

The Trustworthiness of God

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Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 00] Romans chapter 9 verses 1 to 24. Theirs is the adoption to sonship.

Theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah who is God over all, forever praised. Amen.

It is not as though God's word had failed for not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children.

On the contrary, it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

For this was how the promise was stated. At the appointed time, I will return and Sarah will have a son. Not only that, but Rebecca's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac.

[1 : 34] Yet before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad, in order that God's promise, a purpose in election might stand, not by works but by him who calls, She was told, The older will serve the younger.

Just as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all.

For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

For scripture says to Pharaoh, I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

Now one of you will say to me, Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will? But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God?

[2 : 43] Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, Why do you make me like this? Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

But what if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath, prepared for destruction?

What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory? Even us, whom he had also called, not only from the Jews, but also from the Gentiles.

This is the word of the Lord. Thank you. So let me have my word of welcome.

It's great to have you here. And it'd be great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at Romans chapter 9. It's really important that everything I say just comes from there, that we're just explaining what God's word says to us.

[3 : 59] And we've got on the notice sheet, just inside there you'll find an outline of where we're going as we look at this together. Quite a lot of detail on there. Just if that will help you as we look at this portion of God's word.

But let's ask for God's help. We've heard how the Spirit needs to be at work to open our eyes and give us light of understanding. So let's ask him to do that. Jesus said, man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

So gracious God, almighty God, and loving heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. And we pray that by your Spirit at work within us, you'll help us not to receive it just as words, but as spiritual food for our souls.

By your Spirit, enlighten our hearts, giving us eyes to see your truth, heads that can understand it, and hearts that are willing to change and follow you.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, the most watched TV series this year was Line of Duty, so far.

[5 : 14] And I don't know whether you watch Line of Duty, but I think it's terrific edge-of-your-seat drama. Wouldn't be for everyone. It's pretty violent, but pretty tense stuff. And by the time we got to the final episode of the series, I was reading on page, on the third page of the broadsheets on the weekend of the final series, articles on who might be the main culprit, who's the bad guy who's going to be revealed.

The nation was gripped. And one of the things that the drama Line of Duty shows about our culture is that we really want to know who we can trust. Trustworthiness is a really big issue for us.

So Line of Duty, if you've never heard of it or seen it, it follows an anti-corruption unit within the police force, AC-12. So it's headed up by Superintendent Ted Hastings, and he's got Kate Fleming and Steve Arnott on his team.

And the whole drama is really exploring the idea of what happens when the people you're meant to trust, the police, have people within it you can't trust.

Or as Ted Hastings put it, there's only one thing I'm interested in, and that is catching bent coppers. But this season, that's just happened, the tables were turned in line of duty.

[6 : 27] AC-12 has been searching for this senior police officer, H, codenamed H, who is the head of a corruption ring. And there were suspicions that it might be Hastings himself.

So the guy we've trusted for four seasons, suddenly his credibility is in doubt, was he H? In fact, Private Eye have said recently they think H probably wasn't a person after all, it might just stand for Huawei, the Chinese company.

But it was a person in the show, and by the eve of the final episode, there's all this speculation, there's bookies taking bets on who is H. and it turned out that it wasn't Hastings.

But the key thing there was the kind of the layers of mistrust. What do you do when the people that you've trusted to find the people you should have trusted but you can't trust might be untrustworthy? You see what's going on there? It's really important to us that when we put our trust in somebody, we know we can rely on them. And I guess when we're thinking, can I trust this person?

[7 : 26] Will they keep their word? We're thinking about their character, we're thinking about their track record. Have they been trustworthy in the past? We're thinking about how in control they are.

Someone could make a promise to us and genuinely intend to keep it, but actually they're not powerful to keep it. And other things come in the way and they end up letting us down. Well, the Christian faith is fundamentally a question of trust.

God has made promises to us and the invitation goes out to each one of us, each person he's made. Will you trust him? Does the God of the Bible, the God who made us, have the right to be trusted?

That's the focus of this section of Romans, Romans 9 to 11. We're going to start it tonight. We're going to look at it over three weeks. This letter, Romans, was written by an early Christian leader, Paul, to a church at the center of the world at the time, in Rome, the church at the heart of the Roman Empire.

And we've just, in chapters 5 to 8, as we've looked at it as a church, we've heard promises made to every Christian as we stand in God's grace that we are free from the penalty of sin because Jesus has died a sin-bearing death in our place on the cross.

[8 : 41] God looks on us as righteous, as a gift. We're free from the power of sin that God's spirit in us enables us to live for God. We don't have to sin anymore.

We're adopted into God's family. So, we know God as our Father and even though we still live in the presence of sin and death, we actually have the privilege of calling on God as our Father.

We have the gift of the Holy Spirit. Chapter 8, verse 1, the Spirit reassuring our hearts, there is no condemnation for you now that you're in Christ. And at the end of chapter 8, nothing, even death, nothing can separate us from the love of God that's in Christ Jesus.

So now in this section, Paul builds on that because he wants to address the issue, okay, God's made all those promises, can we really trust him?

And folks, this is a challenging bit of the Bible. But I just want to say as we find it challenging and we find it difficult, it is good for us to be challenged by God's word.

[9 : 44] In my experience, it's the times when we find we're most confronted by what God says about himself, about the world, about ourselves, in his word, they can be the times God's most at work in us to reshape us and refashion us.

And if we let Romans 9 do that kind of mind-stretching, reshaping work inside of us, we end up with a really breathtaking view of who God is. But Paul wrote these words because of a problem and that's our first point on the sheet.

Israel has rejected God's Messiah. Messiah is Bible language for God's chosen, rescuing king, promised in the Old Testament scriptures. Israel were God's people.

They had their Bibles. But when Jesus came to fulfill the promises that had been made in their Bibles, as a whole, they rejected him. Many of the early first Christians were Jewish by background and saw this was the Messiah.

But if you looked at Israel as a nation as a whole, they didn't accept that Jesus is the Messiah. And of course, there are many people around us today, very many people. In Glasgow today, who do not accept Jesus as the Messiah.

[10 : 55] But it's a particular problem that Israel didn't do that. If you just look at verse 4, Paul tells us why that's such a problem. Verse 4 of chapter 9, he says, theirs is the adoption to sonship.

God had chosen that people group out of all the peoples of the world and he called them his son. Then he says, theirs is the divine glory. God came to be present with them in their magnificent temple.

There's are the covenants. God made binding promises with those people, a binding agreement with them where he would be their people and they could be their, he would be their God and they could be his people.

God came to be with them and he goes on to mention that he gave them the commandments.

Those are the commandments that God told them about his will for their lives.

He gave them the temple and the sacrificial systems so they could have their sins forgiven. He gave them the promises that it was through their prophets that he promised Jesus into the world and he promised a king in the line of their king.

[12 : 02] The human ancestry of the Messiah in verse 5 was the Jewish people, the children of Abraham. So they had every privilege we could imagine and they wouldn't accept that Jesus was the one who'd fulfilled those promises and that leaves Paul with two big problems and they're on the sheets there.

The first one is great sorrow over their lostness. We see that great sorrow in verse 2 but he trailers it in verse 1. It's a bit like if we're going to say something that really matters to somebody we might say the thing is or well to be honest with you as though everything else we say is dishonest to be honest with you.

It's a way of trailing what we're about to say is I'm about to tell you something that is really important really gets to the heart of it and Paul says in verse 1 of chapter 9 he says I'm not lying three times.

Did you notice that? I speak the truth in Christ. I am not lying my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit. What is it Paul?

I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. He even goes as far as to say that if it were possible he could even have wished that he was cut off from Christ if it would have meant that God would save the people of Israel.

[13 : 21] And we need to hear that. We need to remember that emotional distress from Paul as we read the rest of Romans chapter 9 that nothing he's about to say takes away from Paul the great sorrow he feels that these guys have not trusted in Jesus.

he's about to explain why God is still trusting still worth trusting but he is in great pain. And it's a challenge to us as well about the people around us.

Do you feel grief like Paul felt for the people around you who have not seen that Jesus is God's saving king? Especially in Scotland today all the privileges that people have in Scotland the Christian history churches everywhere in every town the Reformation Billy Graham revivals 50 years ago stadiums full of people coming forward to respond to Jesus just two generations ago the Christian values of tolerance and human rights that we cherish today even though we've rejected the God who gave them to us are we emotionally grieved by that?

by the hundreds of thousands of people in our city who are cut off from God's promises so they're cut off from God. So as Christians we will talk about this a bit more again next week at Romans 10 but we're to have this kind of contented discontent.

If you're a Christian and you're looking forward to a day you think might come in this life where you'll be completely satisfied and happy that day is not going to come because a mark of the maturity of a Christian is that even while you're content because you believe the gospel you know that you're loved by God you know where you're going you're going to heaven and you have great hope and you have a right standing before God you live with great sorrow unceasing anguish for the people around you who have not seen who Jesus is.

[15 : 25] We know that terrible danger is coming Romans 1 told us about the wrath of God we see it in the brokenness of our world today that God is angry and people are streaming towards God's wrath in their droves totally unprepared for it and Paul felt great sorrow over that but he also he also feels great concern over God's promises that's the second thing he feels and that's why he writes the rest of Romans 9 the issue for Christians is if Israel broadly as a whole is denying that Jesus is the Messiah does that cast doubt on what we believe about Jesus and that's really significant because at the end of Romans 8 we were on the mountaintop of God's promises to his people he says nothing can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ now that we are children of God and we could think to ourselves but hang on a minute Israel had been adopted by God Israel had been loved by God if they've stumbled how do we know that we won't stumble as well is God really going to keep his word to us and that's what

Romans 9 is ultimately all about the trustworthiness of God so that's our second point God has been true to his word the first part of his answer is in verses 6 to 9 it's the absolute reliability of God's word his point is that God never promised to save all of Abraham's descendants look with me at verse 6 it's not as though God's word had failed for not all who were descended from Israel are Israel they didn't all receive God's promises he gives the example that Abraham had two sons Isaac and Ishmael but the promises to be God's family they only went to one of them then verse 8 in other words it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring there are two Israels Israel ethnically children of Abraham but actually those who get the promise are a subgroup within ethnic Israel and that's how it's always been you have to be a child of the promise to be one of God's people so who gets to be a child of the promise whoever God chooses that's the next point the absolute control of God's choices and he shows us that in verses 10 to 13 the example is of Isaac's children so going down a generation from Abraham to Isaac and the promise to be God's people was passed down to Isaac and his wife

Rebecca and they had two children they were twins although Esau came out first so he's slightly older but Jacob inherited the promise and not Esau why did he get the promise and Esau not how would you answer that verse 11 tells us have a look yet before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad in order that God's purpose in election might stand not by works but by him who calls she was told the older will serve the younger just as it is written Jacob I loved but Esau I hated it's not he doesn't say verse 12 not by works but by him who has faith we know we say by faith not works he says it's not by works but by him who calls it's not that God looked ahead and saw well Jacob will trust me it's that God called Jacob and he didn't call Esau so we're face to face here with a tension that runs right through the Bible the Bible teaches very clearly that as human beings we make real choices and we are morally responsible for the choices we make we have we have decisions and of course we'd agree with that wouldn't we that unless somebody puts a gun to our head and tells us that we have to do something in general in life we are free in the choices that we make and God will hold us responsible for the choices we make and when it comes to whether or not we'll follow Jesus Christ and accept him and trust him we make a choice about that that's human responsibility as it's taught in the Bible but the Bible also teaches us that God is absolutely in control of his universe we call it the sovereignty of God nothing happens in God's universe outside of his control now we find it hard to hold those two things in tension but that's what we have to do because the Bible teaches both of those things and we see it worked out in human history if you think about the cross why did Jesus die there are two different ways to answer that and in Acts chapter 2

Peter tells us about both ways verse 23 he says to the crowd in Jerusalem this man Jesus was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge so if you were just hearing that

why did Jesus die God planned it so that by his death he could save the world that's why Jesus died but humanly why did Jesus die some wicked people killed him so the next thing Peter says is and you with the help of wicked men put him to death by nailing him to the cross so the people who killed Jesus are responsible for their wickedness in killing the son of God but God had planned the death so that he could save the world through it and we learn here in Romans 9 that that same principle that same tension holds true when it comes to whether or not any of us becomes one of God's people how does anyone become a Christian there are two answers to that on a human level we hear Jesus invitation to accept him as our saviour and king and we make a free choice whether or not to accept that on a divine level

God chose us so it's a bit like imagine your life going on a journey down the road imagine that's a metaphor for your life you're on a journey walking down a road and one day by the side of the road you see an arch and above the arch are the words of Jesus inviting you to trust him a public invitation to the world everyone who walks along that road of life sees the arch and Jesus says says it on the arch come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest and you make a choice you think I'm going to I'm going to follow this man and you go through the arch a change of direction in your life when you go through you look back at the other side of the arch on the other side and it says I chose you before the foundation of the world and in Romans 9 Paul's point is when you look at Israel don't let their rejection of Jesus make you doubt that God is trustworthy his word is totally reliable it was just never the case that all of Abraham's descendants inherited the promises they weren't all chosen by God and he is absolutely in control of his choices he says it as a great comfort for you today if you're a Christian because you're hearing that if God chose you he's not going to let you go so we can trust him so that's our second point

[22 : 55] God has been true to his word but hang on a minute what gives God the right to choose some people and not choose other people that's the next thing we're asking ourselves wasn't that a bit unfair on Esau isn't it a bit unfair on Abraham's descendants who didn't get chosen and more sharply for us we could add isn't it a bit unfair on the people we know and love who it seems have not been chosen by God so that's our third point that Paul comes to God is unquestionably right in everything he has done I know this is difficult but Paul gives us four points to back up that claim that God is unquestionably right in his actions why is God right?

firstly because he's merciful verse 14 what then shall we say is God unjust? not at all and then he quotes the words that God said to Moses God's people Israel had been rescued by God they'd been brought to Mount Sinai and almost immediately as Moses went up the mountain they made a golden calf and they worshipped that instead of God they rejected God for a calf they'd made they deserved nothing but judgment for rejecting God but God forgave them for what they'd done why? because he chose to have mercy on them verse 15 he said to Moses I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion so what about when God doesn't have mercy well nobody gets less than they deserve from God you either get what you deserve for rejecting him or you get mercy from him and he saves you his example next is Pharaoh verse 17 he talks about Pharaoh as the king of Egypt who enslaved the Israelites and when Pharaoh refused to let God's people go we hear we read in Exodus God hardened Pharaoh's heart he said I've raised you up for this purpose that by by having to use mighty acts to defeat Pharaoh he would show the world who he is and how he cares for his people but Pharaoh didn't start neutral Pharaoh was a horrible man at the start of Exodus we hear about Pharaoh enslaving a people group into forced labor and then throwing their children into the Nile he was horrendous and here's the point we don't deserve anything from God when God takes sinful humanity and he chooses to have mercy on some of them and draw them to himself and harden others to stay away nobody gets less than they deserve from God and I know we find that difficult because we think of people we love and we ask why hasn't God chosen them and I think one of the answers to that is we just need a deeper awareness of sin our own sin and the sin of the people we know that we are all in rebellion against God and if God gave us completely free choice without intervening we'd all reject him forever our hearts are bent on being against God and if God sees us like that and he chooses to have mercy on some and not on others nobody has anything to complain about in that it's a bit like if you imagine a pirate ship on the high seas on the pirate ship you're going to have some pretty nasty characters on a real pirate ship aren't you if you take away the sort of the kid's sentimentality you're going to have some nasty people on a pirate ship you might have a chief pirate who is pretty brutal you might have some of his henchmen who are violent murderers who have seized ships to

get their plunder but you're also you might have some people on a pirate ship who are actually quite nice people you might have a chef who is a decent bloke and he likes cooking the food for everyone there might be a ship's doctor who likes to make the pirates better when they get poorly but at the end of the day when the navy capture that ship they're all on the wrong ship they're all pirates because they're serving under the wrong flag with their energy and their skills even if they're doing things we think of as good cooking the meals making people better their whole identity is away from the authorities and so it is for the human race that we're all on a ship like that when it comes to God we all know well I'm sure that most of us know

I certainly know some very very nice non-Christians not yet Christians but at the end of the day while they're not Christians they are serving under the wrong flag they're living in God's world taking the good things from him and living in rebellion against him and God is perfectly right to decide not to have mercy on some and to have mercy on others next God is unquestionably right because he is God verses 19 to 21 verse 19 Paul says one of you will say to me then why does God still blame us for who is able to resist his will but who are you a human being to talk back to God shall what is formed say to the one who formed it why did you make me like this to emphasize that in the original in the Greek man is at the start of the sentence and God is at the end he says oh man who are you to talk back to God who do we think we are our sinful creatures complaining to our uncreated creator who made everything it's like lumps of clay complaining at the potter's decision on what to do with them and then he tells us why God is acting in this way it's that he's displaying his glory verse 22 what if God choosing to show his wrath and make his power known bore with great patience the objects of his wrath prepared for destruction what if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy whom he prepared in advance for glory even us whom he also called not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles so we don't know why God hasn't chosen everyone but Paul's questions here suggest that the way

[29 : 38] God is doing things will ultimately bring God more glory on our own none of us would ever have chosen God our desire to sin is too strong but by God choosing some people and not everybody God can show the people he does choose for glory how glorious he is that there must be a way in which if God does it like this in the new creation we who are saved sinners are going to be more aware of the brilliance of God the glory of God because of the way he judges some sinners who don't receive his salvation so folks I know that's hard but we need to remember God is not responsible for people coming under judgment in the same way as he is responsible for people being saved for any person who's not a Christian if we're asking why are they facing God's judgment the answer is it's because of their sin they will get what they deserve from God but for any Christian if we ask why do they have eternal life the answer is because God has saved them because of God's mercy because God he's chosen them and he's drawn them to himself if he hadn't done that they wouldn't have turned so the offer goes out to everybody to be saved anyone can be saved but only by God's gracious work of election can any of us accept the offer and Jesus has that tension in what he says so in John chapter 6 verse 37 as he offers salvation to anyone he says all that the Father gives me will come to me just have that on the sheet

Alexander on the screen Jesus says all that the Father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never drive away so if you're here and you're not yet a Christian can I urge you just to keep focused on the choice that you face Jesus invites you he says whoever comes to me I'll never drive away all you have to do is come to him and trust him as your saviour and king are you worried that you're not chosen well just become a Christian don't worry about whether you're chosen if you become a Christian you can assume you are chosen come to Jesus and receive forgiveness of sins and he won't drive you away but if you do that it's because the Father has given you to the Son all the Father gives me will come to me and God is doing that today to the most unlikely of people people of every nation so Paul gives us the final reason why God has been right unquestionably right it's that God does what he says in verses 25 to 29 he quotes two prophets from the Old Testament

Hosea and Isaiah they were both speaking at a time when Israel had rejected God and through them God said he's only going to save a remnant of Israel of ethnic Israel only a number of them but he will save people from the nations so Paul's saying when we see Israel rejecting their Messiah as a whole and just a remnant accepting and people from the nations coming in that's exactly what God promised he would do he does what he says so folks Romans 9 confronts us with the bigness of God just think about what God is like we have a God so big he can do whatever he wants nothing

hinders his sovereign choices let me just give three implications first of all unceasing anguish over unbelief let's remember Paul's anguish do we feel that about people around us who could you plead with this week about Jesus who could you plead to God about who could you share Jesus with who could you be clearer with that they need to come to him to have eternal life from God to be saved from God's wrath secondly steadfast confidence for us in God's word the invitation of chapter 9 of Romans is trust him trust him trust him because of his character which he proved at the cross because of his track record that he's always done what he says he will do because of his sovereign power that he can do anything he wants to do trust him will you trust God and thirdly humble gratitude at God's amazing grace as we come to the Lord's table together and we share bread and wine let's do that let's receive bread and wine with a fresh grasp today of God's kindness to each one of us who's trusting him the minister Charles Spurgeon in the 19th century said this he said I do not find it hard to believe that God wouldn't choose everyone I find it hard to believe that God would have chosen me we're more sinful than we ever dared realize without God's gracious intervention breathing life into our hearts of stone we would be incapable of responding rightly to him and we would have had nothing to complain about but the Holy Spirit has come into our lives and he's opened our blinded eyes to see Christ and he's given us new hearts of flesh so that we were moved about how much God loves us and he's drawn us back to God with irresistible grace and the Spirit chose to do that because he loves you and he set his love on you before he made anything before the foundation of the world there's a modern hymn that puts it like this loved before the dawn of time chosen by my maker hidden in my saviour I am his and he is mine cherished for eternity let's pray together just a moment of quiet to reflect on God's word heavenly father we thank you that your spirit searches our hearts we thank you for your mercy to us where we find your word hard to accept where we grieve for the lost where we feel we ask why do things need to be like this we pray that you will work in our hearts and enable us to accept your will and your ways and trust you we praise you for your love for your mercy for your wisdom in your eternal salvation plan for your faithfulness to your promises for your sovereign power help us to trust you we thank you for your mercy to us in the lord jesus and his death on the cross amen amen amen

[37 : 02] I will thank you for your■■■■■