

# “Mystery and Assurance” //

## Romans 9:1–29 // Romans #19

Yes, that is worth celebrating. **Brand new Christian who brings 3 people to Jesus.**

**Romans 9. You ready for this?** Okay, let's do it...

**As you turn there**, just a reminder that this upcoming week is one of my favorite weeks of the year—**Serve RDU Week**. Our goal is to get all 11K or so of us out into the community to see some parts of the city we may not always see--and then let the HS take over, putting in your heart a love for the people and a burden and for many of you a long-term calling to get engaged.

*Jesus loves us*, so we should love our neighbors.

**My family and I will be engaged in some of our neighborhood outreaches.** There's a ton of other options online at [serverdu.com](http://serverdu.com). **So, sign up now!**

**For those of you who like to wait** until the last minute, this your moment to shine!

**Romans 9 is one of the most mysterious and difficult chapters in the whole Bible.** *I've been nervous (and a little excited) about this one all week.*

**We just finished Romans 8, which many regard to be the most inspiring chapter in the Bible**--the one that everybody loves and memorizea. This is the chapter most people **would prefer to skip**:

- I'm surprised all of you are here today. Maybe you won't be next week.

- Honestly, it was hard to find good resources for this chapter. Most Bible teachers skip it. **I was tempted to.**

**But this is a crazy important chapter.** It is the most extensive discussion in Scripture of the tension between God's sovereignty and man's free will. Today you hear terms like Calvinism and predestination and Reformed theology. This **chapter deals** with those. **The central questions are: “How much is God actually in control of the details of history? Does he choose people for salvation, or do they choose it themselves?”**

**Whenever this topic comes up, people always immediately want to know**, “Pastor J.D., what side of this debate are you on?”

And **honestly, I take it as a little bit of a compliment when people don't know**. You see, I believe the Bible maintains a tension between these two, and so, when I am dealing with a text of Scripture that emphasizes **God's sovereignty**, I want to sound like a Calvinist.

**But when I am preaching those parts that emphasize our responsibility to choose**, and why our praying and sharing Christ makes a difference in the eternities of others, I want to **sound like a non-Calvinist**.

**And I'm perfectly ok if that creates an unresolved tension in my preaching.** I determined a long time ago that I'd rather get to heaven and hear God say “*You know what? You preached my word a **little too literally**”* than to hear him say, “Son, why did you ignore or explain away those passages that didn't fit with your theories?”

**Listen, I know Scripture and God never contradict themselves**, but that doesn't mean you and I have the capacity to resolve it all in our **relatively-tiny-little** minds. **After all, we're talking about the ways of God!** We should expect some mystery.

- **I mean, if things like ‘quantum physics’ and ‘chaos theory’ in mathematics have taught us anything**, it is that apparent

contradictions are often resolved by expanded knowledge into dimensions we haven't known about yet.

- And, of course, **if that's true** in the natural world, how much more should we expect it with the supernatural?

**Whenever I get into this, I remember the words my dad gave me when I first** came home from college with all these questions about God's sovereignty. My dad listened patiently, and said, *"Son, people a lot smarter than you have been wrestling with this for 2000 years and they haven't figured it out yet. I doubt you're going to be the guy to do it. Just preach Jesus."* **And that's what I have been trying to do.**

(BTW, so you know my background: I wasn't raised Reformed. In fact, **the Christian school I grew up in** was fiercely non-Calvinist. We loved the "whosoever will" passages. And why the world's salvation was all up to us. And why no true Christian would ever drink, play cards, get a tattoo or go to the movies. I'm grateful for many things I learned there. Some I've left behind but...

**And then, in God's sense of humor he led me to fall in love with a beautiful Presbyterian girl**--and Presbyterians tend to emphasize those passages about God's sovereignty. She had a class on the 5 points. I joked with her that in her nursery growing up they played nursery games like / you have decided

**And then we got married** (and yes, I'm talking about the girl I married). **You say, "What was that marriage like?"** A legalistic, we-gotta-save-the-world independent Baptist, and a free-in-Christ, frozen-chosen Presbyterian. I always say I baptized her, made her quit drinking, and consented to the fact that it was all predestined to happen. That was our compromise.

**Well, just like our marriage, I consider my own theological approach a blending of two perspectives:** When I get to the passages that emphasize our responsibility to choose, I am going to preach them just like they are written; **and when I get to the ones**

**that emphasize God's sovereignty**, I'm going to preach those like they are written, too.

And **maybe you are smart enough** to figure out how it all works together. Bully for you. I'll let God sort it out for me one day.

*But here's **what all of us need to understand: Romans 9 is in our Bibles for a reason**. It is no accident that Paul includes this **discussion** about God's sovereignty immediately after his triumphal declarations in chapter 8 about God's unwavering commitment to fulfill his purposes in our lives.*

***How can we be sure that what God has started in us he'll actually finish?*** (How do we know someone else or even we won't mess it up)

You see, **as Paul says in chapter 8:** *"Those he foreknew, those he predestined..." he hears in his head an objection* (as he has so often throughout this letter), where someone says, ***"Wait, wait a minute there, Paul. What about the Jews? They were chosen by God--and clearly they have fallen away. They rejected Jesus!"***

**So, that's the question he starts answering in chapter 9:** *Why did the Jews reject Jesus? And, if God failed with them, how do we know he won't fail with us also?*

**(In the first 3 verses, which we are going to mostly skip and come back to later,** Paul makes clear this is not an academic or philosophical question for him. He says that **if he could**, he would give up his salvation if it meant his fellow Jewish countrymen might be saved. He loves these people--they are his friends and family. These are not the philosophical speculations of a seminary student. It's **deeply personal** to him. (Again, we'll come back to those verses later).

In vv. 4–5, Paul *acknowledges* and laments the fact that Israel, of call people, should have believed. He identifies **several spiritual privileges** Israel had that no one else had.

- God adopted Israel and only Israel to himself through the Exodus, Paul says, bringing them out of slavery with a mighty hand. He did that for no other nation.
- From that point on, Israel experienced miracles, manifestations of God, and foreshadowings of the gospel that no other nation got to see.
- Through Moses, Israel was entrusted with God's law, the best reflection of his nature back then.
- They hosted the Temple, where God himself dwelt and that had all these pictures in it of how salvation worked
- Every single one of the prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah were Jews, and when Jesus finally came, he was born as a Jew and he lived exclusively in Israel.
- **Of all people, Paul says**, the Jews should have recognized Jesus when he came.
- **They were a people of spiritual privilege.**

**So, what happened? And, more importantly:** *How was this not a failure of God's purposes? And if he failed then, how can we be sure God will do any better with us?*

**Paul breaks this down into 4 questions.** Paul breaks the passage down into answers to these 4 questions. **We're going to walk through it, and then I'm going to offer you some conclusions:**<sup>1</sup>

**Question 1 (9:6–13): Has God failed to keep his promises? NO!**

**And here's why.** In vs. 6, Paul explains that not every Jew born in racial Israel was a member of the true Israel.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Tim Keller, *Romans 8–16 for You*

From the beginning, being a true Jew was a matter of the heart and not something of the flesh. **6 Now it is not as though the word of God has failed, because not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.** **7 Neither are all of Abraham's children his descendants.**

**That** means even in the Old Testament there was a distinction between Jews who were so only by heritage and those who embraced Abraham's faith from the heart.

- The **covenant God had with Israel**, Paul says, was never about ethnic identity. It was about personal trust in his promises.
- **(Do you remember how he had explained** in chapter 2 **that the true circumcision**, was not the cutting away of skin on your physical body; it is the cutting away of spiritual deadness from your heart?<sup>2</sup> The real circumcision was a **circumcision of the heart**, and not everyone experienced that. )

**Paul uses two examples:**

- **Vs. 9: Abraham had two sons:** Isaac and Ishmael. Isaac represents the son who embraces the promise; Ishmael represents the other son of Abraham who rejects it. **All of Abraham's descendants fit into those two categories:** promise-embracers and promise-rejecters.
- **Perhaps even more clearly (vs. 13), Isaac himself had two sons:** one was **Jacob** who, though he had a pretty rough past and was by all estimations a sleezebag--embraced God's promises. **The other was Esau**, who traded his stake in God's promise for a bowl of soup. The NT that **Esau represents those Jews** who inwardly trade obedience to God's promise for indulging the lusts of their flesh.<sup>3</sup>

**Those two kinds of people always existed in Israel. God never had a relationship with the Ishmaels and Esaus.**

<sup>2</sup> Romans 2:28–29; Cf. Ezekiel 11:19; Jer 31:33; Deut 10:16

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Hebrews 12:15–17

So, Paul says, **you can't say that the Jews' rejection of Jesus** is evidence that God sometimes loses the sons and daughters he foreknew and predestined. He never knew them. **And you can see that in the OT.**

## Question 2 (9:14–18): Is God unfair in how he dispenses mercy? NO!

14 What should we say then? Is there injustice with God? Absolutely not! 15 For he tells Moses, I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

The question here is whether God somehow did something **wrong** by only showing mercy to Jacob and foreknowing him (and not doing the same Esau).

But the *definition* of mercy, Paul explains, **excludes** any sense of obligation. The *definition* of mercy is receiving something that you do not deserve. **If you deserved it**, it would not be “mercy,” that would be justice.

And so, if **God doesn't owe anyone mercy**, you can't say it is unfair for him not to show it to someone.

### Paul's reasoning goes like this:

- **Are you saying that God owes someone salvation?** No, of course not!
- **And if he owes no one salvation**, then **he is free to give** it to (a) **all**, (b) **some**, or (c) **none**.<sup>4</sup> *Right? It's his choice.*
- In fact, “*God would have done us no injustice by leaving us all to perish.*”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> TK, *Romans For You*, 64.

<sup>5</sup> *Canons of the Synod of Dort*.

- **What was fair is that all of us** be left in the condemnation we had chosen for ourselves. (That was **Rom 1–3**)
- The fact that any of us know him **is sheer grace**.
- So, **Paul is saying**, let's make sure we are seeing things correctly here.

**John Stott** summarizes it this way: “Paul's way of defending God's justice is to proclaim his mercy. That may seem backward to us, but it is not. Paul is indicating that the question itself is misconceived, because the basis on which God deals savingly with sinners is not justice but mercy.”<sup>6</sup>

But still, you ask, **why does God choose some and not others?**

Paul explains in vs. 16, “*Well, first, realize that it had nothing to do with our inner goodness or how much we deserved it.*” 16 So then, it **does not depend on human will or effort but on God who shows mercy**.

- That means God didn't look down and say, ‘Oh, this person... they deserve it more. *I'll give it to them.*’
- ‘They were more sincere.’
- ‘They have more potential.’
- ‘Oh, you know, they just got dealt a bad hand.’

**None of us deserved it more than anyone else.** His choice to bestow it was **undeserved grace** from top to bottom.

**This does not mean, however, that God's choices are arbitrary**, as if he chooses people by going “**eeny, meeny, miney, moe.**”

Paul never says that God has **NO reasons** for his choosing, just that the reasons for his choosing do not correspond to goodness in us. ‘*Believers thus can feel no superiority over unbelievers.*’<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 268–69.

<sup>7</sup> TK, *Romans 8–16 for You*, 62

In vs. 17, Paul gives you a hint at God's reasons (it's not a full answer, just a hint)

He says that God's *not* choosing of Pharaoh was so that through Pharaoh's resistance God could put his power & glory on display:

- (Pharaoh was the one, you may recall, who rejected God's command to let the children of Israel go and set himself up as the enemy of the people of God.)

17 "For the Scripture tells Pharaoh, I raised you up for this reason so that I may display my power in you and that my name may be proclaimed in the whole earth."

- IOW, Pharaoh's hardness of heart gave God an opportunity to show his power over wickedness and his loving commitment to saving his children that he wouldn't have had without it.

That leads to...

Question 3 (9:19–29): Is God unjust in holding us accountable? NO!

19 You will say to me, therefore, "Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?"

If Pharaoh is just playing the role he is supposed to play, how can he be held accountable for that?

For many of you, this is your question: "If God is the one who is in control of who hears and believes, how can he condemn those who are simply playing the role he has assigned them to play?"

Good news, friend: If you think that, you're in good company. Paul knew you are thinking that.

Paul's first answer to this is to show you that God's rejection of Pharaoh was consistent with Pharaoh's own choices. In fact, here's the key question: **Who rejected whom FIRST?** Did Pharaoh reject God first or did God reject Pharaoh?

Scripture does indeed say that "God hardened Pharaoh's heart to resist his message."

But! That statement comes only after the 6th plague.<sup>8</sup> After the first 5 plagues it says "Pharaoh hardened his own heart. (Exodus 8:13)"<sup>9</sup>

- **IOW, God's** hardening of Pharaoh's heart is after Pharaoh does it to himself 5 times!
- **The point is:** God is not to blame for Pharaoh's hard heart; Pharaoh is.<sup>10</sup>

Someone's rejection of God is always presented this way. **When Jesus lamented the Jews' rejection** of him in Matthew 23, for e.g.:

- **Mt 23:37** "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." Not, I was not willing" but "**you** were not willing."

I know this might hurt your head a little, but **C.S. Lewis correctly said** that hell is always a door first locked from the inside.<sup>11</sup>

IOW, **it's true that if anyone is saved**, the credit is God's alone, but if anyone is lost, the blame is all theirs!<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Exodus 9:12

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Exodus 8:15; 8:32; 9:34

<sup>10</sup> <https://thebibleproject.com/blog/pharaohs-heart-grew-harder/>

<sup>11</sup> John Stott said if anyone is saved, the credit is God's alone, but if anyone is lost, the blame is all theirs!

<sup>12</sup> If anybody is lost, the blame is theirs. If anybody is saved, the credit is God's. This (is) a mystery which our present knowledge cannot solve, but it is consistent with Scripture, history, and our own experience." John Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 270. Lightly edited for understandability.

**The late D. James Kennedy (a Presbyterian)** uses a really helpful **illustration**: “Say you have 5 people planning to hold up a bank. They are friends of mine. Well, I find out about it and I plead with them not to do it. I beg them. Finally they push me out of the way and head out. I tackle the weakest looking one and wrestle him to the ground. The others go ahead, rob the bank, in the process kill a guard and 2 civilians. They are **captured, convicted, and sentenced** to life in prison. But the one man who was not involved in the robbery goes free.

Now I ask you this question: Whose fault was it that the other men were arrested and sentenced? Can they blame you?

And this other man who is walking around free—can he say, ‘Because my heart is so good and resisted the temptation, I am free?’

No, the only reason that he is free is because of me. I restrained him.

So it is that those who go to hell have no one to blame but themselves. Those who go to heaven have no one to praise but Jesus Christ. Thus we see that salvation is all of grace from its beginning to its end.”<sup>13</sup>

#### **Question 4 (9:20–23): Is God’s choice to save only some inconsistent with his goodness? NO!**

This the other big one. Honestly, where I have most struggled.

**Paul hears in his mind the objection** that a “good God” would save everybody. **Why would God let anybody perish?**

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<sup>13</sup> D. James Kennedy, *Truths That Transform*, 39–40

Paul’s answer: **20 But who are you, a mere man, to talk back to God? Will what is formed say to the one who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?”** (Keep in mind, Paul has already established that sin was not God’s choice, but ours.) **21 Or has the potter no right over the clay, to make from the same lump one piece of pottery for honor and another for dishonor?**

If God uses your own **free choices** to reject him to set up a display of his glory, can any of us accuse him of injustice?

And, if you say, “A **good** God would have had different plans for his creation.” Paul says, “Really? You think you are as wise and smart as God?”

**22 What if God, wanting to display his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much patience objects of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And what if he did this to make known the riches of his glory on objects of mercy that he prepared beforehand for glory?**

**Here’s a tough truth:** The ultimate end that God pursues in all things, including our salvation, is his glory.

**Tim Keller** says this: “If God had mercy on all or condemned all, we would not see his glory. I don’t think Paul is giving us much more than a hint here, but it is a very suggestive hint. For the biggest question is: If God could save everyone, why doesn’t he? And here Paul seems to say that God’s chosen course (to save some and leave others) will in the end be more fit to show forth God’s glory than any other scheme we can imagine.”<sup>14</sup>

**Honestly, that’s hard to wrestle with.** And that’s because we’re used to thinking of ourselves and our interests as the most important element in the universe.

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<sup>14</sup> TK, 68.



**But we are not.** God's glory is. (Take a clue from the structure of the universe itself. **The human race is just fragile organism** on a tiny speck of dust in a remote corner of a medium-sized, backwoods galaxy that is but one of billions of such galaxies. **God is the center of it all.**

- **Go outside at night and look up:** the whole creation is designed to scream at you, "You're not the point!"

**The exaltation of his glory is the greatest good** in the universe. And that might offend us in a culture who grew up thinking we're the point of it all, we're special, unique, snowflakes, but it is true.

**I am tempted here to stop and build a case** for why God making the pursuit of his glory his central objective is actually the **most loving thing** he could for us, but that's another sermon for another day.

- For now, I'll just **try to explain it with one quick word-picture I use a lot:**
  - Astronomists say it is a **good thing for us** that the sun, not the earth, is the center of the solar system. If **the earth were at the center**, it would never have the gravitational ability to hold the rest of the solar system in orbit and we'd all die.
  - **Because the sun is 30,000x bigger than the earth**, and because it is an independent source of heat and light, it can sustain an orderly solar system that enables us to have life.
  - **So, if the sun were a person**, the most loving thing the sun could do would be to keep itself at the center.
  - **And so it is** with us and God. If God is the pinnacle of joy, then having him at the center, recognized for his worth and importance, is the most loving thing he can do for us.

**In vs. 25, Paul pulls back the curtain a little farther and shows us how God actually had a merciful, good purpose in allowing Israel to reject him.** Israel's rejection of the Messiah, he explains, allowed us Gentiles ("Gentiles" meant all non-Jews) to find him.

**He quotes Hosea's prediction of God opening** up the door of salvation to the Gentiles through the rejection of the Jews: **25 As it also says in Hosea, I will call Not My People, My People, and she who is Unloved, Beloved. 26 And it will be in the place where they were told, you are not my people, there they will be called sons of the living God.** (That was us--in all the places our ancestors were living)

**Because Israel rejected Jesus, a lot us Gentiles** were able to find him as Savior. **That means that even Israel's rejection** of Jesus ultimately **served a larger**, better purpose: the inclusion of the Gentiles! **One day we'll see** that all God's actions had a good end. (Paul is **going to build on this idea in chapter 11:** he just introduces it here.)

**So, the question we started with: Why did Israel reject Jesus and was that a failure on God's part?** No, and God was not wrong to let it happen or to hold those who rejected him accountable.

**So, why then did Israel reject him?** Notice: Paul's **answer, vs. 31:** They rejected him because they wouldn't humble themselves before the gospel: **31 But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not achieved the righteousness of the law. 32 Why is that? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.**

**His answer is not, "They rejected Jesus because God appointed it."** They rejected him because they **wouldn't humble themselves** and accept the gospel.

- **They wouldn't accept that salvation could only be by grace through faith** and not because of their goodness or efforts.
- **That was the big, sticking point:** Jesus didn't show up saying that he was here to reward them for their goodness. **He showed up saying that they, and all of us**, had no goodness and could be saved only by an act of free unearned grace.

- **And they wouldn't humble themselves to admit**, "Unless you show mercy to me for reasons that have nothing to do with my goodness, I can never be saved."
- So, they rejected him.
- (And lest you say, 'See, the Jews of that day were especially bad.' You've missed the whole point of Romans: **all of us would reject Jesus unless God gave us the insight to see.**

Let me draw a few conclusions (the 'so what')

### 1. We can't escape the sovereignty of God in salvation

- **Some Christians, who deeply love and believe the Bible**, will say, "*Well, I get the logic of what you're saying. But I just can't accept that God would leave some to perish. In my view, God must always be doing everything he can to save everybody.*"
- **Yes, but realize that at some point you have to acknowledge something of God's sovereignty** in salvation, right?
  - **Remember how Jesus appeared to Paul in Acts 9?** He reveals himself in incredible glory and says "I am Jesus. Follow me." **Why not do that daily? To everyone?** I mean, **he's God, right?** He writes the rules. He could if he wanted to.
- Some have tried to alleviate the difficulties of God choosing some for salvation by saying that **in Romans 9 Paul is only talking about** is "national" election. As in, **God first chose Israel; now he's chosen the Gentiles.** But he doesn't choose individual people within those groups--he let's them decide for themselves.
- **But honestly, does that really help?** I mean,
  - Why didn't God elect more nations? Why not reveal the Bible equally to everybody at the same time?
  - Why only choose the Jews?"
  - *Why make the church, that is so consistently unreliable, the only vehicle for gospel proclamation?*
  - Why not send a **band of angels?**

- Why not **come as a 900 foot version of himself** and stand on Ellis Island and give his own invitation on CNN tonight? **I feel like that would be compelling.**
- You see, this approach just kicks the can down the road.
- **At some point all of us have to admit: In our view, God could be doing more to get the gospel to people if that was his only objective.**
- **So, even if it is only a national election** (and I don't believe it is), **the point Paul is making is the same: *Giving mercy is God's free prerogative--and he owes it to no one.***<sup>15</sup>

### 2. This truth forces us to wrestle with whether or not we really see ourselves as truly unworthy of the gospel

- **Karl Barth** said of this passage, "**The more a man finds these texts to be harsh, the more he is wedded to his own righteousness.**"
- **Do you deep down believe that God owes you salvation?** That you don't deserve condemnation and hell?
- The **reason we have a problem with other people** getting condemnation is that deep down we don't believe we are worthy of condemnation.
- **Scripture's testimony is that you and I are worthy--genuinely worthy--to be condemned forever.**
- **Do you believe that?** If so, you will have less trouble with this truth.

### 3. Don't be silly and suppose that you would be more merciful than God

- **And I say that because some of you say in your heart**, "Well, if I were in charge, I'd do things differently."
- **But any time in Scripture God's mercy** is contrasted to ours, God comes out favorably. Every. Single. Time.

<sup>15</sup> That's why I agree with the *Believer's Study Bible*, ed. Paige Patterson, that "The primary application is Israel, but can also be applied to individual election."



- When the **human race had kicked God** off his throne, he responded by laying down his life. When someone cuts you off in traffic you fantasize about ramming them with your car.
- **David recognized this. When he faced** a judgment for his sin, he said: **“Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into human hands.”** 2 Sam 24:14
- The **only reason we’d think we’d do it in a way kinder and better** than God is because we don’t see things clearly.
- That’s why Paul says in vs. 20, “Do you, the created thing, really **think you’re in a place lecture the Creator** about true goodness and love?
  - **Where did you even learn** about goodness and love? Wasn’t it from the Creator?
  - The created thing can’t say to the Creator: I’d be better than you!”
- **Let me remind you of what I’ve explained to you before: Think about how much power it took to create our Universe.** We say God is infinite in power. If God is infinite in power, and infinite in goodness, should we not suppose that he is also infinite in wisdom? **And, here’s the question:** if his wisdom is as high above ours as his power is above ours, should it surprise us that there is a lot about the wisdom of his ways we can’t grasp yet?”
  - **Illus. Documentary on nuclear fusion.** Sun burns at 27 million degrees. Can’t get my mind around that. God spoke that into existence. I can produce 98.6 degrees... or if I’m cold, I can rub my hands together and generate another 5–6. Light me on fire and I might get to 250?
  - If God’s wisdom is as high...
- **The ways of God seem confusing to us now, but** I can assure you (using the words of J. Oswald Sanders) “What will amaze us as we look backwards from eternity is not the severity of God’s justice but the greatness of his mercy.”
- **Here’s how I know that: The Apostle Peter says that** what boggles the mind of the angels is the extravagance of God’s mercy. Not the severity of his judgment, but the extravagance of

his mercy. They see everything, and that’s what blows their mind. That’s what we’ll be like one day.

#### 4. This truth should destroy any last vestiges of pride in us

- You are saved **NOT** because God saw a goodness in you that was worth saving.
  - You didn’t have a **little good left in you**--like Luke saw in his father Darth Vader. (*Sorry, spoiler alert!*)
  - You didn’t have **some good potential**--some **natural ability**--that God could work with if he could just get you back into his spiritual gym.
  - You **weren’t like the guy in Princess Bride** who was only “mostly dead,” with a little life left in you that God could fan back into flame.
- **You were dead.** Utterly and totally spiritually dead.
- **Remember Romans 3:10? There are how many righteous?** No not one. How many who naturally sought after God? No, not one.
- This is hard to admit, and where many people stumble: **The human heart, apart from the grace of God is so wicked and so hard**, it takes a miracle to open it.
- It takes a **MIRACLE** to **make the blind see**, a miracle to make the **lame walk**; a miracle to **make the dead** walk out of that grave.

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature’s night;  
thine eye diffused a quickening ray; I rose, the dungeon flamed  
with light!*

#### That destroys my pride!

*You see, Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, then grace my fears relieved.*

It is God who works in me both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

From **the start to the finish**, and at **every place in the middle**, salvation is all, totally, 100%, of God.

Where is **pride** in this scenario? *My richest gain, I count...*

#### 5. We must not let limitations in our ability to understand God's sovereignty keep us from obeying God's clear commands

- (These get a little more into what we'll get in chapter 10, but let me address it briefly here so I don't get 10K emails this week)
- You say, "Well, if God has **chosen some for salvation** and determined to save them, what purpose is there in me sharing Christ?"
- **I understand the question.** But Paul never uses these truths to reduce human agency in bringing these things about.
- In fact, **he explains that only through** our efforts do things change. **Prayer really moves the hand** of God. Sharing Christ, sending missionaries--makes an actual difference in the eternities of others.
- Over the years here, I've used a quote I found by **A.A. Hodge**: "Does God know the day you'll die? Yes. Has he appointed that day? Yes. Can you do anything to change that day? No. Then why do you eat? To live. What happens if you don't eat? You die. Then if you don't eat, and die, then would that be the day that God had appointed for you to die? ...Quit asking stupid questions and just eat. Eating is the pre-ordained way God has appointed for living."  
A.A. Hodge
- **How it works together I don't know.** All I know is the more I share Christ, the more I find that people keep getting elected!
- **Friend, listen:** It is not on you to figure out the ways of God. It is **on you to obey**.
- It is arrogance and presumption to sit around **speculating** on the sovereignty of God when simple obedience is commanded.
- When I get a **19-page email from a seminary student** wanting to argue with me about these things, I always want to email back and say, "Who have you told about Jesus this week?"
- **Stop philosophizing** and start obeying!

#### 6. This truth emboldens us to share with even the least likely

- This truth shows you that God can save anybody, and he often will save the most difficult as a display of his glory!
- He's told you what his motive (and his game plan) is--to save the least likely as a testimony of his grace!
- **Some of you have someone** in your life you think will never believe--**some of you have someone who is just ridiculous**--keep praying and keep sharing. God just might use that to display the greatness and glory of his grace. **Used to be ridiculous?**
  - **One of our worship pastors...** showing off
- **For those serving among difficult nations**--God has promised to save some from every nation, and he can fulfill that promise. Keep sharing!
- **I've often said that serving in a difficult place is like that WOODPECKER**
- Boldly share! Saving them is not on you, it's on him.
- He's going to save people from Sudan, Indonesia, China, Saudi Arabia... Hollywood, Republicans, Democrats.
- You just put it out there and let God do what he's going to do
- How God sometimes uses me when I don't do well...

#### Finally, 7. This truth is the source of our assurance

**This is where we started:** I can be confident that the God who sought me and bought me and clothed me with his goodness when I had none of my own **is the God who will never** let me go.

Let me close this message on Romans 9 **with a letter we got from one of our members after their small group worked through Romans 9. It's perfect.**

*I grew up in a dysfunctional, non-Christian home. Neither of my parents were capable of expressing love, and my father was always*

angry and disgusted with us, his children. When I came to Christ at age eighteen the scars from my childhood were deep.

One night, as a teenager, I was laying awake struggling and crying out to God. I became fixated on a question which I prayed to God: "Why did you save me?" I did not understand myself well enough to know why that question seemed so important.

I struggled and wept and cried that question out to God, and suddenly God answered me in a way that was nearly audible: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion (that quote from Romans 9)." I didn't understand what that meant then, but I vividly remember the experience.

[In the church I grew up in, 'Get your act together' and I lived in a constant fear of not performing well enough.]

[But then I began coming to the Summit and heard the gospel.]

I can now see that what I wanted to hear when asking crying out to God asking him, "Why did you save me?" was that he saw something good in me. I wanted him to say he was proud of me. I wanted to give me some sense that I was worthy of his love.

**But now I see this question as a spiritual trap.** No matter what good qualities God might see in me, they are all tainted with sin, selfishness and rebellion. Any reason which he might have given (as a reason to save me) would have ultimately become the reason I lost my salvation, since I could never be good enough, consistently enough to deserve his love

So, instead he said: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." And **now I understand** that God was telling the love he gave to me was not a love that could be lost by my failures. The love he has for me originates in his character, not mine.

When God showed me this, it was like a burden fell off my back. I am free to know his love and to trust him in everything. I know that I am secure in his hands. God would not send his son to die for me so that I might ultimately be lost. What he began, he will complete. The salvation and purposes of Jesus Christ cannot be corrupted.

I know there are some who are confused or uncertain about Romans 9, but for me it is a tremendous comfort.

**THAT is what Romans 9 is supposed to do.**

## Heads Bowed / Invitation:

**Friend, here is what I know:** Salvation is offered to you, right now, if you will receive it. And I know that it's in your power to choose! I know that because Jesus said, "Whosoever will may come!" He wouldn't invite you if he didn't mean it. Do you sense that now? That you need to be saved?

You are being drawn now!

- You think it's an accident you got invited by that co-worker?
- That all these things have been happening in your life?

(Stop thinking it can't be you! That's why Paul brings up Hosea. Do you Hosea's story? Hosea's wife had left him and cheated on him not once but twice. Who would take her back? God would. He'll take you.) God can and will save anyone who comes to him through the door he's opened!



# Bullpen:

- My wife said that at her youth group meetings they studied the 5 points. We didn't do that at mine.
- I asked her if at her youth camp they sang songs like "*You have decided* I'll follow Jesus." (On the playground **played games like...**)

## **Those who aren't saved have no one to blame but**

**themselves; those** who are saved have no one to thank but God.

Martin Luther pointed out that these concepts don't appear in Romans 1, because this is not the starting point of theology. It's not "the gospel," as some people like to say. Paul brings in these concepts to explain why the promises in Romans 8 are dependable ones.

John Stott said if anyone is saved, the credit is God's alone, but if anyone is lost, the blame is all theirs!

**Question: Why will you miss the gospel?** Is it that same pride? A refusal to admit your need? A refusal to submit to his Lordship? A refusal to see your helplessness apart from God? Will you go bravely and defiantly and foolishly into that dark night of death from which you can never return?

## **You see (listen), i**

- John Calvin's favorite verse: **Deut 29:29** "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

Finally: **Salvation is offered to you, right now, if you will receive it.**

Here's what I know: it's in your power to choose! Whosoever will may come. He wouldn't invite you if he didn't mean it. Do you sense that now? That you need to be saved? And want to be saved? Stop thinking it can't be you! That's why Paul brings up Hosea. Do you know Hosea's story? Hosea's wife had left him and cheated on him not once but twice. Who would take her back? God does. The message is that God will save anyone who comes to him! He is able to save to the uttermost all who come!

since God is in charge of it all, it's not right for God to allow some to miss salvation. He could have worked it out where he saved everybody.

Well, again, first, Paul says no one is being forced against their will to reject God. All who reject God do so of their own choice.

Second, we saw that God is not obligated to show mercy. Mercy is undeserved, so God is free to give it to whomever he wants.

You don't know who God will save!

I grew up in a dysfunctional, non-Christian home. Neither of my parents were capable of expressing love, and my father was always angry and disgusted with us, his children. When I came to Christ at age eighteen the scars from my childhood were deep.

One night, as a teenager, I was laying awake struggling and crying out to God. I became fixated on a question which I prayed to God: "Why did You save me?" I did not understand myself well enough to know why that question seemed so important.

I struggled and wept and cried that question out to God, and suddenly God answered me in a way that was nearly audible: "***I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on***

***whom I have compassion.***" I didn't understand what that meant then, but I vividly remember the experience.

...

[And even after becoming a Christian, for years I was in a church where the main point was, 'Get your act together.' I lived in a constant fear of not performing well enough.]

[But then I began coming to the Summit and hearing the gospel.]

...

I can now see the real reason why I was crying out the question "why did You save me?" I wanted God to tell me that He loved me because He saw something good in me. I wanted my Father to tell me I was acceptable, a good son. I wanted to have some sense of being worthy of His love.

But now I see this question as a spiritual trap. I could never get the answer which I wanted to hear. No matter what qualities God might see in me, they are all tainted with sin, selfishness and rebellion. Anything which He might have said (as a reason to save me) would have ultimately become the reason to lose my salvation, since I could never perform well enough to deserve to be saved.

Instead He said: ***"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."***

Now I understand that God was telling me the kind intention of His love which could not be lost by my failures. I was not saved because of any good quality; I had no qualities good enough to earn salvation. Instead I was saved by His kindness, goodness and love alone. That love originates in His character, not in me.

When God showed me this, it was like a burden falling off my back. I am free to know His love, and to trust Him in everything. I know that I am secure in His hands. God would not send His son to die for me so that I might ultimately be lost. What He began, He will complete, and I can live fully accepted because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which cannot be corrupted.

I know there are some who are confused or uncertain about Romans 9, but for me it is a tremendous comfort.

- **Hudson Taylor (a man who believed in these things):** We have to do with One who is Lord of all power and might, whose arm is not shortened that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear; with One whose unchanging Word directs us to ask and receive that our joy may be full, to open our mouths wide, that He may fill them. And we do well to remember that this gracious God, who has condescended to place His almighty power at the command of believing prayer looks not lightly on the bloodguiltiness of those who neglect to avail themselves of it for the benefit of the perishing.

...I had no doubt but that if I prayed for fellow-workers, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they would be given. I had no doubt but that, in answer to such prayer, the means for our going forth would be provided, and that doors would be opened before us in unreached parts of the Empire... The sense of bloodguiltiness became more and more intense. Simply because I refused to ask for them, the laborers did not come forward, did not go out to China: and every day tens of thousands in that land were passing into Christless graves!

The fault is in us: Ezekiel 33:8, "If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand."... Meaning that though sinful men have no one to blame but themselves for rejecting God,



somehow I am also guilty of their blood because I COULD HAVE saved their lives but didn't. This verse implies that there are some that would have gotten saved had we gone that won't be because we didn't... so that's why there is blood on our hands.

So, Paul says: God doesn't owe anyone mercy. And his choice to withhold it is fully consistent with your choice to reject it.

- **Mt11:21** *“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.”* If regeneration precedes faith... Jesus would have had to say ... *“If these things were done in Tyre and Sidon they would have repented in dust and ashes, that is, of course, if I regenerated them. Without that, they would not have believed either... and, come to mention it, if I had regenerated you, then YOU also would have repented too, so this statement I'm making, theologically speaking, is only a clever tautology.”*
  - Why does God blame us? (v. 19)
  - Remember who you are: God has rights of ownership over us (vv. 20–21)
  - God could reject all, but he doesn't (vv. 22–23)
  - The OT predicted all this (vv. 24–29)
- ... **BUT because Israel rejected the way of salvation by faith alone (9:30–33)**
  - The Gentiles, who did not seek righteousness, have obtained it! (v. 30)
  - The Jews, who did seek righteousness, have not obtained it! (v. 31)
  - Why not? Because they pursued an impossible goal: righteousness by works (v. 32a)

- They were “scandalized”; their pride was offended by Christ and his salvation (vv. 32b–33)

### **Scripture:**

9:1 I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience testifies to me through the Holy Spirit— 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the benefit of my brothers and sisters, my own flesh and blood. 4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple service, and the promises. 5 The ancestors are theirs, and from them, by physical descent, came the Christ, who is God over all, praised forever. Amen.

6 Now it is not as though the word of God has failed, because not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Neither are all of Abraham's children his descendants. On the contrary, your offspring will be traced through Isaac. 8 That is, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but the children of the promise are considered to be the offspring. 9 For this is the statement of the promise: At this time I will come, and Sarah will have a son. 10 And not only that, but Rebekah conceived children through one man, our father Isaac. 11 For though her sons had not been born yet or done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to election might stand — 12 not from works but from the one who calls—she was told, The older will serve the younger. 13 As it is written: I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau.

14 What should we say then? Is there injustice with God? Absolutely not! 15 For he tells Moses, I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 16 So then, it does not depend on human will or effort but on God who shows mercy. 17 For the Scripture tells Pharaoh, I raised you up for this reason so that I may display my power in you and that my name

may be proclaimed in the whole earth. 18 So then, he has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

19 You will say to me, therefore, “Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” 20 But who are you, a mere man, to talk back to God? Will what is formed say to the one who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?” 21 Or has the potter no right over the clay, to make from the same lump one piece of pottery for honor and another for dishonor? 22 And what if God, wanting to display his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much patience objects of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And what if he did this to make known the riches of his glory on objects of mercy that he prepared beforehand for glory— 24 on us, the ones he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? 25 As it also says in Hosea,

I will call Not My People, My People,  
and she who is Unloved, Beloved.

26 And it will be in the place where they were told,  
you are not my people,  
there they will be called sons of the living God.

27 But Isaiah cries out concerning Israel,

Though the number of Israelites  
is like the sand of the sea,  
only the remnant will be saved;  
28 since the Lord will execute his sentence  
completely and decisively on the earth.

29 And just as Isaiah predicted:

If the Lord of Hosts had not left us offspring,  
we would have become like Sodom,  
and we would have been made like Gomorrah.

30 What should we say then? Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained righteousness—namely the righteousness that comes from faith. 31 But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not achieved the righteousness of the law. 32 Why is that? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. 33 As it is written,

Look, I am putting a stone in Zion to stumble over  
and a rock to trip over,  
and the one who believes on him  
will not be put to shame.