

Romans 9:1-29 - Salvation belongs to God

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[0:00] Romans chapter 9, verse 1 to 29. I speak the truth in Christ. I am not lying. My conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit.! I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship.

Theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God all over, forever praised. Amen.

It is not as though God's word has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.

In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated.

[1:11] At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son. Not only that, but Rebecca's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born, or had done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose in election might stand, not by works, but by him who calls, she was told, the older will serve the younger.

Just as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all. For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.

It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For scripture says to Pharaoh, I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

Therefore, God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. One of you will say to me, then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?

But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the one who formed us, and formed it? Why did you make me like this? Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay, some pottery for special purposes, and some for common use?

[2:36] What if God, although choosing to show his wrath, and make his power known, bore with great patience, the objects of his wrath, prepared for destruction? What if he did this, to make the riches of his glory known, to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory?

Even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews, but also from the Gentiles. As he says in Hosea, I will call them my people, who are not my people, and I will call her my loved one, who is not my loved one.

And, in the very place where it was said to them, you are not my people, there they will be called children of God, of the living God. Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, though the number of Israelites, be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved.

For the Lord will carry out, his sentence on earth, with speed and finality. It is just as Isaiah said previously, unless the Lord Almighty, had left us descendants, we would have been like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.

Thanks so much, Jamal, for reading for us. Let's pray, as we come to God's word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we are so very conscious, of our need of your help this morning.

[4:00] Certainly I am. Lord, we long to listen, to what you say in your word. We don't want to come here, and just leave the same as we walked in. We want to engage with you, we want to hear from you, we want you to be at work by your spirit.

And none of those things can be done, because we deserve them, or achieve them, or because of our own great skill, whatever that might be. But Lord, we need you. We need you to work by your spirit, for your glory's sake.

So be at work, we ask, as your word is open. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. It's going to help you this morning, especially if you're here, for the very first time, to know that we have been working our way through, the New Testament book of Romans.

We've been doing that, because our conviction as a church, is that the Bible is God's book. That is, we believe that it is written by people. So this was written by Paul, and you can see his fingerprints in it, his kind of use of language, and his personality come through.

But behind that stands God, by his spirit, who is the author of the book. These are his words. Now, I start there, and it's worth remembering that, because we've been through Romans chapter 8, in the last few weeks.

[5:25] And Romans 8 is one of the most comforting passages, in the whole of the New Testament. And now we come to Romans 9, and that is one of the most challenging chapters, in the New Testament.

But what I have just said about God's word, is no more or less true, of Romans 9, than it was of Romans 8. Just because you enjoy something, doesn't necessarily make it more God's word, than something that you find challenging, or difficult.

And the particular challenge, I think, of Romans 9, is that it gives us, essentially, a very difficult answer, to a question, that we are all asking this morning.

It's a painful question, and a difficult answer. And so I want to urge you this morning, to have your Bible open. I know I pretty much say that every week, but this week, please, have your Bible open. If it's on your phone, and you can trust yourself, not to check your emails, right? I can't do that. As soon as my phone is open, and I'm checking my emails, or something. So, if you can, if you can have it on your phone, and not do that, then do that.

[6:29] But if you want a physical Bible, there should be one near you, and have Romans 9. Because I want you to see, more than anything, is that, what I am saying this morning, is coming from this passage, in the Bible, and not from my head.

So let's start, with a question, that we're probably not asking, right? A question, that we're probably not asking. You might, and you might not, remember that, right at the very beginning, of the letter to the Romans, Paul says, in Romans chapter 1, verse 16, for I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it's the power of God, that brings salvation, to everyone who believes.

First for the Jew, then to the Gentile, right? And then he spent, eight chapters, if you like, articulating the gospel, the message of good news, that is the power of God, to save.

And now, in chapters 9 to 11, he's returning, to the next idea, which is, well, what about the Jews first? What about the Jews first?

So chapter 9, it is not, everything he's got to say, about the gospel, in the Jewish nation, but it is the start of it. And he's going to, articulate this more, in chapters 9, 10, and 11, to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

[7:46] Now, his reason for returning to this, should be obvious to us, right? The church in Rome, and actually, Paul's ministry in general, has been dominated, by preaching to Gentiles, and not Jews.

So he knows, like, theologically, from reading the Old Testament, and from understanding God's word, he understands, that the gospel is first, for the Jews, but in his experience, it has been the Gentiles, who've responded to the gospel, and it's them, to whom he's writing.

And that brings a sadness to him, the lack of responsiveness, of the Jewish people, to the gospel. And so he says, chapter 9, verse 1, look down at it, I speak the truth in Christ. I'm not lying.

My conscience confirms it, through the Holy Spirit. I have great sorrow, and unceasing anguish, in my heart. But don't miss, the layers, that he's building up here. It's like a, it's like a kind of, first century highlighter pen, before highlighter pens existed.

He goes, listen, this is the truth. I affirm this is the truth. It's the truth in Christ. I'm not lying. My conscience tells me I'm not lying.

[8:51] The Holy Spirit tells me I'm not lying. I have great sorrow, and unceasing anguish. Listen how he continues. It gets more serious. Verse 3, Now, the word race there, is a really unhelpful translation of a Greek word.

As far as I can tell, the NIV is pretty much the only translation that uses it. The word is better, sort of, kinsman, or kindred. And that's really, in one sense, because there is only one race in the Bible. That is the human race. God made us all the same in Adam and Eve. But also, it's because Paul's affinity is not with a race category, as we might understand it now. It's not really even just with a national identity, the people of Israel.

Rather, it's not national pride or racism. It's really a concern of who they are in the plan of God. Verse 4 will explain it to you. He then goes on to say this, doesn't he?

What belongs to the Israelites in the plan of God? Well, there is the adoption to sonship. They are called the sons of God. Theirs is the divine glory, the covenant promises of the Old Testament, the receiving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises.

[10:11] Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised. Amen. See, the issue, it's not racism. It's not national pride.

Paul is wrestling with the fact that despite the Israelites being given all of those things, still, they are hard and cold to the gospel.

And Paul is heartbroken, and he wants to know why. Why? Now, I said at the start, that's probably a question that you're not asking, right? I think it's probably, we are so used, I think, to Jews not believing in Jesus, that we don't feel the strangeness of it in the way that Paul does here.

But I hope you can see that it leads to a question that you are asking this morning. It's a question we're all asking. And that is, why are some people saved, and others not? Why is the gospel, the power of God for salvation, for some, and not for all?

You know, we share Paul's pain, don't we, for his kinsmen, when we, we think about the people that we love, who don't believe the gospel. But we, we wonder, or maybe even sitting here this morning, wondering, why are some members of my family in this room with me, and others not?

[11:27] Why is it that some people, walking off the street, come to faith in Jesus Christ, almost straight away, and others hear about Jesus all their lives. They go to Sunday school, they go to church, they go to youth group, and they never respond.

And we can feel about the question, just like Paul does in verse three, wishing even that we might swap places with our loved ones, our friends, and our family who don't know the Lord. Wishing that if it was possible, that we would be cut off, that they might be included in him.

Paul knows, and we know it doesn't work like that. But still the question hangs. Why has being around the church been of so little eternal benefit to so many? Why have so many people seen the glory of God?

They might even have sort of sensed it in a room like this, but now they've walked away. They have no interest. Why are there people who know their Bibles, but still don't believe it?

Why are there people who are Christian in name, but not really in practice? That's the bigger question, isn't it, that Paul raises and is dealing with in these chapters to come.

[12:35] And so then the rest of chapter nine is really a difficult answer that we won't fully understand. It's not really a great headline, is it, for the next section of my sermon, but let's pick this up in verse six and let me show you that this is a difficult answer and we won't fully understand it.

But we're going to walk through these verses and see how Paul deals with the question. Again, eyes on the Bible. This is God in his word. This is not Steve's ideas, right? This is what God says. Firstly, notice he says, it has always been like this, right?

Step one, always been like this. If you look at verse six, he says that right from the very start, not every ethnic Israelite was a child of the promise.

He says, there's always been a distinction, which this means cannot be a failure of God's word because God's word has never meant that every single individual Israelite without exception would be saved.

The selective salvation is, if you like, a feature of the covenant, not a bug in it. So of Abraham's children, verse seven, it was only the son of Sarah, Isaac, verse nine, that was of the promise.

[13:45] Then of Isaac's children from his wife, Rebecca, the twins, Esau and Jacob, only, verse 12, Jacob, who surprisingly is the younger, not Esau the older, he is saved.

So this distinction is, that's causing Paul such pain in chapter nine, verse one, which causes us pain as we see it in our families, in our community, this distinction between those who are saved and those who are lost, that distinction, says Paul, has always been there from the very beginning of the Bible.

And it doesn't matter who your parents are. It doesn't matter how close your connection with the promises were, it doesn't matter how much you knew of the Bible. You know, Ishmael was Abraham's son. Esau was Isaac's son.

But both were lost. Perhaps you could put it this way, God has never in the Bible been what you might call a universalist. In other words, God has never saved everyone without exception.

There has always been inclusion and exclusion from the promises of God. If you're here this morning and your expectation is, do you know what?

[14:56] Probably in the end, God will save everybody. It will be all right. God will just save everybody in the end. Hell is probably an empty place. You know, like the sort of hollow threats of parents.

It's probably what God's like. Listen, that is not the God of the Bible. That is not the God of the Bible. The Bible is littered with people who hear and never believe and are lost as a result.

People who have access to the eternal promises of God but never benefit from them. Look down at verse 27. Paul is picking up that idea from Isaiah. Though the number of Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant, a part will be saved.

That's step one. It's always been like this. Second step, step two, God chooses those he saves and those he doesn't.

Look at verse 11, talking about Rebecca's twin boys. Yet before the twins were born, all had done anything good or bad in order that God's purpose in election might stand, not by works, but by him who calls, she was told, the older will serve the younger.

[16:13] Just as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. Here it is then, outside of anything that Esau or Jacob did, before they had done anything good or bad, because they'd not yet been born, right?

God declared that Jacob would go ahead of Esau, that Jacob would be loved and saved, and Esau would be hated and lost.

This is God's purpose in election, as Paul puts it. Literally, this is God's say-so. Salvation belongs to him.

And it's not that God sort of foresaw that Jacob would do some good, you know, some salvation-deserving stuff. So outside of time, God decides, I'm going to save Jacob because he's a kind of salvation-deserving kind of person, and I'm not going to save Esau.

No, it says before, doesn't it? Before anything that they'd done. And not just in, not just before kind of chronologically, but before logically as well, outside of, disconnected from anything good or bad done by Jacob or Esau, God chose to save Jacob and not to save Esau.

[17:27] Now, I know these are difficult things, right? It's why I want you to keep looking at your Bible. It's worth pointing out to you that Romans 9 is not out on a limb in Bible terms, is it?

Paul himself is just expounding the Old Testament for you. Paul didn't write, Jacob I loved, Esau I hated. God said that to Malachi and he wrote it down.

Paul didn't write the story of the Exodus where consistently we're told that God hardens Pharaoh's heart so that he will not let the people go. What Paul says is also just in line with what Jesus says.

In John chapter 6 Jesus says, all those that the Father gives to me will come to me. Notice what he says. Jesus doesn't say all those who decide to come the Father will give.

He doesn't say that. Rather he says all those the Father gives those are the ones that will come to me he says. Jesus said of his disciples in John 13 that he knew those he had chosen before adding that Judas would betray him because despite being around him and dipping his bread with him still he was not chosen as one of Jesus' people.

[18:45] The other apostles also carry on that teaching say the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2 calls the church a chosen people a royal priesthood and the person they're doing the choosing is not us.

It's not that we have chosen to be God's people rather that God has chosen us to be his people. Paul is just echoing that Bible theme from the beginning to the end that we looked at with the children.

Salvation belongs to our God. in verse 16 he underlines the implication of it all.

Verse 16 so it does not therefore depend on human desire or effort but on God's mercy. In other words it's not that good people or hard working people or people who do the right thing are saved and others lost rather it's about God's mercy and not human effort.

People are saved because of something that is true about God not something that's true about them or me or you. Now it's worth knowing that this is not the only thing that Paul says about those who are saved.

[19:58] Over the page in chapter 10 he will tell people that they need to hear about Jesus and believe in him. In chapter 10 which we're going to look at next week he says that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

He then says in chapter 11 that large numbers of Jewish people will be saved as Gentiles hold out the gospel to them. But he starts not in contradiction to any of that but rather to go ahead of all of that he starts here saying listen first you must understand this is about God's mercy not about anything else.

And he reminds us verse 15 and verse 18 repeat exactly the same line. He has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

Now that's not because people go to him looking for mercy and some are turned away but knowing that people who come to him for mercy are those who have been mercifully called by God himself. So here we are so far this is the difficult answer to the painful question. Number one belief and unbelief has always been a thing it's always been like this. Step two behind all that stands the sovereign plan of God who chooses to show mercy to whom he wills.

[21:17] He chooses to save those he wants and those he doesn't. There's another step to make because in verse 19 Paul anticipates the obvious objection look down at verse 19 one of you will say to me then why does God still blame us for who is able to resist his will?

This is surely what any thinking person who is tracking Paul's argument is asking now right? Wait Paul if you are saying that behind belief and unbelief ultimately lies the sovereign choice of God in showing mercy and hardening how can anybody then be held responsible for unbelief?

If the reason that they don't believe the gospel is ultimately because God made them not believe then surely it's not their fault. Listen this is so important right?

If you are not at this point asking this question two things are possible right? One you've zoned out and you're checking your emails on your phone like I said you might be at the beginning in which case come back or two is you just not really understood what's been said because if you are thinking and knowing what Paul has said this is the important question isn't it?

How can God be sovereign over belief and unbelief and people still yet be held responsible for their actions whether they believe or not?

[22:45] These two things seem to us to be a contradiction to one another. How can they both be true? Either surely God does choose and people are therefore not responsible or people are responsible and God does not choose but surely these two things cannot be true at the same time.

Which one is it going to be? Well look down at verse 20 because Paul gives you the answer you're not going to like it but this is the answer. Who are you? A human being to talk back to God.

Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it why did you make me like this? Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

This is the mind blowing answer. The mind blowing answer is listen that is the obvious question you're right. but you cannot tell God what he is and isn't allowed to do.

You cannot say to God you are not allowed to retain your sovereignty in a world of human freedom. In other words while human freedom and responsibility are true and we'll see more of that next week still they are not true in a way that compromises God's freedom.

[23:57] God God is free. That's the answer isn't it? And you are not allowed to tell him that he is not free. And more than that we need to be careful don't we?

Because you and I are not in a position to lecture God about what he is or isn't allowed to do. He is the potter and we are the clay. In this world the world that God has made the world that God will hold to account the lives that he has given us which we will one day stand before him he is the one who is allowed to dictate the terms not you or I.

Because in this world it's not just human freedom that matters but it's divine freedom because step three is God is free to do as he wills.

God must be free. Now we need to be careful here because there is more to notice in these verses. I want you to see I don't think verse 20 is meant to be angry or confrontational.

Paul is not waving a stick at you saying how dare you ask that question. That's not the tone here. His point is not that asking the question is necessarily rude and objectionable.

[25:13] Rather his point is something like this. When it comes to the issue of divine sovereignty and human responsibility the idea that God chooses those whom he will save and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

When it comes to understanding how those two things hold together the question is who do you think you are as a mere human being to expect to understand that?

Do you think you can understand God? Do you? Do you think that you can ask God listen God tell me because this is a trouble to me.

Listen you must explain to me God please because I don't understand you must explain to me how it can be true that you are sovereign and still hold people responsible. Do you expect God to explain that to you in a way that you can understand?

Do you? Of course he couldn't. Not because God doesn't know but because he doesn't have to explain it but even if he did you wouldn't understand it.

[26:17] Now I realise that's probably not the answer that you were maybe looking for. You're perhaps hoping for more that maybe Paul might land an answer that would end the debate that's rumbled on in churches for centuries. Churches are full of churches that emphasise God's sovereignty at the expense of human responsibility and you have other churches which are all about human responsibility and swerve away from the idea that the Lord is sovereign but Paul says no you need to live in the tension because both are true but you cannot understand them because you're a mere human being I'm a mere human being.

There's one last step let's rehearse the steps right? Belief and unbelief has always been a thing. God chooses those he says and those he doesn't and then next God is free to do as he wills but there is a fourth step God does all this so that God will be seen as glorious.

This is where this section ends verse 22 look down at it what if God this is Paul's suggestion and answer what if God although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known or with great patience the objects of his wrath prepared for destruction what if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy whom he prepared in advance for glory even us whom he also called not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles here Paul's point now is essentially to move on and to say what is true of a God like this what am I to think of a God who saves and holds to account what is true if God sovereignly raises up those who will experience mercy and sovereignly raises up those who will experience his judgment what is true of a God who is able to do all of that that God is glorious says

Paul and notice how he's glorious verse 23 by making known his glory to those prepared in advance for his glory I'm going to slow down here so that we get this look at verse 22 again notice that God's decision to allow unbelief to persist in his world his patience with the objects of his wrath or his judgment is his patience there is for the purpose of showing glory to those who will be saved this is so important okay God allows unbelief to persist in his world not because he is weak not because he's not in control of it but so that he might save and that those he saves might know what it is they've been saved from the order there is the important thing God doesn't allow mercy to exist in order for him to provide an opportunity for judgment instead he provides patience in judgment in order to prioritize mercy use

Paul's example of Pharaoh right God did not save the Israelites from Egypt so that he could judge Pharaoh rather he patiently waited to punish Pharaoh so that he might save Israel salvation was and is God's priority not judgment and the Israelites will look over the bodies of the Egyptians bobbing up and down in the Red Sea and they are to think that should have been me but God showed me mercy Jesus tells a parable in Matthew 13 of weeds and wheat where the kingdom of God is compared to a field that has been planted with wheat and then someone an enemy goes and plants weeds in the field and the servants say shall we pull up the weeds and the farmer says no don't do that because you might pull up the wheat with the weeds by accident and we really don't want that because what we're really about is harvest harvesting wheat no instead wait until the harvest and then we'll separate them and we'll bundle the weeds to burn and the wheat to go in the barn and so it is here

[30:48] God's sovereignty over belief and unbelief means that he can patiently wait to show mercy prioritizing showing his glory in saving his people even to us who don't belong the old testament promises because we were never part of the Jewish nation we are the gentiles and so we can say can't we that because of God's great patience he has time to include even us so as verse 25 puts it as he says in Hosea I will call them my people who are not my people and I will call her my loved one who is not my loved one and in the very place where it said to them you are not my people there they will be called children of the living God it's you and me you!

you're a Christian this morning let me just ask as we close what are we to do with all of this we are surrounded aren't we like Paul by the heartbreaking!

reality of unbelief people that we love care about deeply see no need to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ or follow him or turn from their sin it's not ignorance they know their Bibles they've attended church we've shared the gospel with them they just don't think it's important they just don't care and yet we know because the Bible is so clear that judgment stands before us all what are we to think what are we to do well we are to see that while we don't really understand God is still in charge and God knows what he's doing even if we don't know and yes we know because we kind of come to chapter 10 we should keep sharing the gospel people don't carry labels do they we don't know who God has chosen only God knows that and so we share the gospel but we also pray why pray why do you pray for your friends and family who don't know the

Lord to come and trust in him you pray because you know that salvation belongs to God and that he has the power to save that's what Romans 9 has been telling you but let me just finish with a plea if I can perhaps you're here this morning and you're not a Christian I'm so glad you're here with us this morning maybe you've thought wow this is a bit heavier than I thought church would be but let me say it's really good you're here I wonder that perhaps you thought when you came into I'd really love you to find out more about this Christian thing come along to church it'd be great that's a really good way of finding out more and then you've listened to Romans 9 you thought oh my goodness well what if God hasn't chosen me what was the point of me investigating Christianity if God hasn't chosen me why am I even here well let me say to you if there is a desire from you to know God and to seek after him if you find in your heart that there is a desire to turn from your sin and to live for him a desire to hear his word and follow Jesus what you really must understand and it's really good that you're here because you need to know this right at the very beginning you need to understand you have that desire not because you're a good person not because you've thought it out but because God has put it there that's why that thought is there what is happening this morning you thought you were coming to investigate Christianity right actually what is happening as you feel

like that in your heart is God is calling you that's what's happening you know in this world that God has made that he rules sovereignly with all his power and his might you don't look for him he looks for you and he calls you by name and he says come follow me you're mine from before the foundation of the world

[35:10] I knew you and I loved you that desire you have in your heart to know me to trust me to turn from your sin I put it there that you might come and follow me so let me say to you this morning if you're not a Christian and you know in your heart that God is calling you to follow him please don't resist in fact it is impossible to resist that because salvation belongs to God let's pray maybe just take a few minutes of quiet to pray we've dealt with some heavy things let's take a moment just to seek the Lord and to pray in our hearts heavenly father we find passages like this in the bible to be deeply humbling we maybe perhaps thought that we're

Christians because we worked something out or we're better than other people but we find here that we're Christians that we believe and trust in you because you have shown us mercy oh how kind how loving how gracious how undeserving we are and how deserving you are of praise and glory and how we thank you Lord that you have been patient in history choosing not yet to bring the judgment that you have promised in order that you might save the full number of your people thank you that you've waited another day so that people here in this room can hear your voice calling out to them to come and follow you Lord how we pray that they would hear your voice and respond and how we pray that you might hold us and keep us until the day that we see you face to face in Jesus name we pray Amen!