

ROMANS

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S
MERCY & FAITHFULNESS

9-11





**DALBY
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**



ROMANS

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MERCY & FAITHFULNESS

◀ 9-11

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GROWTH GROUPS AT DPC

WHY GROWTH GROUPS?

At DPC, our mission is to:

"Follow Jesus who calls us together to grow and go reach the world."

Our Growth Groups are at the core of how we do the "grow" part of this mission. Together with our Sunday gatherings, it's where we slow down to focus on helping each other grow in spiritual maturity as we follow Jesus together.

We do that by:

- **Gathering around God's Word** - spending time in the Bible together, digging deeper and figuring out how the gospel shapes our hearts and lives.
- **Building community within our groups** - meaningful relationships are the best context in which we can "speak the truth in love" to each other, spurring each other on as we follow Jesus.
- **Caring for each other** - our Growth Groups are the main way we do pastoral care. As DPC grows, we want to make sure that nobody feels alone, and everyone is adequately cared for. Our growth group network gives us the best opportunities to love and care for each other as we do life together as followers of Jesus.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Growth Groups, along with much of church life, follow the rhythm of the school terms. This helps us get into a familiar rhythm throughout the year, so that we always know what's next and can plan accordingly.

Each term looks essentially the same: it starts with our GG leaders meeting, and our regular weekly growth groups run from weeks 2-5. In week 6 each term, we join together as Growth Groups from across DPC to spend some concentrated time in worship and corporate prayer. Then we return to our regular groups from week 7 to the end of the school term.



DPC FAMILIES

REMEMBERISATIONING

At DPC, we want to help families disciple their kids. And so it's important for us as a whole church, to set aside time intentionally **thinking about, talking about and living out** the gospel. One way we can do this is by helping families memorise bits of the Bible – or as we like to call it, **rememberisationing!**

WHY REMEMBERISATIONING?

There are heaps of reasons why it's a good idea to get into **rememberisationing**. Here's one, from Psalm 1:

- 1 Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
- 2 but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
- 3 That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.
- 4 Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.
- 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
- 6 For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

For a tree to flourish and grow it needs to have deep roots to stay strong and produce fruit. This is true for our spiritual growth as well. With rememberisationing, God's words are planted in our memory and help us grow and bear fruit. They become a natural part of our reactions, thinking and responding.

We'd love you to join in and have a go rememberisationing with us this term.

Joshua Dodd

Generations Pastor

Thanks to:

Tyndale Publishers "5 Reasons Kids Should Memorize Scripture." No pages. Cited 04 October 2020. Online: <https://www.tyndale.com/stories/5-reasons-kids-should-memorize-scripture>

Galea, Sandy. "Ten Tips On Helping Kids Meditate On And Memorise Scripture." No pages. Cited 28 September 2020. Online: <https://www.kidswise.com.au/about/blog/46-ten-tips-on-helping-kids-meditate-on-and-memorise-scripture>

Shelley, Owen. "The A-Z of Ministry with Children." Australia: ANZEA Publishers, 1992.

TEN TIPS TO HELP WITH REMEMBERISATION

Hopefully you'll see these ten tips in 'real' life this term!

#1: Find out what memory verse/s your child is learning at Kid's Church. Ask your child to teach the memory verse they've been learning to the whole family.

#2: Learn where the verse is in the Bible first... then you can find it again IF you forget the words!

#3: It's all about repetition of the verse. It's all about repetition of the verse. Fun and games help here but don't let the fun and games get in the way of repetition.

#4: Display the memory verse on your fridge or in a visible place where everyone in the family is reminded of it daily.

#5: Encourage each family member to try and put that verse into his or her own words. Figure out together what the 'hard' words mean. It's always easier to remember something you understand.

#6: Try to arrange the verse as a family so that it's memorable. Add hand actions, a beat, stamps, claps, melody or, sing the verse to a familiar nursery rhyme or tune. Revise the verse together regularly.

#7: Ask each member of the family to cartoon or draw a series of pictures illustrating a verse. Encourage each family member to share their cartoons/illustrations and what the verse means.

#8: Ask each other "what situations would it be useful to know this memory verse?" The aim is to see how rememberisation is useful in life.

#9: Think of people you could share your family memory verse with (e.g. missionary family, friends, church family member...). Either post, text, Zoom or e-mail the verse to encourage others.

#10: If you want to pick your own verse to do Rememberisation... Look for one verse that stands on its own from what you read as a family in the Bible (i.e. is able to be understood when separated from the surrounding verses). Or you can purchase an app like 'Fighter Verses'. Select verses listed on this app to discuss and learn as a family. Each verse on Fighter Verses is categorised under a topic and has both an audio track and a musical arrangement. The app has Quiz Games and enables you to keep a record as a family of which verses you've learnt.

INTRO TO ROMANS 9-11

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS & MERCY

BACKGROUND

The book of Romans was written by the apostle Paul to the church in Rome around AD57. He was most likely writing from the city of Corinth, a little while before he planned to stop off at Rome on his way to Spain (Rom 15:23-24).

The church in Rome was a mix of Jewish and Gentile (non-Jews) Christians, but the majority would have been Gentiles. Early in the first century, the city of Rome had a large Jewish population. But in AD49, Emperor Claudius had all of the Jewish Christians and leaders kicked out of the city (Acts 18:2). After Claudius died in AD54, Jews slowly started to trickle back into Rome over the coming years. By now though, the church was mostly Gentile.

This is the context Paul is writing into. The big issues for the Roman church were all about race. And as Paul writes, we get a real sense of the simmering tension. Not between black and white, but Jew & Gentile. For example, Jews argued about the importance of their dietary laws and sacred days (ch14), while Gentiles just didn't care and asserted their freedom from these things because of the gospel.

And so in the first 8 chapters, Paul has been giving an overview of the gospel, reminding the Roman Christians that they all (both Jews and Gentiles) are unrighteous and in need of the salvation God has made possible through faith in Christ alone.

The section of ch1-8 ends with what some call a "crescendo of confidence", as Paul explains that our salvation is secure because it doesn't depend on our own effort. God has called us, opened our minds to the truth and now carries us on to final glory (8:30).

CH9-11

As we move into chapters 9-11, it seems as though Paul starts to respond to some possible questions or objections that he knows people will likely have. Perhaps questions like:

- *If Israel are God's chosen people, why have so many rejected salvation through the Messiah? How do we reconcile Israel's unbelief, with God's covenant & promises?*
- *Has God rejected his people? If so, how do we know He won't do it again?*
- *Is God reliable? Do His promises count for anything?*
- *Is God unjust? Does being chosen mean anything?*

Timothy Keller (a New York pastor and scholar) puts it like this:

"But now Paul can imagine someone coming and saying: Hold on Paul! You say that when God calls someone, he always brings them all the way home. But what about the Jews? God called them but most Jews have rejected Christ at the present time. So maybe God's calling and purpose can be rejected! If God promised that Israel would be his people, yet the majority did not believe in Christ, does that mean God's promise, power, or mercy is failing?"

Keller, pg57

As Gentile Christians ourselves, we may not think these chapters have much relevance for us. But actually, some of our questions are potentially the same as they were back then:

Can we trust God? If he hasn't kept His promise to Israel, how do we know he won't do the same to us? Is our future really secure?

OUT OF PLACE?

Many people throughout history have argued that Ch9-11 just seem out of place – an uncomfortable speed bump in the message of the book of Romans. But they are actually a vital centrepiece in Paul's argument:

1. **CH1-8** Salvation is for both Jew & Gentile though faith in Jesus alone
2. **CH9-11** God is a faithful and merciful God with a plan for salvation and has followed through on His plan to save both Jews and Gentiles, even if it's hard for us to get our heads around
3. **CH12-16** Those who have faith in Christ are saved into a community of believers (the church), and their shared righteousness through Christ will radically shape the way the diverse community will look and operate.

For the Jewish Christians in Rome, Paul is reminding them of how everything in their history culminates in Jesus as the Christ.

For the Gentile Christians in Rome, Paul seems to be trying to open their eyes to the story they have been brought in to - the story of God's faithfulness, the history of His chosen people, and His plan to pour out His mercy on both Jews and Gentiles. It's a reminder to all that salvation ultimately is only possible because of God's grace.

CONNECTING ROMANS 9-11 TO US IN 2020

It's important to remember a couple of things as we dig into Romans 9-11, and try to figure out how it applies to us and our church today:

Remember the original context and purpose of the letter Paul was writing to a church that was ethnically diverse - it was a mix of both Jewish & Gentile Christians.

Paul's desire for the church in Rome is that they would be built up, strengthened and united as they continue to grasp the truth of the gospel, both Jews & Gentiles. And so that's why he has written this letter and plans to visit them as soon as he is able.

Remember we're Gentiles – outsiders who have mercifully been included in God's rescue of rebellious people through faith in Christ.

While the Jew/Gentile stuff may seem irrelevant to us, it actually takes us deep into who God is, and how He works. It's a picture of God's unrelenting faithfulness and mercy. Of how He has worked and acted in history to rescue rebellious people, both Jews and Gentiles. This good news is the great leveller and equaliser - all are sinful, all need God's grace, and God is ultimately the one who pours out His mercy as He chooses.

Thomas Schreiner is a guy who wrote a commentary on Romans, and he puts it like this:

"The primary question (of 9-11) relates to the faithfulness and righteousness of God. Is the God who made saving promises to Israel faithful to His word? Paul focuses on Israel, since it has fallen short of realising God's promises, but the text is not limited to Israel. Romans 9-11 also emphasises God's faithfulness to the gentiles, demonstrating that God's plan in history fulfils his promises"

Schreiner, pg462

So what is this all about when it comes down to it?

Marvelling at God's wisdom and Glory as we reflect on His faithfulness and mercy in salvation to both Jews & Gentiles. (9:17; 11:33-36)

1. ISRAEL'S SURPRISING REJECTION

(FOLLOWING SUN 11 OCT)

Romans 9:1-5

They thought they had done everything right: Sunday school, youth, reading the Bible with the family. They even tried not to be too pushy. But as soon as Jeremy and Sarah's daughter moved out of home she stopped going to church. They were devastated. What did they do now?

In these opening verses of chapter 9, Paul himself is responding to the fact that his fellow Jews are not going to church. Whether or not this is fair, or what will happen to them in the future, is what will come next. But in these verses we get an insight into how much it matters to Paul that someone he loves is not part of the Christian family.

Q1. Can you think of a time when you or someone you know has faithfully shared the gospel and Christian life with another person and yet they rejected Jesus? How did you or they seem to feel about God in the midst of that?

Romans 8 is a wonderful description of our precious place with the living God. It finished at a high point describing how we could not be separated from the love of God.

Q2. What clues are we given about Paul's serious tone in verse 1 (see other places he says he's not lying: 2 Corinthians 11:31; Galatians 1:20; 1 Timothy 2:7)?

Q3. Describe the strength of his feelings in verse 2?

Q4. What does Paul ask and for whom does he ask it? Why isn't it even possible?

Q5. Romans 8 finished with God's people unable to be separated from the love of God....but it seems the Jewish race had been separated from the love of God. How might this help us understand the next few chapters?

Q6. What were the blessings offered to Paul's own race and how did they climax?

There is a large elephant in the room in the church in Rome. They are following a God whose love shown through Christ is what reassures them that they can't be separated from God. But the elephant is that it seems like the Jewish people had received similar promises but now they are cut off. What's the deal? Paul knows it's a big question. These chapters are his answer. But before he gets there, he shows how much he gets it. It's not a hypothetical question for him. It's his race, his family, his lifelong friends who are cut off. Before answering anything, he shows how much of a tragedy it is for someone to be cut off from Christ.

Q7. When someone tells you that a loved one has walked away from Christ how do you think you can respond in a way that helps?

Remember GIMATS? It's our word to describe the pathway to helping people come to faith in Christ. Go to people's things, Invite them to your things, Mix them with other church friends, Ask about their life, Tell them about yours, Share the gospel.

Q8. Talk about some people you know who are cut off from Christ. There's no reason to stop praying for them or loving them by including them in your life. Who is one person you can pray for and which part of the GIMATS path could you do with them?

Paul would like to be cut off from Christ for those he loves, but he can't. That's what Jesus did - he was cut off from God for the sake of his people. Paul is in such sorrow he wishes he could do anything to see his own saved. It's simply tragic. This passage shows us our response should firstly be sorrow with a desire to see them not cut off.

PRAY

- Thank Jesus that he was willing to be cut off for our sake
- Ask God to move us deeply at the plight of our friends and family cut off from Christ
- Pray for the women who were part of the outreach event last week
- Pray for the upcoming men's event

- Pray for the Mission Partners that your group is connected to

COMING UP

October 22 - Men's outreach event
November 2 - Jesus an introduction



2. HAS GOD'S PROMISE FAILED?

(FOLLOWING SUN 18 OCT)

Romans 9:6-13

The challenge of this passage is that our issue is not their issue. We're going to run into questions about God's election and his character. But neither of these were in the mind of the audience who first heard this. So, in this study we're going to try and firstly get what it was about and secondly face the big questions it raises for us.

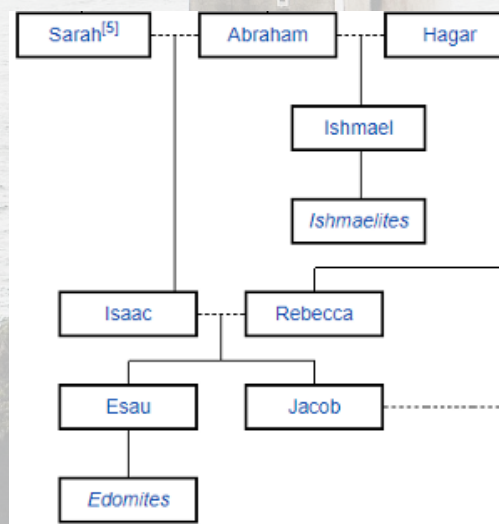
For the Jewish Christian people returning to the church in Rome after being chased out by the emperor, the persecution of their race is front of mind. Why hasn't God protected their race like he said he would? Don't they have a right to expect to be all 'in'? As with much of this part of Romans, these verses help us all wrestle with God's faithfulness.

Q1. Spend some quiet time each thinking about when you find it hard to trust that God is doing what he says?

Plenty of the people in the church in Rome would have thought 'well, didn't God say all the Jewish people were his?' If that's the case, it seems that God is in trouble....

Q2. In his first answer to the charge made against God in verse 6, what is Paul's cryptic answer?

Here's the early part of Abraham's family tree:



Q3. Who did Abraham have children with and how many children did he have in this diagram?

Q4. Jacob is later renamed 'Israel.' How does this help make sense of the point Paul is making in v6-9?

Paul can sense a possible objection here. Someone might say that it was always genuine bloodline Jews who would be saved, and since Ishmael was the son of an Egyptian slave (Hagar) he would never have been included in God's family anyway.

Q5. How do verses 10-11 answer that possible objection? (look at the family tree again if it helps).

Isaac's wife Rebecca was 100% Jewish. And, Esau and Jacob were twins. In fact, as the oldest it's Esau who should have been given the inheritance.

Q6. What happens in v12-13?

The main point here is that it's never been about having the right race (Jewish in this case), it's always been about being those who receive God's promise. The Jews in Rome shouldn't be surprised to see some ethnic Jews excluded and some Gentiles included.

DOES GOD REALLY HATE?

In our culture and time, verses about election and God choosing seem wildly unjust – Isn't God unfair if he only saves some? Shouldn't I have the right to choose? Isn't he a God of love?

We can briefly look at those here and leave a link for more later.

To the first point – is it unfair if God only saves some? – the important thing to remember is that Romans 3 painted a picture of the whole of humanity being deserving of Judgment. It's amazingly merciful that any are saved. It's not unjust, because God is the one who is wronged and he is free to give mercy.

To the second point – shouldn't I have the right to choose? – in the Western world we value free choice very highly. But even if you do choose it leaves you with problems with God. If he chooses then some are still not saved, if it's up to you to choose, some are still not saved. For God to be a truly powerful and Holy God it doesn't seem like a wild stretch to say ultimately, He must always be in control.

To the third point – isn't he a God of love? – yes, but perhaps not in the way we imagine love. He's a God of holiness who cannot tolerate evil. Evil angers and dishonours him. In fact, we also see God as one who hates. In Revelation 2 Jesus hates the practices of the Nicolaitans (whoever they are), and Jesus talks about Hell more than anyone else. So God's love is not just airy fairy vibes, it's a love built on His glory and mercifully extended to those who trust His son. A love that refuses to allow evil to flourish.

To read more on this, head to the "Dig A Little Deeper" section on pg31. You'll also find a link to an article from Timothy Keller.

7. What do you find most difficult about v12-13?

8. How is this section actually really good news for us?

9. What hope does this section give for the kinds of people that God might bring to faith?

God has always meant what he said. Salvation is always for those who live under his promise, not people of a special time or race or group.

PRAY

- Thank God for allowing Gentiles to be part of his family
- Thank God for showing mercy when he didn't have to
- Thank Jesus for his sacrifice which shows us the serious nature of sin and the depth of God's love
- Pray for the women who were part of the event earlier in October

- Pray for this week's men's event
- Pray for Jesus an Introduction starting next Monday night

COMING UP

October 22 – Men's outreach event
November 2 – Jesus an introduction



NOV 2
WHO IS JESUS?

Jesus

AN INTRODUCTION

NOV 16
WHAT DOES IT MEAN
TO FOLLOW JESUS?

NOV 9
WHY DID
JESUS COME?

Go to dpc.cc/next to register

3. IS GOD UNFAIR?

(FOLLOWING SUN 25 OCT)

Romans 9:14-29

God is generous with his mercy and compassion, we can neither choose it or work for it.

Life can get frustrating sometimes. We can leave a situation feeling like we've been treated unfairly, or overlooked when we thought perhaps we were deserving of something. We see in this passage that even though we might feel like this, God still loves us. He shows us that He is generous with his mercy and his compassion. He is incredibly patient with us. But it shows us that He will be the one to decide who receives his mercy or compassion. It's not up to us. Everything God does, He does as part of His bigger plan for us.

Q1. Do you ever feel like you've been treated unfairly or overlooked for something you thought you deserved? Can you share about a time you've felt like this?

Read Romans 9:14-29

Q2. Who does God say He will have mercy and compassion on?

Q3. Can we do anything to earn God's mercy or compassion?

Q4. Look back on verses 20-21. How does this statement make you feel? How can we use those feelings to help us glorify God?

Read Psalm 86:15

Read Psalm 103:8

Q5. Paul's language in our Romans passage might seem quite brutal. What comfort can we find from these words in Psalms?

Read Matthew 20:1-16

Q6. What similarities can you see between this passage and the passage in Romans?

God is generous with his mercy and compassion. He has been patient with humanity and our sinfulness. Too often we can have an expectation of receiving God's blessings, and feel anger or frustration when we don't get them. But the reality is we should be grateful that God has chosen to bless some of us at all.

Tim Keller puts it like this:

"...salvation "does not... depend on man's desire or effort" (v16) – that is on anything we want or strive for or achieve – but on God's mercy." And therefore no one can accuse God of unfairness in not extending his mercy to more than he chooses to. Salvation is about his mercy and his gift, not our work and our right."

Keller, pg65

Q7. Do you have any questions from this passage? Things that you need to wrestle with or research some more?

Q8. Have you experienced times when you felt like God was unjust?

Q9. What are 1-2 practical ways we can help each other wrestle with this together? Write them down, and pray for them together.

The misbelief of gaining salvation by human effort remains as strong as ever—people still think good intentions are the key that unlocks the door to eternal life. By the time they get to try the lock, they will find that their key does not fit. Others imagine that their efforts are building an invisible ladder to heaven made up of service, family, position, reputation, good work, and desire, but none of these rungs will support a feather. People are so busy trying to reach God that they completely miss the truth that God has already reached down to them. We cannot earn God's mercy—if we could, it would not be mercy.

PRAY

- That we remember that God is generous with His mercy and compassion
- Thank God for His patience with sinful humans
- Thank God for those have already received His blessings
- Pray that we will be grateful for the blessings we receive

- For those who attended the mens outreach event last week
- Pray for Jesus an Introduction starting Monday night (2 Nov)

COMING UP

November 2 - Jesus an Introduction
November 12 - Prayer & Praise



4. REAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

(FOLLOWING SUN 1 NOV)

Romans 9:30 - 10:13

Have you ever wondered what righteousness is? It's one of those words we hear a lot of throughout the Bible, but to most of us it's probably one of those "christian-ese" words we actually aren't quite sure what it's meant to make us think of.

Q1. Have a look at these verses and see if that helps to work out what righteousness is – Romans 6:11-14; 2 Corinthians 6:7-14; 2 Corinthians 9:10 and Ephesians 4:24.

Our passage in Romans this week is all about righteousness. And Paul wants to talk about *REAL* righteousness. Which as we'll find out, wasn't all that easy for God's people, Israel to grasp, and it led to them largely pursuing it in completely the wrong way.

Read Rom 9:30-33

Q2. What is Paul saying the difference is in the righteousness between the Jews and the Gentiles here?

Q3. In verses 32 and 33 Paul talks about a stumbling stone. What do you think this stumbling stone might be? Have a look at Isaiah 28:16.

Read Rom 10:1-4

Q4. Why does Paul say the Jews have got righteousness wrong?

Q5. How can we make sure, and help each other, be zealous for the right things - the gospel of grace - rather than the wrong things - works or performance?

Ultimately, being made righteous is part of our relationship with God. It's about being made "right" with God. Having a "right status" before God, that enables us to know Him and enjoy an intimate relationship with Him. But Israel, Paul says, largely has not obtained real righteousness - because they didn't pursue it by faith as God had called them to, but **pursued** the LAW instead, hoping to gain righteousness as a result. They created their OWN righteousness, rather than freely receiving it from God. The gracious offer of righteousness through faith in Christ was right in front of them, yet they stumbled over it as they pressed on in their pursuit of the law and works.

Read Romans 10:5-13 and then Deuteronomy 30:10-16?

Q6. Is what Paul is saying here for us to have a good relationship with God any different to what Moses was telling the Israelites? What do you think the difference is?

Q7. Do you think that you are sometimes a bit like the Jews when it comes to righteousness, when it comes to your relationship with God? Do you think there's a danger that you might sometimes pursue your own way of righteousness, rather than God's?

Q8. Do you think this means we don't try to do any good works? How do we balance the two?

Q9. What do v9-13 tell us about the basis of salvation and righteousness? Why is this good news for us?

PRAY

- Thanks that we have been made righteous through faith in Christ
- Help us to continue to pursue him, and not slip into pursuing our own righteousness
- Pray that God would help us to respond appropriately to the gift of righteousness

- Pray for your **Mission Partner**
- Pray for our **ongoing ministries** (Edge, Kidschurch, Staying Sharp, MOPS, etc)

COMING UP

- November 2 - Jesus an Introduction starts
- November 12 - Prayer & Praise



PRAYER

PRAISE

DATE: THURSDAY 12 NOVEMBER

TIME: 7PM

PLACE: DPC AUDITORIUM



5. WHY DID ISRAEL REJECT GOD'S MERCY?

(FOLLOWING SUN 8 NOV)

Romans 10:14-21

Do you know of someone who has completely rejected the good news of Jesus? A close friend or maybe a family member? It's tough, isn't it? And it can leave us asking the question "why?". Why don't they believe? Why have they rejected this good news?

This very same question is what Paul is addressing in these verses of his letter to the church in Rome. If faith in Jesus is all that's required, why have so many people of the nation of Israel rejected this message? If Israel were God's chosen people, how is it that they have largely failed to accept the message of righteousness through faith, and instead pursued righteousness on their own terms?

In these verses, Paul is going to help his readers see that there's no excuse for Israel's unbelief - it's just simply because of their stubbornness and disobedience.

Read Romans 10:12-21 (we'll start a few verses earlier)

Q1. How does Paul outline what's required for people to be saved, and how does this happen?

Q2. In v18, Paul asks: "Did they [Israel] not hear?" Why do you think he asks this question? And what is his answer claiming here, including the OT quote from Psalm 19? (it might help to read the whole of Psalm 19)

Q3. In v19 Paul asks another question: "Did they [Israel] not understand?" Check out the OT quotes from Deuteronomy and Isaiah, and discuss what you think he's getting at by answering his question with them.

Q4. From v21 (also an OT quote from Isaiah), what's Paul's conclusion about Israel's rejection/unbelief?

PAUL'S ARGUMENT ABOUT ISRAEL'S UNBELIEF IS THIS:

- Anyone who calls on the name of Jesus in faith will be saved (v13)
- The only way people can call on the name of Jesus is through hearing/believing/understanding the good news (v14-17)
- Israel **have** heard the good news (God has revealed His grace to them clearly in the Messiah, Jesus) - so that can't be the cause of their unbelief (v18)
- Israel **should** have understood, because even "foolish" Gentiles who didn't seek God or have any understanding have believed (v19-20)
- Ultimately, Israel's rejection of God's salvation is due to their stubborn and disobedient hearts. They don't believe, because they flat out choose not to (V21)

HEART PROBLEMS

Israel's stubborn and prideful hearts were the problem for them. They chose to seek righteousness and salvation their own way, rather than trusting in God's way, and accepting His gracious offer of mercy.

Q5. What do we learn from these verses about the nature of God's character? (V20-21 in particular)

Q6. Are there people in your life you can be praying for – that God would soften their hearts to accept His offer of grace in Jesus?

Q7. Quietly Reflect: How's your heart? Are there times in your life that stubbornness and pride make you hostile to God's grace?

Q8. How might we help each other trust in the grace of God day after day?

PRAY

- Thanks that God's offer of salvation is through faith
- Pray that our friends and family who don't know Jesus would hear the gospel clearly, understand and believe
- Pray that our hearts wouldn't be hostile to God's grace
- Thank God that He is merciful to those who don't deserve it or seek him

COMING UP

November 9 & 16 - Jesus an Introduction
November 12 Prayer & Praise (this week!)



6. HAS GOD REJECTED HIS PEOPLE?

(FOLLOWING SUN 15 NOV)

Romans 11:1-10

The Story so far...

Romans 11 has a reputation as being one of the most difficult passages in the whole of the Bible. So before we dive in, now is a good time to recap where we've been, and set the scene for where we're headed. This summary from Tim Keller is helpful:

"God chooses those he will save through faith in the gospel. We are responsible for our rejection of him and his gospel. So the Jews are responsible for their refusal to turn to Christ; and they have not come to faith because God has not chosen to have mercy on them. That is a summary of the teaching of Romans 9-10.

Keller pg 85

Chapter 11 begins with Paul again pre-empting the logical next question from his audience –

"Has God rejected Israel?"

Paul's answer? No! The rest of Romans 11 explains why – that God has not rejected Israel, because Israel's unbelief is not total. In v1-10, Paul builds a case for God's grace to Israel, laying a solid foundation for why we can *continue* to rely on this grace.

And this seems to be the big question *behind the question* Paul is addressing:

Is God's grace reliable?

Q1. How would you describe "grace" to someone who doesn't know Jesus?

GRACE IN THE PAST, GRACE IN THE PRESENT

In the first few verses of Romans 11, Paul seems certain that God has not rejected his people, Israel, despite their large scale rejection of Him.

Q2. What reasons does Paul seem to list to backup his assertion?

Verse 1a -

Verse 2-4 -

Verse 5 -

The evidence is pretty clear. It's *impossible* to think that God has rejected his people because:

1. Paul is an ethnic Israelite by birth, yet he has found salvation through Jesus
2. There has always been a remnant of faithful Israelites, even when it seemed there was not
3. There is still a faithful remnant - all those Jews in Paul's day who had also accepted Jesus as the Messiah and found salvation.

Q3. From v5&6, what does Paul say is the reason this remnant exists? And what's NOT?

LOTS REJECT GRACE, BUT SOME GET IT

From v7, Paul outlines how it is that only some of Israel have accepted God's grace, yet the majority have not. And his assessment is going to show that ultimately, God's grace has only been found by some, because the majority have completely missed it as they strive to figure out how to gain God's favour on their own, rather than accepting it as a free gift.

Q4. Go back and read Romans 9:30-10:4. How does this help us understand what Paul is saying in 11:7?

"Israel sought the righteousness of God earnestly but wrongly, except for the elect. As a result, the majority was hardened."

Keller pg 87

Q5. What do you think it means that "the others were hardened?"

Q6. Read v8-10 and then check out the Old Testament passages they are from (Deuteronomy 29:4; Isaiah 29:10; Psalm 69). What do you think these verses tell us about the "hardening" of Israel's majority?

Q7. Is this "hardening" a new thing? Why has God seemed to harden His people in the past?

In referring to these OT quotes Paul is saying - "Moses warned Israel in his day that their rebellion resulted in God giving them spiritual blindness...Isaiah told Israel that this had continued "to this very day" Now I am telling you that this hardening is still ongoing."

Hardening is a fitting punishment for a proud spirit.

GRACE REMAINS

Despite so many rejecting it, still God's grace remains. Grace is constant. It's always been the only way to obtain righteousness and salvation. And when Jesus comes, he's the culmination of God's plan of grace, a plan that now includes all those who have faith in Jesus - just as God had always planned. God's grace is completely reliable.

Q8. Do you struggle to trust that God's grace is enough? Are you sometimes resistant or apathetic towards God's grace?

Q9. What might it look like in our lives, and in our church, to be completely reliant on God's grace?

Q10. Do you know someone who just rejects the notion of grace all together? Pray for them together as a group - that they might be receptive to God's grace!

PRAY

- Thanks that we can rely on God's grace
- Pray that we'd be reminded daily of God's grace
- Pray for those you know who are hostile to or reject the idea of God's grace

- Pray for those who have been part of **Jesus An Introduction**

COMING UP

November 16 - Jesus an Introduction (final week)



MISSION PARTNERS

A core part of our mission at DPC is to see the growth of the church across the Darling Downs and the world. And so we support several Mission Partners in Australia and around the world.

Every Growth Group is linked with one of our Mission Partners. This is a simple, but effective way we can keep mission on our minds as a church, and be constantly supporting our Mission Partners in prayer. Below you'll find a list of these Mission Partners, which Growth Groups they are connected to, and contact information for each of them.

What to do with this information:

- Be in contact with Mission Partners (and/or their Go Global representative) once a term to encourage them and get up-to-date information
- Uphold them in prayer regularly
- Consider if there are any other ways you might support them

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- Derryck & Anna Mickelborough
- Terry & Marcia McCullough
- Troy Law (Men's group)

GO GLOBAL TEAM

Loretta Vickery
Allan Johnstone
Troy Law
Gavin Walton
Hilton De Meillon

7. WE ARE THE BEST, FORGET ABOUT THE REST!

(FOLLOWING SUN 22 NOV)

Romans 11:11-24

One of the most horrifying scenarios for school kids is the team choosing moment. When two leaders look out across the group and one by one pick those who they think will help their path to victory. Those chosen first, feel pretty happy, those left till the end...well, it's the stuff of nightmares!

This passage looks at how God's mercy has seen the Gentiles picked to go to the front of the line for salvation. It's got the potential for them to be pretty happy with themselves. For us, we can use this part of scripture to look at our own hearts and see how we think about our own salvation and those who are not in God's family.

Q1. What are some examples you can think of that might make Christians and the church look a little arrogant?

Are they done? v12-16

It's easy to give up on people. That's the issue in these next few verses. Did God just give up on the ethnic Jews?

Q2. What has the transgression of the 'they' (Jewish people) done?

Q3. What was the apostle Paul hoping his ministry would do?

Q4. In v12 and v15 what future hope is being held out for both Gentiles and Jews?

Shoulders of Giants v17-21

Grafting was a common practice in their world. But, in this next section the way it's done is reversed. Normally they would take a sturdy wild olive root and graft cultivated olive shoots on it. Good fruit on sturdy root. But here it's turned upside down.

Q5. What impact do you think turning their grafting practice upside down might have on the way the Jews and the Gentiles thought of themselves?

Q6. For what reason do the Gentiles remain in God's family? How might this change the way they think?

Where to look v22-24

Q7. Consider at the start of v22 could also be 'look at' or 'reflect'. Who are they to look at and what will they see?

Q8. For what reason have Gentiles been included, and how might this impact the way the Jews and the Gentiles got along together in church?

In God's enormous plan the Jewish people are not cut off forever. Though many individual Jews may reject the Lord, God's plan is that many of them will see God's grace to many and come back to him in faith. The risk for the Gentile Christians is that they might think the Jews are stupid and that they are awesome for figuring it out. Nothing could be further from the truth. Romans has already laid out how all are sinful (chapters 1-2). God's mercy and kindness is why the Gentiles can be saved. And, in saving them he intends to bring mercy to many of the Jews too.

Q9. How would you know if you were being arrogant about being a Christian? Are there any of these signs in you or our church family?

Q10. Take a moment to write down some of the things you can remember about God to help you remain humble with both brothers and sisters in Christ and those who don't have faith:

At the end of the day it is God's kindness that allows any of us to be saved.

PRAY

- Thank God for his patience with those who reject him.
- Thank God for giving hope to the Jewish people
- Thank God for allowing Gentiles like us to have a special place in his plan.

- Pray for those who were part of **Jesus An Introduction**

- Continue praying for your **Mission Partner**
- Pray for the final few weeks of regular ministries

COMING UP

- Christmas services



8. MARVELLING AT GOD'S WISDOM & MERCY

(FOLLOWING SUN 29 NOV)

Romans 11:25-36

Does God's plan for salvation actually make sense? When we read these verses, it might actually be hard to come up with an answer. In this final section of Romans 9-11, we read that actually, God's plan for salvation IS a bit of a MYSTERY. It's hard to get your head around. However, what we do know for sure is that God is abounding in MERCY. He is overflowing with mercy for disobedient people, whatever their race or background. And finally, as we wrestle with the mystery of salvation and the truth of God's mercy, the only appropriate response is to humble ourselves and MARVEL at His wisdom and glory.

Read Romans 11:25-36

Q1. What is the mystery Paul is talking about? Why is he telling his audience about this mystery?

Q2. What do you think v26 means? (See OT quotes and the notes below ("All Israel Will Be Saved" for some guidance).

"ALL ISRAEL WILL BE SAVED"

Verse 26 is tricky to get our heads around. What does it mean that "all Israel will be saved"?

"Who is in view here? What does Paul mean when he says "Israel"? Some want to say that it is only the elect remnant of Israel, but that makes this a meaningless statement (of course all the elect will be saved!). Besides, in verse 25 the word "Israel" clearly means ethnic Israel in contrast to the Gentiles. So this refers to the Jews as a whole body....

What does the word "all" mean in verse 26? ...Likely, it means a great mass of the Jewish people. That is how the word "Israel" is used through the rest of the chapter. Paul often uses it to refer to the majority of Israel over and against the minority of believing Jews. That is, though he himself is part of Israel ethnically, he does not include himself when he speaks of "Israel" rejecting the gospel."

"...God is not showing preference. He uses the Jews to reach the Gentiles and the Gentiles to reach the Jews. All peoples—both the Gentiles and the Jews—have been disobedient, and yet all peoples—from the Gentiles and Jews—will find God's mercy (or rather, be found by it.). God's mercy is coming to all means that, as FF Bruce puts it, it is coming "on all without distinction, rather than on all without exception."

Keller, pg95-98

Q3. What do v30-32 tell us about the disobedience of both Israel and the Gentiles, and how it relates to God's mercy?

Q4. If you had to sum up Paul's argument in v25-32, what would you say?

Q5. What do you think our/your role is in God's mission of salvation? How do you think our faith in Jesus in a little country town in Queensland, Australia, plays a small part in God's worldwide mission to show mercy to those he chooses? How might our faith in Jesus be a witness to those who are hostile to the gospel, even Jews on the other side of the world?

DOXOLOGY

In light of the mystery of how God has saved, and the outpouring of his mercy on disobedient people, what is Paul's response?

He MARVELS at his God. Paul's response to the complex and hard-to-get-your-head-around story of God's plan for salvation isn't despair or dissatisfaction - it's praise!

The reality is, Romans 9-11 is really hard. The way in which God has chosen to save both Israel and Gentiles is a bit of a mystery to us. But it's clear to Paul that what's *not* a mystery is God's **mercy** and **faithfulness**! He does what says He'll do, and He showers mercy and grace on Jews and Gentiles alike, regardless of whether or not they deserve it. It's all about His grace.

And so what's Paul's response? (to this whole section, really!) - to give glory and praise to the God who is so much greater and wiser than we can imagine.

We need to keep going back to the gospel. We can only begin to understand God's wisdom in salvation when we look to Jesus "the wisdom of God for salvation" (1 Cor 1:18-25).

Q6. How might being reminded of God's faithfulness and mercy in Jesus help you respond to God each day?

PRAY

- Thanks that even when we don't understand God's ways, we can still trust Him
- Thanks that God is a God of mercy and faithfulness
- Pray that we'd remember we are not God
- Pray that we'd give all glory and praise to our creator for His wisdom and mercy

- Pray for Mission Partners, our regular ministries as the finish for the year, for our Christmas Services, and for DPC as a whole - that God would continue to grow us and we'd be faithful to Him

COMING UP

- Christmas services



DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

THE DOCTRINES OF ELECTION & GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

AN EXERPT FROM "ROMANS 8-16 FOR YOU" BY TIMOTHY KELLER

In Romans 8 - 11, Paul teaches about the sovereignty of God over all the affairs of human history. Here, we take time to consider in more detail than in the earlier chapters in this book both what the Bible teaches about God's sovereignty and his election, and some objections to and questions about these doctrines. This is not everything that can be said about these truths, and they are often unsettling for believers as they wrestle with them. As with all doctrine, these things are best discussed and thought about with other Christians, so it is well worth using this appendix as the basis for a discussion with others at your church.

What the Bible Teaches

The Bible holds together two truths:

A. Everything that happens is under God's direction

"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28). Though this verse only makes reference to the way in which God controls the circumstances of believers' lives, Ephesians 1:11 tells us that he also does this for everyone: God "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." In both Ephesians 1:11 and Romans 8:28, the Greek words are the same. God "performs" (*ergon*) "all things" (*panta*) that happen. In Romans 8:28, we are told he directs all things to "work together" (*sunergei*), meaning that God not only brings his power to bear on every circumstance, but he conforms all events to be part of his master plan. If we take the word "all" seriously, it means that:

1. His plan includes "little things." Ultimately, there are no accidents. Proverbs 16:33 says: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." Even the flip of a coin is part of his plan.
2. His plan includes "bad things." The evil of the world was not God's original design. Death, disease, sin and decay are a temporary result of sin (Romans 8:18-23). God is distressed by our distress (Isaiah 63:9) and grieved by our pain (Psalm 56:8). Therefore, he is weaving into his plan even those troubles, sorrows and pain, because his plan in the end will result in glory for him and "good" for his people (Romans 8:28). "Not one [sparrow] will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father" (Matthew 10:29). "When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?" (Amos 3:6). "I am the LORD, and there is no other... I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things" (Isaiah 45:6-7).
3. His plan includes sins. This must be the case, for our sins and the sins of others are a very major part of "all things." (If our sins were left out of the plan of God, there wouldn't be much left!) Psalm 76:10 says of God: "Surely the wrath of man shall praise you" (ESV), meaning that God will overrule and control things so that even wicked and violent events come out for the good of his people and his glory. In Genesis 50:20 Joseph says to his brothers: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." His point is that his brothers' evil action of selling him into slavery was used by God to do great good.

B. All choices are free acts for which we are responsible

Romans 9:16 says: "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy." Then in verses 31-32 Paul states that: "Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works."

Many readers find Romans 9 contradictory. In the early part of the chapter, Paul says that many Jews do not believe the gospel because they are not chosen, and God chooses his people regardless of their deeds or works (v 10-18). But at the end of the chapter, he says that they don't believe because of their stubborn refusal to accept grace (9:30-33). It may seem like a contradiction, but everywhere in the Bible this same balance is maintained.

Put another way: God's plan works through our choices, not around or in spite of them. For example, God sets his plan by rendering our choices certain and yet doing so without destroying our responsibility. The Greek notion of "fate" or the Islamic notion of "kismet" are quite different from the Christian doctrine of God's sovereignty. The Greek myth of Oedipus reveals "fatalism."

Oedipus is fated to kill his father and marry his mother. Though he and all around him do all they can to avoid this fate, he ends up accomplishing it. He and his parents make every effort to avoid it, but it occurs despite his choices. The Christian concept is quite different. Our choices have consequences and we are never forced by God to do anything other than what we want. Yet God works out his will perfectly through our willing actions. It is a marvel!

Martyn Lloyd-Jones expands on this:

"Why does man act as he does? ... Well, there are only three ultimate explanations. One is called contingency—that there is no rhyme or reason in anything; it is accidental and haphazard. The second is the doctrine of [determinism] ... 'you cannot help it ... you are like that.' Everything is determined and [you are] not free at all ... There is ... the biological view ... They say that what a man is, is determined by various glands in his body ... There is ... psychoanalysis. [One Freudian said,] 'Psychoanalysis has undermined our confidence in the reality of free will ... by showing how often our apparently deliberate actions are in fact determined by motives of which we are unaware.'

"So there it is. [Those are] the alternatives to the teaching of the Apostle Paul. [Either we are determined by natural forces, or things happen randomly by chance] but the third explanation is the biblical doctrine of certainty [that we make responsible choices but all under the sovereignty of God]."

(*Romans Chapter 9*, pages 204-205)

Here are some biblical examples of how God works in people's lives:

1. *Judas*. Acts 2:23 tells us that Jesus was crucified according to God's plan, yet by "wicked men." The actions of the people who killed Jesus were wicked and they were liable for them, yet God used their wicked intentions to carry out the crucifixion exactly how and when he wanted it. So Peter says that: "The Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus" (Acts 1:16).
2. *Jacob*. Jacob deceived his father and robbed his brother. As a result he had to flee his homeland experience suffering and injustice in a foreign land (Genesis 27:1 - 28:5). Yet there he met the love of his life and had the children through whom Jesus was descended (Genesis 29:16 - 30:24—plenty of sinful motives and actions are involved here, too!). Now it is clear that his sin did not put him into a "Plan B" for his life. It was all part of God's perfect plan for him. Ultimately God worked his sin out for good. Was he therefore not responsible for his sin? Yes, he was. Did he suffer the consequences of his foolish behaviour? Yes, he did. But God was infallibly in control, even as Jacob was completely responsible.
3. *Paul in the storm*. In Acts 27, when Paul was in the storm-wracked boat, he prophesied to the passengers: "Not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed" (v 22). By revelation he revealed God's plan. Their preservation was certain. Yet in verse 31, Paul warned that the sailors must not get into the lifeboat. "Unless these men stay with the ship, it was equally true that the men were responsible to act and choose wisely. Paul did to say: Well, God predestined you all to survive this storm, so it doesn't matter what you do. When God appoints a result, he also appoints the means—our choices and efforts. Paul did not have the Greek notion of fate—such statements make no sense in the fatalistic framework!

As J. Gresham Machen writes:

"[God] brings to pass the actions of personal beings in a way that preserves their freedom and their responsibility to the full. [Is that] inconceivable? We persuade our fellow men, yet their freedom is preserved when they do what we persuade them to do of their free will. Shall not then God be able to do with certainty what we with our little power do with uncertainty? Does not God who made the soul know how to move it in accordance with its own nature so that its freedom shall not be destroyed?"

(*The Christian View of Man*, page 100)

The answers to his last two questions must surely be: Yes, God will and Yes, God does!

Therefore, when it comes to salvation, the Bible teaches that:

C. People who choose God do so strictly because God has opened their hearts; people who fail to do so strictly because they closed their hearts.

Let us take each part of that statement in turn.

Only God is responsible for our salvation. Romans 3:11 says: "There is no one ... who seeks God." (For comment on what this means, see *Romans 1 - 7 For You*, pages 69-71.) Romans 8:7 says: "The sinful [natural] mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (see this volume, page 20). Romans 9:11-16 states: "Yet, before the twins [ie: Esau and Jacob] 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 ... as it is written: 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.' ... It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (see page 61).

Paul teaches that, through sin, we have lost the ability to see the truth and the desire to serve God. "No one ... seeks God." Paul is not saying that the human will is not free to do what we want. We are free in that sense. *But*, he is saying, *we cannot ever want God. We aren't free to choose him.* Our mind does not submit; indeed it cannot. To put it a different way, our human will will never freely choose God.

We will never want God; we are incapable of choosing God, unless God breaks in. And that is what he does. "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy." We don't initiate our salvation—we don't even want it. God wakes us up from a helpless sleep; he unlocks us from a helpless state. As this prayer from the collection of Puritan prayers Valley of Vision puts it:

I was dead in iniquities, having no eyes to see thee,
no ears to hear thee,
no taste to relish thy joys,
no intelligence to know thee;
But thy Spirit has quickened me,
has brought me into a new world as a new creature ...
thou has drawn me with cords of love.

Only we are responsible for our condemnation. In Romans 9:21-24, Paul asks: "Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for [honour] and some for [dishonour]? What if God, 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?"

In these three verses in Romans 9, we have the important and crucial "asymmetry" of the biblical gospel, namely this: God alone prepares any person for spiritual glory, but we alone prepare ourselves for spiritual destruction. There are two basic, competing views. *The correspond somewhat, but not completely, to "determinism" and "contingency.")

1. "Hyper-Calvinism." Fatalism is found in Greek through, Islam, and Eastern religions, but some Christians over the years have adopted it as well. In this view, God equally and symmetrically prepares all people for their fate. God in his sovereign will has determined to have some people lost and some saved, and he goes about directing each group down each path in the same way. In other words, God prepares us for glory or God prepares us for destructions.

2. "Pelagianism." (The name is taken from Pelagius, a fifth-century monk.) This view is also found in ancient and modern thought, though it has been very prevalent in the west in the last two centuries. In this view, every person has the ability to choose good or evil, to serve God or self. This ability is equal in every individual. Thus every person who is saved is saved in the very same way that every person who is lost is lost—by his or her exercise of the ability to choose. We prepare ourselves for glory or we prepare ourselves for destruction.

In Romans 9:22-24, Paul very carefully refuses to take either view. Paul says "he" (God) prepared some vessels for glory, but he does not say that God prepared vessels for destruction. Paul says they were "prepared" for condemnation, but that God chose to endure them with great patience. It therefore appears that their preparation is not his doing; meaning that all human beings have freely chosen sin and deserve condemnation. God could allow us all to perish as we have chosen, and he does allow some to go to the destruction they have prepared for themselves. But he breaks in and opens the eyes of some, whom he prepares for glory.

This is the only way to understand Paul. If you take a fatalistic view, you cannot explain Paul's reticence to say that God prepared the vessels for destruction. But if one adopts the view that every individual is equally capable of choosing God, that leads to the conclusion that God does nothing more for saved people than for lost people, and thus salvation is not by grace. The vessels prepare themselves for glory!

Here are two commentators on Romans 9:21-24, explaining how Paul's view "threads the needle" between these two mistaken views:

"Paul's picture is that of a potter making various utensils and implements for household use and so on ... Now ... 'creation' ... means 'creating out of nothing' ... [but] the potter does not create the clay ... It is there in front of him on the bench and he is now going to do something with it ... [So] the Apostle is not dealing here at all with God's purpose in the original creation of humanity. [This] is an account of what God does with fallen humanity.

"[Many think] God deliberately made some people that they might go to hell. That is a lie! It is not taught anywhere in the Scripture ... God created all things good. No one has ever been forced to sin. [Humanity] rebelled against God and sinned ... And what the Apostle is dealing with here is what God does with humanity in the light of that, and he says he has an absolute right to do as he wills in his own sovereign will and Lordship. With such a hopeless mass, which could be all consigned to perdition, he has nevertheless, because of his grace and glory and his purpose, chosen and elected and formed some out of that mass unto glory and honour ...

"What we all want to ask at this point is: ... Why [and] how does God decide to make one unto honour and one unto dishonour? There is only one answer to that—I do not know! Nobody else does ... I cannot go beyond the Scripture, and all the Scripture tells me is that God does that and that he has a right to do it, and that if I raise the question ... I am trying to contend with my Maker ...

"So let me put the teaching to you like this: If anyone is saved it is entirely because of the mercy and choice of God ... but I add this: if people are lost, it is entirely their own responsibility."

(Lloyd-Jones, *Romans Chapter 9*, pages 199-203)

"If ... anybody is lost, the blame is theirs, but if anybody is saved, the credit is God's. This antinomy contains a mystery which our present knowledge cannot solve; but it is consistent with Scripture, history and experience."

(Stott, *The Message of Romans*, page 270)

Objections and Questions

1. Isn't "election" just a Pauline doctrine?

No. Though Paul does teach it in Romans and elsewhere (see also Ephesians 1:3-5; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:9), the doctrine permeates the rest of Scripture. Here are three examples:

Jesus' teaching in John

John 6:36-39: "But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

John 6:44: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day."

John 10:25: "Jesus answered, 'I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.'"

Here Jesus twice says, first, that if someone doesn't believe, it is because God has not "given" them to him; and second, that everyone who is given to him will come to him and will never be lost. Why can Jesus make these two statements? Because of a third principle that is a premise for the first two: no one is capable of coming to God unless God is drawing him. (This accords with Paul in Romans 3:11, that no one seeks God.) Therefore, if anyone is seeking, it is because God is drawing. If God is drawing, they will be saved and kept.

Peter's teaching

1 Peter 1:1-2: "To God's elect ... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood."

Luke's teaching

Acts 13:48: "When the Gentiles heard this [gospel preaching from Paul and Barnabas], they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed."

Acts 16:13-14: "On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message."

Notice that Luke does not say: "All who believed were appointed to eternal life" but rather: "All who were appointed for eternal life believed." Thus the belief is a result of the appointment; the appointment is not the result of the belief.

2. But election just complicates the simple gospel! I wish it hadn't been brought up!

No, election establishes the simple gospel. The main reason (the strongest argument) for the doctrine is that rejecting it creates far more problems than it solves. Why? Unless you embrace the doctrine of election, you are forced to hold that salvation is not by grace alone and God alone, but is due ultimately to something better in those who believe.

Here is a penetrating line of reasoning from Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

"There is one final argument. People seem to think that if you reject this doctrine [of election] you are in a happy position. [But] let me show you where you are if you reject this doctrine of Paul as taught here. Take Acts 28:24 ... 'Some believed the things which were spoken and some believed not.' [Now] why do some believe and some not? Those people were ... all of them the same: same background, same everything, but some believed and some did not ... What decides it?

"'Ah,' says somebody, 'it is quite simple. Free will!' Very well, one chooses to believe, the other chooses not to believe. [But] why? What is it that makes some want to believe and others not? 'Oh well,' you say, 'one saw things in one way, and the other ... in a different way.' Yes, but ... why does one see it like this, the other one like that? ... Let us go further back ..."

(Romans Chapter 9, pages 207-208)

If we keep asking why one believes and the other doesn't and reject the idea of election, we are forced eventually to say that one person was humbler, more open to the truth, or more virtuous than the other in some way. In other words, the real differentiating factor, and the critical cause of one person's salvation over others, is *something better in them*. In other words, you are back into justification by works!

Paul makes this point: that the doctrine of election is necessary to preserve the doctrine of justification. God chose Jacob "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" (Romans 9:11-12).

Therefore, the final case for the doctrine of election is that it reminds us of what we already know—that we are saved by sheer grace alone, not on the basis of anything in us. Yes, "election" causes many difficulties. But, aside from the fact that Scripture teaches it, the best reason for accepting the doctrine is that every alternative creates even more problems and difficulties. Without "election" you compromise the central teaching of the Bible, that we are saved by grace alone, not our works. If the difference between the unbeliever and the believer is ultimately in us (a greater humility, a greater openness, etc.), then we are the real authors of our salvation.

3. If you believe in election, doesn't that leave you with the problem of why God doesn't choose to save everyone?

Yes, but the same is true for Christians who don't believe in election. Election doesn't create the problem, it only leads us to think about it. To deny the doctrine of election does not help you escape the issue. All Christians have this problem, and so we cannot object to election by appealing to it. The person who does not believe in election has the same problem:

- (a) God wants everybody saved.
- (b) God could save everyone.
- (c) God does not.

The question still remains, therefore: *Why not?* That is the ultimate mystery, but abandoning the doctrine of election does not answer it.

Someone says: *But I believe that though God doesn't want us to be lost, some are lost because they choose wrong and God will not violate their freedom of choice.* But why is freedom of choice sacrosanct? I try to honour my child's freedom of will, but not if I see he is about to be killed by it! Why can't God "insult" our freedom of will for a moment and save us for eternity?

No, regardless of whether you think we are saved by our choice or by God's election, you still have the same question: *Why wouldn't God save us all if he has the power and desire to do so?* It is a hard question, but it cannot be used as an argument against the doctrine of election.

We can go further. Suppose election is not true. Suppose that aeons ago, God set up salvation on this system: Every person will have an equal ability to accept or reject Christ, who will die and be raised and be presented through the gospel message. The moment God determined to set up salvation on that system (assuming for the moment that he did), he would have immediately known exactly which persons would be saved and which would be condemned on that basis. So the minute he "set it up," he was *de facto* electing some and passing over others. We come out to the same place. God could save all, but he doesn't.

So why doesn't he? We can only know two things. First, the answer must have something to do with his perfect nature. He is perfectly loving and perfectly righteous and neither can be preferred over the other or he would not be God. Somehow the answer has to do with his being consistent with himself. Second, we cannot see the whole picture. Why? If we can conceive of a more merciful system of salvation that God has, we must not see it rightly, for God is more merciful than we can even imagine. When we finally see the whole plan and answer, we will not be able to find fault with it.

4. But it isn't fair for God to elect some and not others.

It is one thing for a doctor to see five patients and only choose to treat two. That would be unjust, because as a doctor he owes care to all, and all have a right to be treated. But if a judge condemns a number of criminals and pardons some, it is merciful, for he owes nothing to any of them. (Of course, this would raise questions about the justice of that judge's decision; Paul takes care to explain how God is both just and merciful in Romans 3:21-26—see *Romans 1 - 7 For You*, pages 82-84.)

The real question is not why God doesn't take all, but why he takes *any*. It is well worth quoting D. James Kennedy's illustration again:

"Here are five people who are planning to hold up a bank. They are friends of mine. I find out about it and I plead with them. I beg them not to do it. Finally they push me out of the way and they start out. I tackle one of the men and wrestle him to the ground. The others go ahead, rob the bank, a guard is killed, they are captured, convicted, sentenced ... The one man who was not involved in the robbery goes free. Now I ask you this questions: Whose fault was it that the other men died? ... Now this other man who is walking around free—can he say, 'Because my heart is so good, I am a free man'? The only reason that he is free is because of me; because I restrained him. So those who go to hell have no one to blame but themselves. Those who go to heaven have no one to praise but Jesus Christ. Thus we see that salvation is all of grace from its beginning to its end."
(*Truths That Transform*, pages 39-40)

5. But it makes God seem arbitrary.

No, it makes God gracious. The Bible doesn't say that God's election has no reasons for it. We know that God always does what is right (Genesis 18:25) and wise (Romans 11:33). There is no indication that God chooses us at (what we would call) "random"—eeny, meeny, miney, moe! He has reasons, but all we know is that the reasons are not in us. 1 Corinthians 4:7 says: "Who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive?" To say that we don't know on what basis God chooses is not the same as saying that his choice is arbitrary.

There is one hint as to why God seems to choose some over others, but it is not flattering! 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 says: "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly ... and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him." It is possible that God chose you and me because we are foolish or weak or despised!

Again, as mentioned above, the only alternative is to believe that we are saved by something in us that makes us better than those who are lost. That is a complete contradiction of the biblical gospel.

6. But if everything is fixed and certain, why pray, evangelise or do anything at all?

This objection is short-sighted. First, if everything were not planned by a holy and loving God, we would be absolutely terrified by the prospect of even getting up in the morning. Our actions (always done with very little understanding) could have horrible consequences. Everything would depend on us! If everything were not planned by a holy and loving God, there would be enormous pressure on Christians when we evangelise. We would know that our inarticulateness could result in a person missing his or her one “chance” for salvation. It would be a horrible prospect.

Second, we evangelise and pray because of the privilege of sharing in God’s work with him. For example, a father might be able to chop wood for the stove himself, but he asks his children to learn to chop the wood and stoke the fire as well. What if the children say: *We have no incentive to chop the wood. We know that if we don’t cut it, our father will do it anyway—he won’t let us freeze!* But the father would say: *Of course I could do it myself, but I want you to share the work with me.* The authority and the privilege of working with our heavenly Father is surely plenty of incentive! He wants to work with us and for us.

Also, we are not supposed to second-guess God. We are never to try to guess who is “elect”—ever! God calls all to repentance and so should we. In fact, the doctrine of election should give us far more hope about working with people. Why? Because no one is a hopeless case! From a human point of view, many people look totally hard and lost, but since salvation is by God’s election, we should treat everyone and anyone with hope, since God calls the dead to life through us.

Therefore, God’s sovereignty is a motivation to evangelise, not a discouragement. In Acts 18, Paul is in Corinth and the gospel has been rejected by the Jews there. How does God encourage Paul not to be afraid, to “keep on speaking [and] not be silent” (18:9)? “I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city” (v 10). God assures Paul of his presence, his protection, and his *election*. And Paul responds by staying “for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God” (v 11). The teaching is this: the next person you pray for and/or share the gospel with may be one of God’s elect, and you may be part of the way God has ordained to bring them to faith.

7. Doesn’t this lead to the superior attitude—to think that you are “elect”?

With all due respect, such a question would show that the asker really doesn’t understand the doctrine of election! The doctrine has the completely opposite effect. As we said in response to Objection Two, it is the denial of election that will lead you logically to feel superior to those who don’t believe. If we deny election, believers will be strongly tempted to say to unbelievers: *Why can’t you see this as I can? You must be more stupid or proud than I was!* The doctrine of election says that believers are chosen people, not choice people. We are not chosen for our superior qualities. The reasons we are chosen are not in us. There is no superiority of believers over unbelievers.

8. I believe the Bible and I see all the teaching about election, but why do I still dislike it so?

My theory is that the biblical gospel is so supernatural that it always combines qualities that by natural reason and culture we cannot keep together. The doctrine of justification is one way of looking at the gospel. It combines both law and love in ways that no one could have thought up. We are saved apart from the law so that now we can obey the law. All other philosophies are either law-ism (legalistic) or law-less (antinomian). Now, the doctrine of election is just the gospel of God and the responsibility of human beings. Here too, we find that human cultures and philosophies cannot combine these things.

So, whoever you are you come from a culture that has saturated you in some view that is so unbalanced that you will see the doctrine of election as something more simple and extreme than it really is. Eastern philosophies and religions have always been more fatalistic. They believe individual autonomy to be an illusion. When people from that background come to the gospel, they may see it as being “just individualism.” On the other hand, western secularism believes strongly in the right and power of individuals to determine their own course and destiny. When people from that background come to the gospel, they see it as being “just fatalism.”

Thus, no matter which “side” we come from, no matter what our culture or temperament, we must make an effort to discern the carefully nuanced balances of the gospel of free justification and election. We must remember the prejudices we bring with us to the Scripture. We must be willing to learn to balance out our own views.

Practical Applications

In the end, the Christian concept of God's sovereignty is a marvellous, practical principle. It is mysterious but not confusing. It brings security and confidence in...

1. *The difficulties of life.* It means we have great incentive to use our wisdom and our will to the best effect, knowing God holds us to it and knowing we will suffer consequences from foolishness and wickedness. At the same time, there is an absolute promise that we cannot ultimately mess up our lives. Even our failures and troubles will be used for God's glory and our benefit. How profoundly comforting! "God ... fulfils his purpose for me!" cries the psalmist (Psalm 57:2). We develop a sweet inward spirit, a quiet delight in every disposal of God's will. Even wickedness and tragedy, which we know come from the evil of this world and the human heart –evil, which God did not design or create—are nonetheless woven into a wise plan. But the promise of Romans 8:28, that "God works for the good of those who love him," is a promise to believers. It is a guarantee to those who are adopted into God's family through faith in Jesus as Saviour. If you are not in the family, even good things in your life may not work to your benefit. They may harden you to make you proud and blind to your need and dependence. But for God's children, his sovereignty is always exercised in a way of love and mercy.
2. *The intimacy of praise and worship.* Electing love is ultimate love. If God loved us because he found something better in us, we'd always be afraid of losing his love. And we'd never find his love a total miracle. But God does not say: *I love you because you are serviceable to me* or: *I love you because you are more humble than others*. He says: *I love you simply because I love you*. That is perfect love. This understanding is a fountain of endless praise, gratitude and thanksgiving.

RESOURCES & SOURCES

1. "Romans 8-16 For You" - **Timothy Keller**

© Timothy Keller, 2015. Published by The Good Book Company

2. "BECNT: Romans" - **Thomas R. Schreiner**

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3. "TNTC: Romans" - **F. F. Bruce**

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4. "The Message of Romans" - **John R.W. Stott**

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5. Article on Objections to Election - **Timothy Keller**

<https://www.thegoodbook.com/blog/usefulresources/2015/08/18/three-objections-to-the-doctrine-of-election-tim-k/>



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