

# Did God's Plan A Fail?

## Week 1 - Romans 9:1-29

### Objectives

To understand that:

- God's plan did not (and has not) failed
- "It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy." verse 16
- God has revealed some of his plan to us, but much of the why and how remain a mystery - we should be ok with this and trust in His sovereignty

To believe that:

- We do not deserve God's mercy
- All people are in sin until God should redeem them

### Leader notes:

This portion of the Romans series is going to be challenging. Your group may not necessarily argue with each other, but these chapters have been the source of debate among scholars as well as the everyday people of the Church for centuries. We encourage you and your group to focus on these key themes of the set of chapters, as well as the book of Romans, as you study. There may be a temptation to zoom in on one or two verses week to week and derive the message of the whole chapter from only those; yet this book was written as a whole letter well before it was divided into verses and chapters.

The key themes to focus on in Romans 9 through 11 are:

- God's plan for salvation has not failed
- God has always chosen His people as remnant
- There is a tension to balance between "determinism" and "open theism", and we can't know the boundary (predestination vs. autonomy)
  - **Determinism:** God completely determines all human activity, including individual thought and action. *Therefore, free will does not exist and salvation is already determined.*
  - **Open Theism:** There is some human activity that God does not determine, therefore God cannot be all-powerful or all-knowing e.g., *Salvation is a choice that is up to the individual, and God doesn't know or choose who to save.*
  - Rather than viewing this as "either / or", scripture indicates the answer is "YES" to both. There is a tension between God's sovereignty and the reality of human choice...

From the Hope [Elder's Statement of Faith](#), under 6.4: "God's election is an unconditional act of free grace which was given through His Son Jesus Christ. By this act God chose, before the foundation of the world, those who would be delivered from from bondage to sin and brought to repentance and saving faith in his Son Jesus Christ (Romans 3:19, Romans 9:11-18, John 10:25-29, John 6:37-39, Romans 8:28-30)"

### **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. <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.



Describe a time when things didn't turn out the way you thought they would?

### **What stands out?**

**We encourage you to consider and discern whether your group would benefit from a couple weeks wrestling with this passage. This section shouldn't be broken up, exactly, because the tough truths are best handled all together; but it may help your group to digest them by revisiting it together once or twice.**

In verse 1, Paul says "I am not lying." In verse 6, Paul says "It is not as though God's word had failed." Repeatedly throughout the passage, Paul anticipates and addresses possible questions that may come up. Why do you think he does all of this?

This passage was as difficult to hear then as it is today. It can be heavy and hard to come to grips with some of the truths. Yet, Paul wants to ultimately understand that this is God's truth, God's plan, and that none of it has failed. This is most important.

### **Romans 9: 1-29 (NIV)**

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit— <sup>2</sup> I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, <sup>4</sup> the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. <sup>5</sup> Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

<sup>6</sup> It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. <sup>7</sup> 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." <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

<sup>10</sup> Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. <sup>11</sup> Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: <sup>12</sup> not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” <sup>13</sup> Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

<sup>14</sup> What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! <sup>15</sup> For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

<sup>16</sup> It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. <sup>17</sup> 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.” <sup>18</sup> Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

<sup>19</sup> One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?” <sup>20</sup> 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?’” <sup>21</sup> 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?

<sup>22</sup> 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? <sup>23</sup> 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— <sup>24</sup> even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

<sup>25</sup> As he says in Hosea: “I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people; and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one,” <sup>26</sup> and, “In the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘children of the living God.’”

<sup>27</sup> Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. <sup>28</sup> For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality.”

<sup>29</sup> It is just as Isaiah said previously: “Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.”



What are some repeated words and concepts in this passage?

*Possible answers: Mercy, God's choice, children/descendants, 'objects', Jews/people of God, purpose...*



What questions come up in your mind as you read this heavy passage?

*Possible answers: lots of questions can come up! Don't answer them, this is to get a sense of what everyone sees in this passage!*

? Who are the biblical figures that Paul names?

*Possible answers: Abraham and Sarah, chosen by God after the tower of Babel story (after the flood); Isaac and Rebekah, who gave birth to Jacob and Esau; Jacob was chosen, known as a liar and later named 'wrestles with God'; Pharaoh, who burdened the Israelites and rejected God's call in the book of Exodus. Moses, born to an Israelite slave family, but raised in Pharaoh's household.*

Paul mentions just two snapshots of Israel's story in this passage, though he is referring to it all. Jacob, who is later named Israel, is chosen over Esau; Pharaoh, in the negative example, is hardened against Israel's pain. Other key 'plot points' of God saving a remnant would include salvation from enemies, saving some of the exiled peoples, the initial rejection and acceptance of Jesus, and so on through today!

### Digging a little deeper

**These questions are intended to dig into what Paul is communicating. If we can restate it faithfully with the text, then we might be on the right track of understanding!**

? What is the difference between "children of God" and "children of flesh"?

*Possible answers: offer possible answers that can be used as a starting point - Children of God are chosen according to His purposes. It does not depend on physical race or descent (a'la Isaac vs Ishmael, Jacob vs Esau)*

? Why is Paul concerned with everything he lists in verse 4 if Jesus introduces a new covenant?

*Possible answers: God is **not** starting over with a plan B! And Paul is expressing how painful it feels to be so close yet still reject the Savior Israel had been promised. Paul is displaying how God's same plan has been in place since the beginning, as well as how this plan relates to Israel.*

? Is God unjust? What is Paul saying in verse 14 and onward?

*Possible answers: "Far from it!" Paul arrives in verses 21 and 22 that God himself determines what is 'just'. Additionally, we don't deserve mercy in the first place. All people are born in sin.*

? Can you think of reasons why God would choose Abraham (vs Lot), Jacob (vs Esau), David (vs Saul), etc. to bring about his plan of salvation?

*Possible answers: To show his Glory and confound the wisdom of the world? It's not because they were more deserving or better in any way (v16)! Ultimately, we do not know.*

## Bringing it home

### Psalm 53:2-3

<sup>2</sup> God looks down from heaven  
on all mankind  
to see if there are any who understand,  
any who seek God.

<sup>3</sup> Everyone has turned away, all have become corrupt;  
there is no one who does good,  
not even one.

? Re-read verses 25 and 26. What does God's exercise of mercy mean to you? How does His choice of you impact you?

*Possible answers: this should drive us to humble worship, gratitude, love. God loves us! For no good reason that we've given him. This is the father running to the son in Luke 15, but even earlier than the son's return! This is covenantal love, God making the choice for us; it is not because of our works, nor out of some arbitrary coin toss either!*

? Have you ever felt similarly to Paul, when thinking about those in your life who don't know Christ?

*Possible answers: offer possible answers that can be used as a starting point*

## For Discussion and Accountability

? Are there things that drive you to great frustration lately? Have you considered that God is in control even in that situation?

? Is there anyone in your life for whom you grieve that they do not know Christ? Share about them.