

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Romans: God's Power for Salvation
TITLE: How Do You Measure Faithfulness?

SCRIPTURE: Romans 9:6-13

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PASTOR: Jim Thompson

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!

How do you measure faithfulness? Is it simply, you said you were going to do "X" and you didn't, so you're not faithful? Is that it? Or is faithfulness more about your motive? What If you tell your teenage son to go clean out the car, and you realized that he threw out all the trash and brought inside all the stuff that belongs inside, but he didn't vacuum it out. Was he unfaithful, or just not faithful to your liking? How precise were you in your instructions?

What about your marriage? Let's say you haven't had an affair, and you don't fight, and you support each other financially. Is that enough to count as faithfulness? Is that really all that you meant by "I promise to love and cherish you until death do us part?"

Obviously, the most important context in which we should think about this question is in our relationship to God. How do we know if we're rightly trusting, following, and obeying him? That's one side of the coin. But the other side of it is, how can we be sure that he'll stay faithful to us? Is he really fully reliable?

In Romans 9:6-13, Paul is writing to some of his friends who are starting to feel that perhaps God has been unfaithful. Throughout the Old Testament, God promised Israel that he would send them a Messiah-King to rescue them from their enemies and bring mercy, justice, and peace at last. And then Jesus – the Jewish Messiah – shows up on the scene, and much of ethnic Israel rejects him. Doesn't this make God look a little unfaithful, like he didn't follow through with his word? Of course not. God is always faithful, but Paul's explanation of *how so* is interesting.

Paul goes on to explain that not everybody born as a physical Jew was truly a "spiritual Jew." (Paul calls this circumcision of the heart in Romans 2). Paul then talks about how God chosen line of bring restoration and blessing to the world is usually the unlikely line (i.e. Isaac from the barren Sarah and Jacob the younger instead of Esau the elder). And all of this means that God's His word hasn't failed because he never defined membership in his family as primarily an issue of ethnic birthright or a human effort. Rather, membership in God's family has always been about his gracious calling. This proves God to be surprisingly and sovereignly faithful. And so...

We can measure God's faithfulness by the precision of his word and not our presumption of his word.

We should always be attuned to exactly what God has promised us, and we should never take those promises for granted. Old Testament Israel frequently assumed upon God's word to them, and lost sight of the promise and their vocation. But God's faithfulness seems to always include doing things backwards with backwards people. This is part of the precision of his promise.

Noah, go build an ark in the desert so that mercy will come out of judgment. Abraham, I'm going to change the world through your family and your wife can't have kids. Joseph, I'm going to make you a prince from a dungeon, and bring about abundance through famine. Moses, you have public speaking problems so go stand before the most supreme court and ruler in the land. Joshua, you're a teenager; now go lead 100,000 people into the promised land. Hosea, go marry a prostitute to show people my love for them even in their waywardness. Mary, you're a pregnant virgin. Sinners, I bring you life by my death. I bring you belonging by my being separated. I bring you wholeness by my being broken. I am your King, here to serve.

And for many of these people, they probably thought that God's word had failed. Surely, this isn't the way he will be faithful, they thought. But sovereign and shocking faithfulness is faithfulness nonetheless.

So, is God reliable? Is he dependable? Yes, more than we could ever imagine. And this reliability and faithfulness is often unique, wooing us to trust him more. And while we should never presume on God's promises, we need a constant and clear vision of his faithfulness. And the decisive place to see this is in the gospel of Jesus.

Jesus is the reliability, dependability, and trustworthiness of God with skin on. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:20 that, "All the promises of God are YES in Him." Jesus is the place where God's surprising and steadfast faithfulness blossoms. And if God raised Jesus from the dead, then we have all the proof we need to continue to seek him, share him, know him, and make him known because he is and will be good to his word.

For Discussion —

1. In what ways are you tempted to doubt God's faithfulness in your own life?
2. Summarize what you think Paul is saying in Romans 9 so far in your own words.
3. How does it make you feel that God often chooses and uses unexpected people?
4. Personally, what part of this message stood out to you the most?
5. Because we are called to be his image-bearers, in what areas of your own life do you sense a greater need for faithfulness?
6. What should you do when you are confused about God's faithfulness or his promises?