

# CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY OCTOBER 18, 2026  
ROMANS 9:1-29

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## MERCY WE DON'T DESERVE



It's an honor to worship and study God's Word with you. We've been on a beautiful journey through Romans, and here is where we've been over the past five months:



Today we begin the next section of Romans, **chapters 9–11**, and it's a tough one. This section often creates confusion rather than clarity about God, which can leave us with an inaccurate picture of how God interacts with people.

So rather than leaving you confused, our goal is to focus on the beautiful character of God that shines through this section. It's three chapters, and it will take us six weeks to cover them. So be patient. Today's passage may raise more questions, and some may not be answered until the last week.

If you feel like your questions are not being answered, feel free to email [sermonquestions@ccleb.com](mailto:sermonquestions@ccleb.com).



Here's where we're headed today: we will see that God remains faithful, sovereign, and merciful.

If the book of Romans were a play, **chapter 8** would be the end of an act. And what a powerful act it was! It ended with Paul's elation, joy, hope, and promise. Paul's eyes see hope for life now and hope for the future. Life now, lived by the power of the Holy Spirit. And life in the future where Paul sees beyond the horizon of this world into a beautiful eternity of living in harmony with God forever – where nothing will be able to separate us from his love.

The last three verses of **chapter 8** capture Paul's emotion about the amazing security we have in Christ Jesus. **Romans 8:37-39**. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing! But then the curtain closes on Paul, the lights go dark, and there is silence. (1-2-3)

When the curtain reopens, the scene is different – dark and foreboding. Paul is sitting alone, staring at nothing, deep in thought. He's no longer elated. His countenance is heavy, and he wears the face of anguish. You've seen that face before; it's familiar. Paul has the face of someone who knows that many people are about to experience the horror of eternal separation from God. Key words: separated from God.

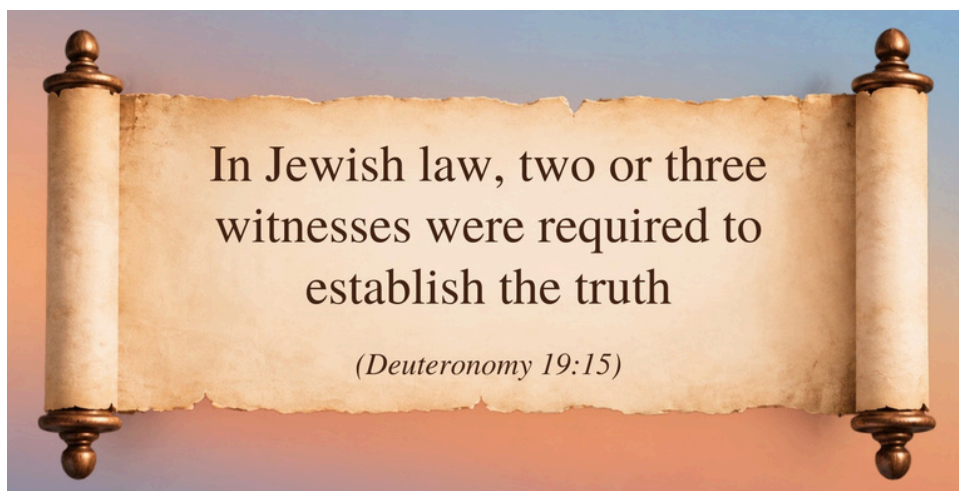
Paul describes himself this way in **Romans 9:2**: "My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief..."

That's how the new act begins in chapter 9. Paul carries over the theme of separation from God into **chapter 9**. **Chapter 8** ended in elation: nothing can separate those in Christ Jesus from the love of God. But **chapter 9** picks up with those who are not in Christ Jesus – his fellow Jews – who will be separated from God forever. Two contrasting pictures. Where is Paul headed with this?

In **verse 1** Paul begins dramatically by citing three witnesses: Christ, his conscience, and the Holy Spirit.

And establishing the truth matters here, because Paul is about to make a crazy statement.

**Chapter 8** ended with Paul convinced of his security in Christ, and the security of everyone who is in Christ.



But at the beginning of **chapter 9**, Paul says he would be willing to give up that security if it would save his fellow Jews. **Verse 3**.

Let me paint the picture like this. Suppose you've worked hard all your life for something you could never obtain on your own. Think of the frustration and despair. Then you're introduced to a man who tells you that through him alone you can have what you've been working for all your life. And he offers it to you for free. But it only comes through him.

Over time you learn to trust him. You accept his offer, and it's amazing! As you hold that precious gift in your hands, it sinks in that it really is yours – forever – and nothing will ever be able to separate you from it. Oh the joy!

But then you look back over your shoulder and remember that you weren't alone in your quest. You see all the other people, millions, just like you, working hard for the very same thing. And for them, too, it's unattainable on their own. You know they will never obtain it unless they turn to the same person you did. That terrifies you.

You tell them how to get what they're looking for – by turning to the man you turned to – but they won't listen. They remain convinced their way is the right way. But you know it won't work. You know it will only end in eternal separation from the very thing they want: God's love and God's presence.

You see, in **verse 1-3** Paul is in anguish for his fellow Jews, who in their quest for God believed the law and their Jewish lineage would make them right with God. Paul wants them to have what he has so desperately that he says – with three witnesses present – that he would be willing to be cut off from Christ himself if it would save them. What kind of love is that?

It seems like an impossible situation for the Jews, doesn't it? Through Christ, Gentiles have received exactly what God wanted them to have: an eternally secure relationship with him, reminiscent of Adam walking with God in the garden.



It almost seems like God's plan for the world failed them. Like perhaps his promise to them never materialized? Like maybe God wasn't faithful to his own people?

Paul expresses all of that in **verse 4-6a**. These were the covenant family God chose in the Old Testament! So did God fail the Jews? That's a dangerous but important question, because it goes straight to the faithfulness of God.

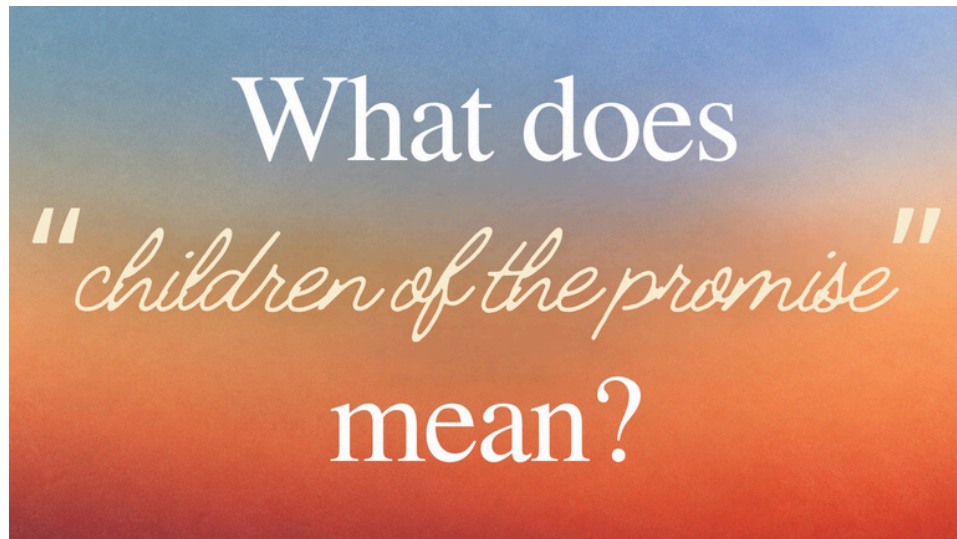
Paul answers emphatically in **verse 6b-7**, and as you'd expect, his answer defends the faithfulness of God.

These verses need some explanation about who Abraham's children are, because in anyone else's world, if you're a descendant of Abraham, you're his child.

But we already know from earlier in Romans that when Paul speaks of Abraham, he speaks of him not just as the father of the Jewish nation but as the father of all who believe. Look at the last line of **Romans 4:16**.

Now jump down to **Romans 4:22-24**. So clearly, when Paul refers to Abraham, he refers to him as the father of those who put their faith and trust in Jesus. And that is the family of Abraham Paul is talking about here in **chapter 9**.

So, in **Romans 9:8-9**, Paul calls this covenant family of faith the children of the promise.



It means Abraham had two types of children. First, biological children, like you and I have, whose children have children, and so on. Second, what Paul calls the children of the promise – and they are the ones Paul is focusing on. So, two types. And who decides which is which? God does!

#### **Romans 9:10-13**

For reference, in **verse 13** Paul is quoting the prophet **Malachi 1:2-3**. Traditional translations use the word “hated” instead of “rejected.” The NLT captures the Hebrew idiom well with “rejected,” because rejection implies a clear choice – and God’s choosing is the point of Paul’s argument.

It’s like this. Suppose you go to the grocery store to buy bananas, and the shelves in the produce section are full of beautiful bananas. Some are just starting to ripen, some are a beautiful bright yellow, and some have tiny brown polka dots – just the way I like them, begging to be slathered in almond butter – sprinkled with sea salt.



Whatever stage of banana you like, it’s available. But you have to choose which bunch you’re taking home. By default, choosing one bunch means all the other bunches are rejected.

Does that mean the other bunches are bad? Not at all! It just means they weren't chosen. Look, just because they're all bananas doesn't mean they end up in your cart. Only the chosen bananas end up on your counter.

In the same way, just because you are a Jew – a biological descendant of Abraham – doesn't mean you are a child of the promise. Only the descendants of the promise are children of the promise. And in the Old Testament the children of the promise became the covenant lineage leading to Christ.

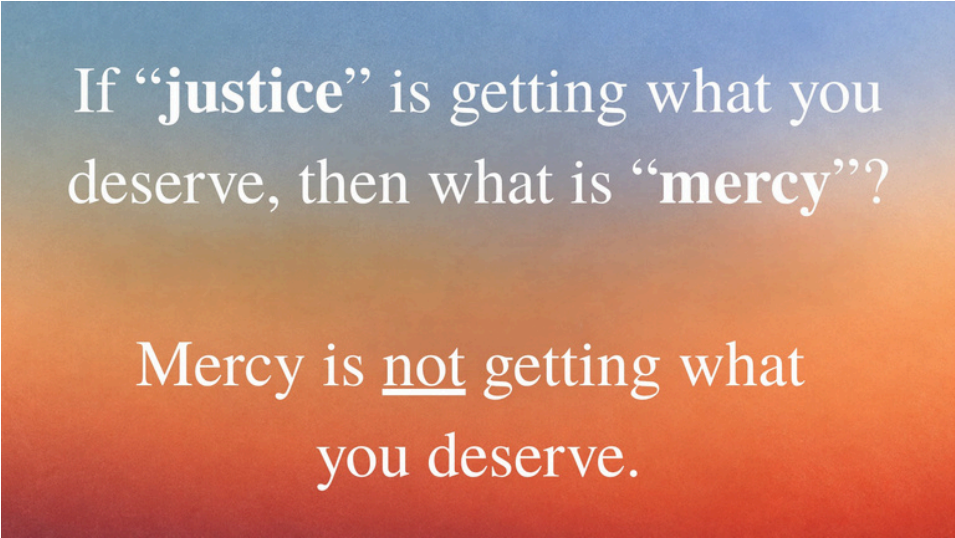
Someone might say, "That's unfair!" That's exactly the response Paul anticipates in **verse 14-15**.

Paul counters the accusation that God is unfair: "Of course not!" And to prove his point, he quotes what God said to Moses about mercy (**Exodus 33:19**).

Here's where a distorted picture of God can emerge if we don't properly understand "mercy". So let me tell a story.

The story is told of a young man on trial for a crime. The court has seen all the evidence, and moments before the judge issues the guilty verdict, the young man's parent runs up to the bench crying, "Please have mercy on my son. Have mercy!"

The judge looks at the parent and says, "All the evidence shows your son committed the crime." And the parent responds, "I'm not asking for justice. I'm asking for mercy."



If “justice” is getting what you deserve, then what is “mercy”?

Mercy is not getting what you deserve.

Let's take that back to the children of the promise. It's clear why God chose Isaac and not Ishmael. Isaac was the son God promised to Abraham. Ishmael was the product of Abraham and Sarah trying to fulfill God's promise on their own. Key words: on their own.

But of Isaac's two sons, Jacob and Esau, why did God choose Jacob and reject Esau to carry on the lineage?

It certainly wasn't because one brother was better than the other. The Bible shows both with significant character flaws. Jacob was the manipulator, the deceiver. Esau is called “godless” in **Hebrews 12:16** – the one who despised his birthright. So God didn't choose based on merit. In fact, **verse 11** tells us that before the twins were born, before they had done anything good or bad, God chose Jacob to be the covenant heir in the line of the promise.

Does that mean God didn't bless Esau? Not at all! Later, God blessed Esau – he became wealthy, had his own land and people, and even commanded his own army. But God chose to show Jacob mercy – Jacob didn't get what he deserved. **verse 16**.

So where is Paul headed with this argument? From a Gentile perspective, it may seem that God or his promises have failed the Jews. But Paul is showing that God's character has not changed. He remains faithful, sovereign, and merciful.

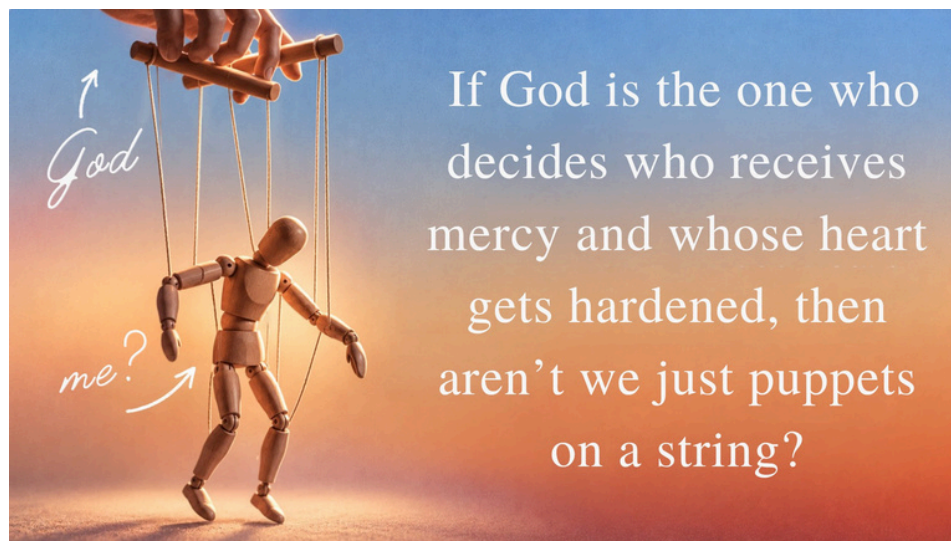
The next story Paul uses to support God's character is Pharaoh and Moses in **verse 17-18**.

We know from Exodus that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. But it's not as if Pharaoh had been a kind, compassionate man full of sacrificial love. No, he was evil through and through. He used anyone he wanted for his own advantage, especially the despised Israelites. That was the bent of his heart. He considered himself a god and expected his people to worship him. In fact, Exodus says more than once that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (**Exodus 8:15, 32**). So God didn't harden a soft heart. He hardened the heart of a king whose heart was already hard, and who had refused to show compassion to foreigners.

And so, God, in his sovereignty, used Pharaoh, the Exodus, and the ten plagues to spread his fame throughout the earth.

So, let's bring that back to Paul's argument. We already know from earlier in Romans that "all have sinned" (**Romans 3:23**) and deserve destruction. And now we know that God chooses to show mercy to some who deserve destruction. Which ones?

Before Paul answers that, he raises the next logical question in **verse 19**. If God chooses who receives mercy, how can he blame people, or "find fault" with them? In other words:



How can God hold anyone responsible for doing what he determined they would do?

Paul's answer in **verse 20-24** shows that the question comes from the wrong perspective. It misunderstands who the players in the scene are: God is the Creator, mankind is the creation, and all of mankind deserves destruction.

Jews and Gentiles are equally deserving of God's wrath. And God does not choose who receives mercy along ethnic lines.

Rather, as **verse 24** says, "we are among those whom he selected, both from the Jews and from the Gentiles." (1-2-3)

Paul opens **verse 25** with "Concerning the Gentiles..." Why does he switch from the lost Jews to the Gentiles?

Keep in mind that part of the reason Paul wrote this long letter was that the church in Rome was divided along ethnic lines. The Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome for a time (**Acts 18:2**), and when they returned, Gentile and Jewish Christians struggled to get along. Much of this letter responds to their division. Paul is showing both groups that they are equally guilty before God and equally justified by faith alone, and thus equally receiving mercy by God's choosing.

Back in **Romans 9:25-26**, Paul quotes the prophet Hosea to show that bringing the Gentiles into God's covenant family of mercy has been part of God's plan all along.

Then in **verse 27-29**, Paul quotes Isaiah to show that the Old Testament also prophesied that only a remnant of the Jews would receive God's mercy as part of his covenant family.

That's our passage for today – its an abrupt end and it still hasn't answered the question: who does God choose to receive his mercy, and why? Stay tuned – we'll get there.

But here's what we do know. Remember that courtroom? We're all standing in it. The evidence is in, and it all points to us. Jew or Gentile, raised in church or never set foot in one – all have sinned, and all deserve destruction. But God – faithful, sovereign, merciful – made a way through Jesus for us not to get what we deserve.

So the question this morning isn't, "Is God fair?" The question is, "What am I going to do with his mercy?"

Some of you are like Esau. God is offering you something priceless, and you're trading it for something that won't last. Your comfort? Your schedule? Your pride? Your own way? Esau later wept over what he lost. Don't be Esau.

Some of you are like Pharaoh. You want to be your own god, sitting on the throne of your own life. And little by little, your heart is getting harder. **Hebrews 3:15** says, "Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts." If God is tugging at your heart this morning, don't resist him.

And some of you are like Paul's fellow Jews. You're still trying to earn it on your own – with your heritage, your good works, your church attendance. Stop pleading your case and start pleading for "mercy". Pray like that parent in the courtroom: "I'm not asking for justice. I'm asking for mercy." That is a prayer God loves to answer.

Now, for those of us who are already in Christ: don't ever get over the mercy you've received. You are Jacob in this story. God didn't choose you because you were better. Like Jacob, you were a manipulator, a deceiver, a rebel – just like the rest of us. And God did not give you what you deserved. **Verse 23** says "he makes the riches of his glory shine on those to whom he shows mercy". That's you!

When was the last time you thanked him for that? Not just for your health, your job, or your family, but for his mercy? Don't let the wonder of mercy fade. Let "thank you" be the first words out of your mouth every morning.

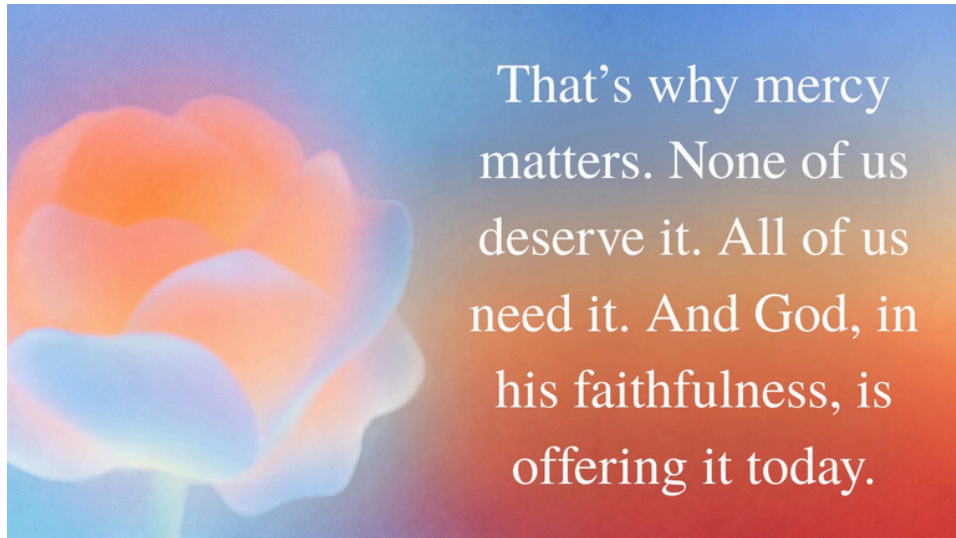


And if you're truly thankful, it will show up the way it did for Paul. Paul ended **chapter 8** secure in God's love and began **chapter 9** in anguish for the people outside of it. That's what mercy does. Once you've received it, you can't stop thinking about those who haven't received it.

So who is your "fellow Jew"? A family member? A coworker? A neighbor?

This week, pray for them by name, and ask God for the courage to tell them about the man who offered you mercy for free.

Because:



# BONUS

## CONTENT:

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**RE: Pharaoh and God hardening his heart** – here's one way to look at it. God is the master chess player, and he accomplishes what he wants with the pieces on the chessboard in two ways. The first group are those who are surrendered to him, willing to be used however and wherever he wants. God uses them beautifully, and they are blessed.

The second group are those who want to be their own god. They have already refused the true God, and the master chess player uses them for his purposes anyway.

Think of Caesar Augustus, whom God used to issue a decree that sent Joseph back to his ancestral town of Bethlehem (**Luke 2:1-4**) – right where the Messiah was prophesied to be born (**Micah 5:2**).

Think of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, whom God used to send Judah into 70 years of exile (**Jeremiah 25:11**). And then Cyrus of Persia, who conquered Babylon and released the captives near the end of those 70 years (**Ezra 1:1-4**) – just as Isaiah had prophesied, even naming him (**Isaiah 44:28-45:1**).

Pharaoh was just one of many rulers who made themselves their own god, whom the true God, Yahweh, used for his purposes on his chessboard.