

Romans: The Righteousness of God for Salvation

Romans 9:1-5

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

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If you have your bibles, I'd like to invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 9. Today as we launch into a study of this great chapter a few preparatory remarks are in order. The first thing I want to say is this; this is a difficult passage. Don't let that put you off. It's not difficult to understand, it's just difficult to accept. What Paul says does not require a rocket scientist to understand in this passage, but it takes a little bit of grace in the heart. You know there are many fine and godly Christians who find what Paul says in Romans 9 through 11 to be a little bit hard to swallow. This passage is a difficult passage because it's hard to accept, but it's the word of God and we're going to study it as such.

The second thing I want to say is this, if you are looking for answers to questions like, "Is God fair in salvation?" "How can he choose some, but not others?" "How can we possibly think that God would actually deliberately pass over some while choosing others?" If God chooses and elects, doesn't that mean that our choices don't matter? Doesn't election make us robots? If you're looking for biblical answers to hard theological questions like that, well this is the place for you, because there is no place in the Bible that more systematically or comprehensively addresses directly those kinds of questions than in Romans 9 through 11. And we are going to be able to discern God's answer through the apostle Paul to those very important questions.

Now, thirdly, let me say this. Some of you may be visiting with us for the first time and you may be thinking, "There those Presbyterian go again, all they want to talk about is God's sovereignty and predestination and election." Well, let me respond on behalf of the congregation and say two or three things. First of all, we are just working through Bible books; that's what we normally do here. I didn't decide that I was going to sit down and talk to you about God's sovereignty. We're working through Romans and here we are in Romans 9, and if I don't talk about it, then I can't talk about Romans 9, because that's what Romans 9 is about. So there is no special or hidden agenda here. We're just working through Bible books and the only way we couldn't talk about these things is to simply skip these chapters. That's the first thing I'd like to say to any skeptical minds out there.

The second thing is this, let me clue you in one reason why Presbyterians love to talk about the doctrines of God's sovereignty and predestination and election and such, it's because they're in the Bible and Presbyterians believe that the Bible is inspired, it's inerrant, it's authoritative, it's the final rule in faith and in life. Therefore because these teachings are found in the word, we love them.

But thirdly, let me say, the reason that we so love to talk about God's sovereignty is because God's sovereignty exalts His grace. We love to think about sovereignty because we have tasted of God's grace and we know that God's sovereignty more than any other doctrine magnifies the grace of God and so we hope that you would taste and see that the Lord is gracious even as we learn of His sovereignty.

Now, let me give you a little taste of what we are going to be doing as work through Romans 9 together. Let me outline the passage for you. Just allow your eyes to scan the chapter as we work through it. In verses 1 through 5, Paul displays his heart for Israel. We're going to see why he does this in just a few moments, but Paul is preparing the way to answer a question that has been put to him about the fulfillment of God's promises. Is there a problem here, have God's promises to Israel failed in the time of the apostles and the time of Lord Jesus Christ since Israel by a large has not accepted Jesus as Messiah? That's the big problem that Paul is going to begin to address in this passage.

In the first five verses, Paul gives you a little glimpse into his heart before he gives you the answer. And frankly seeing Paul's heart I think will help you to embrace the answer that he gives.

Then in verses 6 through 13, we see a second thing. Here Paul explains why God's promises have not failed and here's his answer: Not all Israel is Israel. Now, I'm not going to explain that right now. You're going to have to come back next time to find out what that means, but that's Paul's answer to the question, "Have God's promises to Israel failed?" - not all Israel is Israel. And we'll explain that the next time. But that's the second thing that he says in the chapter.

Then if you look it verses 14 through 18 you'll see him take up a third question. Somebody out there in the audience goes, "But wait a minute Paul, it's not fair for God to choose some in Israel, and not others." Now, if you believe in the doctrine of God's sovereignty and you've talked to anybody who doesn't, chances are you've heard that question. Well, in verses 14 through 18 you get the divinely inspired apostle Paul's answer to that question. Don't you want to know what that is? Don't you want to know what that answer is? Well, you'll get it as we study Romans 9 verses 14 through 18.

Then fourthly, in verses 19 through 23, he moves on to another objection. "But wait a minute Paul, you're saying that God is sovereign. How can He condemn

us for resisting His will since nobody can resist His will since He's sovereign?" And the Apostle Paul answers that question in Romans 9 verses 19 through 23.

Then again in verses 24 through 29, Paul goes to the Old Testament and he gives you quotations from the Old Testament Scriptures to show, just like he did with justification, that he's not making this stuff up on the fly. He's not the first one to ever expound these particular teachings. These are, in fact, the teachings of the Old Testament Scriptures and so he roots what he says in what God has already taught to the people of God in the Old Testament prophets.

Then finally, in verses 30 through 33, the Apostle explains why it is that Israel failed to embrace the promise, why they failed to obtain the promise, and I trust you will be helped in your faith as we work through this great chapter, because I want you to understand not only the structure of it and the original meaning and purpose for it, but I want you to understand as well it's significance for you. As we work through this chapter you will deal with a range of significant questions. You'll find out whether you have a heart for Christ or not, and what it looks like to have a heart for the lost. You'll, as we work through this, get an answer to the question, "Can God's promises fail?" We'll learn together an answer to "Is it unfair for God to choose some and not others?" We'll learn an answer to the question of, "How can God condemn if we can't resist his will?" We'll learn an answer to the question, "Does the Old Testament teach God's sovereignty and election?" And we'll get an answer to the question, an important question, "Why in the world would somebody reject God's salvation?" Answers to all those questions are found in Romans 9 and we will be learning them as we study it together over the next few weeks. So let's hear God's word today in Romans 9 beginning in verse 1.

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the temple service and the promises. Whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all. God blessed forever. Amen.

Thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word, may He write its eternal truth upon our hearts. Let's pray.

Our Heaven Father, we ask that You would give us grace as we study Your word this day. Bring its truth home to us and give us a heart for you and for the lost, like the Apostle Paul. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

These few little verses at the beginning of Romans 9 are a prologue to a problem. Paul is going to be answering a significant problem and challenge to his

gospel message which is afoot in his own time. That problem is, why is it, Paul, that Israel has, by and large, rejected this Messiah that you say is the sent Messiah of God to Israel? Why is it that, by and large, Paul, that your kinsmen in the flesh are not in droves embracing Jesus as their Redeemer? Why is it that there are more Gentiles, Paul, in your ministry responding to the gospel than the people that you say that this Messiah was promised to in the first place?

This is the problem that the Apostle Paul is going to have to answer in Romans 9 through 11 and it's not the first gigantic problem that a preacher of God has had to answer. You see, the prophets had a similar huge problem to answer with regard to the promises of God. You remember that God has promised to Abraham that he would be a God to him and his descendants forever. He also promised to Abraham that He would settle him and his descendants in the land of Canaan forever. Then God promised to David, supplementing those promises to Abraham, that he would reign on the throne of His people and that his descendants would reign on the throne of Israel forever. And then something happened. And that something was the exile. Not only the Northern Kingdom of Israel, but the Southern Kingdom of Judah was sent into exile, and suddenly the people of God felt far from God. They were outside of the land that He had promised. The kingly line of David, though it had reigned for four hundred and something years, the longest single dynasty to reign in the history of the world, was no longer on the throne. And God had promised that that line would go on forever. And the people of God were left scratching their heads, and here's the question they were asking, "Okay Lord, have Your promises failed? You promised to be a God to Abraham. You promised to give his descendants the land of Canaan. You promised to David that his descendants would reign on the throne forever. Now our nation doesn't exist, the kingly line is done and we're long and forgotten in exile. Have Your promises failed?" This is the question that so many of the prophets were wrestling with. You'll find Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and most of the Minor Prophets addressing this very question, "How is it that God could all have allowed this to happen? How is it that God could have ordained this to happen in light of the promises that He has made?"

And the prophets have certain answers to that. They state, for instance, that God is going to bring His people out of captivity, in Isaiah 51. This morning, that is a promise of God through Isaiah, "Remind the people to take heart" that God is going to return His people from captivity. So that's one way that they answer that problem.

Another way is that they talk about what they call *the remnant*. That is, that there is a faithful believing part of God's people that always remains loyal to Him and with whom His favor always rests no matter where there are, no matter whether they be in Judah, or whether they be in Babylon. And you'll find that phrase, *the remnant* throughout the later prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets all talk about the remnant. That's one way that they give an answer to this problem of can God's promises fail.

But they also answer it by saying this, "God is going to send a Messiah who will reestablish the throne of David and reign forever." That is the biggest solution to the problem of the seeming failure of God's promises during the time of the exile. That is the biggest solution and answer that the prophets give to the people. And so the people of Israel, from the time of the exile on, begin looking very intently for what? The coming of the Messiah who is going to reestablish David's throne.

Now that is the problem that the Old Testament prophets had to deal with. But you see Paul's problem was even bigger than that, because Paul's problem is a new problem and the problem is this, that when the Messiah came, that God had sent to fulfill these promises, the people of God rejected him. The Old Testament people of God, the children of Israel, by and large rejected the solution, and now we have this new problem: "Why could this happen? How could this be Paul? Can God's promises fail?"

And the Apostle Paul's answer to that, in large measure, is the assertion of the sovereignty of God. In Romans chapter 9 he says, "The only way you could understand this is if you understand God's individual electing love." In other words, he says the only other way you'll ever understand that is if you understand that God's grace is God's choice. And so in this great passage he begins to explain that profound truth.

And in this introduction here, in verses 1 through 5, he prepares us for that discussion, but he also reveals to us his heart. And by revealing to us his heart, it makes us more able to receive the teaching, because his teaching is hard, just like our Lord Jesus' teaching in many places, it's hard to accept. Not hard to understand, but hard to accept. And understanding Paul's heart helps us to accept this truth, but it also shows us what the truth of Romans 9 ought to produce in our heart. For Paul shows us a heart of great love and mercy and grace and compassion toward the lost. And we have to ask ourselves and I want to ask at the very outset, "Do you have that kind of a heart, of mercy and compassion for the lost?"

Well, let's hear what Paul has to say in verses 1 through 5. Three things I'd like for you to see here. Let me outline that passage for you very quickly. In verses 1 and 2, we see Paul make an emphatic declaration of compassion and heartbreak over Israel. In verse 3 and the first few words of verse 4, Paul reveals to us his heart of mercy over his unbelieving people, the children of Israel. And then through the end of verse 4 and verse 5, we see Paul list these special covenant advantages that belong to the children of Israel. And in the course of this Paul reveals to us his heart. He gives us a warning and he challenges us to have a heart like this.

I. We should grieve over the lost.

Let's look at verses 1 and 2 first. Here Paul grieves over the lost and he shows us the posture that we ought to have toward those who are unbelieving in both the church and the world. In verses 1 through 5, Paul seems to be responding to a charge that has been brought against him. The charge is apparently something like this, "Well Paul, you don't care about your people, you have abandoned and rejected your own heritage by preaching this gospel, by going to the Gentiles. By saying the same things that you have said about Israel and about Israel's spiritual leaders, you have rejected Judaism, you have rejected Israel, you have turned your back on your own people, you don't care about them." And so the apostle is starting right here at the outset and saying, "Before I get into this explanation, I want you understand what I really think about my people. I want you to see a glimpse of my heart." And by way of contrast of accusation, he makes it clear that he has a large heart of compassion. Indeed he agonizes over them. He rejoins this charge of having antipathy for Israel, by asserting here in the most emphatic way imaginable his love for Israel.

And I want to say this, our attitude to those who are lost, like Paul's, shows us a lot about our Christianity and it show us about whether our heart has really tasted the grace of God. Paul shows us here a heart of agony over his own people who are lost. And I want to ask you a question. Do you agonize over the fate of the lost? Is it a burden to you? If you don't, let me ask you this question, why not? Maybe somewhere in the back of your mind you believe, "Well, in the end God just couldn't condemn anybody." Or maybe you believe in the end everybody will be saved, or maybe you have come to the point where you think that hell is an outdated doctrine and you can't really believe in God's eternal punishment of anyone. Well, let me say that if you believe that it's clear that Paul doesn't believe that. Because he agonizes over those who have not embraced Christ. If Paul believed like you, he wouldn't be agonizing over the lost. So, if you're not believing or if you're not agonizing over the lost because of any of those reasons, make sure that you understand that you simple disagree with what the Bible says. You disagree with Paul with regard to the fate of the lost, but Paul realizes that that's true and so he agonizes over the lost.

But perhaps, perhaps your heart has simple not grown large in compassion for those who have not embraced Christ. Perhaps you have embraced Christ and you love Him and you're growing and you love His word, but you have not gotten a heart of compassion. One of the things that learning Romans 9 through 11 will do, if you learn it rightly, it will give you a heart of compassion for the lost. You see, when Paul saw God in His sovereignty and he saw Him in His holiness and he saw his own sin and he saw what his sin deserved and then he saw the plight of the lost and he saw what God had done for him in Jesus Christ, he had abounding compassion for those who were apart from Jesus Christ. And clearly we ought to join Him in that. Paul's heart grieves over the lost and that ought to be our attitude toward the lost as well. That's the first thing I'd like for you to see.

II. The doctrine of grace has a heart for mercy.

The second thing is this, you'll see it verses 3 and 4. Here Paul reveals his heart of mercy for his own unbelieving people and we learn this; Paul's doctrine of grace ought to be accompanied by a heart for mercy. Paul's teaching on God's grace and own God's sovereignty ought to be accompanied by a heart of mercy. Paul in this passage was willing to be damned if only his own people would come to the saving knowledge of Christ. This is an indication of the intensity of his love for his people and it's all the more striking since in Romans 8:35 through 39, the verses that butt up right against these verses, what has Paul just said? He's just said that it's impossible to separate a believer from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ and then he turns right around and says this, "If only my people would embrace Christ, I would be willing to be separated from them." Paul know it's hypothetical. Paul knows that it can't happen, but Paul is saying this in order to express the intensity of his love for people who are lost, indeed, people who claim to be those who love and follow God, and yet in fact do not embrace the Messiah who is the only way to salvation. And this attachment that Paul has is not merely an attachment of blood kinship, but it's an attachment born of a profound understanding of the historical role of Israel and plan of God and the unique privileges Israel enjoyed.

And this heart that Paul has toward the Jews is also the heart of the mature Christian toward the ancient people of God. I'm perfectly aware that Christians over the ages have performed many great atrocities toward the Jewish people. In so doing, they have failed to live up to the heart of Paul. And I want to say to you, many of you love the doctrines of grace taught by Paul in Romans 9 through 11, and if you really love those doctrines, and if you really understand those doctrines you'll have a heart like Paul. You'll have a heart of grace. It won't be a shriveled, small heart with no love in compassion. It will be a heart, which is large with grace, because Calvinists ought to manifest grace as well as to teach it. We ought to have more heart for the lost than anyone. We ought to, along side of our embrace of the doctrines of grace, we ought to manifest a heart of grace. Listen to what Phil Ryken says about this, "We respond to God's mercy by becoming merciful ourselves. Sadly, people who believe in election are not always known for their mercy. In fact, sometimes it seems like there is an ornery streak in Calvinism. But it seems that someone who understands the wonder of God's mercy would seek to become a living demonstration of it. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." But you know, we could also reverse that statement and say, 'blessed are those who have been shown mercy for they will be merciful.'

One way to test your grasp of God's mercy is to ask how you treat other sinners. How do you respond when you encounter a homeless person or a gay prostitute or a drug addict, or a drunk, or whatever co-worker, or family member or church member is most difficult to deal with? Usually my response is to get angry and

wonder, "Why these people can't get their act together?" That is hardly the response of someone who has known God's mercy, who knows that the bondage of sin can only be broken through the mercy of the Cross.

I have observed that some Christians are Calvinists when they deal with their own sins, but are minions when they deal with others. Oh, they've learned that the only solution for their own depravity is divine grace, but they still expect other people to save them. Certainly, God holds sinners responsible for their sins, but He also reaches out to them in mercy. If you really understand the doctrine of election, you will not be judgmental or proud; you will be a messenger of God's mercy. "What does the Lord require of you." Micah says, "but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Are you merciful, do you have a heart of mercy? If you embrace the doctrines of grace does your heart reflect a heart enlarged by the taste of those doctrines of grace?

III. We are not to presume upon God.

Thirdly and finally, in verse 4 and 5, Paul gives us this list of advantages of Israel and he reminds us here that God's covenant privileges are real even when they are not embraced, and at the same time they must never be presumed upon. Paul does not deny that God has given these privileges and advantages to Israel. He gives this incredible list of things that God has done for Israel, but two things need to be noted. These privileges are real. They are just like the privileges that we experience in the Christian church today. Even when they are neglected, the means of grace are real and important, and they always accomplish what God wants them to accomplish. Paul says that's true then and it's true now, but it is also true that these privileges can never be presumed upon. The Jews had these privileges, but by and large rejected the Lord Jesus Christ in Paul's time. And the Apostle is saying, it doesn't matter what privileges and advantages you've had, if you have not embraced Christ, you have no part of Him or of the blessing of God.

And my friends, that message is just as relevant to this congregation and it was to the Jewish Christian congregation to whom Paul was speaking in Rome. We may have been members of First Presbyterian Church for fifty years, given faithfully, given regularly, but if we have not embraced the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, then we are not part of Him, and we have no interest in His blessings and benefits. And so these privileges can never be presumed upon for real saving faith in Christ and Paul's message certainly speaks to this. We should never discount the significance of the means of grace, even when people neglect, or abuse or reject them. But we should never presume that just because we have the privilege of being a part of a congregation that loves the Lord, loves His word, teaches it in pulpit and classroom, that just thereby that we are guaranteed an interest in salvation. No, that must be when we deal with God ourselves, trusting in Him by faith alone as Christ is offered in the gospel. May God grant that you would do just that. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, by the work of the Spirit in our heart grant not only that we would embrace Christ savingly, but that our hearts would be enlarged to be hearts of compassion for the lost. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

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