

# “Mystery and Assurance” //

## Romans 9:1–29 // Romans #19

Happy Lord's Day weekend, Summit Church. Today we're diving into Romans 9. I know we've all been bracing for it. You ready? Okay, let's do it. ... As you turn there, just a reminder that this upcoming week is one of my favorite weeks of the year—Serve RDU Week. We want to be a church that loves our community, just as Jesus loves us. **I'll be engaged in some of our neighborhood outreaches**, and we've got a ton of other options online at serverdu.com. Sign up now!"

**OK, you ready? Romans 9.**

**Romans 9 is one of the most mysterious and difficult chapters in the whole Bible.** *I've been nervous (and a little excited) about this one all week.*

**We just finished the greatest chapter in the Bible**--the one that everybody loves and memorize. This is the chapter most people **would prefer to skip**: I'm surprised all of you are here today. Maybe you won't be next week. **A lot of teachers skip this** and go right to chapter 12. I have to admit **I was tempted**.

**But it's a crazy important chapter.** It is the most extensive discussion in Scripture of the tension between God's sovereignty and man's free will, covering questions we now refer to with terms like Calvinism and predestination and Reformed theology. The central questions being considered are: *"How much is God in control of the details of history? Does he choose who becomes Christians, or do they choose it themselves?"*

**Whenever this topic comes up, people always want to know**, "Pastor J.D., what side of this debate are you on?" And **honestly, I take it as a little bit of a compliment that you don't know**. You see, I believe the Bible maintains a tension between these two, and

so, when I am dealing with a text of Scripture that emphasizes God's sovereignty, I want to sound like a Calvinist.

**But when I am preaching those parts that emphasize our responsibility to choose**, I want to sound like a non-Calvinist.

**And if that creates a tension in my preaching, that's ok with me.** I determined a long time ago that I'd rather get to heaven and hear God say "You know what? You preached my word a little too literally" than to hear him say, "Why did you ignore or explain away those passages that didn't fit with your preconceived theories?"

**Listen, I know Scripture never contradicts itself**, but that doesn't mean you and I have the capacity to resolve all the teachings about God in our relatively-tiny-little minds. After all, we're talking about the ways of God! We should expect some mystery.

- I mean, **if things like 'quantum physics' and 'chaos theory' have taught us anything**, it is that apparent contradictions are often resolved by expanded knowledge.
- And if that's true in the natural world, how much more the supernatural?

**Whenever I get into this, I remember the words my dad gave me when I first started to wrestle** with these things. I came home from college with all these questions and my dad said, *"Son, people much smarter than you have been wrestling with this for 2000 years and they haven't figured it out yet. I doubt you're going to be the guy to do it. Just preach Jesus."* **So that's what I try to do.**

(BTW, so you know my background: I was not raised Reformed. In fact, the Christian school I grew up in was committedly non-Calvinist. We loved the "whosoever will" passages. And we had lots of rules about drinking and not going to movies. **But then I married a Presbyterian**-- and they tend to emphasize those passages about God's sovereignty.

- My wife said that at her youth group meetings they studied the 5 points. We didn't do that at mine.

- I asked her if at her youth camp they sang songs like “You have decided I’ll follow Jesus.” (On the playground **played games like...**)

**But the two of us got married.** A legalistic, non-Reformed independent Baptist, and a frozen-chosen, free-in-Christ Presbyterian. **You say, “What was that union like?”** I always say I baptized her, made her quit drinking, and consented to the fact that it was all predestined to happen. That was our compromise.

**Well, just like our marriage, I consider my own theological approach a blending of two perspectives:** I want to preach the passages that emphasize our responsibility to choose just like they are written; I also want to **embrace everything God says about his sovereignty**. And **maybe you are smart enough** to figure out how it all works together. Bully for you. I’ll let God sort it out for me one day.

*But here’s **what all of us need to understand: Romans 9 is in our Bibles for a reason.** It is no accident that Paul includes this discussion* about God’s sovereignty immediately after his triumphal declarations in chapter 8 about our assurance that God will complete his purposes in our lives.

***How do we know** that is going to happen? You see, **Paul hears in his head an objection** (as he has so often throughout this letter), where someone says, “**Wait, wait a minute there, Paul. What about the Jews? They were chosen by God--and clearly they have fallen away. They rejected Jesus!**”*

**So, that’s the question he starts answering in chapter 9:** *Why did the Jews reject Jesus? **And, if God failed with them, how do we know he won’t fail with us also?***

**(In the first 3 verses,** Paul makes clear this is not an academic or philosophical question for him. He says that if he could, he would

gladly give up all his privileges of salvation if it meant his fellow Jewish countrymen might be saved. He loves these people. The point is, this is not philosophical speculation for him. It’s personal. (We’ll come back to that in a few weeks. But, for now, just know for Paul this is not an ivory-tower academic discussion)

**In vv. 4–5, he *acknowledges* the fact that Israel should have believed.** He identifies **at least 8 spiritual privileges** Israel had that no one else had.

- He adopted Israel to himself as sons through the Exodus, bringing them out of slavery to himself miraculously.
- From that point on, Israel has experienced multiple miracles, manifestations of God, and foreshadowings of the gospel through the lives of the patriarchs.
- They were given God’s law, the best reflection of God’s nature ever given on earth
- They hosted the Temple, the best physical representation of God’s presence on earth and the place where God himself dwelt
- Every single one of the prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah were Jews, and finally, when Jesus finally came, he was born a Jew and lived exclusively in Israel.
- **The point is: the Jews had more spiritual privilege** than anyone else, and of all people they should have believed!

**So, what happened? And, more importantly:** How is this not a failure of God’s purposes? And how can we be **sure God will do any better with us?**

**To this question, Paul gives 4 answers:**<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Tim Keller, *Romans 8–16 for You*

## Answer 1: Has God failed to keep his promises?

### NO! (9:6–13)

And here's why. In vs. 6, Paul explains that not every Jew born in racial Israel was a member of the true Israel, and it's been that way from the beginning: 6 Now it is not as though the word of God has failed, because not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Neither are all of Abraham's children his descendants.

That means even in the Old Testament there was a distinction between Jews who were Jews only by heritage and those who embraced Abraham's faith from the heart.

- The covenant God had with Israel, Paul says, was never about ethnic identity. It was about trust in his promises.
- In the same way, **the signs of the covenant, he explained in Romans 2**, were not external demarcations on the body, but inward dispositions of the heart. The true **circumcision--circumcision which was one of the most important symbols** of Jewish faith--was not the cutting away of skin on your physical body; it is the cutting away of spiritual deadness from your heart.<sup>2</sup>

Within ethnic Israel, there were **those who had this heart-level faith** in God, and those who didn't, and **it was those who never had a relationship with God to begin** with who fell away and rejected Jesus. **Paul uses two examples:**

- **Vs. 9: Abraham had two sons:** Isaac and Ishmael. Isaac represents the son who embraces the promise; Ishmael represents the son of Abraham who rejects it. **All of Abraham's descendants fit into those two categories.**
- **Perhaps even more clearly (vs. 13)**, Isaac himself had two sons: one was **Jacob** who, though he had a pretty rough past and was by all estimations a sleezebag--embraced God's promises. **The other was Esau**, who traded his stake in God's promise for a bowl of soup. The writer of Hebrews explains that **Esau**

**represents those Jews** who inwardly trade obedience to God's promise for indulging the lusts of their flesh.<sup>3</sup>

**Those two kinds of people always existed in Israel, and God never had a relationship with the Ishmaels and Esaus.** So, Paul says, you can't say that the Jews' rejection of Jesus is evidence that God sometimes loses the sons and daughters he foreknew and predestined. He never knew them.

It was the spiritual Ishmael's and Esau's that rejected Jesus.

## Answer 2: Is God unfair in how he dispenses mercy? NO! (9:14–18)

14 What should we say then? Is there injustice with God? Absolutely not! 15 For he tells Moses, I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

**The question here is whether God somehow did something *wrong*** by only showing mercy to Jacob (and not to Esau) as if God was somehow being unfair.

**But the *definition*** of mercy, Paul explains, is receiving something that we do not deserve. If we deserved it, it would not be "mercy," it would be justice.

And so, if **God doesn't owe anyone mercy**, you can't say it is unfair for him not to show it to them.

**IOW, Paul's reasoning goes like this:**

- **Are you saying that God owes someone salvation?** Of course not!

<sup>2</sup> Romans 2:28–29; Cf. Ezekiel 11:19; Jer 31:33; Deut 10:16

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Hebrews 12:15–17

- **And if he owes no one salvation, then he is free to give it to (a) all, (b) some, or (c) none.**<sup>4</sup> Right? It's his choice.
- In fact, "God would have done us no injustice by leaving us all to perish."<sup>5</sup>
  - If God gave any of us what we deserve, **none of us would be his children.** That's what is fair.
- The fact that any of us know him **is grace.** So, let's make sure we are seeing things correctly here.

**John Stott** summarizes it this way: "Paul's way of defending God's justice is to proclaim his mercy. That may seem backward to us, but it is not. Paul is indicating that the question itself is misconceived, because the basis on which God deals savingly with sinners is not justice but mercy."<sup>6</sup>

**But still, you ask, why does God choose some and not others?**

Paul explains in vs. 16, "Well, first, realize that it had nothing to do with our inner goodness or how much we deserved it." **16 So then, it does not depend on human will or effort but on God who shows mercy.**

- That means God didn't look down and say, 'Oh, this person tried harder.'
- 'Oh, they were more sincere.'
- 'Oh, they have more potential.'
- 'Oh, they just got dealt a bad hand.'

**None of us deserved it more than anyone else,** and his choice to bestow it was his own free choice.

**This does not mean, however, that God's choices are arbitrary,** as if he chooses people by going "eeny, meeny, miney, moe."

**Paul never says that God has no reasons** for his choosing, just that the reasons for his choosing are not in us. Believers can feel no superiority over unbelievers.<sup>7</sup>

**In vs. 17 Paul gives you a hint at God's reasons--**it's not a full answer, just a hint.

**He says that God's not choosing of Pharaoh** was so that through Pharaoh's resistance God could put his power and glory on display. (Pharaoh was the one who rejected God's command to let the children of Israel go and set himself up as the enemy of the people of God.) **17 "For the Scripture tells Pharaoh, I raised you up for this reason so that I may display my power in you and that my name may be proclaimed in the whole earth."**

- IOW, Pharaoh's hardness of heart gave God opportunity to show his power over wickedness and his loving commitment to saving his children.
- **His hardness of heart gave God opportunity** to demonstrate his power and compassion.

**Answer 3: Is God unjust in holding us accountable? NO! (9:19–29)**

**19 You will say to me, therefore, "Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?"**

Paul hears people saying, "Well, **if God is the one who is in control of who hears and believes,** how can he condemn those who are simply playing the role he has assigned them to play?"

Some of you think, "Yep, that's precisely my question. I've been afraid to say it out loud, but that's my question." **Good news: if you think that,** you're in good company. Paul knows you are thinking that.

<sup>4</sup> TK, *Romans For You*, 64.

<sup>5</sup> *Canons of the Synod of Dort.*

<sup>6</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 268–69.

<sup>7</sup> TK, *Romans 8–16 for You*, 62

His **first answer to this** is to show you that God's rejection of Pharaoh was consistent with Pharaoh's own choices. **Who rejected who first?** Did Pharaoh reject God or God reject Pharaoh?

**The use of Pharaoh by Paul here is a brilliant one.** You see,

- Scripture says that **“God hardened Pharaoh's heart to resist God's message.”** You say, “Ah, that sounds like God rejected Pharaoh first.”
- Yes, but pay attention: That statement comes only after the 6th plague.<sup>8</sup> During the first 5 plagues it says **“Pharaoh hardened his own heart. (Exodus 8:13)”**<sup>9</sup>
- **God's** hardening of Pharaoh's heart is after Pharaoh does it himself 5 times!
- **The point is:** God is not to blame for Pharaoh's hard heart; Pharaoh is.<sup>10</sup>

A person's rejection of God is always presented this way.

- **Mt 23:37** **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”** Not, I, sovereign Jesus, was not willing” but **“you** were not willing.”

C.S. Lewis said that hell is a door first locked from the inside.<sup>11</sup>

John Stott said it's true that if anyone is saved, the credit is God's alone, but if anyone is lost, the blame is all theirs!<sup>12</sup>

**The late D. James Kennedy (a Presbyterian)** uses a really helpful **illustration**: *“Say you have 5 people planning to hold up a bank. They are friends of mine. Well, I find out about it and I plead with them not to do it. I beg them. Finally they push me out of the*

*way and head out. I tackle one of the men and wrestle him to the ground. The others go ahead, rob the bank, in the process killing a guard and 2 civilians. They are captured, convicted, and sentenced to life in prison. The one man who was not involved in the robbery goes free.*

*Now I ask you this question: Whose fault was it that the other men were arrested and sentenced? Can they blame anyone else but themselves?*

*And this other man who is walking around free—can he say, ‘Because my heart is so good and resisted the temptation, I am free?’ The only reason that he is free is because of me. I restrained him.*

*So it is that those who go to hell have no one to blame but themselves. Those who go to heaven have no one to praise but Jesus Christ. Thus we see that salvation is all of grace from its beginning to its end.”*<sup>13</sup>

## **Answer 4: Is God's choice to save only some inconsistent with his goodness? NO! (9:20–23)**

**Paul now hears in his mind the objection** that a “good God” would save everybody. **Why would God let anybody perish?** This the other big one. Honestly, where I have most struggled.

Paul's answer: **20 But who are you, a mere man, to talk back to God? Will what is formed say to the one who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?”** (Keep in mind, Paul has already established that sin

<sup>8</sup> Exodus 9:12

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Exodus 8:15; 8:32; 9:34

<sup>10</sup> <https://thebibleproject.com/blog/pharaohs-heart-grew-harder/>

<sup>11</sup> John Stott said if anyone is saved, the credit is God's alone, but if anyone is lost, the blame is all theirs!

<sup>12</sup> If anybody is lost, the blame is theirs. If anybody is saved, the credit is God's. This (is) a mystery which our present knowledge cannot solve, but it is consistent with Scripture, history, and our own experience.” John Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 270. Lightly edited for understandability.

<sup>13</sup> D. James Kennedy, *Truths That Transform*, 39–40

was not God's choice, but ours.) 21 Or has the potter no right over the clay, to make from the same lump one piece of pottery for honor and another for dishonor?

If God is using your own free choices to reject him to set up a display of his glory, can any of us accuse him of injustice?

22 What if God, wanting to display his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much patience objects of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And what if he did this to make known the riches of his glory on objects of mercy that he prepared beforehand for glory?

**Here's a tough truth:** The ultimate end that God pursues in all things, including our salvation, is his glory.

**Tim Keller** says this: "If God had mercy on all or condemned all, we would not see his glory. I don't think Paul is giving us much more than a hint here, but it is a very suggestive hint. For the biggest question is: If God could save everyone, why doesn't he? And here Paul seems to say that God's chosen course (to save some and leave others) will in the end be more fit to show forth God's glory than any other scheme we can imagine."<sup>14</sup>

**Honestly, that's hard to wrestle with.** And that's because we're used to thinking of ourselves and our interests as the most important reality in the universe. But we are not. God's glory is. (Take a clue from the structure of the universe itself. The human race is just a small part on a tiny speck of dust in a remote corner of a medium-sized, backwoods galaxy that is but one of billions of such galaxies. **God is the center of it all.** The creator and sustainer of it all.) **The exaltation of his glory** is the greatest good in the universe. And that might offend us, but it is true.

- **I am tempted here to stop and build a case** for why God making the pursuit of his glory his central objective is actually the **most**

**loving thing** he could do for us, but that's another sermon for another day.

- For now, I'll just **try to explain it with one quick word-picture I use a lot:**
  - Astronomists say it is **a good thing for us** that the sun, not the earth, is the center of the solar system. If **the earth were at the center**, it would never have the gravitational ability to hold the rest of the solar system in orbit and **we'd all die.** Because the sun is 30,000x bigger than the earth, and because it is an independent source of heat and light, it being at the center gives birth a solar system with life in it.
  - **If the sun were a person**, the most loving thing the sun could do would be to keep itself at the center. **So it is** with us and God. If God is the pinnacle of joy, then having him at the center, recognized for his worth and importance, is the most loving thing he can do for us.

**In vs. 25, Paul pulls back the curtain a little farther and shows us how God actually had a merciful, good purpose in allowing Israel to reject him.** Israel's rejection of the Messiah, he explains, allowed us Gentiles to find him.

He quotes Hosea's prediction of God opening up the door of salvation to the Gentiles through the rejection of the Jews: **25 As it also says in Hosea, I will call Not My People, My People, and she who is Unloved, Beloved. 26 And it will be in the place where they were told, you are not my people, there they will be called sons of the living God.**

**Even Israel's rejection of Jesus ultimately served a larger, better, good purpose!** The inclusion of the Gentiles. One day we'll see that all God's actions had a good end. (Paul is **going to build on this idea in chapter 11:** he just introduces it here.)

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<sup>14</sup> TK, 68.

**So, the question we started with: Why did Israel reject Jesus and was that a failure on God's part?** No, and God was not wrong to let it happen or to hold those who rejected him accountable.

**So, why then did Israel reject him?** Notice: Paul's answer, vs. 31: They rejected him because they wouldn't humble themselves before the gospel: **31 But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not achieved the righteousness of the law. 32 Why is that? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.**

**His answer is not, "They rejected Jesus because God appointed it."** They rejected him because they **wouldn't humble themselves** and accept the gospel.

- **They wouldn't accept that salvation could only be by grace through faith** and not because of their goodness or efforts.
- **That they could never earn it;** that they couldn't even work up the faith or the goodness to choose it.
- **They wouldn't humble themselves to admit,** "Unless you show mercy to me for reasons that have nothing to do with my goodness, I can never be saved."

Let me draw a few conclusions:

### **1. We can't escape the sovereignty of God in salvation**

- **Some Christians, who deeply love and believe the Bible,** will say, "I get the logic of what you're saying. But I just can't accept that God would leave some to perish. In my view, God must always be doing everything he can to save everybody."
- Yes, but realize that at some point **you have to acknowledge something of God's sovereignty** in salvation, right?
  - **Remember how Jesus appeared to Paul in Acts 9?** He reveals himself in incredible glory and says "I am Jesus.

Follow me." **Why not do that daily? To everyone?** I mean, **he's God, right?** He writes the rules. He could if he wanted to.

- Some have tried to alleviate the difficulties of God choosing some for salvation by saying that **in Romans 9 Paul is only talking about** is "national" election. As in, **God first chose Israel; now he's chosen the Gentiles.** But he doesn't choose individual people within those groups--he let's them decide for themselves.
- **But honestly, does that really help?** I mean, why would God give some nations a greater chance to hear the gospel than others? Why didn't God elect more nations? Why not reveal the Bible equally to everybody at the same time?"
- This approach just kicks the can down the road. Why make the church, that is so consistently unreliable, the only vehicle for gospel proclamation? Why not send a **band of angels?** Why not **come as a 900 foot version of himself** and stand on Ellis Island and give his own invitation?
- At some point all of us have to admit: **In our view, God could be doing more to get the gospel to people if that was his only objective.**
- **So, even if it is only a national election** (and I don't believe it is), **the point Paul is making is the same: Giving mercy is God's free prerogative and he owes it to no one.**<sup>15</sup>

### **2. This truth forces us to wrestle with whether or not we really see ourselves as truly unworthy of the gospel**

- **Karl Barth** said of this passage, "**The more a man finds these texts to be harsh, the more he is wedded to his own righteousness.**"
- **Do you deep down believe that God owes you salvation?** That you don't deserve condemnation and hell?
- **Scripture's testimony is that you and I are worthy--genuinely worthy--to be condemned forever.**

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<sup>15</sup> That's why I agree with the *Believer's Study Bible*, ed. Paige Patterson, that "The primary application is Israel, but can also be applied to individual election."

- **Do you believe that?** If so, you will have less trouble with this truth.

### 3. Don't be silly and suppose that you would be more merciful than God

- **And I say that because some of you say**, "Well, if I were in charge, I'd do things differently."
- **But any time in Scripture God's mercy** is contrasted to ours, God comes out favorably. Every. Single. Time.
- **David recognized this.** Facing judgment for his sin, he said: "**Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into human hands.**" 2 Sam 24:14
- The only reason we'd think we'd do it in a way kinder and better than God is because we don't see things clearly.
- If you find yourself saying: "Well, if God really was loving, he would do things differently." Let me remind you of what I've explained to you before: If God is infinite in power, which he is, and infinite in love, which he is, should we not suppose that he is also infinite in wisdom? And if his wisdom is as high above ours as his power is above ours, should it surprise us that there is a lot about the wisdom of his ways we can't grasp yet?"
  - **Illus. Documentary on nuclear fusion.** Sun burns at 27 million degrees. Can't get my mind around it. God spoke that into existence. I can produce 98.6 degrees... or if I'm cold, I can rub my hands together and generate another 5–6.
  - If God's wisdom is as high...
- **The ways of God seem confusing to us now, but** I can assure you (using the words of J. Oswald Sanders) "*What will amaze us as we look backwards from eternity is not the severity of God's justice but the greatness of his mercy.*"
- **The Apostle Peter says that even now**, what boggles the mind of the angels is the extravagance of God's mercy. Not the severity of his judgment, but the extravagance of his mercy.

### 4. This truth should destroy any last vestiges of pride in us

- You are saved **NOT because God saw a goodness in you that was worth saving or some natural capacity he could build off of.**
- You didn't have a **little good left in you**--like Luke saw in his father Darth Vader. (*Sorry, spoiler alert!*)
- You didn't have **some good potential**--some **natural ability**--that God could work with if he could just get you into his spiritual gym.
- You **weren't like the guy in Princess Bride** who was only "nearly dead," with a little life left in you that God could fan back into flame.
- **You were dead.** Utterly and totally spiritually dead.
- **Remember Romans 3:10** There is how many righteous? No not one. How many who naturally sought after God? No, not one.
- This is hard to admit, and where many people stumble.
- **The human heart, apart from the grace of God is so wicked and so hard**, it takes a miracle to open it.
- It takes a **miracle to make the blind see**, a miracle to make the **lame walk**; a miracle to **make the dead** come out of that grave.

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
thine eye diffused a quickening ray; I rose, the dungeon flamed  
with light!*

*In light of that, My richest gain I count but loss, and pour  
contempt on all my pride!*

*You see, 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, then grace my  
fears relieved.*

- It is God who works in me both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

From **the start to the finish**, and at **every place in the middle**, salvation is all, totally, 100%, of God.

**Where is pride** in this scenario?



## 5. We must not let limitations in our ability to understand God's sovereignty keep us from obeying God's clear commands

- (These get a little more into what we'll get in chapter 10, but let me address it briefly here)
- You say, "Well, if God has **chosen some for salvation** and determined to save them, what purpose is there in me sharing Christ?"
- **I understand the question.** But Paul never uses these truths to reduce human agency in making these things happens.
- In fact, he explains that only through our agency do things change. **Prayer really moves the hand** of God. Sharing Christ, sending missionaries, makes an actual difference in their eternities.
- Over the years here, I've used a quote I found by **A.A. Hodge**: "Does God know the day you'll die? Yes. Has he appointed that day? Yes. Can you do anything to change that day? No. Then why do you eat? To live. What happens if you don't eat? You die. Then if you don't eat, and die, then would that be the day that God had appointed for you to die? ...Quit asking stupid questions and just eat. Eating is the pre-ordained way God has appointed for living."  
A.A. Hodge
- **How it works together I don't know.** All I know is the more I share Christ, the more I find that people keep getting elected!
- **What we do makes an actual difference.**
- **Friend, listen:** It is not on you to figure out the ways of God. It is on you to obey. It is arrogance and presumption to sit around speculating on the sovereignty of God when simple obedience is commanded.
- **Prayer moves the hand of God**, and through it God does things he otherwise would not have done. **Sharing Christ** and sacrificing to get missionaries on the field changes the destinies of people in the nations.
- **Stop philosophizing** and start obeying!

## 6. This truth emboldens us to share with even the least likely

- This truth shows you that God can save anybody, and he often will save the most difficult as a display of his glory!

- **Some of you have someone** in your life you think will never believe--keep praying and keep sharing. God just might use that to display the greatness and glory of his grace.
- **For those serving among difficult nations**--God has promised to save some from every nation, and he can fulfill that promise. Keep sharing!
- **I've often said that serving in a difficult place is like that** Woodpecker
- Boldly share! Saving them is not on you, it's on him.
- You just put it out there and let God do what he's going to do

## Finally, 7. This truth is the source of our assurance

This is where we started. Instead of re-presenting this point, let me close Romans 9 **by sharing an email we got from one of our members after their small group worked through Romans 9:**

*I grew up in a dysfunctional, non-Christian home. Neither of my parents were capable of expressing love, and my father was always angry and disgusted with us, his children. When I came to Christ at age eighteen the scars from my childhood were deep.*

*One night, as a teenager, I was laying awake struggling and crying out to God. I became fixated on a question which I prayed to God: "Why did You save me?" I did not understand myself well enough to know why that question seemed so important.*

*I struggled and wept and cried that question out to God, and suddenly God answered me in a way that was nearly audible: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion (that quote from Romans 9)." I didn't understand what that meant then, but I vividly remember the experience.*

*[Even after becoming a Christian, for years I was in a church where the main point was, 'Get your act together.' I lived in a constant fear of not performing well enough.]*

*[But then I began coming to the Summit and hearing the gospel.]*

*I can now see that what I wanted to hear when asking crying out to God asking him, "Why did You save me?" was that he saw something good in me. I wanted him to say he was proud of me. I wanted to have some sense of being worthy of His love.*

*But now I see this question as a spiritual trap. No matter what qualities God might see in me, they are all tainted with sin, selfishness and rebellion. Any reason which he might have given (as a reason to save me) would have ultimately become the reason to lose my salvation, since I could never be good enough, consistently enough to deserve his love*

*Instead he said: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."*

*Now I understand that God was telling the love he gave to me was not a love that could be lost by my failures. The love he has for me originates in his character, not mine.*

*When God showed me this, it was like a burden falling off my back. I am free to know his love and to trust him in everything. I know that I am secure in his hands. God would not send His son to die for me so that I might ultimately be lost. What he began, he will complete. The salvation and purposes of Jesus Christ cannot be corrupted.*

*I know there are some who are confused or uncertain about Romans 9, but for me it is a tremendous comfort.*

## **Invitation:**

**Friend, here is what I know:** *Salvation is offered to you, right now, if you will receive it. And I know that it's in your power to choose! I know that because Jesus said, "Whosoever will may come!" He wouldn't*

*invite you if he didn't mean it. Do you sense that now? That you need to be saved?*

*Stop thinking it can't be you! That's why Paul brings up Hosea. Do you Hosea's story? Hosea's wife had left him and cheated on him not once but twice. Who would take her back? God would. He'll take you. God can and will save anyone who comes to him through the door he's opened!*