

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Romans: God's Power for Salvation

TITLE: God is God

SCRIPTURE: Romans 9

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The book of Romans is a masterfully written exposition of the gospel of God. Without a doubt, it is the foundation of authentic Christianity and the most articulate, systematic understanding of our faith found in the Bible. Countless lives have been changed by the truth found in this ancient letter, and it continues to change lives today. Interestingly enough, Romans was written to Christians. So, while the good news found in Romans can certainly bring people to faith in Jesus, the actual focus is on how the gospel helps Christians think rightly about God, life, faith, and Christian community. If you want to grow to know God more personal and intimate way, this letter is for you!

Undoubtedly, Romans 9 is one of the most difficult passages in all the Bible to understand. For those who have been Christians for some time, a big reason for this has to do with what we bring to the passage from what we may have been taught in the past. Specifically, the teaching that Romans 9 has to do with God's sovereignty over who goes to heaven and who goes to hell. But if we let the passage speak for itself, we find that individual salvation is not the theme of this chapter. So, what is it about? *Romans 9 strongly sets forth God's sovereign, predetermined plan to save Gentiles, and a remnant of Jews, through faith in Messiah Jesus.* The question Paul is answering in this chapter is this: *Has God failed to keep his covenant promises to his people Israel? How can God be faithful and righteous and not save all Israel, but instead open the door of salvation to the Gentiles?*

To see this as the main theme and to answer this question, it is essential that you follow the flow of thought through the whole chapter and not get bogged down, taking individual verses out of context. N.T. Wright puts it this way: "Reading this part of Romans is like riding a bicycle: if you stand still for more than a moment, forgetting the onward movement both of the story of 9:6-10:21 and of the letter as a whole, you are liable to lose your balance—or, perhaps, to accuse Paul of losing his." In other words, to understand Romans 9 you have to keep pedaling all the way to the end. What follows is my own interpretative paraphrase of 9:1-33 to help you pedal your way through.

At the close of chapter 8, Paul rejoices in the fact that—No one and nothing can separate us from the love of God in Messiah Jesus (8:35-39). He then anticipates a question: 'But if nothing can separate us from God's love, what about Israel? Compared to the number of Gentiles who are turning in faith to Jesus, only a small number of Jews are embracing Jesus as their Messiah. Has God failed to keep his promises to Israel?' Here's how Paul answers that question.

"I'm not lying when I say, my heart breaks for my people Israel. I would gladly separate myself from God if they would embrace Jesus as their Messiah. After all, it is through God's predetermined purposes and promises to Israel that Messiah Jesus has come" (9:1-5). *But the fact is, God never promised that all of Abraham's descendants would be a part of God's new covenant people. Why not?*

Because not all of the children of Abraham are children of God (6,7). Only those who are in the line of *promise* can become children of God. For example, of Abraham's two sons, Isaac was the child of promise, not Ishmael (9). And, Jacob, was the divinely chosen child of promise, not Esau. God was sovereignly choosing the line of promise through whom Messiah would come (10-13).

So, is God unjust to choose one man--one nation--over another through whom Messiah would come? (14). Absolutely not! God is God—He has the sovereign right to be merciful and compassionate to whomever he wills (15-16). For example, God purposed to exalt Pharaoh to a position of prominence and harden his hard heart in order that God’s glorious power and name would be proclaimed to all the nations. Mark it down, God has mercy on whomever he wills, namely, the Gentiles, and he hardens whomever he wills, in this case, unbelieving Israel (18; cf. 11:7, 25).

‘But if God is hardening his own people in order to show mercy to the Gentiles, how can he fault Israel (19)?’ Whoa! Hold on! Who are you to question the justice and mercy of God (20)? God has the sovereign right as God to work out his purposes in salvation however he chooses. Does a statue say to its sculptor, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ Or think of a potter. Is the potter not entitled to take a lump of his own clay and make one part into a lovely vase and another part into a common pot (21)? So what if God, desiring to show his wrath against sin and make known his power to save, endured with great patience vessels of wrath—[*his own rebellious people Israel*]*—*who are destined for destruction as the way he predetermined to show the riches of his glory to vessels of mercy—[*believing Gentiles and a remnant of believing Jews*]*—*(22-23)? I’m talking about *us*, we are his vessels of mercy—the people of promise whom he has called not only from the Jews, but also from the Gentiles (24) . No, God’s promises have not failed. He promised through the prophet Hosea that one day, Gentiles would be called “sons of God (cf Hos 2:23; 1:10).” And God also promised through Isaiah that only a remnant of Israel would be saved and the rest judged (27-29; cf Isa 10:22-23; 1:9).

So, do you see? God is righteous in his judgments and his ways. He is faithful to his promises. Gentiles, who were not looking for God, are receiving mercy and being made righteous because they are coming to God through faith in Messiah Jesus, (just as God promised). But Israel, by pursuing self-made righteousness through the works of the law, stumbled over Jesus, and this too was promised (30-32; cf Isa 28:16), Isaiah says that God has put a stumbling stone in front of Israel—Jesus, an offensive, crucified Messiah. But he also promises that *whoever* believes in him will never be put to shame (*and this to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*, cf 1:16). So, everyone who believes in Messiah Jesus will have no regrets on the great day of God’s coming judgment (33).

Here’s the BIG IDEA: God sovereignly chooses to save all those who come to God by faith in Christ.

God’s covenant with Israel has always been God’s plan and purpose to put the world back right with himself. But who could have ever conceived that he would harden his own people to do it? ...But that was God’s purpose in election.

For Discussion —

When you listen to Bible teaching, you should be listening with an ear to learn, but also with an ear to share with others what you are learning. Keep that in mind as you discuss today’s message. How do you need to internalize this message so you can share this Good News with someone God might bring across your path this week who needs to hear it? ...

Have someone read Romans 9:1-33. Then have someone read Charlie’s interpretive paraphrase of Romans 9 above. This is a lot of reading, but there’s no way to discuss this chapter without pedaling all the way through it.

1. How is this understanding of Romans 9 different from how you may have previously understood this chapter?
2. Do you agree or disagree with this interpretation? ...Point to specific passages in Romans 9 to make your case.
3. How might this understanding of Romans 9 fit into the larger picture of Paul trying to bring Jews and Gentiles together as one new people in Christ? (cf 15:5-7)
4. What questions do you still have?

5. Charlie suggested that the main idea of Romans 9 is this: "God has sovereignly chosen/promised to save all who come to Him by faith in Christ?" ...agree or disagree?
6. Galatians 3:29 -- And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. ...How does this verse shed light on what Paul is saying in Romans 9?
7. What applications can be drawn from this great chapter? What difference does this teaching make in your life this week?

OR try this approach...

After reading Romans 9 and then reading the interpretive paraphrase, ask"--From what you heard in Charlie's message or what we just read right here—*What are some of the "AHAs" you took away from what you learned?* ...When someone volunteers an "AHA" ...ask follow up questions to dig deeper and to keep the discussion going. Ask the group, "*Anyone else have this same "AHA"--what do you think about this insight?*" After you've exhausted topic. ...Throw the original question back out to the group--"*Who else had an "AHA?"* Repeat the pattern above. Follow up questions then get input from the group. ... If someone says, "*I didn't really have an "AHA," it's more that I don't understand*" Then go that direction. ...Ask follow up questions to help them clearly articulate the issue then ask the group for input. "*Anybody else think about that/struggle with that?" ..." So, how would you answer that question?"* Whoever answers--ask follow up questions, ask for input from the group on that answer (*What do you think about that?*), etc. It's been my (Charlie) experience that you can have a great discussion around this approach to community group conversations