

Romans 9

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[0 : 00] Let God be God. Let God be God. I think that's the message of Romans 9. We know nothing about God, you know nothing about God apart from revelation. We only know what God is like because He's revealed Himself in creation as glorious.

But more than that, we only know what God is like because He's revealed Himself in His Word and in the person of the Lord Jesus. And it's only when we look in the Bible that we see God clearly. And what is God like? God is God.

And in Romans chapter 9 we see some of the implications of the godness of God. The end of Romans 8, do you remember, it's an amazing passage, we know it and we love it, don't we? That we have just celebrated God's unstoppable purpose for His people who He chose before the foundation of the world. That He is predestined to eternal glory. And chapter 9 picks up on that theme and develops it and it is the theme of God's sovereignty in salvation. And I don't know whether you picked it up as I read through it, but this may be an uncomfortable exercise for you. Because you start to see that God is God. The starting point for the chapter in chapter 9 is not celebration like it was at the end of chapter 8, but it's lamentation. Look at verse 1.

[1 : 30] I'm speaking the truth in Christ, I'm not lying, my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit. That I have great sorrow and am ceasing anguish in my heart. Well why is Paul so upset?

Great sorrow and ceasing anguish. Well look at verse 3, what's the reason? For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

Paul's great sorrow is because of the unbelief of Israel. Remember that Paul himself is a Jew. He is a Jew who had come from hating the Lord Jesus to believing in the Lord Jesus.

But the majority of his fellow Jews had rejected the gospel. And that caused Paul immense sorrow. In fact as Moses did many years before, he says he is so concerned for them that he says he would give up his own salvation for their sake if it meant that they would be saved.

Well that is a challenge isn't it? Paul's concern, his heart for the lost. That unceasing anguish of those around us. Would we save our family for the sake of their salvation?

[2 : 43] I would go to hell. That's the strength of what Paul is saying. And we do well don't we to pray for Paul's heart for the lost. Because in 2 Timothy chapter 4, Paul says that God our saviour desires that all people might be saved.

All kinds of people would come to a knowledge of the truth. So the particular point at the start of chapter 9 in Romans is Paul's sorrow for the people of Israel. And we need to see this here that Paul's heart is God's heart.

So in Luke chapter 13 and verse 34, Jesus lamented and he said, O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, when he looked at the city he said, How often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.

But you would not. God says in Ezekiel 33 verse 11, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. But that the wicked man would turn from his way and live.

Turn back. Turn back from your evil days. For why will you die, O house of Israel? So this concern is for the salvation of Israel.

[3 : 47] And that is a challenge to us, isn't it? Few people down the ages have been hated quite as much. And as violently persecuted as the Jews. But in contrast to anti-Semitism, the Christian attitude should be what?

It should be of loving, longing for their salvation. And the tragedy of Jewish unbelief is all the greater when you consider the privileges that they had.

So look at verse 4. They're the Israelites. To them belong adoption. The glory. The covenants. The giving of the law. The worship. And the promises. To them belong the patriarchs. And from their race according to the flesh is Christ. Who is God over all. Blessed forever. Amen. No race in history. No race in history enjoyed such privileges as the Jews. Jesus Christ himself is a Jew.

And yet the vast majority of his people rejected the gospel and they still do today. Now this unbelief of Israel is tragic.

[4 : 51] It is tragic in the same way that if my own children reject the Lord Jesus. They've enjoyed the blessing of being brought up in a covenant home.

But it's more than that. It's more than just a tragedy. The unbelief of Israel is not just a tragedy. It's a theological problem. Because it raises a question.

It raises the question. Has God gone back on his word? In verse 4. Verse 4 says they enjoyed Israel. God's promise of blessing. Has God gone back on his word?

And if he has it's not just a problem for them is it? Not just a problem for the Jews. It's a problem for all of us. And it means that this book that we love cannot be trusted. The gospel promises that we believe are not worth the paper they're written on.

If God has gone back on his words. Do you remember? Last week we saw God's unstoppable purpose. But it seems, doesn't it? When you come into chapter 9.

[5 : 49] Well has God's purposes. Well have they been stopped? Pretty effectively for the people of Israel. So look at verse 6. No. But it is not as though the word of God has failed.

How is that? Well it goes on. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel. It's saying that in God's eyes. Physical descent.

Is not what made someone a true Israelite. So that you were born a Jew. Did not mean that you really became one of God's people. And you enjoyed God's blessing.

What was it that made someone a true Israelite? And I wonder how you'd answer from Romans 1 to 8. What made somebody a true Israelite?

Our automatic answer would be faith, wouldn't it? God's true people were those who responded in faith. That is the mark of God's people in chapter 4 and in chapter 10. But that isn't what Romans 9 says.

[6 : 49] What is the determining factor? Here in this chapter. And it is God's sovereign choice. Not all Israel were God's people.

But only those in God are chosen freely and sovereignly. There's two examples. Firstly in verse 7. It speaks about Isaac. And not all are children of Abraham.

Because they are his offspring. But through Isaac shall your offspring be named. 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.

So this is what the promise said. About this time next year I will return and Sarah will have a son. The Jews have descended from Abraham. He's the father of the nation. And God's promised blessing to Abraham's descendants.

But do you remember Abraham had two sons. He had two sons. He had Ishmael and Isaac. And God said that his promise, blessing, would come to the descendants of only one of those sons.

[7 : 52] The descendants of Isaac. Why was that? Well it was simply because God had chosen Isaac and not Ishmael. It wasn't because of anything in those two boys.

It wasn't that Isaac had faith and Ishmael didn't have faith. It was purely because of God's will and God's choice. You might say if you know the story of a lay of different mothers. So maybe that was the difference.

That accounted for God's choosing the one and the other. But the second example in Romans 9 closes that loophole. Because Isaac's wife Rebecca gave birth to twins.

Look at verse 10. And not only so but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man. By one act of section. In Jesus' course that could be literally. Our forefather Isaac. Though they were not yet born and had done nothing.

Either good nor bad. In order that God's purpose of election might stand. Might continue. Not because of works but because of him who calls. He was told the older shall serve the younger. As it is written. Jacob have I loved and Esau I hated.

[8 : 52] Why did Jacob. He's a pretty dubious character. Why did he enjoy the blessings instead of Esau. Very simply because God chose Jacob.

And why. Not because there was any merit in Jacob. It says here that he chose him didn't it. Before they were born. Before they had done anything whether good or bad. Purely because of God's free and sovereign choice.

That God had chosen to set his love on Jacob. But he'd rejected Esau. Where it says that Esau have I hated.

That is the fourth of it. It's not talking about an emotion. It's talking about an action. That God rejected him. And God freely chooses people. According to his own purpose and will.

Ultimately the fact that some people. Are saved. And some are not. Comes down to God's sovereign choice. He has freely and sovereignly chosen to save some.

[9 : 53] And not others. Not because some are better. Not because some are kinder. Not because some have faith. But because of his own purpose.

And his own will. I don't know if you know this term. There's a term. It's a theological term. It's quite helpful. It's called unconditional election. Election meaning choice.

It's saying that before the foundation of the world. God selected out of the human race. Those whom he would redeem. And justify and glorify. Through Jesus Christ. And that divine choice.

Is an expression of God's free and sovereign grace. It is unconstrained. It is unconditional. It is not merited.

Now how does that make you feel? Let me say to you again. Romans 9. Let God be God. And if you are such a person.

[10 : 53] Whom God has chosen before the foundation of the world. Isn't that a great privilege? What does it do to you? It says it humbles you. And it makes you feel awe at the sovereign power of God.

Ours is a culture that tends to exalt what is human. And diminish what is divine. But unconditional election. The teaching of Romans 9. And puts God and us in his rightful place.

It lets God be God. Now I'm aware that it provokes a lot of questions. And as Paul taught this. In a number of places.

He had lots of objections. And he deals with two of them here. The first one is. It's not fair. It's not fair. Look at verse 14. What shall we say then?

Is there injustice in God's part? By no means. 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. It's very striking that Paul does not argue.

[11 : 56] That God sees into the future. And that he foresees. Who will have faith. And he chooses them on that basis. So it's fair. No. What Paul does.

Is all he does. Is reaffirms God's sovereign right. To freely choose. Then in verse 16. So it depends. Not on human will. Or exertion. But on God who has mercy.

It's saying. It's not some people. Who have chosen God. Or tried harder than other people. To seek God. But it is God. Who has freely chosen them. And such people. Will be marked out. By faith. But God's free choice.

Came before your faith. And caused that faith. Augustine very helpfully said. God does not choose us. Because we believe.

But that we may believe. Is that unfair. Well again. Remember the book of Romans. Romans chapter 1. Says. That all of humanity.

[12 : 55] Have known who God is. And yet they've suppressed that. And they've denied that. And they've rejected it. Romans chapter 3 says. All have sinned. And fallen short of the glory of God. And God would be perfectly just.

To condemn the whole human race. But that he does not. Is pure mercy. He's not being unjust. Second objection is.

But what about the rest? Well they receive justice. With verse 17. For the scripture says. To Pharaoh. For this very purpose.

I've raised you up. That I may show my power in you. And that my name might be proclaimed. In all the earth. So then he has mercy. On whom he has mercy. But he has. Whoever he wills.

It's an example of Pharaoh. Isn't it? In Exodus chapter 7. Isn't it unfair? Absolutely not. Pharaoh by this stage. Is worshipping false gods. In Exodus. And idols.

[13 : 55] He's already oppressing. In the people of God. And God's hardening. The heart of Pharaoh. That is God's. Just judgment. On him. We came up against this.

In Romans chapter 1. That when we give up. On God. When we reject. The one true God. God gives up on us. And he rejects us. And their hearts.

Are hardened against him. And their guilt is magnified. Is that just? Yes. It's perfectly just. No one will say to God. I'm getting a raw deal. God is perfectly just.

In showing mercy. To some. And not to others. Let God. Be God. One writer has said. God does not treat.

Everybody equally. But he does treat. Everyone. Justly. God has mercy. On whoever he wills. And he hardens.

[14 : 52] Whoever he wills. And in doing so. He is perfectly just. Here's another big objection. It's not my fault. It's not my fault. I don't believe.

Because God hasn't chosen me. And verse 19. Picks that up. You will say to me then. Why does he still file fault?

Because so can resist his will. Nothing I can do about it. Verse 20. But who are you. Oh man. To talk back to God. Will what is molded. Say to his molder. Why have you made me like this? Does the potter know.

Right over the clay. To make out of the same lump. One vessel for honourable use. And another to dishonourable use. That's not saying. That you are not allowed. To ask questions. About predestination. If you come up to me afterwards.

And ask me something. And I say. Who are you. Oh man. That's not right. But just think about the potter. For a moment. He takes a lump of clay. And out of that piece of clay.

[15 : 45] He makes a cup. And out of another piece of clay. He makes a doorstep. That's right. Isn't it? He's able to do that. And our culture has little respect for authority.

And anyone is seen as being fair game. Just look at the headlines today. MPs. Donald Trump. Banking chiefs sometimes.

Isn't it? It's power to the people. But you must not treat God like that. God is not some MP. He's not even the President of the United States. He's not some banker. He is the sovereign God who made you.

Look at verse 22. What if God desiring to show his wrath. And to make known his power. Has endured with much patience. Vessels of wrath. Prepared for destruction. In order to make known the riches of his glory.

For vessels of mercy. Which he's prepared. Beforehand for glory. What those verses are saying. Is that God has the right to do that. Does that mean equally.

[16 : 42] That some are predestined for salvation. And others are predestined. In eternity for destruction. In the same way. Well I think there is a distinction.

Election is God's eternal decision. To save some people. Reprobation is God's eternal decision. To leave some people in their sins.

To get the justice that they deserve. They are not identical. And yet God is involved in both. Why doesn't God just save everybody you ask.

He could do it. Why doesn't he do it. Well I think the answer is there. In verses 22 and 23 again. Which speak of God's desire. To show his wrath.

That they will make known his power. And his glory. And his mercy. And he does that. In verse 23. That he might make known. The riches of his glory.

[17 : 41] For vessels of mercy. Which he's prepared. Before their glory. It's very difficult for us to accept. Isn't it? But there will come a day. When all will speak.

For God's glory. And that every part of our lives. Is right and wrong. And all that God has done. Will be for his glory. But it's particularly.

For the enjoyment of his elect people. From every nation. So look at verses 24 to 29. And they speak of God's people. And it says.

Even us. You and I. We as called. Not from the Jews. But also from the Gentiles. As indeed. He says in Hosea. That God has chosen.

Some Gentiles. As Hosea prophesied. In verses 25 to 27. And in verses 28 to 29. You'll see. That he's chosen from Israel. A remnant. Who shall be saved. Now I've tried to go quickly.

[18 : 39] And carefully. Through the passage. Because I don't want you to think. This is my framework. This is some kind of. Presbyterian monopoly. That we've got. We're playing. But there's something. That you need to know. You need to know.

That chapters 9 to 11. Hang together. And they are dealing. With the question. Of the unbelief. Of Israel. And the whole section. Ends in chapter 11. Verses 33 to 36.

Let me read to you. Verse 33. For the depth. Of the riches. And the wisdom. And the knowledge of God. How unsearchable. Are his judgments. And how inscrutable. His ways. Verse 36.

For from him. And through him. And to him. Are all things. To him be the glory. Forever. Amen. And that is the right response. It's the bow down.

In worship. It's to be amazed. And to be awestruck. At God. That the all powerful. Sovereign God. Is at work. To display his glory. In the lives.

[19 : 31] Whom he has freely chosen. And in the judgment. Of everyone else. And we worship the God. Who is really there. And who is not one.

We've invented ourselves. And that will inevitably involve. An element of mystery. So there will be things. That you and I. Are not able to fathom. That is what. Chapter 11.

In verse 33. Says. How unsearchable. Are his judgments. How unscrutable. His ways. Things like. Divine. Sovereignty.

And human. Responsibility. How did the two. Go together. And this is not something. We can fully fathom. But the Bible affirms. That you have to believe. Both. Fervently.

Even as we acknowledge. The mystery. Of how both can be true. At the same time. That should shape. Our relationships. With one another. And so what effect. Should this have. It should have the effect.

[20 : 28] Of harmony. In church life. In the church at Rome. We see that there was. Frictions. Between Jews and Gentiles. And one reason. That he writes. Is to promote harmony. In the church. And chapter 9 to 11.

Is really the key section. Of that. God's people. Comprised. Jews and Gentiles. There's no room. For looking down. On the other group. There's no room.

In that. For church life. For one super group. And another. Not so super group. God's.

Unconditional. Election. Is the great leveler. In church life.

There is no merit. In yourself. We are all. From the same. Lump of clay. It's the greatest. It's the greatest. Irony. Isn't it. In the history. Of the Christian church. That Romans 9.

Was written. With the express purpose. Of promoting harmony. And Romans 9. Has been the greatest. Cause of division. A truth. That should unite. God's people. Has ended. Ended up.

[21 : 22] Dividing God's people. And lastly. The third effect. That this should have. This teaching. In Romans 9. Is it should. Be comfort. It should comfort you.

It is something. To embrace. And to enjoy. And savour. That God has chosen me. For no merit. In me. And it gives me. Security. And encouragement. And if salvation.

Was dependent. On my free will. I'd be constantly. Fearful. I have read. Numerous commentaries. On Romans 9. I think Romans 9. Should not really. Be illustrated. There are some. Horrific illustrations. Of election. Out there. I'm going to give you one. And I don't even think. It sounds good. On the day. That I asked Claire.

To marry me. And I said. Will you marry me. On bended knee. She did not say. What about all these.

[22 : 20] Other women. She didn't say. What about her over there. Why not her. She said. I'm the most. Thankful woman. In the world.

She said yes. And that is how. We approach elections. The Christian. Approaches election. Realises. Why your God. Such love to me.

I think. Understanding Romans 9. Goes something like this. I don't like it. So I don't believe it. And then we move to.

I believe it. But I don't like it. And then over time. As we reflect. On the doctrine of election. And the graciousness of God. We say. I believe it. And I love it.

And I need it. And I've got no hope without it. Martin Luther talks about this passage. And he speaks of the comfortable certainty. It's that wonderful. Comfortable certainty.

[23 : 18] And as we understand this. Let me tell you what the effect of election. Should be. The effect of election. Should go hand in hand. With a concern for the lost. And that's where we started.

Isn't it? Do you remember? Romans chapter 9. We do not know. Who God's elect people are. On Ealing Broadway. They haven't got a sign. We don't know who they are. And so we passionately. Declare the good news to people. As Paul says. In 2 Timothy chapter 2. We endure all things. For the sake of the elect. And as we preach. We know. And as we tell the gospel. We know that God is calling out. A people for himself. And it may just well be. That this lunch time. You find yourself. Being drawn. To the Lord Jesus Christ. And if that's you. Soften your heart. And put your trust. In the Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 16] And let God be God. Let's pray.