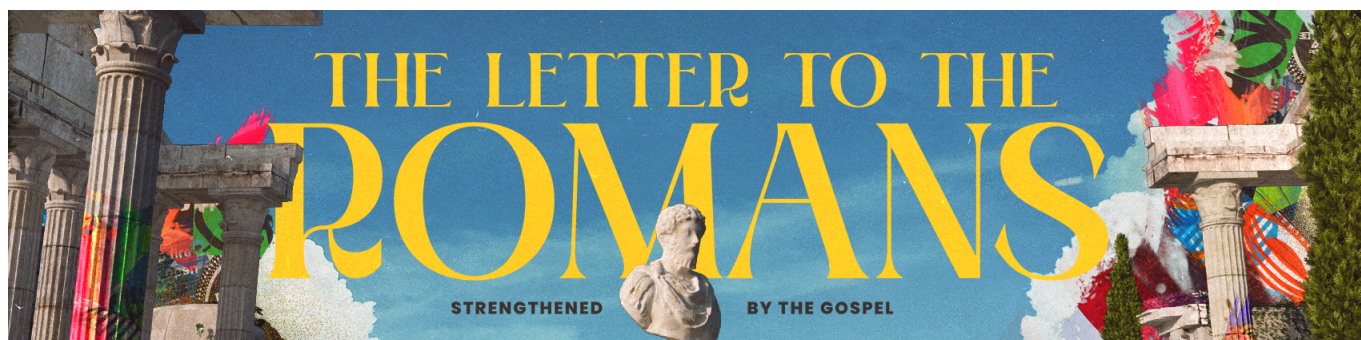




Romans (Strengthened by the Gospel) (Week 13/18) God's Sovereign Mercy

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect *Which of the three 'gifts' from Romans 8 is helping you most right now to live with patient hope?*

Warm-Up

1. If God's promises could fail, what would that mean for our confidence in him today?

Read Romans 9:1-5 (Truth through Tears)

2. How does Paul's sorrowful heart towards his people move or challenge you?
3. Who are one or two persons whose salvation you long to pray for? (May pray with group together).
4. What has God given Israel? Why were these privileges not the same as saving faith?

Read Romans 9:6-13 (God's Promise Has Not Failed)

5. What promises have God made to Abraham and his offspring? (cf. Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Gal. 3:16).
6. What strikes you when Paul says, "*not all who are descended from Israel are Israel*"?
7. What does God want us to understand about his purpose in election? What does it depend on, and what does it not depend on? (cf. Rom. 9:11-12)
8. If salvation has always depended upon God's call. How should this humble or encourage us?

Read Romans 9:14-23 (God's Sovereign Mercy is Not Unjust)

9. Why do you think people may object that "God is unjust"? (Rom. 9:14) What logic are they drawing?
10. What do God's dealings with Moses and Pharaoh teach us about his mercy, judgement, sovereignty?
11. How does the 'potter-clay' picture humble us while still allowing us to ask genuine questions to God?
12. What do verses 22-23 show us about God's riches of his glory toward the object of his object? How does this change the way we think about God's mercy toward us?

Read Romans 9:24-33 (God Calls All to Trust in Christ)

13. While not all who are descended from Israel are Israel, who is God calling to be his people?
14. Why did Gentiles obtain righteousness while many in Israel did not? What is the crucial difference between faith and works?
15. Jesus is the stone over which some stumble, yet the one who trusts in him "will never be put to shame." What two responses to Jesus does Paul place before us?

Apply *Romans 9 ends not simply with a puzzle to solve, but a person to trust. Where are you tempted to rely on your heritage, morality, church involvement, or your own effort rather than Christ, and what would it mean for you to trust Christ instead?*

Pray *Merciful God, humble us before your sovereign mercy, give us hearts that grieve for the lost, and help us trust Christ alone, in whom we will never be put to shame. Amen.*

GOING DEEPER

Romans (Strengthened by the Gospel) (Week 13/18) God's Sovereign Mercy

Small Group Discussion Questions

On Your Front Line this Week

Who is someone you can invite to the Public Lecture this Friday? You might be surprised who says yes!

For Families

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- *Listen (Sermon):* "God's Sovereignty" by Vaughan Roberts:
<http://bit.ly/4xiaiyx>
- *Listen (Sermon):* "Romans 9 (Part 1)" by Christopher Ash:
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/romans-9-pt-1/>
- *Listen (Sermon):* "Romans 9 (Part 2)" by Christopher Ash:
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/romans-9-pt-2/>
- *Listen (Sermon):* "Learning the Lesson - A Sermon on Romans 9:1-33" by Martyn Lloyd-Jones:
<https://www.mljtrust.org/sermon/learning-the-lesson/>
- *Watch (Reflection):* "Ten Effects of Romans 9 on My Life" by John Piper:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A09Iax_7nWY
- *Read (Article):* "How Romans 9 Anticipates Objections to Unconditional Election" by Justin Dillehay:
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/romans-9-anticipates-objections-unconditional-election/>

Series Resources

- *Read:* "Strengthened by the Gospel" by Brian Rosner. 📖
- *Read:* "The Story of God Bible Commentary: Romans" by Michael Bird.
- *Read:* "Into the Heart of Romans" by N. T. Wright. 📖
- *Read:* "Epistle of Paul to the Romans" by F. F. Bruce. 📖
- *Read:* "The Message of Romans" by John Stott. 📖
- *Read:* "The Epistle to the Romans" by Leon Morris. 📖
- *Watch:* "Romans" by the Bible Project:
<https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-romans/>

📖 Available to borrow from the St Bart's Library (Toowoomba): stbarts.com.au/library

ROMANS (STRENGTHENED BY THE GOSPEL)
Week 13/18 “God’s Sovereign Mercy” | by Justin Lai (09/08/2026, Toowoomba)

하나님의 주권적인 긍휼 | Nhialic ëë Riëël dë Kác dë Piöu | 神的主权怜悯 |
தேவனுடைய இறையாண்மையுள்ள இரக்கம்

Bible Passage: Romans 9

Merciful God, we come before you in solemn humility and thanksgiving, for you have called us the undeserved to be your people. Open our eyes, so we may see the greatness of your mercy. Teach us your Word now, and shape us into a people of gratitude and passion for sharing your mercy with our neighbours. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Introduction: Truth through Tears (9:1-5)

Most of us can probably think of someone we love who is far from Christ.

- Those who do not yet believe, or those who walked away.
- When it is someone you love, their *unbelief* is not just a theological problem.
- *It’s personal.* We long for them to know Christ, to know his love, his forgiveness, and the hope of eternity. So we pray for them; sometimes we weep for them.

That’s how Paul feels for many of his fellow people.

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit— 2 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 sake of my people, those of my own race. (Romans 9:1-3)

- Paul is heartbroken. These are his own people - the people he loves.
 - And yet so many of them refuse to come to their own Messiah, Jesus Christ.
 - Paul’s grief is so deep that, if it were possible, he says he could wish himself cut off from Christ for their sake.
- And what makes his grief even sharper is how much Israel has received from God.
 - They had God’s presence, covenants, the law, the temple, the promises; and,
 - supremely, the Messiah, the Saviour who is “*God over all, forever praised!*”
 - You can almost hear Paul pleading: “*My love, you have been brought so near, yet you are so far. Please now, see him. Trust him.*”

Romans 9 is not cold speculation; it is a writing of a sorrowful man.

Paul wants his people, *and us*, to understand God’s mercy, and God’s call to his people.

As the chapter unfolds, Paul shows us three things:

- [1] God’s promise has not failed;
 - [2] God’s sovereign mercy is not unjust;
 - [3] God calls both Jews and Gentiles to Faith in Christ
- Beneath all the difficult questions in Romans 9, there is one great reality -
None of us belongs to him because we deserve to, but God is sovereignly merciful.

[1] God's Promise Has Not Failed (9:6-13)

6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 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." 8 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. (R.9:6-8)

God had made promises to Israel. He promised Abraham that through his offspring blessing would come to the world. (cf. Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Gal. 3:16).

- But if so many Israelites have rejected the Messiah, you can understand why people might ask: have God's promises failed? Has God's word failed?
- And Paul's answer is: No.
- Then he makes an important and striking distinction: "*not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.*"
 - Physical descent from Abraham was an extraordinary privilege. Paul has just listed Israel's privileges in verses 4–5. And later in chapter 11, he will insist that God has not simply rejected Israel's descendants.
 - *But physical descent was not enough on its own.*
 - Paul shows this from Israel's own history:
 - Look at Isaac and Ishmael: they were both from the same *physical* father, Abraham, but only Isaac was through whom God had *promised* to carry his covenant purposes.
 - Look at Jacob and Esau: the point is even stronger here. They were from the same *biological* father and mother; they were even twins. Yet before they were born or did anything, God declared that his *promise* would continue through Jacob.
 - Why? Verse 11 says: "*in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls.*"
 - That's the point:
 - God's *promise* does not finally depend upon ancestry. It does not depend on work or on someone making themselves worthy enough.
 - *Instead, it has always depended upon the gracious God who calls.*
And how people have faithfully responded to that call.
- Now, *being called by God* should never lead to pride; but to deep humility and worship.
 - Some of us grew up surrounded by Christian things. We sang the songs and knew the Bible stories; went to Sunday school and to the Youth group. Those are wonderful privileges; we should thank God for them. But being surrounded by Christian things is not the same as *personally trusting in Christ*.
 - Here's an encouragement. If you are trusting in Christ today, your confidence is not in your background or achievements. Your confidence is in the mercy of the God who calls.
 - So there is no room for boasting, only gratitude. As John Stott puts it, God's calling becomes a "*foundation for Christian worship.*" Because, "*if we were responsible for our own salvation...we would be justified in singing our own praises and blowing our own trumpets in heaven.*" [Stott, 268]

[2] God's Sovereign Mercy is Not Unjust (9:14-23)

14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. (Romans 9:14-16)

At this point, you might hear some object: it's not fair!

- If God's purpose does not depend on our ancestry, our works, or our effort, but on the God who calls—does that make God unjust?
- Paul's answer could not be stronger: *"Not at all!"*
- Because the whole point of mercy is *that none of us deserves it*.

- Paul first takes us back to Moses: *"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."* (Rom 9:15; cf. Ex 33:19)
 - This was spoken after Israel made and worshipped a golden calf idol. They had just broken the covenant with the God who saved them from Egypt.
 - God would have been completely *just to judge them*. And yet, astonishingly, he *showed mercy* and continued with the people.
 - *That's what mercy is: kindness that is given to those who do not deserve it. Mercy cannot be earned, demanded, or claimed as a right.*
 - Last week I walked past the Supreme Court in Singapore. Singapore is one of the countries that imposes the death penalty for certain serious crimes. But in rare circumstances, a person under sentence can receive a pardon. A pardon does not mean the person was innocent. It means someone who stood condemned has been shown mercy.
 - But here the gospel goes even further.
 - Because when God shows mercy to sinners, he does not simply sweep justice aside. At the cross, justice is not ignored; it is borne by Jesus Christ, who took upon himself the judgement our sins deserve.
 - So God can be completely just and, at the same time, pour out astonishing mercy upon guilty people.

- After Moses, Paul then turns to Pharaoh, and shows that it's possible to be hardened. *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."* (Romans 9:17)
 - This does not mean God made Pharaoh evil. Pharaoh repeatedly resisted God, oppressed God's people, and hardened his own heart. He is *fully responsible*.
 - Yet Paul also says something so plainly that we cannot ignore: *God hardened Pharaoh*.
 - It is possible that there is a judicial dimension to this hardening, something like what we saw earlier in Romans, when God gives rebellious people over to their own sinful desires. (cf. Rom. 1:24)
 - Pharaoh is fully responsible for his stubborn resistance. Yet Paul will not allow us to reduce God's hardening simply to God watching Pharaoh's

choices from a distance. God remains sovereign even over Pharaoh's resistance, using it to display his power and make his name known.

- So Paul summarises in verse 18: "*God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.*"
- Notice what Paul is teaching us:
 - God is sovereign in both mercy and judgment.
 - And at the same time, our response to God is real and accountable.
 - So the disposition of our hearts towards him really matters.

Now Paul anticipates another objection:

19 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?" 20 But 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?'" 21 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? (Rom 9:19-21)

- When a decision is made in a court, we may question the judge. We can wonder if they got it right. And of course, even the best human judges can get it wrong.
- But God is not a mere human judge.
- That's the point of the three questions he poses:
 - Q#1: Who are we humans to question God? (20a)
 - Q#2: Who is the creation to question the creator? (20b)
 - Q#3: Who is the pot to question the potter? (21)
 - Tim Keller helpfully puts it, "*we must beware of standing judgement over God, rather than remembering he is judged over us.*" (Keller, 67)
 - Paul is not saying that it's wrong to ask sincere questions. The issue is presumption - when we assume that God must answer to us.
- But Paul does not stop there;
 - Look carefully at verse 22. What does God do with the people who deserve his wrath? God bears with them, us, *with great patience.* (9:22)
 - Not lightning, not fire - but patience!
 - Earlier in Romans 2, Paul spoke about how God's delayed judgement is his patience intended to lead us to repentance.
 - God's patience is already evident in the very fact that final judgement has not yet fallen.
 - So perhaps the astonishing question is not only, 'Why does God judge?' but, '*Why is God so patient with sinners—and why does he show saving mercy to any of us?*'"
 - So verse 23 turns our eyes again to mercy: "What if he did this to make the *riches of his glory to the objects of his mercy*, whom he prepared in advance for glory?"
- So we are the "objects of God's mercy?"

[3] God Calls Jews and Gentiles to Trust in Christ (9:24-33)

24 - even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? 25 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," (Rom 9:24-25)

- God calls his people *"from the Jews and also from the Gentiles (non-Jews)."*
 - By quoting from Hosea and Isaiah from verses 25-29, Paul shows that this "surprising" shape of God's people does not mean God's word has failed. A way has always been prepared for both Jew and Gentile.
 - Hosea speaks of God graciously calling those who were "not my people" his people. That means people like us, who were once outside the ancestry, have been brought in.
- Some might ask how could Gentiles possibly be welcomed as God's people?
 - They didn't pursue the Law to be right with God.
 - But that's when Paul shows us something critical:
 - Verse 32, *"Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works."*
 - The problem was not that God's word had failed.
 - The problem was that many in Israel sought righteousness through what they could do, rather than receiving God's righteousness by faith.
 - And so some stumbled over the very one God had provided: *Jesus Christ* - the stone who is the foundation of God's mercy.
 - While some might trip over this stone, for those who put trust in him, in Jesus Christ, there is a wonderful promise:
 - Verse 33, *"The one who believes in him will never be put to shame."*

Conclusion

So the chapter ends not with a puzzle to solve, but a person to trust.

- Jew or Gentile, Western or Eastern, long-term churchgoer or newcomer -
It is in Jesus Christ we see God's justice and mercy come together.
We may still have questions. We may even have objections,
But the question Paul finally puts before us with tears is, *"Will you trust Jesus Christ?"*
 - Not your heritage.
 - Not your moral record.
 - Not how long you've been in the church.
 - Only this... whether you put your trust in Him.

Because the promise still stands:

"The one who believes in [Christ] will never be put to shame."

Merciful God, we praise you that your Word has not failed, and your mercy never ends. You are just in all your ways, and yet in your great mercy you have called sinners like us to belong to you. Fix our eyes on Jesus Christ, the stone you have laid. Humble us, deepen our trust, fill us with gratitude, and make us a people who weep for the lost and gladly share the Good News of Christ. In His name. Amen.
