



## [Romans 9:10-16](#)

(10) And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (11) (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) (12) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. (13) As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. (14) What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. (15) For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. (16) So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

*King James Version*

[Jacob](#) had God's election, selection, or calling, thus giving him a very decided advantage withheld from Esau by [God](#), who did not choose to call him. God's election of Jacob and rejection of Esau had nothing to do with anything genetically inherent within them. It had nothing to do with what either of them had done. It had everything to do with what God chose to do and did: He gave Jacob the edge. Jacob eventually responded correctly, but the sovereign God exercised His right to make moves and use people as He designs. This is Paul's main point.

God's decisions—what He elects to do—are not matters of emotion but of will. Whether we think they are right or wrong, fair or unfair, means nothing. Isaiah 55 makes plain we do not think as He does. Our thinking on these issues does not matter because, first, God is Creator and can do as He pleases. Second, what He does is always right anyway. That we are not completely masters of our own destinies and that free moral agency has its limits are sometimes humbling and difficult to accept. God, of His own volition, can and does treat some with what we might deem as [favoritism](#), as though some are better than others.

Notice John the Baptist's reaction to a situation in which something like this is involved:

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And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!" John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. . . . He must increase, but I must decrease." ([John 3:26-27](#), 30)

John had come to grips with this concept. He understood that his role in the vast scope of God's purpose was limited by the overruling [wisdom](#) of the Creator as He carried out *His* purpose. This is a reason why [salvation](#) is spoken of as "free"—because God is not bound to show [mercy](#) to anybody since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. All too often, we forget that the invisible God is working things out according to His purpose, not ours. God is free to do as He pleases. He owes no one anything.

[I Corinthians 4:6-7](#) adds:

Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

Do we have grounds for being puffed up or jealous? John the Baptist did not think so, and what he declared is [truth](#). I Corinthians 12 makes clear that God places people in the church as it pleases Him, and He gives gifts to them so they can be responsible for a function. The gifts do not make them "better," just prepared by the Creator to serve in a specialized way.

At this juncture, we can draw a major lesson from the [Parable of the Talents](#) and fit it into this picture:

For the [kingdom of heaven](#) is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. . . . So he who had received five talents, came and brought five other talents, saying, "Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them." . . . He also who had received two talents came and said, "Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them." . . . Then he who had received the one talent came and said, "Lord, I

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knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed." ([Matthew 25:14](#), 20, 22, 24)

Not all are expected to produce the same results, but all are expected to be equally faithful to the gifts God entrusted to them. Interestingly, the one who was unfaithful to what God gave him failed to produce based on his reasoning that God is unfair. Like so many people today, he felt victimized.

We see, then, that Jacob was not inherently a better person than Esau was. He was simply gifted in a way Esau was not. God probably chose to use twins to illustrate this vitally important lesson to draw attention to how He works and to His [grace](#). In this way, God is never indebted to man.

What makes this so important to us? We have the same advantage over those not called as Jacob had over Esau. We also learn that those who judge themselves among themselves are not wise because not everyone is gifted in exactly the same way. Finally, we learn that each bears his own responsibility to edify the body according the measure of what God has given him.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

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