

Is God's Word of No Effect?

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Date: 08 January 2012

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[0:00] All right, Romans chapter 9, and if you'll find verse 1, or verse 1, started with verse 1, and the text tonight will be verses 1 through 5 with half of verse 6, okay?

And I hope that will make sense as we go along here. All right, so Romans chapter 9, verses 1 through, how about this, 6a, okay?

Okay. I tell you the truth in Christ, and I'm not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart, for I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen, according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises, of whom are the fathers, and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

And then we'll add half of verse 6, but it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. Now, that may be an odd place to end it.

You want to kind of go on from there, but we've got to take this a chunk at a time, okay? And verses 1 through 5 are key, and I'll say again a number of times by way of introduction or in the introduction that these verses are key to understanding not only chapter 9, which for many is a troubling chapter in the book of Romans, but also help us understand Paul's point in chapters 9, 10, and 11, because those three go together.

[2:15] Chapters 9, 10, and 11. Did I say 3? 9, 10, and 11. Those three chapters. In fact, someone has kind of organized the book of Romans, the entire book of Romans, separating each part of it into five sections, main sections, where the themes are consistent, five major themes.

And I'll just give this to you, and that'll help us understand where chapters 9, 11 through 11 fit in. And here it is. Chapters 1 through 3, verse 20. You can write it down that way.

Chapter 1 through 3, verse 20. The theme is God's holiness in condemning sin. Chapters 3 and verse 21. We'll get the rest of chapter 3 all the way through chapter 5.

The theme is God's grace in justifying sinners. And we've already covered all of this ground.

Chapters 6 through 8. Kind of a neat section, okay? No verse this, verse that.

Chapters 6 through 8. The theme is God's power in sanctifying and securing believers. Chapters 9 through 11. The theme is God's sovereignty in saving Jews and Gentiles.

[3:51] And then chapters 12 through 16. The theme is God's glory as the object of service. That's kind of really a very neat way of dividing the key sections or the logical divisions of the book of Romans.

I mention that because I want us to see that chapters 9 through 11. The theme throughout that chapter, and we're going to have to dig this out and understand it, is the sovereignty of God in saving Jews and Gentiles.

All right, now. Then we've entered this section of Romans who, again, the overarching subject, the theme, is the sovereignty of God.

Now, I should tell you that a number of Bible scholars argue that chapters 9 through 11 represent an interruption in the book.

Not that that would necessarily be perceptible to us as we just read it, but, you know, the scholars, they know something we don't know. And they would maintain there's an interruption here.

[5:05] At 9, 10, 11 are what we might call a parenthesis. That is, Paul's kind of going along in his letter and the theme, and it's running along logically.

And then when he gets to the end of chapter 8, really, you ought to skip over to chapter 12, because that's where he picks it up again and finishes up the letter.

And chapters 9, 10, and 11 are a parenthesis. They kind of stand alone. That's what some would argue, have argued. And so we really could, by the way, even though I think they're wrong, you could, if you wanted to, read down through the end of chapter 8, which goes kind of like this, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Of course, no one. And we read there, Therefore I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature or created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

And then you could skip to chapter 12 and begin reading, And I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, those are the mercies of God, chapter 8, as the climax, in a sense, of the great mercies of God.

[6:34] You could make this argument. By the mercies of God that you now present your bodies a living sacrifice unto God, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

So in reality, in all fairness, you really could go through to the end of chapter 8 and then skip to chapter 12, and if 9, 10, 11 did not exist or you didn't know it was part of the book, then it would just continue to read and it would just make perfect sense.

But there are those scholars who would have us believe that because it's a parenthesis, then it's inserted with a different subject. And some scholars would say that since national Israel, the nation Israel seems to be in view here, that's the subject in their view, then these chapters are not for the church.

There are scholars who teach that, believe that. This is all about Israel. It doesn't have anything to do with the church. By the way, it's rather convenient.

If you have a big problem with the sovereignty of God and salvation, then since chapter 9 is key in that theology, then, well, this is not for the church.

[7:58] This is just for Israel. So it's easy to deny those truths that are taught in chapter 9. Then there would be others on the other end of the spectrum, I guess, in a sense, that would hold that the Israel that's mentioned here in these three chapters, and certainly Israel is mentioned here quite often, that they would argue that the Israel here is not national Israel, but it is true Israel.

It's the church. So these chapters are inserted to deal with an issue related to the church. It's only for the church. And there's some merit to some of that, but we'll wait to get to that.

But here's what I believe is the correct way to understand it. Chapters 9 through 11 are not an interruption, not a parenthesis.

Chapters 9 through 11 are an explanation of something, of a very important point that Paul is making here, or truth that he's wanting us to understand.

It's the explanation of it, along with some very important illustrations. And it's included here by Paul as an answer to a serious problem, or maybe a serious objection.

[9:27] And we don't have anything said about the objection itself, or that someone has said, well, I object to this.

We don't have Paul mentioning that, but it's pretty clear that there is an objection to something.

There's a problem that needs to be answered here at this point.

And it's a serious problem. A problem that has tremendous implications, not just for Israel, but for us here today.

And so, instead of going on to chapter 12, Paul gives us a very important lesson in theology.

That's what he does. Have you ever played the game of life? I don't know if Wes is not here tonight. He and I were talking about this game the other day. The game of life. Have you ever played that game?

[10:28] Game of life? I haven't for years upon years. But you might remember that, you know, to begin your first turn, you place your game piece on one of two places, or spaces.

Start career or start college. And so you kind of begin the game of life. And so, if you decide to place your game piece on start a career, then you draw a card from the career, a career card. But sometimes the card will say, need a degree first. Or, degree required. And then you have to draw again, and that's how the game goes on from there.

Well, I use that as kind of an illustration, because chapter 9 is kind of like the board game. Game of life. And so we've come to the end of chapter 8, and the rich doctrinal lessons.

And we think now it's time to move on to the career. The service. For God the work. Like chapter 12 says, present your bodies a living sacrifice, which is your reasonable service.

[11:40] And we want to put our game piece then on the start career, but Paul says no. Not yet. He says a degree is required. We've got to learn some more theology here.

We're not through with college yet, is the point. There are some important theological issues that have yet to be learned, and I would even suggest that chapters 9 through 11 represent graduate school.

It's PhD level. Not in its complication, but this is heavy, heavy stuff here. And there's a lot at stake here in these chapters.

Did you love what chapter 8 taught? Did you love that? You know how chapter 8 begins with, there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Did you love that? What a tremendous truth. What a promise. No more condemnation. Did you love what it said in verse 28, and we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

[13:07] Did you like that? For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Moreover, moreover whom He predestined, these He called, and whom He called, He justified, and whom He justified, He also glorified.

What then shall we say, if God is for us, who can be against? Do you like that? Do you love that? Isn't that great? The Word of God, these promises, who can separate us from the love of Christ? The short answer is, not anything, not anyone. We're more than conquerors. Do you like that? What? I can see a smile on your face, and some of you are nodding, some of you are saying, is there a trick here?

Well, not really. But my point is, you love that, then let me ask you something. Can you trust it? How do you know?

[14:23] Can you trust the Word of God, here in chapter 8? Can you take Him at His Word? I mean, you can believe Him, for the things He says, the promises He gives us here?

And already you have said yes. Well, then I have a question. Why didn't that work for Israel? Now, you think you know the answer, and maybe you do, but you know the answer because you know what He's going to say a little bit later in this chapter, in these chapters.

But here's the question. If all of this is true, God's Word is true, and you can count on it, and it will not fail you, then what happened to Israel?

Huh? What happened to them? What about God's chosen people? Did you know that five times in the Old Testament, God declared concerning Israel, I will be their God, and they will be My people. And that's tantamount to saying, God's saving purpose for His chosen people cannot be stopped, cannot be thwarted, it cannot be frustrated.

[15:43] And yet Israel remains unbelieving. Israel. God's chosen people.

They're unbelieving. They have rejected their own Messiah. And so, here's the question. Can Christians today trust God's Word when it seems that He has failed the Jews?

He said, no, it wasn't God, it was the Jews who failed. Well, just think of all that God has said and promised them and God has given them and He's, Paul's going to give us, kind of lay that out for us.

this is the argument. This is the problem that Paul is going to answer for us.

And there's a lot at stake here. Our hope, the Christian's hope, really, in a sense, comes to a climax at the close of chapter 8.

[16:55] Well, chapters 1 through 8, all about our hope, our great hope, and it comes to a climax there in chapter 8. The hope of the Christian is absolutely, completely dependent upon God's faithfulness to His Word.

Can we trust God's Word when it seems that it has failed the Jews? I know the answer, okay?

You're looking at me like, well, Brother Don, don't you know? What I'm trying to do is lay before you the reason why we have chapter 9.

And Paul's answer to that question, and believe me, it was a big, big question for the people of his day. And we're privileged that Paul answered them because in his answer we learn a tremendous thing about God's purposes and His grace and His sovereignty.

But that's the question that Paul answers in Romans 9 through 11. And we need to understand this if we're going to interpret these chapters correctly. And we need to see, then, having said all that, that verse 6 is the main point of this section in Romans.

[18:22] One half of one verse because the other half of the verse is the beginning of Paul's answer to it.

And then he'll continue all the way to the end of chapter 11. But verse 6 or 6a is the main point of these chapters. What does verse 6 say again?

Look at it. But it is not that the Word of God has taken no effect. Or, it's not that the Word of God has failed.

I'm talking about Israel. Israel is not believed. They have rejected Christ. God's Word didn't work for them. Seemingly. But it's not as though God's Word has failed.

Or, really, literally, and I'm not sure if some of the translations bring this out, but the Word here means to fall to the ground. It's not that God has spoken His Word, but instead of it accomplishing His purposes, it has fallen to the ground.

[19:32] It's failed. That's the main point of all three chapters. From there on, Paul's going to explain this and tell us why.

Though Israel is unbelieving, God's Word has not failed because, and then He's going to give us the rest of it. We're not even going to get into that tonight because what we want to do is look at verses 1-5 and verses 1-5 are the verses that set all this up for us, that present the problem that needs to be answered.

Someone has, a respected scholar has put it this way, reminded us in this way, what is at stake ultimately in these chapters is not the fate of Israel.

So as we go through this, don't be focusing on Israel and what about them and what's their fate and, you know, later when it says all Israel will be saved, are they really going to be?

The point here what's at stake is not the fate of Israel. Ultimately, I'll go on with the quote, God's own trustworthiness is at stake here.

[20:52] And if God's Word of promise cannot be trusted to stand forever, then all our faith is in vain. And so what God has said and promised for Israel, if that fails, then all of His Word fails.

But His Word concerning Israel has not failed. That's what Paul is going to tell us. Now keep that in mind as we work our way through this and I'll remind you at a number of places along the way, okay?

Now verses 1 through 5 then, and we're going to need to hurry. Verses 1 through 5 then set the stage for all Paul is going to teach us in these three chapters.

And I've divided it into three parts. Chapters 1 through 5. First, and this is the part we know if we know anything about this passage, and it is the selfless passion for Paul's kinsmen, Israel.

That's the first thing we notice. Paul's selfless, sacrificial passion for his people, his kinsmen, Israel.

[22:06] Second, we're going to see the serious plight of Paul's kinsmen, Israel. And then third, the special privileges of Paul's kinsmen, Israel.

And when we set all that up and consider all of that, then we have then this suggestion that seeing that Israel is God's chosen people and they are privileged in all of these ways, then why are they still unbelieving?

And if they, since they are still unbelieving, then God's word must have failed them. Alright, that's what this passage is doing for us again. Alright, now, there you have the outline.

Let's start with the first one. The selfless passion for Paul's kinsmen, Israel. Now, if we remember anything about this text, as I said a moment ago, we remember this. Paul's passion for his people. I mean, he had a great passion for his people. And who were these people? They were his enemies. Remember? Well, that's not part of what Paul is saying, but let's face it.

[23:11] These people, Israel, by and large, they were Paul's enemies. Wanted to have him killed. Groups of them made a pact with one another.

They would be accursed if they didn't kill Paul. Get rid of him. They were his enemies. But that's not the point here. The point is that they were his kinsmen according to the flesh.

He was a Jew. And, the greater point is he loved them. Loved them. Passionately. And so, look at how he lays this out for us.

Paul says, I tell the truth in Christ. I'm not lying. You know, when you read that and you kind of relate that to how sometimes we talk or you might hear someone else talk, generally, when

somebody makes such a strong point about that, usually they're lying.

I'm not lying. I'm telling the truth. That, of course, is not the case here with Paul. and he's qualifying it and he's giving evidence or, you know, strengthening his declaration.

[24:22] I tell the truth in Christ. Really, really, all he's saying is I'm telling the truth just like every Christian ought to.

All those who are in Christ tell the truth. I'm telling the truth as a believer is what Paul is saying. This is Christian truth because I'm a Christian and Christ is my Lord and inhabiting and indwelling my life and I am immersed in Him and I tell the truth in Him.

Paul might as well have said I never lie. I never lie. That's what he's saying. And then to reinforce that I am not lying. He says it in the positive then he says it in the negative.

He is emphasizing it. This is tremendous emphasis on the fact of what he's about to say as God is my witness or as the scout's honor or whatever. But actually it's much stronger than that.

In Christ I say to you that what I'm about to tell you is true. And to add to that to even fortify it further he says my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit.

[25:37] So he has evoked the name of Christ and now he's evoked the name of the second person of the Trinity or third person the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit. Now what does he mean my conscience also bearing me witness.

You know we can't always just say you know I trust my conscience and this is what my conscience says. we can't always say but if our conscience is ruled controlled by the Holy Spirit that you've brought your life as Paul has brought his life under the absolute lordship of Christ in his life in the person of the Holy Spirit under the control of the Holy Spirit then your conscience is sanctified in that sense.

So he's just kind of saying it over and over again to make it strong. I'm about to tell you something that you can believe. I'm not lying I'm telling the truth in Christ my conscience bears witness because my conscience is ruled controlled by the Holy Spirit and this is what he's telling the truth about this is his truth that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart for my people for my kinsmen.

This is his passion a passion his emotion it's more than emotion it is a broken heart for unbelieving Israel.

There's no way to remove that from this I'm going to make a point here in a minute that really Paul's point is much much bigger than this something else than just this but you cannot deny the fact that Paul had a such a passion for his own kinsmen many of them his enemies some of them were were flogging him and and putting him in prison and and all the other things he endured but he loved them with a passion he said I'm telling you the truth I have great sorrow and then verse 3 for I could wish that is I could if it were possible you really ought to know that that's the idea here because what he is wishing he knows is not possible I could wish that I myself were cursed from Christ for my brethren my countrymen according to the flesh my kinsmen and

[28:31] I'll point this out a little bit later but accursed from Christ is the word anathema anathema and he said I wish I could wish that I myself were anathema accursed from Christ separated eternally from Christ for my brethren my countrymen you know there is one other person in the Bible and I bet you can you know who it is or was who said something similar in the Old Testament Moses Moses and yet what Paul says here went way further than what Moses said and I'll just remind you it was Moses who said in Exodus 32 32 I believe it is yeah Exodus 32 32 he said well starting with verse 31 then Moses returned to the Lord and said oh these people have committed a great sin and have made for themselves a God of gold yet now if you will forgive their sin and and the sentence just ends there incomplete sentence in fact

I've heard one scholar say it's the only incomplete sentence in the entire Bible now he does go on but the sentence is incomplete I he said again he said will if you will forgive their sin but if not I pray blot me out of your book which you have written just blot me out now I say that what Paul said is the same but it's further Paul did not say just simply blot me out by the way Moses is primarily saying just strike me dead Paul is saying I want to be under your wrath for eternity or I could wish that I could be accursed separated from Christ for eternity and under the wrath of a holy

God it's powerful powerful thing that he said again Paul knew that this could never be his readers knew this could never be in fact someone I was reading pointed this out and I've never really thought of it until now but you know preachers they preach through the book and it's been a number of weeks since I've been preaching out of chapter 8 probably been a long time since you looked at

chapter 8 but for Paul's readers they would have heard what he said in verse 3 just a few seconds after they heard what he said at the close of chapter 8 and what did he say at the close of chapter 8 that nothing is able to separate us from the love of Christ love of God which is in Christ Jesus nothing can and so here in verse 3 Paul is saying I wish that could happen to me and he knew it could not and his readers knew it could not and yet nevertheless it does identify for us the passion the sacrificial passion that

Paul had for his kinsmen second the serious plight of Paul's kinsmen Israel the serious plight they they and and still today are serious troubles serious trouble eternal trouble see here listen Paul's passion that we've just been talking about Paul's passion for his kinsmen though it's important for us to see it it is not the main point of those verses that's not the main point the point is not evangelistic even though many preachers preach it that way and encourage their congregations to have the same passion that Paul had I mean just think of the passion for lost souls that we ought to have just like

Paul we ought to have passion for lost souls but that's not the idea here that's not Paul's main point remember verse six is the main point verse six is not as though the word of God has fallen or failed that's the main point and verse six then is Paul's response to verses one through five don't forget that and so the point of these verses is to appear to call into question the faithfulness of God to his word and so therefore Paul's expression of deep love for his kinsmen is intended to declare something theological about them something serious and what is that it's intended to declare that Paul's kinsmen the Jews are anathema anathema see we don't we miss that we think

[34 : 20] Paul said I wish that I could be just accursed and separated from God if all Israel could be saved if my kinsmen could be saved and that's as far as we get but actually what Paul is saying is indirectly yes that his kinsmen are anathema they are they are cursed and separated from Christ even today that's serious very serious and this is the plight the serious plight of of Israel even today now what calls God's word into question if this be true it is true that's what Paul says he says I could wish that I myself just like they are accursed separated from Christ eternally under the wrath of

God I could wish that for myself but what I'm saying is they are under that if that's true and it is true then why considering all that God has said and done for them and given to them I know being redundant but this is the point here it calls God's faithfulness to question that he's not faithful to his word and so then Paul lays out all of these special privileges of his kinsmen that's the third and final thing the special privileges of Paul's kinsmen Israel and Paul packs no fewer than eight we might even argue that there are nine privileges that God has granted his people Israel and Paul lays all these out and piles them up in this string of tremendous privileges and he does so again to make the point if they have all of this why are they not saved has

God failed and so look at these privileges and Paul begins by calling them Israelites and I guess I could argue that that's the highest privilege it's a privileged title Israelites because all of the privileges fall under that because they're Israelites they have all these privileges it heads the list and really it is the title and all the privileges that come next are subordinate!

to it they fall under that title Israelites and it's interesting that he divides the privileges these eight privileges into three categories and he identifies the category first in verse four to whom and then he lists several things there of whom verse five and then he gives a privilege there and from whom in verse five so to whom of whom from whom and then all of the privileges are listed in those categories now the first set of privileges!

to whom pertain the adoption there's the first one and I'm not going spend a lot of time you know really getting down into the nitty gritty of each of these a lot of them are just pretty self explanatory the adoption or to whom belongs the sonship it's translated that way I think in some of the more literal translations the sonship that belongs and I would say no same thing it's promised it's a privilege to Israel the adoption the Bible speaks about adoption in fact I'll just give you several places Galatians chapter 4 verse 5 the Bible says to redeem those who are under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons the sonship now this is a promise issued to born again believers this is the

[38 : 57] New Testament those who have trusted Christ but the same promise is given to Israel it's been given to them the sonship Ephesians chapter 1 verse 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to himself according to the good pleasure of his will and even we're in Romans and we look back there Romans chapter 8 and a couple of times in Romans chapter 8 Paul speaks of our adoption in chapter 8 and verse 15 for you did not receive the spirit of bondage

again to fear but you received the spirit of adoption by whom we cry out Abba Father that's what you've received this is the promise of God this is what chapter 8 says is the blessing to you can we trust that well he gave it to Israel too and they're not believing and then also in

Romans and this points us future verse 23 not only that but we also who have the first fruits of the spirit even we ourselves grown within ourselves greatly waiting for the adoption the redemption of our body that is the completion of that adoption that even our bodies will be redeemed that's a promise to us and here there's no reason for us to believe that what he says is a privilege for Israel is something different than what God has promised us and so if they're the same then why is Israel still unbelieving God must have failed I know he hasn't!

but that's that's the argument and then secondly the glory that's a privilege and Israel has been privileged with the glory of God God's glory was revealed to Israel early on a number of times God's glory dwelt with them and led them and protected them his Shekinah glory his glory rested upon the tabernacle and in the temple his glory is promised to them in the future how then how then could they be unbelieving then has God failed has his word fallen the covenants the covenants all the covenants were given to Israel all of them starting with Adam and then Noah and then Abraham and then Isaac and Jacob and and later David the covenants were given and renewed and reestablished and restated over and over again to whom to

Israel not to Gentiles to Israel and Paul mentions an important covenant for Israel at the end of this section in chapter 11 in chapter 11 and verse 26 and so all Israel will be saved as it is written the deliverer will come out of Zion and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob for this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins and we're going to get to that passage you know later I'm not sure when there's a covenant it's a privilege of Israel and yet here in the end times the end of the age and that's where we're living that's where Paul was when he so God's word must have failed his covenant has failed and not only the covenants but also the giving of the law is a privilege Israel was given the holy law of God at Sinai and both the giving of the law to them and also the possession of its message was given to them a tremendous privilege for Israel and by the way God expresses through his law his saving purpose for Israel through his law expresses that and yet they're unbelieving has God failed the service of God is the fifth privilege God gave Israel the entire ceremonial system of worship gave it to them and them alone all the sacrifices the offerings the forms ritual ritual isms of cleansing and the priests and the only way the only means of worship and repentance all of that was given to Israel what a privilege and the promises the promise of the [43:51] Messiah the promise of redemption the promises of the kingdom of God and then the second set of privileges starts with of whom are or to whom belong number seven seventh privilege the fathers they were given the fathers and this is very much like the covenants because he gave all the covenants to the fathers the patriarchs there's Abraham and Isaac and Jacob or later called Israel and through these men God laid the foundation of blessing for all men even Gentiles God gave that to Israel and yet they have rejected Christ and they not believing what happened something went wrong seems to be God's plan and it didn't work see this is the point and then the final privilege is from whom according to the flesh Christ came and I guess you could say and rightfully so this is the climax of their privileges

Christ came and here here's interesting thing with what Paul adds to this their Messiah the Messiah that came is greater than they ever dreamed he would be not just a man not some military leader he was his God and that's what he says here he may have had a human origin in Israel certainly was born a Jew but he is God overall eternally blessed Paul says this is the list of privileges given to Israel what a privileged people and God gave them all this yet they are unbelieving has God failed has his word fallen to the ground and this is what is at stake in Romans 9 through 11 and it appears from verses 1 through 5 that what

God has guaranteed for Israel that is their salvation that that in reality has not happened and so then has the word of God the reliability of God's word fallen and with it this is important with it the truth of Romans 8 that we so much embrace has that failed and with that your hope your hope this may not have the same impact for us as it did for Paul's original readers but if you think about it has tremendous impact especially when we get into Paul's answer and Paul's answer is no God's word has not failed it's not fallen to the ground verse 6 says that it is not as though the word of God has taken no effect that is if it has fallen and then what follows verse 6 on to the end of chapter 11 is Paul's explanation