. This righteousness is available to all who desire it by faith in Jesus Christ
 - a. **Faith** – trust in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf
 - 3. This faith leads to our **justification**
 - a. Justification – the legal declaration that we are declared not guilty of all of our transgressions
 - 4. This all comes to us by **grace as a gift**
 - a. Grace – the undeserved favor of God
 - b. More than that, the favor of God for those who deserve the opposite, who deserve the judgment of God
 - 5. It is a gospel of **redemption**
 - a. In which sin-spoiled sinners are redeemed, set free from bondage to sin, released from the slave market of sin
 - 6. All because of **propitiation**
 - a. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ which removes the wrath of God
 - b. Propitiation – a wrath-removing sacrifice
 - c. Accomplished by the blood of Christ, the death of the Son of God
- F. It is a glorious gospel indeed!
- G. So then Paul goes on to elaborate the glorious benefits of this glorious gospel
 - 1. We receive the forgiveness of God (**Romans 4.7-8**)
 - 2. We have peace with God (**Romans 5.1**)
 - a. No longer is God our enemy!
 - 3. We have access to God and to His grace (**Romans 5.2**)
 - a. No longer separated from Him
 - 4. We rejoice in hope (**Romans 5.2**)
 - a. No longer is there a dark cloud over our future
 - 5. We even find ourselves rejoicing in our sufferings (**Romans 5.3-4**)
 - a. Because know that God uses our sufferings to produce endurance and character and hope
 - 6. And He even gives us His Holy Spirit to indwell us (**Romans 5.5**)
 - 7. And He saves us from his wrath (**Romans 5.9**)
- H. Once we enter Chapters 6-8 we find even more glories
 - 1. We are united with Christ by His Spirit (**Romans 6.5**)
 - 2. Sin and death no longer have dominion over us (**Romans 6.9**)
 - 3. We are released from bondage to the Law, and live in the new way of the Spirit (**Romans 7.6**)
- I. And then Chapter 8 is the crowning jewel!
 - 1. The glories of the gospel turn into the glories of assurance
 - 2. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (**Romans 8.1**)
 - 3. The Spirit of God dwells in you, giving life to our mortal bodies (**Romans 8.11**)

4. The Spirit is the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry “Abba, Father!”
(Romans 8.15)
 5. Making us heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ (Romans 8.16-17)
 6. The Spirit helps in our weakness, helping us in our prayers, interceding for us according to the will of God (Romans 8.26-27)
- J. And then, what extraordinary assurances for those who are in Christ Jesus!
1. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8.31)
 2. “He who did not spare His own Son, how will not also with Him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8.32)
 3. There is no one to bring any charge against us; no one to condemn us!
(Romans 8.33-34)
 4. There is nothing to separate us from the love of Christ! (Romans 8.35)
 5. In fact, we are more than conquerors – spiritual super-heroes! – in Christ Jesus (Romans 8.37)
- K. That’s the book of Romans so far
1. So far...
 - a. Dave Barry – a contemporary humorist – wrote a history book of sorts
 - b. It was a history of the millennium – that is the millennium that began in the year 2000
 - c. He published it in 2007
 - d. That’s right – he wrote a history of the millennium and it only covered the first 7 years of the 1,000 years!
 - e. It was called “Dave Barry’s History of the Millennium”
 - f. “Dave Barry’s History of the Millennium (So Far)”
 2. So when I say that’s the book of Romans so far
 - a. It means there’s still a lot more to come!

III. Paul’s Anguish

- A. So last week we got a taste of what’s more to come
1. We learned that Paul, in spite of this glorious gospel
 - a. This gospel with all its assurances
 2. He was in anguish
 - a. “Great sorrow and unceasing anguish” (Romans 9.2)
- B. And his concern was driven by the knowledge that in spite of the fact that God has accomplished in Messiah Jesus what no human could ever do for himself or herself
1. His own kinsmen, by and large, have not believed in Jesus
 - a. His own kinsmen have not embraced their Messiah!
 2. His own kinsmen, the Jewish people, who had every advantage conceivable
 - a. The adoption
 - b. The glory
 - c. The covenants
 - d. The Law

- e. The sanctuary worship
- f. The promises of God
- g. The patriarchs
- h. Even the Messiah Jesus came from their race
- 3. They have, the vast majority of them, dismissed the Christ
 - a. Some by violent attacks
 - b. Some by ignorance
 - c. Some by neglect
- 4. But they failed to see the diamond shining against the backdrop of human sin
- C. That's Paul's anguish, his great sorrow

IV. **The Problem**

- A. But that raises another problem
 - 1. Paul's anguish is that his own people, unless they turn from sin and self and embrace Messiah Jesus, are destined to remain under the wrath of God
 - 2. But if there is anything that breaks Paul's heart more than the loss of his own countrymen
 - a. It's an attack on the glory of God
 - 3. Because that's what the rejection of Messiah Jesus comes down to
 - a. An attack on the glory of God
 - b. God – who gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life
 - c. God – who in love and grace, turned His back on His Son as His Son took upon Himself the just penalty for our sin
 - d. God – who Himself became the just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus
 - 4. The reason the gospel is glorious is because it displays the nature and character of God in such completeness that no one has any excuse in rejecting the love of God
 - a. His justice
 - b. His righteousness
 - c. His lovingkindness
 - d. His mercy
 - e. His grace
 - f. His wrath
 - g. His omnipotence
 - h. His sovereignty
 - i. Are all on display in this glorious gospel
 - 5. And to reject the gospel is to reject God
 - a. It is to dismiss the glory of God
 - b. It is to belittle God
 - 6. And one of the ways the glory of God is attacked flows from the idea that the kinsmen of Paul, the Jewish people, have rejected the gospel
 - a. And in doing so, there is the idea that God's promises have failed

- b. That God, who promised to shepherd His people, His sheep, has lost His sheep
 - c. That God, whose word, whose covenant, determined to save His people, was unable to do what He said He would do
- B. **The Word of God on Trial**
 - 1. So Paul raises that issue – which would be on the minds of every Jew in his day
 - 2. **Romans 9:6** (ESV) —
 - a. 6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. ...
- C. The fact that the gospel – in all of its glory – is rejected by so many of Paul’s own kinsmen, the people of Israel – implies that God’s promises, God’s word has failed!
 - 1. For Paul – as anguished and sorrowful as he is, his concern for God and His glory looms as an even more significant issue
 - 2. And so Paul begins to lay out how that couldn’t possibly be the case
 - a. That God, the self-existent, independent, altogether holy and righteous Being
 - b. That God could never be false in His word
 - 3. **Romans 3:4** (ESV) —
 - a. 4 ... Let God be true though every one were a liar...

V. **The Solution**

- A. **Israel v. Israel**
 - 1. First, Paul makes a distinction between Israel, and... well... Israel
 - 2. **Romans 9:6** (ESV) —
 - a. 6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel...
 - 3. Paul is making a distinction between those who are Israel because they are natural descendants of Jacob
 - a. And those who are true Israelites
 - b. True Israelites – those who actually trust in the promises of God in the Hebrew Bible
 - 4. He’s saying that not everyone who is physically descended from Israel are actually spiritually true Israelites
 - 5. Now Paul has already made that point earlier in Romans
 - 6. **Romans 2:28–29** (ESV) —
 - a. 28 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.
 - b. 29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.
 - 7. So there’s Israel... and there’s Israel
 - a. There’s Israel who are physically descended from Israel
 - b. And among those who are physically descended from Israel, are some who genuinely believe in the promises of God

- c. Who are Jews inwardly – who have been born again by the Spirit of God!
 - 8. Jesus said essentially the same thing to Nicodemus
 - a. The Pharisee, a member of the Jewish ruling council
 - b. He told Nicodemus that he must be born again
 - c. And he said, “Are you a teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” (John 3.10)
 - 9. You see, Nicodemus – a Jew by birth; a descendant of Israel – should have known that some portion of the Jewish people were spiritual Israel!
 - 10. In fact, the Pharisees of all people, who had prided themselves on being people of the Book, should have seen that throughout the history of Israel there have always been Israelites who were mere descendants, and Israelites who were true believers
 - 11. There were plenty of Israel who were unbelievers in the northern kingdom which was overrun by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. due to their unbelief
 - 12. There were plenty of Israel who were unbelievers in the southern kingdom of Judah who were destroyed and exiled by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.
 - 13. Only a few Israelites during those times were genuine spiritual Israel
 - 14. Remember Elijah, who in his encounter with Ahab and Jezebel in the northern kingdom, who believed that he was the only one left in all of Israel who believed
 - a. But God assured him that there were 7,000 who not bowed the knee to Baal
 - b. 7,000 who were true, spiritual Israel
 - 15. So there was always a remnant
 - a. But the remnant was a mere shadow of the larger body of Israelites who were mere descendants
 - 16. The point is this – the promises of God, the word of God – applies to true, spiritual Israel
 - a. And God’s promises to genuine Israel – who are those circumcised in the heart by the Spirit – are, and always will be, true and certain!
 - 17. An example of this is evident from Jesus Himself
 - 18. John 1:47 (ESV) —
 - a. 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!”
 - 19. Jesus: “Here’s a real one! A genuine Jew!”
 - a. He wasn’t saying that he was descended from Jacob
 - b. He was saying that he was of those who genuinely believed
 - 20. So not all Israel are Israel
 - a. Not all those who are descended from Israel belong to Israel – the true spiritual Israel
- B. Abraham’s Offspring
- 1. Then Paul takes it a step further
 - a. He has started with descendants of Jacob, the offspring of Israel, of the twelve tribes

- b. But now he goes back even further
- c. He goes back to Abraham
- 2. **Romans 9:7** (ESV) —
 - a. 7 **and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”**
- 3. Now why Isaac?
 - a. Well, Isaac was the child of the promise
- 4. Abraham had two sons – Ishmael and Isaac
 - a. Ishmael from Hagar
 - b. And Isaac – miraculously from Sarah when Sarah was past child-bearing age
 - c. And the birth of Isaac was of the promise of God
 - d. Once again affirming that the word of God, the promise of God, cannot fail
- 5. Jesus Himself has made that very same distinction
 - a. Remember the argument Jesus had with the Jewish leaders in John 8
 - b. They claimed to be the children of Abraham
 - c. Jesus said they were not children of Abraham – because they were trying to kill him – but were children of their father the devil
- 6. Or **Matthew 3:9** (ESV) —
 - a. 9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.
- 7. It is not the natural descendants of Israel who truly belong to God and are the recipients of the promises of God
 - a. It is those who genuinely believe in the promises of God
 - b. The OT saints believed the promises and looked forward to the Messiah
 - c. From the NT on, believers look back and believe in the One whom God sent, Jesus His only Son

VI. **Children of the Promise**

- A. So then, Paul brings the point to a conclusion
- B. **Romans 9:8** (ESV) —
 - 1. 8 **This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.**
- C. There it is explicitly
 - 1. It is not the children of the flesh – the natural descendants of Israel – who are the children of God
 - a. But it is the children of the promise who are offspring – genuine believers
 - 2. So the word of God has not failed
 - a. God always saves those who truly belong to Him
 - b. Those who are spiritual Israel – the true Israel

- D. Now here's the truly amazing thing, dear friends
 - 1. You might get the impression that in this passage Paul is entirely focused on the Jewish people
 - a. And he certainly is deeply concerned with his Jewish brethren
 - 2. But if you had that impression, you might dismiss this section and think that it doesn't apply to you
 - a. But it does apply to you
 - b. And when I say you – I'm making the presumption that most of you are not natural descendants of Israel
 - c. That you are Gentiles
- E. Elsewhere Paul makes explicit application to Gentiles as well as to Jews
 - 1. **Galatians 3:25–29** (ESV) —
 - a. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,
 - b. 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.
 - c. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.
 - d. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
 - e. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.
 - 2. **Galatians 4:28** (ESV) —
 - a. 28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.
- F. If you believe in Messiah Jesus – in the Lord Jesus Christ – genuinely
 - 1. Then you are Abraham's offspring
 - a. Heirs according to the promise
 - b. Just as much as was Isaac

VII. **True Christian**

- A. So then we return to our question at the beginning
 - 1. What constitutes a genuine Christian?
- B. Just as there were natural descendants of Israel who were not believers
 - 1. And some remnant who were
 - 2. There are cultural Christians; nominal Christians
 - a. Those who might claim the title Christian as their religion
 - 3. But are they genuine Christians?
 - a. Are you a genuine Christian?
- C. So let me ask you some questions
 - 1. Do you believe in Jesus Christ?
 - a. That is, do you trust Him, and Him alone, for your salvation?
 - b. Trusting not in yourself, or in your religious activity, or in your church membership
 - c. But trust in Jesus Himself – His life, death and resurrection?
 - 2. Do you follow Christ?
 - a. Do you put yourself in the way of Christ?
 - b. Meeting with other Christians?

- c. Talking with other Christians about Christ?
 - d. Regularly attending the worship of Christ as you are able?
 - 3. Do you have a desire to share your faith in Jesus with others?
 - a. Do you witness to what Jesus has done for you in saving you from your sin?
 - 4. Do you long to know more and more of Christ?
 - a. Do you count, as Paul did, as not having arrived at full knowledge of Christ?
 - b. But, like Paul, are pressing on to the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus?
- D. Paul was concerned that his kinsmen were not mere natural descendants
 - 1. He was concerned that they were genuine, Spirit-born, believers in Messiah Jesus
 - 2. And he was also concerned for you and me
 - a. Are we genuine believers in Jesus?
 - b. Not mere cultural Christians