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God's Word Has Not Failed

Romans 9-11 Overview

Introduction

Deutschmarks in Germany in 1923

As unemployment rose to six million and the exchange rate of the Deutschmark stood at four trillion to the dollar in 1923

Question: Are God's promises worth the paper they're printed on?

Deeper: Romans 9 is one of the most challenging chapters in the Bible... it has rocked more worlds theologically than perhaps any other chapter in the Bible. It forces us to eat the strongest doctrinal meat there is, no longer to sip on milk.

In Romans 9, we come face to face with the deepest issues of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. We face the questions of predestination and reprobation. The ultimate questions of eternity: on what does my salvation ultimately and eternally rest? Does it rest ultimately on my will, my decisions, my actions, my commitments... or does it rest ultimately on God: His will, His decisions, His actions, His commitments?

Recognizing that God's absolute sovereignty is difficult meat to chew, I don't assume that one or two sermons will be all it takes to convince you of its message. Some people may rail against it, some may weep as for a lost son, some may become angry with the preacher, others may become angry with God. I hope that none of that happens... but I understand that seismic shift in the bedrock foundation of your view of God and humanity will be painful and take time.

Jonathan Edwards:

I. Context: How Does Romans 9-11 Fit In?

A. Is Romans 9-11 a Dangerous Insert?

1. Some people would like to avoid Romans 9-11

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2. Some feel a careful handling of this explosive and difficult section only inflames controversies
3. Some are content with a small and immature view of the God of the Bible
4. Others, like Philip Melancthon, thought it was best for pastors never to mention or carefully teach the doctrine of predestination
5. John Piper relates that a young pastor in his denomination was urged by a denominational official to be especially careful with Romans 9

“It is possible to preach Romans 9 without telling anybody what you really think!”

B. Is Romans 9-11 a Superfluous Insert?

1. Some commentators: Paul added Romans 9-11 later... it doesn't really fit into the flow of argument
2. Augustine: Paul added these chapters to expand on and illustrate his doctrine of predestination
3. C.H. Dodd thought Paul inserted in chapters 9-11 a pre-existing sermon
4. Other commentators say: At the end of Romans 8, Paul has finished his doctrine, his main argument... the book would get along fine without Romans 9-11

C. Individual Salvation vs. National Purpose

1. Romans 1-8: Clear doctrine to answer individual question: “What must I do to be saved?”
2. Romans 9-11: What about the Jews as a nation, and the Gentiles as a group of nations? How do we understand the big picture of what God is doing

D. Romans 1-8 Overview: Individual Salvation

1. Romans 1: The Gospel alone the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes
2. Romans 1:18-32 The wrath of God revealed against godless pagans who exchange the truth of God for a lie and live wicked lives

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3. Romans 2: The wrath of God also revealed against hypocritical Jews who have the law of God, but do not keep it; who use the law to feel superior to other people but who fail to see their own wickedness and need to repent
 4. Romans 3: Universality of sin
 5. Romans 3:21-27 Glowing center of the gospel... the Substitutionary Atonement of Christ
 6. Romans 4: Justification by faith apart from works of the law
 7. Romans 5: Assurance of total peace with God by faith in Christ, plus doctrine of original sin
 8. Romans 6-7 The doctrine of sanctification and the purpose of the law
 9. Romans 8: Glorious assurance and perseverance of the saints
- E. Romans 8: Astonishing Promises of Assurance
1. God's eternal saving purposes for us cannot be defeated
 2. God has predestined us in Christ for glory
 3. Everyone so predestined will eventually end up glorified... no one will be lost!

Romans 8:28-30 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

4. With God for us, who can be against us!!!
5. Therefore, everything we could face in this world will fail to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus

Romans 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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F. Striking, Piercing Question: What About the Jews?

1. If your God is so mighty and His power so awesome, what then about the Jews?
2. History was bearing out that the overwhelming majority of the Jews were rejecting the Gospel of Jesus Christ
3. They did not love Christ, they hated Him, they reviled Him, they opposed Him
4. What does this say about your God and your gospel?
5. You say “If God is for us, who can be against us!” Was not God also for the Jews???

Deuteronomy 7:6-8 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. ⁷ The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸ But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

G. Paul’s Standard Procedure: Raise Objections, Then Answer Them

1. Having laid out the doctrine of universal sinfulness and of free salvation through faith in Christ in Romans 1-3,
2. Now: he faces the question from Jews: they were God’s people because they were circumcised and kept the law; while the Gentiles were not circumcised and did not keep the law... SO Paul writes Romans 4 to answer this objection: Abraham was justified by faith BEFORE he was circumcised

Romans 4:1-3 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about-- but not before God. ³ What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

3. Then he resumes laying down the implications of his doctrine in Romans 5, resulting in a triumph of the marvelous grace of God in Christ

Romans 5:20 where sin increased, grace increased all the more

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4. But now the next objection comes: if grace always covers sin, why not just sin as much as we want?

Romans 6:1-2 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

Romans 6:15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

5. Having refuted this misunderstanding of grace by teaching the true Christian life as one of constant growth in holiness by the Spirit, Paul now faces another attack concerning the Jews: what then is the purpose of the law of God?

Romans 7:7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sin?

6. Having answered these objections, he finishes he unfolding the glories of the gospel's majestic promises in Romans 8

7. Now he must face this question about the Jews:

HAS GOD'S WORD FAILED??? And if it has, what guarantee do we have that we will be saved?

II. Paul Faces the Jewish Question

A. Apostle to the Gentiles

B. Constantly Facing Jewish Opposition

Douglas Moo: "Paul's presentation and defense of 'his' gospel to the Roman Christians occurs against the backdrop of controversy over the relationship between Judaism and the church. Paul, the 'apostle to the Gentiles' found himself in the center of this debate. A decade of struggle to preserve the integrity and freedom of the gospel from a fatal mixture with the Jewish torah lies behind him; a critical encounter with Jews and Jewish Christians suspicious of him because of his outspoken stance on this very issue lies immediately ahead."

Paul's whole ministry was forged in the fires of constant opposition and debate from Jews

The questions he raises here are deeply engrained in his mind and ministry

Also in his life

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C. Still Deeply Concerned About His People

1. Notice how he begins each chapter... openly identifying himself with the Jews

Romans 9:1-4 I speak the truth in Christ-- I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit-- ² I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, ⁴ the people of Israel.

Romans 10:1-2 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ² For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.

Romans 11:1 I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.

2. Paul clearly burns personally for his people to be saved
3. He also wants to reach out to them winsomely and attractively

D. Possibility of Gentile Arrogance

E. Desire for Unity in the Roman Church (Romans 14-15)

III. The Central Issue: The Vindication of God & His Word

A. Vindication of God

Romans 9:14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!

B. Vindication of God's Word

Romans 9:6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.

- C. Not Merely Predestination
- D. Not Merely the Jewish Question
- E. Theodicy: Defending the Righteousness of God

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IV. Secondary Themes

A. The Tragedy of Jewish Rejection of Christ

B. God's Freedom and Absolute Sovereignty in Election

1. Not merely that God DOES predestinate people to eternal life in Christ
2. Not merely that God's choice is the root and ground of all our decisions
3. RATHER a vision of God in which He is perfectly FREE to do this... that it is right and proper and just... in no way opposed to the justice of God
4. God is the King and has the right to do what He wants with what He's made, without conferring with us in the matter!

C. Vindication of Paul's Gospel as Rooted in Old Testament

1. One scholar counted Paul's Old Testament quotations in all his twelve epistles
2. Of 89 OT quotations, 27 are found in these three chapters... over a third!!!
3. Paul is clearly trying to make his case from the Old Testament
4. Trying to prove that his gospel is not an innovation, nor a discontinuity in God's worldwide purposes
5. A.D. 144 in ROME!!!: Marcion taught that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament were two different entities, entirely two different beings
6. Paul would clearly have been appalled if anyone thought he was preaching a different God than that revealed in the Prophets

D. Terrible Danger of Misunderstanding & Misusing Doctrine

1. Paul is constantly trying to correct these false interpretations of the gospel
2. He is destroying all boasting, all human pride and arrogance
3. He is refuting the dreadful misunderstandings of the Jews when they read their own scriptures

4. He is also refuting Gentile arrogance that they now, NOT THE JEWS are God's chosen people
5. He is refuting the false understanding of God's sovereignty that says, "There, now, I have got my salvation like a fire insurance... I no longer need the law, or to fight sin, or to keep believing... I can do whatever I like and I will still end up in heaven."
6. All these false understandings of doctrine are deadly dangerous! And Paul attacks them

E. The Glory and Mystery of God's Eternal Purpose

1. Above all, Paul wants to end with the majesty of God and the mystery of His ways
2. He wants to leave us all with a sense of awe and wonder
3. NEVER NEVER NEVER think you've got God figured out, you've got Romans 9 down pat
4. Paul who wrote it marveled over the depths of what he wrote

Romans 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

5. If Paul didn't fully understand what he wrote, how will we??

V. The Movement of Paul's Argument: Romans 9-11

Six steps:

- 1) Paul's anguish for his lost kinsmen (9:1-5)**
- 2) Key concept: God's word has not failed (9:6-29)**
- 3) Jews stumble while Gentiles stream in (9:30-10:21)**
- 4) God Has Not Rejected His People (11:1-10)**

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5) Mystery: God Uses, Then Ends, Israel's Hardening (11:11-32)

6) Proper Response: Awe-Struck Praise of God's Eternal Plan (11:33-36)

A. Paul's Anguish for His Lost Kinsmen (9:1-5)

Romans 9:1-4 I speak the truth in Christ-- I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit-- ² I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, ⁴ the people of Israel.

1. Note: Paul begins with anguish and ends with exceptional joy and worship
2. While looking upward at God and His purposes, we can celebrate with joy unspeakable and full of glory
3. While looking downward at rebellious sinners in their lostness, we should be awash with tears
4. If we are not awe-struck looking upward or awash with sorrow looking downward, then our hearts are hard... may the Lord graciously soften us to see what Paul saw and react the way Paul reacted!
5. Don't miss basic thrust: Paul's deep, deep anguish means that individual Jews really are perishing eternally, and will spend eternity in hell

B. Key Concept: God's Word Has Not Failed (9:6-29)

Romans 9:6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.

1. Key concept: God's word has not failed... fallen
 - a. Absolutely essential for every human being on the face of the earth, not just Jews
 - b. If God's word has fallen, has failed in their case, how do you know it won't in yours??

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c. What assurance would you have if God promised to save all of Abraham's biological offspring, and now many of them are under His wrath?

Answer: NONE!!!

2. God NEVER PROMISED that all Abraham's biological offspring would be saved
3. Salvation is never a birthright, not even for Jews (6-13)
4. Rather, salvation is a free gift of God's electing love (14-23)
5. God is not unjust in this election

Romans 9:14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!

6. God is free to give that gift to anyone He chooses, even to Gentiles (24-29)

C. Jews Stumble, Gentiles Stream In (9:30-10:21)

Romans 9:30-31 What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.

1. In this section, Paul returns to the gospel he laid out so plainly in Romans 1-8
2. Individual people are saved by believing in Christ (10:9) and "calling on the name of the Lord" (10:13)
3. They call on that name when the word of Christ is clearly preached (10:13-17)
4. That word has gone out to the Jews as well as to the Gentiles, and was simple to understand, and required no previous seeking of God (10:18-20)
5. God continues to extend the gospel even to Jews... but they refuse to accept (10:21)

D. God Has Not Rejected His People (11:1-10)

Two senses in which this is true:

First, by saving a small remnant of Jews even now

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Second, by promising a grand a glorious future for the physical descendents of Abraham...
God has not forsaken physical Israel

Paul deals with the first in 11:1-10, and with the second in 11:11-32

Romans 11:1 I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.

1. Paul consistently identifies himself with the Jews
2. The mere fact that Paul himself is a believer shows that God has not totally reject the Jews
3. Rather, there is now as there has always been: a remnant chosen by grace

Romans 11:5 So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.

4. Throughout Israel's history, including the time of Elijah, God has always had His remnant, which He reserved to Himself by His sovereign choice
5. Paul then describes the present situation plainly: elect are saved, others hardened

Romans 11:7-8 What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, ⁸ as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day."

6. This active hardening on God's part alone can explain how Jews cannot see in Christ the fulfillment of all their prophecies... which Gentile believers can see so plainly

E. Mystery: God Uses, Then Ends, Israel's Hardening (11:11-32)

1. Again, Paul begins with a rhetorical question:

Romans 11:11 Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.

2. In other words, there is a PURPOSE in God's hardening of the Jews

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3. He uses it to reach out to the Gentiles, then uses the success of the Gospel among the Gentile to make the Jews envious
4. Paul then muses on what will happen once God removes the hardening from the hearts of Jews as a whole

Romans 11:12-15 But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! ¹³ I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry ¹⁴ in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

5. Paul uses this experience of the Jews to warn Gentiles not to become arrogant
 - a. He uses the image of an olive tree... the tree represents God's saving work among people on earth: the "Family of God"
 - b. Unbelieving Jews represents fruitless branches God broke off
 - c. Believing Gentiles represent wild branches that are grafted into a Jewish olive tree
6. Lesson is clear: DON'T BE ARROGANT!!!!

Romans 11:19-23 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." ²⁰ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. ²² Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. ²³ And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

7. Mystery: this is the future of the Jews, the physical descendants of Abraham... to be grafted back into their own olive tree... someday again to be accepted by God by believing in Christ!!!

Romans 11:25-27 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved, as it

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is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. ²⁷ And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

8. God's amazing, overall purpose: BINDING ALL TO DISOBEDIENCE to HAVE MERCY on ALL!!!

Romans 11:30-32 Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. ³² For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

Gentiles have their time of disobedience and remember it well

Jews also have their time of disobedience and remember it well

On Judgment Day, both Jew and Gentile alike will shut their mouths in shame-filled silence concerning their own righteousness and will exult and boast only in Christ!!!

F. Proper Response: Awe-Struck Praise of God's Eternal Plan (11:33-36)

Romans 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

VI. Applications

A. Be Patient and Be Not Afraid of Romans 9

B. Why Study This? Two Immeasurably Sweet Benefits

C. Humble Yourself and Study Carefully: God Wants You to Know This!!