

For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ⁸ In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. ⁹ For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

¹⁰ Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

¹⁴ What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses,

**"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."**

¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. (NIV 84)

Theme: It's not Fair (and that's a good thing)

A boy thinks his older sister is getting some sort of preferential treatment from his parents. He stomps off and yells, "It's not fair! Why does she always get more than me? Or why does she get to stay up later than me?" He wants the same thing as his sister; he simply wants what's fair.

"Life isn't unfair" we are often told. But that doesn't mean that we accept that. No when we perceive something to be unfair we often act like that little boy. We yell and complain when it seems as if we are on the short-end. Today in our society we expect everything be fair and we demand changes when things are not. But it's funny, rarely will we complain when we actually end up on the good side of the situation.

Life isn't always fair. And neither is salvation—but today we see that this is actually a good thing for God doesn't treat us as our sins deserve—but he gives us his mercy and grace.

It has been said as a way to define the differences between justice, mercy, and grace: "When you get what you deserve, that's called justice. When you don't get what you do deserve, that's called mercy. When you get what you don't deserve, that's called grace." What one do you want? Do you want what is fair? Do you want justice—to get what you deserve? Or do you want God's mercy and grace—to not get what you deserve and to be given what you don't deserve? By which one(s) are you saved? Why did God choose to save you? Are you saved because of justice? Is your salvation fair? What about the Old Testament believers, how were they saved?

Let's take a look back at the history of the Jews for the answer. First off, God called Abraham, then known as Abram, the son of Terah. And to him God gave him three main promises: 1. That he would be the Father of a Great nation, 2. that this nation would live in the land of Canaan, and 3. that from his line all nations would be blessed—meaning that the Savior of the world would come through him. Why did God choose Abram? We don't know. His Father worshiped the false gods of the people around him. It wasn't as if Abraham was a better person than everyone else. God simply chose him.

In order for those three blessing to come true, Abraham first needed a son. But the problem was that when God first gave him this promise Abraham was already pretty old. He was 75 while his wife Sarah was 65. And as the years passed on, it seemed as if time was running out. So Sarah gave her servant, Hagar, to Abraham so that he could have a child—and Ishmael was the result. Abraham figured that this was the son God promised him, and through him God could fulfill his promises. But God had other plans in mind. The child of the Promise would be the Son of Sarah, not Hagar, the servant. So when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90 Isaac was born. It was through him that the Savior was come, through him the blessings were given to Abraham. Even though Ishmael was the firstborn and would have, under normal circumstances, received the birthright; it was Isaac who received it. Even though God gave this promise to Abraham, his first son, Ishmael did not receive the promise.

Then there is the next generation. With his wife Rebekah, Isaac had two sons—twins. The first born was named Esau, and the second was named Jacob. Again, under normal circumstances, Esau would have received the blessing of the first born. But that is not what God intended. Before he even formed the world, God chose Jacob. And when Rebekah was pregnant God informed her of his choice, **the older will serve the younger**. In other words, the younger son, Jacob, would receive the right of the first born. The three-fold promise given to Abraham would be passed on to him.

God chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And there is more, God chose you. He chose you to be a child of Abraham. Even though you may not be his physical descendent, you are his spiritual descendent. You make up true Israel. You are God's child; you are part of his chosen nation. There are plenty of Abraham's children, like Ishmael and his descendants, Esau and his descendants, and even many of Jacob's own descendants, who are not God's children. **As Paul explains, For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children.** You fall into this category—you may not be a child of Israel—his physical descendant, but God chose you to be part of the true Israel—his spiritual descendant, a believer in Christ.

Why? Why did God choose you? Why did he choose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? There was nothing special that Abraham offered to God that led God to choose him as the Father of his Chosen Nation, and as the spiritual Father of all believers. Ishmael was Abraham's first-born. Esau should have received the blessing before Jacob. And yet, that's not what happened. God chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Why? Why did God choose you? It is because of justice? Do you get what you deserve when you are saved?

Many believe so. That is what our sinful nature tries to tell us too. If only you try hard, if you do your best. If you are truly a good person who tries to show love to others, if you better than most people—we could go on and on; then God will save you. How could he not? Just look at all the good things you have done? There must be some way that you can earn your eternal life, or convince God to save you somehow. Our sinful nature tries to tell us that we can earn our salvation, or that when we are saved we have contributed somehow. It claims that salvation comes about by justice—that we have earned it by who we are and what we do.

But look at who you are. Look at what you do. You were conceived and born as a sinner, and enemy of God, who didn't know God and couldn't do anything but sin against him. You were born as a child of the devil, not of God. And because of this original sin, you commit sins constantly every day. You are self-absorbed, you fail to put God first in your lives, you often don't love others as you love yourself. And so look at what you deserve. You can't be saved by justice. Justice is when you get what you deserve and you deserve nothing but God's wrath and punishment. You deserve to suffer forever with the devil. So it can't be justice. If it were by justice God would never choose you. You would never be saved.

So why then are you saved? Why did God choose you? Why did he choose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Mercy—when we don't get what we deserve. When God chose Jacob, he did so before he was even born. While Jacob and Esau were still in the womb he announced to Rebekah that Jacob would be blessed. God knew who Jacob would be. He knew his sin, he knew that he would lie and deceive, that he would fail to trust in God to keep his promises, that he would have favorites, and so on. And yet, God chose him. Even though Jacob deserved his wrath and punishment, God chose him. That's mercy.

And God chose you too. Despite who you are, despite what you do, God chose you. He saved you. He won't treat you as your sins deserve. Is that fair? Is that unjust? Paul answers that question, **What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.** Why did God choose you to be saved? Because he chose you. Because it was his will. It's not because of who you are or anything you have done. But simply God's mercy.

But God isn't just a merciful God, he is also a just God. He demands that payment be made for our sins. That payment is death—not just physical but eternal as well. So God's Son came down from heaven. He lived a perfect life that we could not live. Then he went to the cross upon which he took our sins upon himself, becoming a sinner in our place. And so he suffered through the pain and agony of eternal damnation for us. And he gave us his perfect life; his obedience is now ours. Three days after his death he rose from the dead and

promises that we too will rise from the dead and through faith in him we will live with him in heaven forever.

Christ won for us salvation. He has given us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. That is grace—getting what we don't deserve. We don't deserve any gifts from God, and yet he gives us the best gift of all—our salvation.

And notice that God's grace isn't exactly fair, either. It's not fair that Jesus suffered through the punishment that we deserved. And yet Christ did it willingly out of his mercy he has for us. It's not fair, but that's a good thing. We don't want God to be fair. We don't want to be saved by justice. Because if he was fair, we wouldn't stand a chance. We can't earn eternal life. We can't do enough good things to convince God to save us. Again as Paul said, **it doesn't depend on man's desire or effort. But on God's mercy.**

And that gives us comfort. It doesn't depend on us. We don't have to worry if we have done enough. We don't have to worry about earning God's favor—wondering if we have done enough good things to lead him to save us. We don't have to worry if we have made the right decision or not, or if we haven't felt the Holy Spirit in us. Because our salvation doesn't depend on us in the least—but on Christ. As Paul explains, **God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls.** Why did God choose you to be saved? Not because of what you have done, not because you tried hard, not because you wanted to be saved. But simply because he wanted to choose you. And so instead of complaining that it isn't fair, we praise and rejoice our merciful and gracious Lord.

“It isn't fair,” the kid complains when he thinks his sister is getting preferential treatment. Neither is salvation fair either. But that's a good thing. If it was fair, we would never be saved. So instead of justice, God used his mercy and grace. In his mercy he took away our sins and its condemnation—so that we wouldn't get what we deserve. In his grace he gives us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life—so that we would receive what we don't deserve. He chose us to be saved despite who we are and what we have done. That's not justice, but grace and mercy. Salvation isn't fair, and that's a good thing. Amen.