**Brief Overview of Romans 9**

Now all of this is a bit misleading as an introduction to Romans 9. But only a bit. It might give the impression that Romans 9 is a treatise on the sovereignty of God. It’s not. Romans 9 is an explanation for why the word of God has not failed even though God’s chosen people, Israel, as a whole, are not turning to Christ and being saved. The sovereignty of God’s grace is brought in as the final ground of God’s faithfulness in spite of Israel’s failure, and therefore as the deepest foundation for the precious promises of Romans 8. For if God is not faithful to his word, we can’t count on Romans 8 either.

Consider this brief overview. Verse 3 shows us that Israel as a whole is accursed and cut off from Christ, "I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." We will deal with Paul’s arguments next week. Only notice now that this is the plight of Israel: "accursed and cut off from Christ." Now that raises a huge problem! What about the word of God – the word of promise to Israel and covenant: "I will be your God, and you will be my people!" ([Jer. 31:33](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer.%2031.33)).

So Paul answers this question in verse 6: "But it is not as though the word of God has failed." You can see what was at stake. It looks as though the word of God has failed! But Paul says no. Then he gives the explanation that launches him into the doctrines of unconditional election and divine sovereignty over human willing. His explanation in verse 6b is: "For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel." Not all physical Israel is true Israel. In other words, the word of God has not failed because the promises were not made to all ethnic Israel in such a way that secured the salvation of every individual Israelite.

Verse 8 says it again: "It is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants." In other words, not all the physical descendants of Abraham are the beneficiaries of the covenant promises. Who then is? And here Paul goes right to the bottom of the explanation. He says, The beneficiaries of the promise are the children of promise. But, we ask, who are these? What are the conditions they must meet to be the "children of promise"?

Paul’s answer to this in verse 11, with the illustrations of Jacob and Esau, confronts us with the ultimate sovereignty of God in choosing who the beneficiaries of the promise will be. In referring to Jacob (who became the heir) and Esau (who did not) Paul says: "for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad [there’s the unconditionality, and here’s the reason for it], so that God's purpose according to election would stand [there’s the explanation deeper than human conditions – God’s sovereign purpose], not because of works but because of Him who calls [notice: he did not contrast works with faith, but with "Him who calls" – not even faith is in view here as a condition], Rebecca was told, "The older will serve the younger."

All this raises the question of God’s justice. Paul is hiding nothing here. He is putting it all out in the open. In verse 14 he says, "What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part?" Paul’s answer is no. And after quoting Moses about God’s freedom to have mercy on who he has mercy (v. 15) he repeats the absolute unconditionality of being chosen by God to be a child of promise. Verse 16: "So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy."

Which leads, then, to the question in verse 19, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" Those are the questions we are confronted with in this chapter. Are all Israel the "children of promise" or only some? If only some, what makes one person a child of promise and another not? If it is ultimately God’s unconditional, free, sovereign electing mercy, then is he unjust? If he is that free to have mercy on whom he wills and harden whom he wills (v. 18), and if it does not depend on man who wills or man who runs (v. 16) then, why does he still find fault?

**The Point of Romans 9: An Explanation and Defense That the Word of God Has Not Failed**

So you can see that the issue of divine election, and human will, and God’s justice, and human blame, and God’s sovereignty are all here in this chapter. But they are not here for their own sake. They are here to explain this burning question: How can God’s elect people, Israel, be accursed and cut off from Christ if the word of God is reliable? How can verse 6a be true: "But it is not as though the word of God has failed." That’s the issue in this chapter.

**Will the Promises of Romans 8 Stand?**

And it is utterly crucial for us as we move to the Lord’s table. Will the promises of Romans 8 stand? Will the blood-bought promises that we Gentiles and Jews are staking our lives on stand? Will God stand by his commitments, sealed with the blood of his Son? Will he work all things together for our good? Will the predestined be called and the called be justified and the justified be glorified? Will he give us all things with him? Will nothing separate us from the love of God in Christ? Is there really now no condemnation, and will there be none tomorrow?

Romans 9 comes after Romans 8 for this utterly crucial reason: It shows that the word of God’s covenant with Israel has not failed, because it is grounded in God’s sovereign, electing mercy. Therefore the promises to the true Israel and the promises of Romans 8will stand! That is the gospel of Romans 9. The promises purchased by the blood of Christ will be performed by the sovereign power of God.

Oh, how thankful, how humble, and how confident we should be as we worship the Lord at his table.