

Has God's Word Failed?

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Preacher: Don Coleman

[0:00] Romans chapter 9 is where we are and we started this last Sunday night.

! Actually, just dealt with the easy part of chapter 9, Romans chapter 9. If you know anything about Romans chapter 9, and you surely do, you know it's a difficult chapter.

But you know when you're preaching through books of the Bible, you can't skip any chapters, that is. And just because they're hard to deal with, or maybe hard to understand, or maybe controversial.

And trust me, Romans chapter 9 is controversial. It really is. And I think you're going to sense that as we get further and further into it.

And in all fairness, there are some difficult things stated in this chapter. Really difficult. And I would even admit to you, and we'll not get to this particular portion of it tonight, but I would say to you there is one part of this chapter, a few verses there, that are really difficult.

[1:25] Not just difficult in understanding, difficult in really deciding just what it is that Paul is saying. Because what it seems that he's saying is alarming to us, is appalling to us on the surface.

So that just kind of whets your appetite as we go forward. And the really tough stuff we're not going to even get to tonight. Though what we do get into, you may be thinking along the way, well, this is tough, tough stuff.

But we shall endeavor to persevere. Now, it's my contention that in order to understand what Paul is telling us here in this chapter, and not just chapter 9, but 9, 10, and 11.

Remember I mentioned last week those three chapters go together. The theme is the same. But in order for us to understand what he's saying and get it right or make right conclusions, we have to start at the right position.

And that's why I spent some time last week really focusing on the first five verses, because you need to understand how verses 1 through 5 fit in to the rest of what Paul is going to say to us in chapter 9 and beyond.

[2:49] And so we have to start right. We have to have the right position to begin with. And, of course, there are differing views on that. But I'm just going to have to preach it the way I believe it.

And I don't know anything else to do. But here are some positions we must, or some conclusions we must state at the outset. And some of these I mentioned last week.

First of all, you need to see chapter 9, 9, 10, and 11 as not an interruption in the letter.

I know that maybe you might be thinking, well, so what's the big deal there? If you take 9, 10, and 11 as a parenthesis or an interruption, the implication being that you can take these three chapters out and Paul's scheme, his theme, is not altered at all.

That really these should be separated. They have nothing to do with what has been written in chapter 8, nor is there any importance necessarily of chapters 9 and 10 and 11 with chapter 12 in on.

[4:09] And so you can just take it out. And there are some who believe that. And I think that's incorrect. I think for us to really grasp the significance of chapter 8, we need to see that chapter 9 follows chapter 8, not just numerically, but in Paul's logic, his argument in the letter.

So we can't separate them out. They go there and they fit there, even though if you were to take them out, it seems that the letter would be seamless still from 8 on to 12.

The second thing that we need to understand at the outset is that these chapters represent Paul's answer to a question, really a series of questions, but one main question that leads to other questions.

These chapters represent, especially chapter 9, represent Paul's answer to a question that naturally forms itself as a reaction to the glorious truths of chapter 8 and what glorious truths there are in

chapter 8.

And some of our most favorite verses are found there. All things work together for good to those who are called according to His purpose and so forth. Love God, called according to His purpose. [5 : 36] And who can separate us from the love of God? And then those passages that speak of God calling us and then ultimately glorification. Those are wonderful truths in chapter 8.

And those truths then lead to a natural question. And this was kind of my focus last week. And the question is going to be asked.

And we'll get to that here in just a minute. So chapter 9 is a question, an answer to a question that naturally flows, is formed by the truths of chapter 8.

Then third, Israel is the primary focus of the chapter. Indeed, the next three chapters. But Paul's concern is much broader than Israel.

Much broader. Because there's a lot at stake here. That precipitates Paul writing what he wrote in chapter 9. There's a lot at stake.

[6 : 39] And I'll repeat a quotation that I gave you last week. What is at stake ultimately in these chapters is not the fate of Israel.

Ultimately, God's own trustworthiness is at stake here. And if God's word, God's word of promise cannot be trusted to stand forever, then all our faith is in vain.

And that's a reference to the connection of chapter 9 with chapter 8. If we cannot answer a certain burning question about Israel and their unbelief, if we can't answer that correctly, then it calls into question the validity, the trustworthiness of all that God has said in chapter 8.

All right? And this is the point of verse 5, or the first five verses of chapter 9. And so if you misinterpret Paul's point in these first five verses, then you will come to a wrong conclusion about chapters 9 through 11.

You almost had to have been here last week to know what in the world I'm talking about. Let me see if I can explain. I will review a little bit.

[8 : 11] But the key to understanding this chapter is verse 6. It's found in verse 6. In the first part of verse 6.

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. That's the New King James translation.

Literally, he's saying, it is not as though the word of God has fallen to the ground.

What word of God? Well, we'll get to that here in a minute. It's not as if God's word has failed. That's the key to understanding what Paul is going to tell us in chapter 9.

How can the gospel, and just think about this logically, because Paul is approaching this very logically, how can the gospel, the new covenant, the new testament, the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, how can that be true?

How can it be true? If the Jews, for the most part, have never believed it. That's what's at stake here.

[9 : 23] That's the question. How can that be true? All the marvelous gospel truths that we read about and rejoice over and glorify in, in chapter 8.

How can it be true if the Jews still do not believe it? Still today. Listen, the Jews are God's chosen people. And so that's the question Paul seeks to answer.

And there is a lot at stake, because how could God give a message that His own people would not believe? His own people have rejected. And if the vast majority of the Jews throughout all of history have not, and still do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and since the Jews are the chosen people of God, who have been given all of the great privileges that Paul outlines for us, or lists there in verses 4 and 5, if they have rejected that, then Jesus must not be the Messiah.

This is what Paul is approaching here. I know this is not our thought process, but his original readers, this is what they were thinking. Right after chapter 8, well, if the Jews have rejected it, for the most part, then Jesus is not the Messiah then, because they are His chosen people.

But if He is the Messiah, then He has failed. Do you see the logic here? He has failed.

[10 : 57] His word has fallen to the ground. Now that's the primary question that Paul seeks to answer here in chapter 9. But there are some other questions, other questions to which Paul seeks to give an answer.

In fact, you could say that one question, this first question that we've already looked at here in verse 6, that one question leads to another question, and that question leads yet to another question.

And that's kind of the flow of chapter 9. In fact, these three questions, as they appear, very neatly organize the chapter for us.

They kind of give us the framework for the chapter, an outline, if you will. And here are the questions. And I've reworded them in my own way. Okay, so maybe we can remember them.

Here are the questions. Question number one, has God's word failed? Now, we've already introduced that one, but that is answered. Paul gives his answer to that in verses 6 through 13.

[12:00] Has God's word failed? And he introduces the question, though it's not put in the form of a question, but the implication is, this is a question, he says in verse 6, but it is not that the word of God has fallen or failed or taken no effect.

So there's the question. Has God's word failed? Second question, are God's ways fair? And that you'll find, or the answer to that question, appears in verses 14 through 18.

I'm giving you these things on the front end. We're not going to cover all this ground tonight. But the question comes there in verse 14, what shall we say then? That is to the previous answer, to the previous question, what shall we say then?

Is there unrighteousness with God? Or is God being fair? And that's the question that is asked there.

Are God's ways fair? And then the third question, is God's will fatalistic? Is God's will fatalistic?

[13:18] Verses 19 through to the end of the chapter. And the question comes to us in verse 19, you will say to me then, why does God still find fault?

For who has resisted His will? If what will be, will be, and there's not a thing we can do about it, then why does God condemn us?

If we have been, if we are not one of the elect, then how could God find fault in us?

Not just the question of fairness, it's the question of His will is just fatalistic. There's not a thing I can do about it. And to kind of make that cross over into the church and our mission, then if that's the case, then why should we share the gospel with anyone?

If God's will is what it is and there's not anything that can change it and what He wills to happen is going to happen no matter what we do, then why tell people about Jesus? Though that's not really the question He's dealing with, that's kind of an application or an implication of the question as it crosses over into the church.

[14:35] But these are the three questions that Paul answers for us in this chapter. Has God's Word failed? Are God's ways fair? Is God's will fatalistic?

And, of course, the answers are very clear, really, though He's going to explain them for us in no uncertain terms.

All right, so let's deal with the first question. And we really started this last week. Actually, verses 1 through 5 kind of set us up for the question or tell us why the question is asked to begin with.

And it's the case of Israel. They've been given all of these things, including the Messiah, and yet they're unbelieving, and so God's Word must have failed. All right. And Paul's answer, of course, is no.

Not at all. All right, so verse 6, But it is not that the Word of God has taken no effect or failed. The Gospel came to the Jews.

[15:39] The promise was given to the Jews. All the privileges belong to the Jews. But they, for the most part, rejected it. Has God's Word failed?

And the answer is no. Now, we need to understand one thing first before we go further, and that is we need to identify what this Word of God is.

And we may think we know, but really it's more specific than we think. The Word of God that Paul refers to here is not the Word of God in general or in the whole.

That is, in the sense of the whole of God's Word. Paul's referring to God's covenant with Israel. His promise.

He's referring to His promise to save them. That's the issue here. Not just that they would be a privileged nation or a called nation and that all these things would be given to them and through them this, this, and such.

[16:46] But that His promise is that He would save them. All right? That's the Word of God that the objector is suggesting has fallen or failed because Israel's not saved.

Most of them are not saved. Not then in Paul's day, not yet even today. All right? So, since Israel as a nation has rejected the Messiah and since the majority of the Israelites are, as Paul implied in

verse 3, accursed, that the majority of Israel are accursed from Christ, that's the word anathema, anathema, that is, dedicated for destruction.

Since that's the case with most of Israel, then has God's covenant, His promise, His elective purpose failed, failed. Now, according to Paul, the answer is no.

And how do we know that the answer is no? Well, look at the rest of verse 6. For they, that is, Paul's kinsmen, are not all Israel who are of Israel.

That's His answer. Now, what's that? Not all Israel who are of Israel.

[18 : 10] Is that some kind of doublespeak? Does that make any sense to you? Well, it really is pretty simple. The first inclusion of the word Israel there refers, of course, to God's covenant people.

The second inclusion of the word Israel refers to the patriarch, Israel. That was his name. That's Jacob.

Jacob, the son of Isaac. Isaac, the son of Abraham. Jacob's name was changed to Israel. Israel, when God made His covenant with him.

Now, so then, what does that mean? It means, actually, more than just not all Israel's descendants are going to be saved. It means that God never promised that they would be saved.

All of them. And so, God's word, just to that point, it's clear. God's word has not fallen because God never promised to save them all.

[19 : 16] He never promised to save them all. Verse 7 makes that clear. Nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham.

Just because they're born out of Abraham. The covenant, of course, was given to Abraham, then given to Isaac, his son, Abraham's son, then to Jacob, later named Israel, Isaac's son.

And the point is that God never promised salvation unconditionally to each offspring of Abraham just because he or she was an offspring of Abraham. God never promised that.

God never intended that all Israel would be saved, would be redeemed. I know you're thinking way out ahead there to chapter 11 where it says all Israel will be saved, but we'll get to that.

That's something else again. All right? We're really talking about Israel in the past and now. And what's at stake is God's Word. Trustworthiness of His Word.

[20 : 16] And God never intended, never promised that all of the descendants of Abraham would be saved. Not all Israel, true Israel, are of the fleshly Israel.

Or include all the fleshly Israel. That is, all the descendants of Israel. All right? So, God's Word, His covenant, His promise, His elective purpose has not failed.

It's not failed. It has not fallen because God in His sovereignty never intended that every Jew would believe. And this is the clincher. The nation Israel was elected to privilege.

That's what we read about in verse 3. The nation Israel was elected to privilege, but listen, only individuals are elected to salvation.

That's what we need to understand. Now, we're going to see later in this chapter that the real Israel, true Israel, is the Israel of faith. Israel of faith.

[21 : 17] We're not going to get to that here tonight, but just kind of a mention of it here. The true Israel is the Israel of faith. And beyond Israel, all true covenant people of God, Jews and Gentiles, are people of faith.

The people of faith. Verse 33, here in chapter 9, and whosoever believes on Him, that's Jesus, will not be put to shame. And I might also have you consider John chapter 8 in verse 37 at this juncture where John says, Jesus says, I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill me. In fact, let me back up just a little ways here. Now, I'll stick with 37. I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill me because my word has no place in you.

I speak what I have seen with my father, and you do what you have seen with your father. Now, who is he speaking to? Israel. In this case, specifically, the leaders of Israel.

Israel. I speak what I have seen with my father, and you do what you have seen with your father. And they answered and said to him, Abraham is our father.

[22 : 33] Jesus said to them, if you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill me, and a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God, Abraham did not do this.

You do the deeds of your father. So, the descendants of Abraham are not true Israelites. Not true Israel. It's the Israel of faith.

And how about Galatians chapter 3 verse 29, where the Bible says, and if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed. True seed.

And heirs according to the promise. There again is a reference to the word of God. Alright, now notice what comes next in verse 7. In Isaac your seed shall be called.

Now, this is proof then that Paul, what Paul offers, proof that Paul offers to show that salvation is not, is not automatic.

[23 : 34] Just because you are a descendant of Abraham. Isaac was Abraham's offspring, but he was not the only offspring of Abraham, was he? No, because what about Ishmael?

That is the son born to Hagar. There's Ishmael. And dear people, Ishmael was a bonafide descendant son of Abraham.

He really was. But Ishmael was excluded from the covenant, and why? Was it because Isaac was better than Ishmael? Was it because Isaac was more worthy than Ishmael?

Maybe Isaac had earned God's covenant promise? Not at all. Isaac was God's choice even before he was born. Even before Ishmael was born, God chose Isaac.

Now, someone might object and say, well, God knew that Ishmael was going to turn out bad. Well, I would say to you that Isaac and Ishmael were not the only sons of Abraham either.

[24 : 40] there was also his wife by the name of Keturah. And Keturah bore Abraham some sons as well, and they were also rejected.

Not chosen. Not chosen. And so Paul's argument is very clear. It's not obscure. We may not like it much, but it's not obscure. His line of reasoning is not complicated.

It's very simple. The choosing of Isaac and the rejection of Ishmael is a demonstration that God never intended, never promised, that all of Abraham's descendants would receive the promise of salvation.

God never promised that. The fact of the matter is, God is sovereign and selective, elective, in His choosing. The key word in verse 7 is the word called.

See? In Isaac your seed shall be called. Called. God's choosing choosing of Isaac was according to His sovereign will, His elective purposes.

[25 : 46] And that's what He's going to tell us in verse 11 when we get down there. Now look at verse 8. That is, let's go a step further, those who are the children of the flesh, just born in the natural way, the descendants, the fleshly descendants, these are not the children of God.

But the children of the promise are counted as seed. Now, who are the true children of God? Paul says the children of promise.

Children of the promise are the true children of God or those called by God to receive the promise of salvation. They are the true seed.

This is what Paul said. Isaac is an illustration of it. A clear illustration. He pictures all of the redeemed. Galatians 4.28 jotted down.

Now we brethren, he's speaking to the church here, now we brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. Isaac represents that, illustrates that.

[26 : 55] And then in verse 9, for this is the word of promise. This is the word of promise. At this time, and this is a direct quote out of scripture, at this time, out of the Old Testament, I will come and Sarah shall have a son.

That's Isaac. God elected him out of the sons, all the other sons of the flesh. And God can do that. That's God's way of doing it.

And it's always been his way, according to his sovereignty. Now look at what Paul says next, very quickly. Verse 10, and not only this, that is the example of Isaac.

But now he's going to move on to another example. Another case in point. But when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, she conceived twins, you know, Esau and Jacob.

She conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac. Isaac was the father. Then we'll skip verse 11, we'll come back to it, but it's a parenthesis, so we'll skip it and go to the next.

[27 : 58] It was said to her, now let's put all this together, when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by her father Isaac, it was said to her, that is, God said to her, the older, that's Esau, shall serve the younger.

That's Jacob. That's what God said to her. This is unconditional election, plain and simple. There was no reason whatsoever for Jacob to have priority over Esau.

No reason whatsoever. Esau was the firstborn. It was his right. He was right, his right because he was the firstborn, yet God chose Jacob unconditionally.

And so he asked, on what basis did God select Jacob? Or you can use the word elect. That's what he did. He elected Jacob.

For what reason? Did he choose Jacob? Well, that's what we have in verse 11. Paul's parenthetical statement. For the children of Esau, children, that's Esau and Jacob, not yet being born, even before they were born, nor having done any good or evil.

[29 : 23] What? It kind of leaves it out. This is a parenthesis. The children, for the children, not yet being born, not doing any evil or good, what?

God chose one over the other. And for what purpose? That the purpose of God, according to election, might stand.

Not of works, but of him who calls. That is the most clear statement of the sovereign grace of God and salvation that you would hope to find in all of Scripture.

Using Jacob and Esau as the example. These two children, yet even before they were born, not ever having done any good or evil, that didn't enter into the equation of God's choosing.

Never done anything good or evil, that the purpose of God, according to election, might stand.

God's word, his promise has not fallen. God's word stands.

[30 : 28] It stands. All Israel has not believed, even yet today. And countless millions have died without believing. They've rejected the Messiah.

They've rejected Christ. Paul even said, I could almost wish, if it were possible, that I could be anathema, just like they are, instead of them, if they could just be saved.

But they're not saved. They're anathema. They're separated, cursed from God. But all Israel, that is true Israel, is not from Israel, because of God's sovereign selection.

And dear people, whether it's Israel, or whether it is the church, every person is chosen by God before that person is born.

The Bible says it very clearly, before the foundation of the world. And here's the mystery of it. You and I will confirm that choice in our believing.

[31 : 37] It's a mystery. Someone has put it this way. We, and this kind of identifies why we have a problem with this. He said, we are so used to man-centered theology that if it doesn't start with us, we can't understand it.

We're introduced to the fact that God chooses between Jacob and Esau before they were born, and we think that's unfair. Why? Because we're so proud, so self-centered.

We're so man-centered, even in our theology, that if it doesn't start with our choice, we can't handle it. And we wanted to start with us, and then try to work our way back to God and hope that He makes sense from our view.

Yet God does the choosing. God does the choosing. Does that change anything that we do?

It doesn't change a thing that we do in our evangelism. God does the choosing and the electing, but I don't know the choices. And I continue to share the gospel.

[32 : 51] And someone says, you know, that just doesn't, that's just not quite right. And, you know, we have a tendency to feel like we should have the right of free will. And yet, we can't imagine a God who has that right.

We think that's unfair. Paul ends this answer to the first question with a quote that is probably disturbing as well. It's a quote from Malachi chapter 1 and verse 2 and 3.

He says, as it is written, Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated. Now, the appalling part of that statement, even without us digging into exactly what Paul means by it.

The appalling part of it on the face of it is that God would hate Esau. It's appalling to us in our own way of thinking, in our own perspective, that God would hate anybody. That just isn't right.

That doesn't seem like God. But as I heard one professor tell me years ago, he said the amazing thing is not that God hated Esau.

[34 : 07] the amazing thing is that he loved Jacob. Jacob is fascinating