



ROMANS 9 - 11

CAN GOD REALLY BE TRUSTED

Growth Groups Material
(4 studies on Romans 9-11)
Nov-Dec 2025

LEADERS MATERIAL

Teaching Schedule

<i>In our gatherings we</i>	20-23 Nov	Romans 9:1-18
<i>will work through a 4</i>	27-30 Nov	Romans 9:19-29
<i>part series:</i>	4-7 Dec	Romans 9:30-10:21
	11-14 Dec	Romans 11:1-36

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Additional Resources

We've put together some additional resources that might help you as you make your way through this series:

<https://jannalianglican.org.au/romans9to11>



Introduction

Can God really be trusted? This is a crucial question, for obvious reasons. We're called to put our trust in God to receive the salvation he offers us through Jesus. We're called to put our trust in God's promise that, despite everything that happens (good, bad, perplexing), He is working through all things for our good. We could go on listing all the promises God makes to us that we must learn to trust. But can God really be trusted?

This is exactly the question Paul is addressing in Romans 9-11. In the background to Paul's letter to the Romans is the co-existence and tension between Jewish and Gentile groups within the Roman church, and the loud voices of Jewish opponents to Paul and his gospel. A gospel which was all about salvation by faith apart from law, and apart from works. That gospel, and its implications has been thoroughly laid out in chapters 1-8. But to Paul's critics, this gospel, and the inclusion of the Gentiles all sounded inconsistent with what God had revealed about his plans in the Old Testament, especially His plans to bless the Israelites, His special nation. How then, would God allow a situation in which so many Jews rejected Jesus, and became excluded from salvation? It didn't add up. Paul tackles this issue head on, assuring his readers that God is doing exactly what he said he would do.

This is a part of the New Testament that is full of tricky concepts which have the potential to confuse and perhaps trouble us. Persevere in close reading and reflection! Because what we learn about God and his salvation plans in these chapters are essential to the life of faith. We will come away convinced by a humbling, but foundational truth: “God is God, and we are not!”. Oh, and there’s immense comfort too – God really can be trusted! Good news for anyone who trusts God to be saved.

We pray that this is a helpful series for you and your journey with Jesus!

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Study 1 | Romans 9:1-18 (members booklet pg 6)

Introduction

1. What does the idea of God 'choosing' or 'electing' people to be saved mean to you? How do you feel when you think about it?

- This chapter unambiguously raises the doctrine of election – the idea that God chooses some people to be saved and not others. This is a sensitive idea, which is hard to digest, but the truth of it, especially in this chapter, is hard to avoid.
- The aim of this question is to raise the topic.

Read and Discuss

2. **Read Romans 9:1-5.** What is Paul so upset about?

- Paul is upset because he has clearly laid out in the preceding chapters, that the only way to be saved is through faith in Jesus, and he knows that many Jews have rejected Jesus, and so will not be saved.
- It seems especially hard to stomach (in verses 4-5) as the Jews were clearly God's special people and the recipients of God's promises.
- Note, some of the promises that God would bless Israel included Genesis 12:1-3, Genesis 15:1-6, Exodus 6:7

3. **Read Romans 9:6-13.** Why might a Jewish reader of the Old Testament suggest that God's word had failed? Why is this such an important question for the reader of Romans?

- It is precisely because of all the promises God has made to his people. If God had so clearly chosen Israel to bless, and to be his people, how could it now be that many of them are excluded from salvation? It seems like a failure on God's part, to execute his promises.
- This is an important question because so much of Paul's argument has been that God's people are completely secure in Christ and cannot fail to come to final salvation. Yet experience shows that some of God's special people, the Jews, now find themselves outside God's blessing. Can God's promises really be trusted?

4. How does Paul show that God's word has not failed?

- Paul's main argument is that according to God's Word, there has always been a difference between physical Israel (those in the actual nation) and God's true people – the actual recipients of his promises.
- The use of Isaac v Ishmael (Abraham's descendants) and Jacob v Esau (Isaac's descendants) illustrate this point. The promises were never to all of Abraham's descendants, or Isaac's descendants, but to the line God had chosen. Physical descent does not equate to being chosen by God.
- We should be careful with respect to verse 13 and not over-read the love/hate language. This does not refer to actual emotions felt by God towards these groups, but rather his actions. *Love* equates to God's choice of Judah/Jacob/Christians and conversely, *hate* towards Esau/Edom/Unsaved people is the opposite – God does not mercifully intervene and leaves us to our own sin, and judgment.

5. **Read Romans 9:14-18.** Summarise Paul's argument about how God chooses people to belong to him? What is explicitly ruled out as a factor?

- God freely chooses some to show mercy towards and others not. There are no human grounds upon which this differentiation is based. It is not based on human will or effort. See also verses 11-12: the difference between Jacob and Esau was not owing to anything they had done, good or bad.
- In Pharaoh's case, when we read through Exodus, we see Pharaoh himself hardening his own heart, alongside God's hardening his heart. Pharaoh's decisions are not mechanical or robotic in anyway. The Bible places these two paradoxical realities alongside each other and invites us to treat both of them true at the same time, without further explanation.

6. **In verse 15, Paul quotes from Exodus 33:19.** Skim over Exodus 32-33. What is the context of God's comment to Moses here? How does this context help us think through whether God is being unjust in choosing some and not others?

- In Exodus 32 we read of the Israelite people, led by Aaron, melting their gold jewellery and fashioning it into a golden calf to worship. This happens while Moses is at the top of Mt Sinai. God sees what happens and is angry with them. Moses intercedes for the people and seeks God's favour for them.
- This context reminds us that mercy, by definition, is a response to wrongdoing. There is never any entitlement to it. No person is ever entitled to salvation as we've all sinned (Romans 3:23).

Reflect and Apply

7. Charles Spurgeon says that what we've been learning about, namely the doctrine of election (God sovereignly chooses people to be saved) is the 'most comforting doctrine of all'. How could this be so? What is comforting about it?

- The comfort emerging from the doctrine election is that our eternal safety (for those with faith in Jesus) is anchored in the will of God, and not our religious or moral performance. This brings immense assurance and peace.

8. Think back to question 5 and the factors that are ruled out of God's consideration in saving people? How does this humble us? How should this affect our approach to evangelism?

- The comfort emerging from the doctrine election is that our eternal safety (for those with faith in Jesus) is anchored in the will of God, and not our religious or moral performance. This brings immense assurance and peace.

9. A friend complains to you that God isn't fair because he chooses some people to be saved, but not others. How would you respond to this?

- This is always a tricky question to address which requires care and sensitivity. A crucial point to be made is that none of us are entitled to salvation as we've sinned against God. As such, God does not owe anybody anything. The true scandal is not that some are chosen to be saved and others aren't, but rather that anyone is chosen at all.

Study 2 | Romans 9:19-29 (members booklet pg 8)

Introduction

1. Share your 'One Thing' from last weekend's teaching. Have your thoughts/feelings about God choosing people evolved over the week? Discuss what (if anything) has changed.

- This is a chance to reflect on last week's study and the first sermon in the series. In your group you may have already heard the first two sermons in this series. Given the doctrine of election is such a major theme, it's worth taking stock of how people are feeling about it.

Read and Discuss

2. **Read Romans 9:19-29.** What is the objection Paul raises (in the shoes of his readers)? What truth has led to his objection being raised?

- The objection is that if God chooses who is and isn't saved (as has been taught clearly in verses 1-18, how can he find people at fault, who resist him. Logically, this objection makes perfect sense

3. In his response Paul uses an illustration of a potter, and the clay. What is Paul's point? (Read also Isaiah 29:15-16, which Paul may be drawing upon).

- The main idea is that humanity is in no position whatsoever to answer back to God and stand in judgment over his decisions. The distance between us and God is similar to a lump of inanimate clay, before the potter. God is God and he has the right to do with us as he wishes.
- Some interpreters have concluded that Paul has in mind the creation. While the language of forming and making leads us to think of creation, it is also possible that Paul is treating the clay as a given (in our case, sinful and guilty before God), and the real issue is what the potter does with the clay.

- If helpful, recall question 6 from the last study. Our default standing before God is that we're guilty before him because of our sin.
- Answers aside, we mustn't overlook the tone in which Paul speaks about this matter and the warning humans must heed. In verse 20, the question "Who are you, a human being, to talk back to God" targets someone who is arrogantly and presumptuously thinking themselves to know better than God. It's a dangerous thing to dig our heels in and insist that God has got things wrong in his elective purposes.

4. What are the *possible* good reasons that Paul speculates might be behind God's plan to judge some and have mercy on others.

- Somehow, God's judgment of those not being saved, will serve to magnify the mercy shown to those who are being saved. This concept, though hard to stomach makes sense. Those receiving God's mercy will comprehend and appreciate God's kindness and grace to them, more and more, as they observe what the alternative destiny looks like – a destiny that ought to have been theirs.
- Again, we should be careful not to over-read an idea of double predestination into the language of being 'prepared for destruction' (v22). This idea suggests that from the beginning, before creation, God created sin itself, and therefore, sinners unavoidably destined for judgment. The Bible paints a different picture – all humanity have wilfully rejected God and therefore are culpable for their own sin. The language of 'prepared for destruction' may be as simple as picking up the pottery imagery again, and these people are objects *on their way towards judgment*.
- Note also that God has 'endured' these people. Presumably this is a picture of God patiently enduring the sin of sinners, graciously allowing them to live, and continue in their sin, without destroying them on the spot.

5. What point is Paul making in quoting from Hosea and Isaiah in verses 25-29? Think especially about what these verses say about the Gentiles, on the one hand, and the Jews on the other hand.

- The big point here is that God had always said that his people would eventually include many Gentiles, and a remnant of Jews. In the background to some of these verses is the ongoing rebelliousness of Israel. God won't be saving all of them – only some.

- Paul's ultimate point in all of this is to assure his readers of God's faithfulness to his word and how the mixed nature of the 1st century church (Gentiles included, many Jews rejecting Jesus) is consistent with what God had said.

Reflect and Apply

6. How do you feel about being compared to a lump of clay that God is free to destroy or preserve?

- For group reflection. This is a confronting idea, so it is worth people reflecting on it. Work hard to acknowledge everyone's feelings about this.
- In a sense, the model response is that which Paul is promoting – humility and acceptance. A godly response demonstrates contentment in God's 'bigness' and our 'smallness'. A less godly response is one which stands in judgement over God and is angry: "How could God think of us like that!".
- Don't forget, this is only one image the Bible uses to describe God and humanity. There are many other, more palatable images, where God speaks of humanity as his precious children, whom he loves.

7. What is our position before God? How should that influence our relationship with Him?

- We ought to come away from the current passage completely humbled, being reminded that God is God, and we are not! This humility might shape our relationship with God in several ways: increase reverence and fear (good fear); gratitude, not being presumptuous and complacent about our salvation.

8. As a result of reading this passage, should we be more or less confident that God can save people whom we don't expect? Why?

- The purpose of this question is to prompt deep reflection on what has been learnt, and perhaps debate the idea.
- On the one hand, we are none the wiser about this question as because we do not know (apart from faith in Christ being clearly demonstrated) who God has chosen.
- On the other hand, verses 25 and 26 speak to God's willingness to bring in people who formerly had not been including (originally referring to the Gentiles)

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Study 3 | Romans 9:30-10:21 (members booklet pg 11)

Introduction

1. In light of what we've been learning, how would you answer the question: "Who is responsible when someone isn't saved?"

- The last two weeks we've seen the doctrine of election raised and defended. One of the natural questions to emerge, has been, if God's chooses people, how can people be at fault. This question is intending to raise that tension and serve as a recap of what we've learnt over the last few weeks.
- Paul is now turning to show how the Jews are at fault for rejecting Jesus.

Read and Discuss

2. **Read Romans 9:30-10:1-3.** What is the question Paul is now raising? What is his summary answer?

- Remember the main question being addressed right throughout chapter 9 has been "Why do so many Jews not believe, when God seemed to have chosen them as his special people?". So far, we've got the answer from God's side. God is free to choose some and not others, and his word in the Old Testament clearly foreshadowed that not all ethnic Jews would be saved (only a remnant), and also that Gentiles would be included. Paul now addresses the issue from the human side – where did the Jews go wrong?
- The question posed is something along the lines of "How is it that Gentiles, that never had regard for God, are now saved, and yet Jews who had God's law and were trying to do the right thing, have now missed out. It seems odd. What's the deal?"
- The short answer is that the Jews, even though they had the law, they sought to be saved by it, according to works, not by faith. They stumbled over Jesus, the stumbling block (c.f. Isaiah 8:14, 28:16)

3. Read Romans 10:4-17. What is the difference between righteousness according to the law, and righteousness that comes by faith?

- The first part of this section, especially verses 4-13 are notoriously difficult to make complete sense of.
- First, to answer the question: righteousness according to law, places the burden on us to do things in order to be saved. On the other hand, righteousness by faith says, no, it's not about what I can accomplish, but rather believing a word (a message) that is very accessible.
- Some other notes:
 - a. In verse 5, Paul is quoting Lev 18:5, which on first glance reading says life comes through obedience of the law. That is true, if you could actually obey it fully. No one can do that! Paul has taught that clearly, earlier in the letter. The Jews however had wrongly taken it as a blueprint for themselves – the path to salvation comes through obedience to the law.
 - b. The other quotes come from Deuteronomy 30:12-14. This is a bit confusing because that also comes from Moses, and there, Moses says that the law is there to be obeyed (but isn't that the 'righteousness by law' attitude?). Paul is interpreting Moses words for us and asserting that the key idea in Moses words from Deuteronomy 30 is one of *accessibility*. Namely, because Christ has already come down from heaven, and has already been raised, we don't need to go to impossible lengths (i.e. keep the law) in order to be saved.
 - c. If the way Paul is using these verses remains puzzling – that's ok. Just remember the big idea of the paragraph – the way to be saved is not through trying to obey the law, but through faith in Christ.

4. Where does faith come from? What are the implications of this for us, as we seek to see people saved?

- Verse 17 says that faith comes from hearing the message about Christ. This means that telling people about Jesus is the key strategy to producing faith. See question 8 for further exploration of this idea.

5. Read Romans 10:18-21. Why do you think Paul uses so many quotes from the Old Testament in this section (and throughout chapters 9-11 more generally)? What point is he making with these quotations?

- Paul uses many quotes throughout this section as he is particularly addressing Jewish complaints that Paul's teaching means God has made a mistake. In other words, the rejection of Jews, and inclusion of Gentiles (Paul's teaching) is not consistent with the Old Testament. Paul is showing from the Old Testament that his gospel is entirely consistent with the Old Testament.
- The point in these particular quotes related to Israel's fault in the matter. The points are:
 - a. Yes, Israel heard the message about Christ
 - b. They are a nation that ought to have understood God
 - c. The Gentiles found God, even though they were not looking for him
 - d. But Israel have been disobedient and defiant, with God right in front of them.

Reflect and Apply

6. In light of today's study, and what we've learnt from chapter 9, who was responsible for the Jewish people rejecting Jesus? Today, can people be blamed for not believing in Jesus?

- Paul's big point is that Jews had been given plenty of opportunity to respond to the gospel in faith, but they did not. They are responsible for taking themselves outside God's blessing when they rejected Jesus.
- Likewise, today, anyone who had heard about Jesus and rejecting him cannot lay blame elsewhere. Yes, from a divine perspective, it may be that they have not been 'chosen'. From a human perspective, people get it wrong by rejecting Jesus and the message of the gospel. The Bible consistently upholds this idea of 'compatibilism', meaning that somehow God's sovereignty and human will work together to produce outcomes.

7. How might established Christians fall into the same trap as the Jews did – trying to establish our own righteousness through what we do?

- Invite the group to reflect on the regular things Christians do that easily become like laws. Note - there are lots of regular practices that are good to stick to, rigidly, like going to church, personal Bible reading, giving etc. It is not bad to make a habit of these things.
- The problem comes when we begin to place our confidence in the doing of those things, as the grounds for being saved, rather than Christ. If we do those things in order to secure God's favour, rather than as a response to God's favour already conferred upon us in Christ, we are making the same mistake as the Jews.

8. What lessons can be learnt from this passage about the heart of evangelism? What other strategies do we tend to use to try and see someone converted? Is there a place for these things? What is that place?

- If saving faith comes from hearing the message about Christ (v17), the key to evangelism is simple – tell people about Jesus. The order of activities is straightforward: (1) someone is sent, (2) they preach/talk, (3) the listener hears, (4) they believe, (5) they call upon the name of the Lord, (6) and finally they are saved.
- Sometimes we confuse the boundary between real evangelism (proclaiming the gospel) and other helpful strategies. Some of these strategies might include:
 - a. Inviting someone to church or an evangelistic event.
 - b. Including someone into loving Christian community;
 - c. Demonstrating how Christians are different, and godly;
 - d. Helping someone's earthly needs (e.g. alleviating poverty etc)
- There are all excellent, necessary and worthwhile things to do. They could lead to opportunities for the gospel to be proclaimed and heard (e.g. in church, or an event, or in personal conversation). They might also help someone see how loving Christians are and therefore make the gospel message credible. That's a good aim, and a good outcome. But on their own, apart from the message about Christ being spoken and heard, these strategies cannot produce saving faith.

Study 4 | Romans 11:1-36 (members booklet pg 13)

Introduction

1. Discuss, as far as you are able, what Romans chapters 9 and 10 have been about. What issues have been raised and addressed so far?

- This question is intended as a way of reviewing what has been studied so far.

Read and Discuss

2. **Read Romans 11:1-10.** What is the question Paul is asking? Summarise Paul's answer to his own question.

- The question Paul is asking is "Has God rejected the Israelites". The answer is no because there is a remnant of Jews who have been saved, including Paul himself.
- The notion of a small selection (aka a 'remnant') being saved amidst the corruption and judgement of the whole nation can be traced back to Elijah's time. This is why Paul quotes from 1 Kings 19, in which God reveals to Elijah his plan to save a remnant, even though the nation at large had become corrupt and turned to worship idols, like Baal.
- Paul also adds that those Jews who have rejected God face God's judgment of being hardened, per what had been written in the Old Testament (c.f. Deut 29:4, Isaiah 29:10, Ps 69:22-23). Remember one of Paul's big aims in this section – to show that God was acting consistently with what he had already revealed in the OT.

3. **Read Romans 11:1-16.** What has been one positive outcome of the Jews rejecting Jesus?

- God has included the Gentiles (verse 11)

4. What does Paul hope will happen with the Jews, as a result of Gentiles being included in salvation?

- Paul's hope (and dare I say, his anticipation) is that the Gentiles being saved will make Jews jealous, and that will cause them to come back to God and be saved.
- Paul even says that was God's plan – verse 11 – *salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel jealous*

5. **Read Romans 11:17-32.** What is the concern that Paul has around the attitude (or possible attitude) of the Gentiles? What reasons does he give to steer the Gentiles away from this attitude developing?

- Recall, the Roman church was comprised of both Jews and Gentiles.
- The apparent concern here is that the Gentiles have become, or are at risk of becoming, arrogant and boastful. As a result of the Jews rejecting Jesus, and salvation coming to the Gentiles, some Gentiles might become arrogant and boastful, thinking too highly of themselves and looking down on Jewish Christians in the church.
- Understanding God's plan, however, should eliminate such arrogance.
- The illustration of the tree and the branches puts Gentiles in their place. They are wild branches, grafted into a tree that from the beginning was Jewish (the natural branches). God can cut off branches for their arrogance.

6. What is God's ultimate plan for the Jews (see verses 25-26). What do you think this means.

- After urging the Gentiles not to become conceited, Paul speaks again to God's ultimate plans in verses 25-26. God has hardened Israel so that the allocated number of elect Gentiles, are saved. Then, in verse 26, all Israel will be saved.
- Verse 26 has baffled many. What does it mean.
- One possibility is that 'all Israel' refers to all the elect of the spiritual Israel (that is both elect Jews and elect Gentiles). Another possibility is some kind of large-scale conversion of many Jews at some future point, after the full number of Gentiles have been saved. Another possibility is that it refers to all of ethnic Israel being saved entirely, as a people. This third option seems impossible given that many Jews have lived and died without accepting Christ – the only grounds of salvation.

- Commentators differ over how to understand the phrase. At a minimum we can confidently assert that God has not given up on the Jews. He plans for more Jews to be saved before Jesus returns, and the order of salvation history (i.e the hardening of the Jews while Gentile mission happens) is quite deliberate and purposeful.
- Verses 28-32 also lift our vision to God's plans in all of this. The disobedience of the Jews, in initially rejecting Jesus, will make it clear that God saves them according to his mercy, not because of their ethnicity and supposed privilege.

7. **Read Romans 11:33-36.** This is spontaneous reflection from Paul, responding to what has come before. What stands out to you? What do you think led Paul to feel this way?

- This is an open question, encouraging people to read it closely. Different people may find particular verses resonate with them.
- Clearly Paul is overwhelmed by the wisdom, and unsearchable mind of God, that is evident in his plans for salvation history. He is probably especially responding to the immediately preceding verses – namely God's plan to harden the Jews so that they would grasp his mercy, in the end.

Reflect and Apply

8. How can we guard ourselves against arrogance or conceit, when it comes to thinking about how we've been saved?

- This picks up Paul's big concern for the Gentiles – that they would arrogantly boast of their inclusion, while the Jews go on rejecting Jesus. Invite the group to share their own strategies.
- The heart of guarding against arrogance or conceit, would be to know our plan in God's plans. He chose us, we did not earn our salvation. Regular confession of sin is helpful.

9. Verses 33-36 speak to our feelings of confusion or being overwhelmed by the apparent complexity of God's plans. What is your natural reaction with you are confused or overwhelmed by God's plans? What can we learn from Paul's example.

- Ask the group what their normal reaction is towards complex, or troubling parts of God's word. For many it may be a similar response to the idea of election – discussed earlier – namely anger that God is unfair or unjust.
- Paul's approach gives us an example to follow. It is saturated in humility, and a true sense that God is God and we are not. It's a recognition that God has ordered his salvation plans in a way which we might not understand. But that is his prerogative. And it demonstrates his wisdom and power to accomplish his purposes.

10. The title of this series has been 'Can God really be trusted?'. What reasons given throughout chapters 9-11 can we point to, to grow our confidence in God's trustworthiness?

- For open reflection. This is an opportunity to reflect on the series as a whole. Remember the questions which Paul has raised, and how they have been answered: Has God failed because so many Jews have rejected Christ? Is God unfair because he elects some and not others? Where did the Jews go wrong? Has God given up on Israel?
- Paul has given us answers to these questions. Sometimes these answers have been complex and tricky to understand our digest. What has been unambiguous though, is that God has, and will always act according to what his word says (hence the many OT quotations throughout this section, supporting Paul's argument).
- All of this gives us confidence, that whatever God has said to us about the way to be saved, we can be sure he will follow through.

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