

Romans Review #4
Rom 9-11
ABC 2/25/18

Open your Bibles to Rom 9 as we continue to review the wonderful truths God gives through Paul in this letter to the Roman Christians. The theme of Rom is the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. As God who became man, Jesus displayed perfect righteousness in His life & He accomplished the righteous payment for sin in His death. Then He proved that righteousness by rising from the dead. That good news answers the problem of every human, that we are born in sin & naturally don't seek for nor honor God. Though all people have the general revelation of creation & a conscience aware of God's existence & attributes, because of Adam's sin we are unrighteous & sinful humans who can't achieve what's needed to reach God on our own. That's the message of Rom 1:18-3:20. Fortunately, by His grace, God has provided a remedy in the Person & work of Jesus. That way of salvation by grace through faith wasn't new. Rom 4 connects that grace back to the OT to remind us of God's faithfulness & His consistent revelation. But Paul wasn't finished by merely solving the problem of sin's penalty under God's justice. In chpt 5, he expands on how much greater this is in Christ to lead us in His love & secure salvation. Then in chpt 6 he broadened the gospel applications as conquering also the power of sin in our lives. That led to an explanation of how those in Christ are also free from the law as our governing husband. By newness of life in Christ, Christians are no longer slaves of sin or of the law. Chpt 7 explains how by faith we become married to Christ & are free to obey His law, not to earn love but because we're already loved. We don't obey to get His favor. We obey because His favor has already fallen on us & transformed our hearts, giving us the willingness & power to obey. We ended last time with Rom 8 & we're reminded that there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ. That reality is secured by God's Spirit sanctifying His people. Each member of the Trinity is involved in bringing God's people to glory. God the Father planned it & Jesus came to accomplish it & the Spirit applies it in us. Chpt 8 concludes with the wonderful promise that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. If you're following Paul's reasoning through Romans so far, you reach with him a culmination of praise at being in Christ. **8:35-39** PRAY

Chpts & vss weren't in Paul's original letter & are there for our convenience. So what ends chpt 8 flows into chpt 9 & it could get Paul labeled as bipolar with the crazy shift he makes. He plummets from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows. If God is faithful & fulfills His promises, why aren't the Jews welcoming Jesus as their Messiah? Why is the church mainly Gentiles? These questions cut to the heart of the gospel because if the gospel couldn't be seen as the continuation of God's plan from the OT, then it would cease to be the gospel of God. God would have seemed to have changed His mind & gone back on His promises or defaulted to plan B. In Rom 9-11 Paul tackles this issue. He argues that the situation in his day is in keeping with the OT promises of God, as long as those promises are interpreted correctly. God seems to have abandoned His chosen people in favor of Gentiles. If this is so, then God doesn't keep His promises. Does the gospel, by promising salvation to the Gentiles as well as Jews, mean God has broken His promises to His earthly people, the Jews? Paul's answer covers Israel's past (chp 9), present (chp 10), & its future (chp 11). These 3 chpts contain an emphasis on God's sovereignty & on human responsibility. Rom 9 is a key passage on the sovereign election of God & Rom 10 balances that truth with the responsibility of man. & in chpt 11 Paul explains God's future plans for the Jews.

1. The Jews' Past Promises 9:1-2

I thought Paul was rejoicing in God's love in Christ so what's this about **great sorrow & unceasing grief**? The burden that sobers Paul's celebration of God's love in Christ was his concern for his own countrymen. What led to this dive from delight to despair? **3-5**

The 1st 5 vss might make somebody think everything had gone wrong, that God had in the intended to save all the Jews but had failed. Paul's answer is the unbelief of Israel is perfectly consistent with God's sovereign purpose & His promises. From the beginning, God was making choices, as seen even before Jacob & Esau were born. Paul went from really glad to really sad because God's love in Christ raised a question about God's promised love for Israel. Don't miss this connection. If most of Israel rejected Jesus & were outside God's saving grace, then what happened to all His past promises to them? If God didn't keep His word to Israel, how can we

trust Him to keep His word to us? The majestic promises of Rom 8 don't mean anything if God can't be trusted to keep His word. Paul recognized that problem & raised it as a question. But then he explains the issue isn't that God's word failed because God has always promised to save only by His grace. God never saved by bloodline or biology. **6-13**

If God made promises to Israel as His chosen people, how can this be squared with Israel's rejection of Jesus & with the Gentiles being brought into God's blessing? Paul insists this doesn't indicate any breach of promise on God's part. Just because a person is born into the nation of Israel doesn't mean he's an heir to the promises of God. It isn't physical descent but spiritual descent that counts (those who exercise faith in God as Abraham did). So a physical descendant of Abraham might not be a real Jew in the spiritual sense. The real descendants of Abraham are those who believe God's promises (Rom 4:13-16). In vs 10-13 Paul gives the example of Isaac's wife, Rebecca, who gave birth to twin babies, Jacob & Esau. Before they were born, God said the older son (Esau) would serve the younger son (Jacob). God's choice made no reference whatsoever to their character. He made His choice before they were born, before they could act in good or bad ways. Paul quotes from Malachi about Jacob & Esau & emphasizes God's sovereign choice. In Hebrew, the expression **I have hated Esau** (Mal 1:1-3) means, *I have no relationship with Esau*. But God had a relationship with Jacob. Jacob was the object of God's love from all eternity, whereas Esau was not. Vs 11 says God did it this way so His **purpose according to His choice would stand**. He did it to show He saves not because of our works but because of His own sovereign choice to do so. God is the One who calls a person to faith in Him. God works inside a heart to bring people into the blessings of salvation in relationship with Him. That's what grace is. It's God's initiative to give what we could never earn. He gives freely & He chooses to do so in eternity past. That was true for Jacob & it's true for everyone He sets free from sin & grants the gift of saving faith. The point here is that salvation by God's free & sovereign grace answers the question of how God keeps His word. He keeps His word because He's always promised to save only by His grace & not by physical lineage or ancestral descent or family origin. So the root of the gospel Paul's been preaching reaches back here (& in Rom 8:29-30) to

His predestining those whom He will save before time ever began. But this always raises questions: How can God choose individuals to belong to Himself & at the same time make an honest offer of salvation to all people everywhere? How can we reconcile these 2 truths? The fact is we can't! To the finite human mind these 2 things are in conflict. But the Bible teaches both doctrines, so we need to believe them & be content to know that the difficulty lies in our minds & not with God. These twin truths are like 2 parallel lines that meet only in infinity. Since we are finite creatures we're completely incapable of reconciling them. Some try to reconcile sovereign election & human responsibility by saying God looks into the future & sees who would trust Jesus & those are the ones whom He elected to be saved (Rom 8:29; 1 Pet 1:2). But this overlooks the fact that God's foreknowledge is determinative. It isn't just that He knows in advance who will trust Jesus, but that He predetermines this result by choosing to draw some people to Himself (Jn 6:44). It's important to understand that though God chooses some to be saved, He never chooses anyone to be damned. The Bible doesn't teach divine reprobation. God doesn't elect people for hell. Again, since these truths are infinite & eternal & our minds are finite & temporal, these teachings are simply not reconcilable in our minds. It would be like putting all the water in all the oceans into a thimble. It just doesn't make sense to us.

This raises another question & hits a nerve that can bring some argument about whether God is fair. If God is the One who really decides whom He blesses & He just decides to hate someone like Esau, is that fair? We might answer by remembering that Esau did reject God's promises & Esau was responsible for his own sins. But that's not Paul's answer about injustice or unfairness. How does he answer? **14-18**

The question is, *Does the sovereign God of creation have a right to select some sinful people to be a bride for His Son?* The answer, of course, is that He does. So what it ultimately boils down to is this: If people are lost it's because of their own sin & rebellion. Conversely, if people are saved it's because of the sovereign, electing grace of God. Rather than backtracking on what he'd already written & explaining how God is fair to judge people like Esau, Paul moves further into uncomfortable territory. He exalts God's freedom to do whatever He wants. Mercy, by definition,

is withholding what's deserved & giving undeserved blessing instead. So mercy does not & cannot depend on the person who receives it. That explains the mercy part of the question, but Paul also raises the issue that God also hardens whom He desires. & that brings up another protest, doesn't it? If God planned to raise up Pharaoh only to show His own power over Pharaoh, then how can God blame Pharaoh for that? God isn't being unfair when He makes a person's heart grow increasingly hard because it's the result of their own sinfulness. God makes choices to save some. Is that fair? Not really. Fair would send everyone to hell. You want fair? I doubt it! There's no vagueness in Paul's understanding of the sovereignty of God, absolutely none! Which brings up more questions. **19-21**

Why does God find fault with Pharaoh or anyone who rejects Him when God is the only One who can show mercy to save them anyway? How can God let evil happen when He could've stopped it? Why would God let a leader like Pharaoh do evil things? & if God purposed that for Pharaoh, then why blame Pharaoh? Do you see how Paul didn't run from hard questions or try to act like God really isn't uncomfortably & confusingly sovereign over all? Instead, Paul went deeper & deeper & then raised a stop sign when it could go no further. Human reasoning cannot reach into God's mind to pick apart how He creates people who exercise freedom to make responsible choices & yet who are also subject to His plan for them. So Paul stopped the arguing in vss 20-21 by pointing out that the Creator can do whatever He wants with His creatures. As the Potter, God can do as He wishes with His clay. Finite man, loaded down with sin, ignorance, & weakness, is in no position to talk back to God, or question the wisdom or justice of His ways. God has the right to deal with people as He chooses, & He isn't obligated to explain to anyone what or why He does what He does. God's decisions are always right & His judgments are always perfect. That may not be the most satisfying answer, but chpts 1-2 already established that we're hard-wired to know that God exists as our Creator. God's status as God means He's bigger than we are. Just as human minds are far more complex than our most intricate inventions, so also is God's mind far beyond us. Paul's answer to arguing with God is to remember the Creator/creation distinction & let God be God. But then he moves into some answers of what God is doing & why. **22-24**

Why did God allow evil & why does He create people to whom He won't show mercy & will punish because of their sin? Because He had to do so in order to truly show mercy. God had to show justice against evil to show the contrast that mercy is. Those who receive mercy don't receive the justice they deserve because God satisfied His justice on Jesus instead. But God displayed His justice & wrath & power as the backdrop on which His mercy shines the clearest & brightest. Paul pictures God as facing a seeming conflict of interest. On one hand, He wants to show His wrath & exhibit His power in punishing sin. On the other, He wants to bear patiently with **vessels of wrath prepared for destruction**. He's chosen to delay judgment & give men more time to repent. These **vessels of wrath** are prepared for destruction by their own sin & rebellion not because of some arbitrary decree of God. Vs 22 uses a Greek tense which means the **vessels of wrath** prepare themselves for destruction. That means God passively allows unbelievers to prepare themselves for what they deserve. He passively allows unbelievers to have exactly what they want in their rejection of His goodness & He never forces them to sin. Yet in contrast, vs 23 describes God preparing vessels of mercy for glory as something He actively does. God actively works to save souls in a different way where He's the Author in initiating & accomplishing good for people. He actively saves in a different way than when He passively leaves others alone who sin their way into judgment. You might say God is hands-on in effecting salvation but He's hands-off in giving people freedom to sin & be condemned. There's no unrighteousness in any of God's actions. Sinners fit themselves for hell & God prepares saints for heaven. These people (be they Jews or Gentiles) will see God's glory & will even share in it (Rom 8:17-18). In this way, God displays the full gamut of His attributes, the complete panorama of His glorious character. He planned to show the goodness of justice in order to show the goodness of mercy also. The questions of our responsibility in this & of what happened to Israel are answered in 25-33.

God had a plan for Jews & Gentiles in all of this. God always had a plan to save a remnant of Israel, a portion out of the nation. Yet He also had a plan to save Gentiles & have people from all nations be called His people. That's what we have now in the church, a multinational family of God who come together by faith in Christ. We arrive there only by grace through faith in Christ,

which is the only way He ever planned to save anyone in any time of history. God never intended Israel to reach Him based on their own righteousness. He always intended the goal of the law to point to Christ. But Israel stumbled over Jesus as God's fulfillment of the law. Paul contrasts Jews & Gentiles. Gentiles weren't looking for a way to have a right relationship with God, but when they discovered the gospel, they accepted it by faith. Most Jews, though, thought they could earn their way to heaven & that God would accept them because of their good deeds. They expected justification by observing the law. But because perfection isn't possible, they could never receive a right relationship with God. They needed to accept the gospel by faith, just as the Gentiles were doing. The gospel is for everyone, both Jews & Gentiles; nobody can earn salvation by means of their own efforts.

As we move to chpt 10, how can our choices really matter if God decides everything? There's no logical human solution to it. Therefore, we must live with this unresolved tension between 2 clear truths. God determines what happens & we're responsible for our choices. Scripture teaches both & we're compelled to believe both, even if we can't explain how it all works. Somehow, God's absolute sovereignty & our free will & responsibility aren't contradictory but somehow compatible with one another. We'll never be able to put together in a neat package with a pretty bow the biblical truth that God determines everything that happens with the equally biblical truth that human beings are fully responsible for their actions. The relationship between chpt 9 & chpt 10 mirrors this tension. In Rom 9 Paul teaches that the existence of only a remnant of Jewish believers is because God chose only certain Jews to belong to His true spiritual people. But in Rom 10 he teaches that the Jewish people themselves are at fault for refusing to recognize & submit to God's righteousness in Christ. Paul says nothing about how these 2 perspectives are to be integrated. He allows these perspectives to stand side-by-side without resolving them. Jews (& gentiles) belong to God's people because God has chosen them; Jews (& gentiles) belong to God's people because they have chosen God.

2. The Jews' Present Position Before we see this explained, **10:1-4**.

This chpt begins by coming back to Paul's burden for Jewish people to be saved. Yet the essential issue of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone remains central. Even the questions about Israel come back to God's grace because God never intended His basic goal to be confusing. His goal has always been for us to see our sin & our need for Him so we call out to Him in faith. That faith looked forward to a Promised Savior until He came. & now we know the Savior's name is Jesus & we know more of who He is & what He accomplished. **5-13**

For Jew or Gentile, for anyone & everyone throughout time, God saves by grace through faith. Call out to Jesus & you will be saved. That's the simple message of the gospel. If you got lost in Rom 9, that's OK. God is way bigger than we are & all His greatness can't fit into our little brains. When the Bible reveals a God this far above us, it's proof that the Bible is from God & not a human invention. But as you wrestle with these deep things of God don't forget He's made the basics really simple. Fear Him to start gaining understanding & wisdom (Prov 1:7). Then trust Him as He's revealed His way of salvation in Jesus. Then go tell others about Him. Paul is telling the sinner to confess with his **mouth Jesus as Lord & believe in his heart that God raised Him from the dead**. So after some of the strongest statement made in Scripture on the doctrine of absolute divine sovereignty in salvation (chpt 9) we have chpt 10 in which Paul says the sinner who confesses Jesus as Lord & believes in his heart that God raised Him from the dead, will be saved. Which is it? God's sovereignty or man's responsibility? Yes! Don't get hung up on it but see what we must be doing in **14-17**.

If you wonder if evangelism is hindered by teaching God's sovereignty in salvation, learn from Paul that it isn't. The mandate to spread the free offer of the gospel comes in Rom 10 right after Rom 9 extolled God's freedom to do as He wishes. Those truths may feel conflicted in our minds, but in God's mind they come together perfectly. So we trust Him with that & respond to what He's said as enough. This means that He'll save some people that we share the gospel with & others He'll leave alone in their sin. But nobody can come to faith in Jesus unless they've heard about Him & people can't hear about Him unless someone tells them. Therefore, God sends you out to tell others the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul finishes chpt 10 with **18-21**.

God in His mercy has used Israel's unbelief to bring the gospel to the nations. That's a truth that comes up again in chpt 11. Again, all this relates to the problem of Israel's unbelief. Despite God sending His Word to them, they rejected Him. But God hasn't rejected them.

3. The Jews' Prophetic Prospects In chpt 11, Paul returns to the main line of his argument. He's asked whether Israel's failure to respond to Jesus jeopardizes God's faithfulness to His promises to Israel (11:1; cf. 9:6). Paul's 1st answer came in 9:6–29. God's promises to Israel never included all the biological descendants of Abraham. His blessing was always given only to those whom He chose to bless. So the unbelief of so many Jews doesn't, in itself, challenge God's faithfulness. After an elaboration of the situation of Israel & the gentiles in chpt 10, Paul's 2nd & 3rd answers now come in chpt 11. God is faithful to His promise to Israel, Paul argues, because He's presently preserving a remnant of Jewish believers (1–10) & He'll bring **all Israel** to salvation in the future (11–32). **11:1-6**

God had wonderful plans for the Jews. He sent Jesus as their Messiah. He offers them grace, salvation, & righteousness. But the reaction of most Jews was unbelief. They refused to accept His generous gifts. It might seem that God's plans for the Jews had failed, but Paul shows that God's plans haven't failed. In fact, God has an even more wonderful plan for the future of the Jews. Paul shows that God hasn't ended His relationship with His chosen people. Paul is a Jew himself, a descendant of Abraham of the family of Benjamin. Paul had zealously acted against God before he became a Christian, but God forgave him. Likewise, God can forgive other Jews as well. Then Paul reminds them of the answer that God gave to the prophet Elijah (2-4). Elijah thought he was the only person in Israel who was still loyal to God, but that wasn't true. God told him there were still 7,000 people who were loyal to God & hadn't worshiped Baal (1 Kg 19:14-18). Paul says (5-6), even now, as in the time of Elijah, there are still Jews who are loyal to God. God had chosen them by His grace. God gives salvation to people who don't deserve it. He has never been without a remnant, a small group from Israel who trust Him & are saved. But their salvation has always been by grace & not by works & that truth is never far from Paul's thoughts. God always saves based on His gracious choice & He always condemns only based on people's

unbelief & sin. So Paul is answering the question, *What about Israel?* He just closed chpt 10 by saying the Jews have rejected the gospel & the Gentiles are welcoming it. Is this the end of Israel? Paul answers in vss **11-16**.

God had a purpose in Israel stumbling in unbelief. That purpose was to spread His saving goodness to Gentiles so every tribe, language, & nation will have souls in heaven praising Jesus. Israel's unbelief leads to many Gentiles believing & yet God isn't done with Israel. He'll use the Gentiles' faith to lead the Jews to faith in Jesus. By Israel's rejection of their Messiah, God brings the gospel to the Gentiles. & the salvation of the Gentiles is intended to make the Jews jealous so they will come back to receive the promises originally given to them. God will then bring the end of history with His future salvation of the people of Israel who turn to Christ in faith. Whether Jew or Gentile, the glory will always go to God as the One who saves by grace. No one will ever have cause for boasting. We all find rest in Christ because we trust in Him alone. That's why we need reminders to keep trusting Him as we read in **17-24**.

There's no reason to boast over another when salvation is only by grace through faith. That's the same point Paul made at the end of chpt 3. It's a theme throughout Romans in considering the implications & applications of the gospel to daily life. We must always be renewing our minds in the mercy we could never deserve. That keeps us humble & it keeps us amazed & thankful at being a vessel of God's sovereign mercy. In all God's plans through time, He was working to bring a Savior through Israel & Jesus came as that Savior. Yet Israel largely didn't trust Christ & God chose to save many Gentiles through the centuries. But He will turn again to save His own people when He circles back to fulfill His past promises fully. **25-32**

Many prophets wrote about God's plan (Is 60:1-14; Dan 12:1; Mic 7:11-12; Zech 8:1-23), so Paul was sure that God has a plan to save the Jews. Through it all, God has been & will be faithful to His word. Through it all, God has been & will be displaying His mercy as the One true source of salvation. God has mapped out & moved through the ages to accomplish His purposes for His glory. & He will finish it all so we can marvel at Him forever. His future plans link back to His past promises & have been arranged to work throughout time & will be fulfilled in the future. His

wisdom is seen in the past as well as the future. & don't miss this: The question of His faithfulness to His promises to Israel that began chpt 9 are now answered. As we end chpt 11, we see God's goodness in His wisdom & future plans & those plans include keeping His word to Israel to save them & fulfill all He promised to them. Throughout history God displays His glorious grace & keeps His word to Israel & also rescues souls from all nations. God's promises can't be canceled. God will save His people in His time. It all comes back to God's promises & power. In the end that comes back to His glory. When it's all said & done, here's the conclusion: **33-36**

As Paul ended Romans 5-8 celebrating God's unshakable love for his people, so he ends Romans 9-11 celebrating God's marvelous plan for humankind. God's wisdom & knowledge, His plans & purposes, are beyond the capacity of any human to fully figure out. How does His unconditional election mesh with the demand that human beings believe & obey? How does God remain fair & impartial even as He promises salvation in the future to a significant number of Jews? How can He work in the lives of individuals to accomplish His plans? We have every right to ask such questions, but we must be cautious about demanding clear answers we can fully understand. We can't penetrate the mind of God. He doesn't need to consult us before He decides what He's going to do. He doesn't need to explain Himself to us. & at a certain point, we must stop questioning & demanding answers & simply believe & worship. From God, through God, & back to God are all things, so praise Him. Renew your mind in the gospel & be refreshed in all the ways He's displayed His glory. & be encouraged to trust Him, to believe God is good & true & faithful. Be moved to faith & strengthened in faith in your God. PRAY **33, 36**