



The Book of
Romans

Small Group Study 3: Romans 9-11

Week Two: Romans 9:14–29

Key Verse

- “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.’” - Romans 9:15 (CSB)

Key Principles

- Our salvation is an act of God’s mercy, as well as God’s choice.
- God is always perfectly just, both in executing judgment and in extending mercy.
- Both God’s judgment and his mercy display his glory to the world.
- God’s mercy is a key feature of Christ’s work to achieve our salvation.
- Election is a term used to describe God’s sovereign choice regarding whom he saves and whom he does not.
- God’s mercy for humankind shines brighter than his judgment.

Read

In Week One, we introduced the complexities of God’s election (9:6, 11). We considered that, at times, God’s faithfulness and his goodness don’t always seem faithful or feel good. It’s important for us to realize that when God’s actions don’t make sense to us or line up with what we think they should be, we shouldn’t jump to discredit his faithfulness or his goodness. If his ways are truly higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8–9), it would make sense that we can’t fully grasp all that he is and all that he does.

These truths help us understand Paul’s motivation for writing this letter, specifically chapters 9–11. Paul writes these words from a place of deep anguish for his own people (the Jews), because many of them had not yet put their faith in Jesus Christ. Many in Israel—Paul’s very kinsmen!—were missing out on the best part of God’s plan. Despite all that God had done for them, they had yet to understand and see clearly his greatest provision—Jesus, the Messiah.

So where does Paul turn for comfort over the anguish he feels for his people? And where does Paul go to understand how God’s salvation works? The answer to both questions might

surprise us: Paul picks up the doctrine of election (introduced in v. 11) in Romans 9:14–29. **Election is a term used to describe God’s sovereign choice regarding whom he saves and whom he does not.**

For many, the idea of election doesn’t sit well. It’s an aspect of God’s character that people wrestle with deeply, and a variety of interpretations exist regarding what election is and how it applies to the Christian life. So, why does Paul turn to election to find comfort in the fact that his kinsmen have yet to receive Christ? Paul sees God’s glory in God’s plan of salvation, and election teaches Paul that God is powerful, faithful, and loving enough to bring all of his plans to completion. Now, knowing the glorious salvation that Paul communicates to us in Romans 9–11, we can rest in God’s merciful plans, righteous judgments, and sovereign choices.

Election, though, does not start with the New Testament. We see the work of election as far back as the Exodus, when God chose to deliver the Israelites from slavery and judge the Egyptians. God chose to harden Pharaoh’s heart in order to demonstrate his power, and he chose to place his love on Israel (Deuteronomy 7:7–8). Though Pharaoh experienced the negative side of God’s election and judgment, God sovereignly worked through Pharaoh’s hard heart to bring mercy to thousands upon thousands of people and put his glory on display for the nations. Paul references this Exodus story in Romans 9 because he hopes that God will bring others to know Christ through the hard hearts of those who have rejected the gospel.

There’s no doubt that the doctrine of election comes with mystery. Some verses describe Pharaoh hardening his own heart, while others say God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Consider these verses from Exodus to see how divine sovereignty and human responsibility work together:

- God hardened Pharaoh’s heart—Exodus 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8.
- Pharaoh hardened his own heart—Exodus 7:22; 8:15; 9:35; 13:5.

Throughout Romans, Paul affirms and expounds on these ideas regarding our salvation. We cannot thwart God’s will for our lives, *and at the same time*, we are responsible for the choices that we make.

Even with Old Testament examples and Paul's explanations, grappling with the concept of election remains difficult, and a variety of interpretations are possible. For example, why does God send some people to hell (Romans 9:19–24)? First, it's important to remember that God never sends people to hell without their participation. Second, Paul explains that our understanding of God's just judgment increases our appreciation for God's mercy. After all, why did God ordain Adam, Pharaoh, Israel, and many others to walk away from him? So that we—as recipients of God's mercy—can truly understand what God did to save us from the judgment we really deserved.

The truth is, God's mercy is the dominant theme of the salvation story throughout history. When we reflect on our own sinful rebellion against the backdrop of God's holiness, we catch a glimpse of just how patient and merciful God is to put up with us all—even with what Paul calls "objects of wrath" (9:22).

Paul hopes that we look at Pharaoh's hard heart, as well as the other Old Testament references in Romans 9:14–29, and learn this basic principle through God's history of salvation: **God's mercy for humankind shines brighter than his judgment.** So how does all this talk of God's election help us understand what God is doing in our communities today?

1. We can take great comfort in knowing that God has our salvation, and our friends' salvation, completely in his hands. He is a just judge and he will always do what is right. He loves your friends even more than you do, and he desires that all of humankind would be saved (1 Timothy 2:4).
2. Notice that the doctrine of election does not make Paul any less energetic in his attempts to share his faith. Paul knows God's plan for the salvation of the world, and he desperately wants to be a part of seeing others come to Christ.
3. When we are concerned about our friends' salvation, we can meditate on God's glory.

When we watch how God has worked salvation through the centuries, we can remember how merciful he truly is. God is both merciful and just, but he leads out in mercy and patience to us sinners. As we study Romans 9:14–29 this week, let's express our gratitude for God's mercy and for our status as "objects of mercy that [God] prepared beforehand for [his] glory" (Romans 9:23)

Study Guide

The following study questions are meant to help us wrestle with the text of Romans and see how the gospel displays God's righteousness. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself. Complete each question *before* your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.



Read Romans 1:16–17 to remain focused on Paul's major points. Then, read Romans 9:14– 29 in preparation for this week's study.

Highlight

What questions does Paul bring up in this chapter? What answers does Paul provide for these questions? (Write down the verses where you find these answers.)

What parts of the Old Testament does Paul quote in Romans 9:14–29? What are the main points of these quotations?

Read back over Romans 9 and write down every example where Paul describes the character of God.

Find and note the verses that highlight God's sovereign choice. What do you learn about salvation in these verses?

Explain

How does Paul explain the doctrine of election in Romans 9:14–29?

Why is it important that Paul grounds his points in Old Testament Scriptures?

How do God's characteristics of mercy and judgment work together in the story of salvation according to Romans 9:14–29?

Romans 9:19–24 presents a rapid series of questions, some of which are answering other questions. What do these questions teach us about resisting God's will? What do these questions teach us about God's mercy and judgment?

Apply

How are you wrestling with Romans 9 to understand your salvation and election?

Based on your study of this passage, how would you explain salvation to a non-Christian?

How would you explain election to a Christian friend who is struggling to understand God's justice?

How does this passage encourage you in your efforts to see your loved ones become believers?

Are there any circumstances in your life right now where it's difficult to trust God's sovereignty? Share them with your small group and pray together.

Respond in Prayer

Each week of this study guide will include a recommended Scripture passage that helps us focus on the faithfulness of our great God. Set aside some time this week to read through the selected

passage and use the prayer prompts below as your guide. We recommend praying through this passage on your own at home *and* together with your small group.

This Week's Prayer Passage: Romans 9:14–29

Read Romans 9:14–29.

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

- **Adoration:** Praise God for being the God of justice, mercy, and compassion (Romans 9:14–18). Praise God for being the Potter, able to shape us and mold us for his glory (9:19–23). Give God glory for being your Creator and giving your life meaning and purpose (9:19–24). Praise God that, thanks to his justice, we never have to fear injustice (9:19).
- **Confession:** Confess to God ways you have doubted his goodness, justice, and mercy when circumstances in your life don't go the way you want them to (9:14, 18). Ask God's forgiveness for how you have tried to resist God's will for your life (9:19). Ask God's forgiveness for how you have not lived up to the title "sons and daughters of the living God" (9:26).
- **Thanksgiving:** Thank God that despite our dishonorable and unworthy actions, he has still chosen to save us (9:27–29). Thank God that he shows mercy and compassion to frail, sinful humans (9:14–18). Thank God for showing us his power and his justice (9:14, 17). Thank God for saving you to bring him honor (9:21). Thank him for specific ways that he's using you to bring him honor.
- **Supplication:** Ask God to save your One and your lost friends, bringing them into God's family (9:26). Ask God to show his power in your life, specifically in the areas where you face great difficulty (9:17). Ask God for wisdom and understanding as we study through Romans. Ask that God would show you his glory as we look deeper into the gospel together.