

God's 'change of course'. What about the Jews?

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[0 : 00] Now we're going to turn and look into Romans chapter 9. So if you have a Bible or can look across at a Bible, you would find that very, very helpful.

We're simply going to go through what it says in the Bible and try to understand it and try to see what it means to us as we're sitting here today. It's not such an easy task, so I'm going to ask Chris Fry if he would kindly pray as we come to do that.

Thank you very much. So just to echo the thoughts that Chris expressed in the prayer, when we come to God's Word, which is what we're doing now, it is a very significant thing.

And if the attitude with which we come and the expectation that we have Jesus said the measure that you give is the measure that you get.

So let's come to this attentively. Let's come with an eye on the promise of God that if we seek Him, He will let us find Him.

[1 : 18] And if we ask, He will answer. Well, we're in Romans chapter 9, and let me ask you the question, what sort of God do you have?

Or if you're not a Christian, and you don't particularly want to be a Christian, what sort of God is it that you are saying you don't want to have? There's all sorts of gods.

For example, the God who cares but has no power to make things happen. So people have thought of such a God, perhaps a God who loves everybody, but can't make things happen because human free will is so strong that this God can't do anything about it.

So this God, for example, can't promise that anybody will ever get to heaven because human free will stands in the way and maybe nobody will believe Him and everybody who does believe Him will all change their minds and this God would be powerless to do anything about it.

Or perhaps this God who runs everything like a machine but is very distant and very impersonal and very uncaring.

[2 : 42] I think that this God took over quite a number of churches in England during the 17th century.

It's like the God of what's called deism, a God who sort of runs everything like a machine but is very impersonal. Is that the God that you have?

Is that the God that you reject? Well, let's come to the Bible because the God that the Apostle Paul, so he's the guy who wrote Romans that was read to us, he says a number of things about the God that he worships.

Well, Paul didn't say this, it was Jesus that said this, God whose word cannot be broken. God whose word cannot be broken.

That's different from most of us, isn't it? Because we break our word. We'll say, we'll see you at 10-2 and we don't turn up until quarter past and we've broken our word.

[3 : 51] But this is God whose word cannot be broken. This is the God, says Paul, who works all things according to his purposes. So the God of the Bible doesn't say, well, you know, there's things there, I'd like it to be such and such a way, but I can't do much about it, I'm sorry.

This is the God that Paul worships, is a God who works all things according to his purposes. So from whether you catch the bus tomorrow when you thought you were going to catch the bus, to the furthest galaxy and the smallest subatomic particle, that's all in his hands.

this is a God who does care about people like us. This is a God who has decided he wants to save sinners. He saves them as they trust him.

This is a God who offers salvation to the whole world through Jesus Christ. That's the sort of God that really exists.

That's the God of the Bible. And that's the God whom Paul is telling us about. But the more you think about it, the more amazing and actually the more difficult it is.

[5 : 16] So what about this that Paul's thinking about? This is the God who is in the Bible from Abraham Moses and King David and the birth of Jesus and all of those things.

But the people of the Bible the people who form most of the Bible that's the Jews are not Christians. Almost by definition.

And they largely reject Jesus Christ. And the more you think about it the more that is a bit of a problem. how does that work?

How can it be that the God of the Bible is supposed to be the God of the Bible and yet most of his people apparently reject him?

Does that mean it's all gone wrong? So that's what the question is that we're going to look at.

[6 : 16] Has it all gone wrong? and I want to put it into a context so it says Romans but it's short for the letter to the Romans which I suppose is short for the letter which Paul wrote a long time ago to a church in Rome and the church was a church of Jews and of Gentiles.

Gentiles please try and have in your mind the huge gulf between the Jews and the Gentiles the two great division in humankind and think then of a church a Christian church where there are Jews and Gentiles and the Jews are thinking about the Gentiles you lot you're wild you're coarse and you're unworthy and I don't know why God's got anything for you at all and the Gentiles on the other hand are thinking of the Jews they are narrow they are old fashioned and out of date with what God's doing and really undesirable and if you have that sort of thing which people might be tempted to think of one another in a church you've got a recipe for division and all sorts of unhelpful things and what Paul is trying to do at considerable length is try to explain to the Jew please don't think of the Gentiles like that and saying to the Gentiles please don't think of the Jews like that there's a deeper understanding of God's purposes that will enable you to accept one another and live together and work together and what Paul is wanting is fruit of Christian mission and a springboard for Christian mission to the rest of the world he wants to see in the church of Rome a group of people where each one appreciates the richness of the other and where they can work hand in hand as it were to praise God so I put a little speech bubble with a P so together they can praise God and together they can speak the gospel to other men and women and Paul thinks this is absolutely this is so important that the church in Rome and indeed everybody else who reads the letter afterwards would understand this and be able with one mouth to glorify God and to say this is an absolutely brilliant message that we want to speak into the world so that's that's what he's that's what he's trying to do so is Mark here no because I always look for Mark because I was going to say does that make sense and Mark usually says yes yeah thank you Mark yeah good right okay well let's let's go through it verse by verse then so if you have the Bible there let's look at what Paul says he's a Jew of course as you know a Jew who became a Christian in a remarkable way and he says this I speak the truth in Christ I am not lying my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers those of my own race the people of Israel that's a pretty moving statement isn't it I have unceasing anguish in my heart and I could wish that I was cursed for the sake of my brothers my own race the people of Israel so here Paul is perhaps giving us an insight for the people who say to him you're only interested in the Gentiles Paul you've forgotten your own people you're disloyal to them you've betrayed them and you know people criticizing him like that and Paul's saying

I really am not that's not where I am I really really am concerned for my own people and if you look at it carefully you'll see three times he talks about the genuineness of this do you notice he says I speak the truth I am not lying my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit so three times he says don't get me wrong on this I'm not spinning you a line I'm not pretending I really really am concerned and he says it's a painful thing to me I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart and if you think about it he could have said that a lot quicker he could have just said I'm upset but do you notice how he piles it up he doesn't just say I have sorrow he says I have great sorrow and he doesn't just say I have great sorrow he says

I have anguish and he doesn't just say I have anguish he says I have unceasing anguish and he says it's in my heart it's deep within me I am really and truly concerned and he doesn't stop there he says it's a selfless concern a lot of people are concerned about something that benefits them have you noticed that has that feature of human behaviour ever crossed your mind so I was at a

conference earlier where they were talking about the government and whether they would bring in a minimum unit price for alcohol which would help a lot of people but the landlords would make less money out of it there's self interest you know there's money at stake bankers need I say more but Paul says my concern here is a selfless one

[12 : 46] I could wish for their benefit even if it cost me everything I had I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers those of my own race the people of Israel what it's a very strong statement isn't it and I want to say first of all what admirable concern that is it's an admirable thing it's not to do with finance he's not going to make any money out of this it's not to do with power he's not going to gain any power over anybody it's not even temporal meaning to do with this world it's to do with the deepest good of these other people and I stop and say do you feel any of this concern yourself could you say and I hope you could say something like this about your family you could say

I am really concerned about my sister brother mum and dad children grandchildren I am concerned well if you're Swiss I'm concerned for the Swiss people if you're Chinese I'm concerned for the millions upon millions of Chinese people if you're a Tamil I'm concerned for the Tamil people if you're a Londoner I'm concerned for Londoners I'm concerned for my children I'm concerned for my family and I just stop and say you do have that concern don't you if you're a Christian you do don't you We're pretty poor Christians if we read a passage like that and say, well, I don't care about people.

How appalling. So I think Paul gives us an insight here into a genuine Christian compassion. I long, I pray for the deepest good, that means to say the eternal good, the good that only Jesus Christ can do for, you know, you fill in the blank.

And I know that we've prayed together, haven't we, as a church, and we've prayed this way for family members, and we've prayed this way for our city, and we've prayed this way for the people up and down London Road, and so on.

So, nevertheless, it's an admirable concern, and perhaps we should ask God for more of that. And I can't help but point out as we pass, it's very like Jesus.

[15 : 38] Jesus, who when they were hammering the nails into his hand, said, Father, forgive them, but they don't know what they're doing. Jesus was very like that.

And where Paul could say, I could almost wish that I were cursed and cut off, Jesus actually was cursed and cut off, wasn't he?

That's the heart of the Christian message. The enormous lengths that Jesus went to because of his concern for other people. He was concerned for the salvation of, and notice, Paul says it's my brothers, my own race, and that would be true about Jesus, but it would also be true about Jesus, that they were his enemies.

He was concerned for the people who were crucifying him. He was concerned for the people who hammered the nails in, and the people who insulted him, and the people who wrongly convicted him.

That's an amazing love, isn't it? To love one's enemies. Well, there's, first of all, then the concern that Paul had. Let's move on now, secondly, to the reasons for this concern.

[17 : 00] So, I'll read the next verses. He says, I'm concerned for them. Theirs is the adoption of sons.

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 Christ, who is God over all, forever praised.

Amen. And what's he saying here? What is he saying here? He's saying, I'm so, you know, I'm so worked up about this, because embedded in Jewish history, and in Jewish tradition, and in the Jewish scriptures, and everything, are things that are fulfilled in Christians.

You have to be a Christian to get the fulfillment of it, and they haven't got it. It's worth working it through, actually, one by one.

Theirs is the adoption of sons. That's what it says, isn't it? Theirs is the adoption of sons. You might remember in Exodus, chapter 4, verse 22, God says to Pharaoh, Israel is my firstborn son.

[18 : 31] Let my son go, that he may worship me. And of course, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, says, no. And he sets himself up to oppose God. And there's like the battle of the sons, isn't there?

Because God says, let my son go, and in the end, you remember that Pharaoh, Pharaoh and all the Egyptians lose their firstborn sons. Theirs, says Paul, is the adoption of sons.

That's the identity, that's the aspiration of the nation of Israel. But the people who have actually achieved it are the ones in chapter 8, verse 15. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you, Roman Christians, you received the spirit of sonship.

And the people who can truly cry, Abba, Father, to God, are believers in Jesus Christ. Let's look at the next one. It says, theirs is the glory, or theirs is the divine glory.

And the glory was very much part, again, of the story of Israel. You remember in the tabernacle or the tent that there was a pillar of fire and cloud which wonderfully and miraculously came down and guided them.

[19 : 57] Do you remember that story? The glory of God descended and the glory of God in the form of a cloud came to the temple. And when later on they built the temple, it was filled with smoke or cloud or something like that, so much that people couldn't go in and the priests couldn't do what they were going to do because of the glory.

And so there it is in a sort of embryonic form in its initial form in the history of Israel and Paul says, glory, that's what we're after. But who gets the glory?

Who is in line for glory? Chapter 8, verse 18 says, I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

He says, we're the people headed for glory. Those whom he called he also justified, those he justified he also glorified.

And the glory that the Bible was pointing to is fulfilled in Christians. And then he talks about the covenants.

[21 : 11] It's interesting that Paul uses that in the plural. There's is the covenants. So he clearly believed there were a number of different covenants or promises embedded in the history of Israel.

And he refers to that in 11, verse 27, where he quotes from the Old Testament and says, this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.

This is my covenant with them when I take away their sins. So there's at least one reference to a covenant which is to do with taking away sins. And how do you get your sins taken away? Well, you don't get your sins taken away by being born into any ethnic group.

You have your sins taken away by belonging to Jesus Christ. The law giving. Let's just look at the law giving.

Chapter 9 where he said, theirs is the receiving of the law. What a huge privilege of all the ethnic groups in the world. It was this group that God came to speak to.

[22 : 22] It was this group that God showed himself to and showed particularly his ethical standards in the Ten Commandments and all of that.

That's the privilege they have, says Paul. But then if you ask, in whom is the law fulfilled? Where does that get fulfilled?

Chapter 8 verse 4, he has said, the righteousness, the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in something who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.

Anybody like to tell us fulfilled in who? Chapter 8 verse 4, us. Fulfilled in us, says Paul.

And then he talks about the temple worship, two words in English for one word, in Greek, the latria, the worship, and that, you know, there was a huge paraphernalia for worship in the Old Testament, wasn't there?

[23 : 30] You had priests, you had special clothes, you had holy places, you had incense, you had sacrifices, had all huge paraphernalia. And he says, well, that's what they had in the Old Testament.

It was aiming at something. The father was seeking real worshippers but real worship isn't done by putting on fancy dress and it isn't done by smelling things and throwing them around and it isn't done by having holy places and holy days.

It's done by, well, chapter 12 verse 1 tells us what latria latria is done by. It's done by Christians who do this.

I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship.

This is worship. It's when you wake up in the morning and when you've managed to drag a cup of coffee inside you, you say, Lord, I don't know what sort of day I've got coming up but I offer myself

to you today whether it's a good day or a bad day, I need your help and I want to serve you and Paul says, that's worship.

[24 : 52] That's what it's all been about and I'm longing to see a world full of worship as people offer their bodies as living sacrifices and it's Christians who do that.

Offering of, I'll put, ourselves. And then he also refers to the promises. Theirs, says Paul, are the promises.

Theirs is the temple worship. Theirs are the promises. So when Jewish people read their scriptures, which of course would be what Christians would call the Old Testament, so that part of the Bible, putting it as a slight oversimplification, but when they read that there are promises.

We actually sang some of them this morning. When we sang Psalm 72, it was a promise about the king who will one day reign from sea to sea and shore to shore and there's loads of promises in the Old Testament and the promises, promises of all sorts of things put in all sorts of ways using all sorts of vocabulary, but 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 20 tells us how they're all fulfilled.

2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 20 tells us how they're all fulfilled. I think, ah, 2 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, chapter 1 verse 20.

[26 : 20] 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 20. How are they all fulfilled? Roger, what does it say in your Bible? 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 20. No matter how many promises God has made, yes, in Christ.

So through him the young man is spoken by us, the glory of God. Thank you. And what Paul seems to be saying, and I think it is what he's saying, is all the promises are fulfilled in one place, in Jesus Christ.

That's where they're fulfilled. And then he goes on to say, well, of the Jews, genetically, biologically, the people from whom the Christ comes is the Jews.

Jesus himself says salvation is from the Jews. And he is the descendant of the fathers, the patriarchs, and, you know, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and so on.

And from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is himself a Jew, but he is also God over all forever blessed. And he says, just think about it.

[27 : 28] Think about it. It's a bit like preparing a meal, specially preparing a meal and getting all the ingredients together and you can smell them and I'm trying not to do Jamie Oliver as you whack things in there and just pile them around.

You're preparing the meal and the person that you've prepared it for doesn't turn up. And you say, I've made this amazing meal and the people I've prepared it for haven't turned up.

Well, let's get somebody else in. Would you like, would you, because it's all ready and would you like to come? And would you like to, I know, but it's ready. And he says, this is the way it is that God has down through the centuries, if you like, prepared the meal, set up this wonderful party and the people who've had the invitations all through their history haven't turned up.

And he says, so I've invited riffraff to come instead. That's you lot. That's us, the Gentiles. And they can come and enjoy this feast. So he gives the rich meal to others and he says, but you know, do you not detect the the irony of this?

Oh, it was prepared for these people and I long in my heart that they should come. That's what he's saying, isn't it? And I think by extension you could apply this to other privileged groups who are prepared and privileged but missing out.

[29 : 05] I think by extension you could apply it to other groups. So I would say you could apply it to Catholicism. You could say, think of all the people who are brought up knowing there is a God, knowing there is Jesus Christ and yet never being told clearly about the once for all sacrifice that he's made.

Never being invited to come by faith alone. Now I'm sure there are Catholic people who are true believers but it's because they've got the wrong end of the stick because they are not taught what the Bible really says and I think it's a terrible thing.

One could have unceasing anguish in one's heart for, perhaps Stefano thinks about this for his fellow Italians. How I would long that they should, they have so much and yet they miss out.

And I think of Orthodox people so as you know my wife's family are Greek Orthodox and they have names like Glory of God and names like Wonder of the Holy Spirit and they have, they say, this is the place where St. Paul was crucified, not crucified, what am I talking about?

This is where he was persecuted, the, you know, in Paphos. They say, we've got all this stuff and you say, but isn't Jesus Christ great? And they say, oh, well, we have priests.

[30 : 34] We've got all the priests and the saints and you say, but you're missing out. This is all meant to point you in the direction of Jesus Christ and you're missing it. And you could add to that list.

You could add to that list. I hope you're not on the list. Maybe you are but maybe you have, you can see that as Paul would have his Jewish listeners see, there's something, you know, a meal's been prepared and you haven't got there yet.

There's a wonderful richness but you haven't quite got the key to it. You've got various bits of the jigsaw but they haven't yet clicked together. So here is Paul's concern for the Jews.

Let's move on. And now Paul wants to deal with an objection. We've seen his concern, we've seen the reasons or some of the reasoning behind his concern but now he has to deal with an objection and it's there in verse 6.

It is not as though God's word had failed. Let's just ponder this for a moment because what his objector is saying is now Paul you've built up this picture.

[31 : 50] I've got the idea. There's the Jews. They have all these things in the Bible you're telling me and yet they don't believe in Jesus Christ. Seems a bit strange. Do you not think then that God got it wrong?

Do you not think then that if what you're saying is true and Christianity is the way that God's word has failed? Now Paul says it is not as though God's word has failed but clearly somebody is saying to him I think God's word has failed.

What does he mean by God's word? Well I think he means the things that he's said obviously including the things that he's promised and including the things that he's gone on oath to say the covenants.

So I'm just thinking of a promise like he said to Abraham I will bless your seed and in you will all the families of the earth be blessed.

Things like that. Do you remember Abraham way back in Genesis and God saying I'm just going to take you and I'm going to make from your family blessing for the whole earth.

[32 : 59] Sort of a big statement of policy and Paul's opponent might say he got that wrong didn't he? Because the Jews don't believe. And Paul might say hold on a minute what are you saying that God promised?

Are you saying that God promised that everyone biologically descended from Abraham will be blessed according to his promise? Is that what you're saying? Because God never promised that. Let's just strike that one out. He never actually promised that and I'll show you that in a moment. But before we go any further let me point out what Paul does not say Paul does not say God was beaten by human free will.

Paul does not use the free will defence. Paul does not say oh you see all God's promises are sort of subject to people's approval. You know it's like laws in the houses of parliament they've got to be signed off by the queen.

So if you don't give God permission to do what he said he'll do then obviously you can't do it. Paul does not use that defence. He's saying no no no God's word doesn't fail and actually you don't have to give God permission to do things.

[34 : 19] God will do them anyway. It doesn't work like that. But what he does say notice please his exact word it is not as though God's word had failed for not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.

not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. That's interesting isn't it? It wasn't a blanket genetic biological ethnic promise.

Not all Israel are Israel. Actually Paul's been saying this all the way through. Saying you need to redefine your understanding of a Jew because a Jew is not just somebody who's been circumcised or has a particular ethnic background.

The real Jew is somebody who God has dealt with in the heart. Not all Israel are Israel. The promise was never a strictly biological one and the promise does not fail.

Let's look at some examples of this. So we're looking in verse 7. Not nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children.

[35 : 33] Paul hang on you're not making sense here. Paul says I am. Just think it through. Not all the descendants count as the children who will sort of inherit the promise or whatever it is.

Something like that. So here's an example. Abraham do you remember he had not just one son he had two sons. The first son he had was Ishmael and you remember that he had Ishmael with a different mother not his own wife with Hagar the servant girl and Ishmael he says well yeah he's technically a descendant but that's not the route that God chose.

Let's read it again nor because they are his descendants are they all his children on the contrary it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.

In other words it is not the natural children who are God's children but it is the children of the promise who were regarded as Abraham's offspring for this is how the promise was stated at the appointed time I will return and Sarah will have a son.

So Ishmael was already born but Sarah that's Abraham's ridiculously elderly wife would conceive and have a baby because God had promised it and Paul is making this sort of set of distinctions between Ishmael who's technically a descendant but not in the sense that God is going to count it he's natural or literally according to human power the power of the flesh when I say flesh I don't mean that there's anything unclean about human reproduction I'm just saying it's by human power alone and Isaac on the other hand who is the child the inheriting child and he is born as a result of promise God's promise

[37 : 56] God's word and hence God's supernatural power it is through this line that the offspring will be verse 7 NIV says reckoned the underlying word is called and in verse 8 it is the children of the promise who were regarded as Abraham's offspring perhaps better to call them reckoned and he's saying even if you go right back to the beginning there was always more to it than simply being born in the right family it was God has always done his stuff by promises and by calling and by what he chooses to do as he reckons and regards people in certain ways so there's Abraham and then he says let me give you another example so let's go to the next example not only that verse 10 but

Rebecca's children had one and the same father our father Isaac so there's Isaac married to Rebecca and he says now just think about the story of course they would have been very familiar with the story I don't necessarily expect all of us have got the same familiarity but what happened a promise was made the elder will serve the younger so it's a promise about the superiority of the younger son which is not the way it normally goes so God is saying that's why you do it this is the way I do it and he pains to point out that this was made before the twins were born before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad so he says God did this it wasn't to do with their deserving he didn't give them marks out of ten for how well they'd done because they hadn't done anything yet he'd already decided before they'd done anything and he interestingly says we hadn't done anything good or bad in order that God's purpose in election might stand not by works but by him who calls and if you notice he's building up the same sort of vocabulary here he says purpose what God is doing is fulfilling his purpose and Paul has no time for any idea of a God who can't do his plans he says no no

God in an amazing way is working it all out according to his purpose and then he says a bit more about his purpose he says it's his election perhaps another word for that would be choice so don't think about a general election where everybody votes and you end up with a decision that way it isn't a general election it's God himself who decides he casts the only vote there is and he decides it and he says this is how it is it's God's purpose in election and then he says a little bit more about it he says it's according to God's call so it's not by works so God doesn't say right let's have these two kids and we'll set them running 100 metres see which one gets there first and I'll choose that one God says no before they do anything I'm going to call this one which is a little bit scary actually isn't it

I mean the whole passage is a bit scary so here we are let's get them born shall we they're twins they're twins you see there's very little to separate them although in fact when they grow up Esau turns out to be a rather hunky outdoor sort of guy and Jacob seems to be a bit of an indoor guy playing on the Xbox and things like that and scheming things because Jacob means schemer he's not very nice person really and strangely God says this is a later quote Esau I have hated and Jacob I have loved don't get too bogged down with the hated it's usually equivalent to rejected but even that is something worth pondering I rejected this one the one who was rather hunky and you know outdoor probably had a mountain bike and designer stubble and things like that

I'm not interested in him that one was rather geeky a little bit unpleasant but that's the one I'm going to bless Esau I have rejected Jacob have I loved it's God's purpose his choice his call his call and Paul takes it further as he says talk about scary examples let me give you another scary example I'm going to talk now about the great enemy of the Jews Pharaoh let's see what it says verse 14 what then shall we say is God unjust not at all I'm not quite sure whether he answers that question at this point he's certainly in the things we're looking at this morning he certainly doesn't tie up all the loose ends but he asks the question is God unjust and says no it's not unjust it's not unjust it's not unjust

[44 : 07] I will have mercy 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 man's desire or effort but on God's mercy it's a bit of a statement that isn't it in the authorised version a little bit more literally it says it is not of the one who wills or the one who runs but on God's mercy rather humbling thought so by willing and trying he says that won't get you there and by running and putting in effort and working hard on other people he says that won't get you there either actually it's purely mercy it's purely mercy and it has a rather scary flip side as well let's do

Pharaoh then and the slaves in Egypt Pharaoh you remember opposed Moses Moses says God says these are my people Ezra is my firstborn son let my firstborn son go that he may worship me Pharaoh says no and Moses says the Lord says that you do that and Pharaoh says who's the Lord that I should take any notice of him so he begins to set himself up against God and it says that it is through a process it is through a process but nevertheless bottom line God hardens whom he hardens and has mercy has mercy on these poor slaves it does not depend on man's desire or effort but on God's mercy totally counter intuitive isn't it because people think God blesses those who help themselves or God bless you know if I've been good God will bless me and he says it actually really isn't like that for the scripture says to

Pharaoh I have 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 not human will not according to human effort but God's mercy for his glory it's rather humbling isn't it because it puts God at the centre and it puts us sort of on the periphery it's not all about us strangely enough it's about a God who decides to show mercy and a God who even decides whom to harden and let me just ask you whether you would prefer it to be some other way would you like it to be a God who doesn't show mercy but who do you who negotiates with the highest bidder would you like it to be like that so that you really have got to have something and you come to

God and say look what I've done and God says well that's not quite good enough let's try you and look what I've done quite impressive anybody do anything better look at me and then of course you'd face the fact that nobody's good enough for God is that what you would prefer or would you prefer a God who has mercy on whom he will have mercy and people can come to God and instead of saying look at me like the Pharisee do you remember who said look at me what I've done I pray and I give money and I do all sorts of stuff and the do you remember the chap next to him said God have mercy on me I'm such a sinner and God have mercy on that chap that's the way it is so God who deals with us in mercy not according to what we deserve and Paul says that's!

the way it is grace I suppose in ordinary English grace means being rather beautiful graceful but in the Bible grace means giving people good things they don't deserve in the Bible yeah we're a bit puzzled by that God is a God of grace in other words the Bible doesn't do the John F Kennedy version of religion don't think what God can do for you think what you can do for God do remember that's what he said about his country didn't he he said don't think of what your nation can do for you but what you can do for your country is that what he said it was about what you can contribute and the Bible doesn't go there as its first point I mean the Bible does want us to serve God but the first point is not what we bring to God but what he does for us it's not a beauty contest and it's not like [49 : 27] X factor in fact the kingdom of God is the kingdom in which the losers the ugly people and the ones who can't sing in tune or dance properly the incompetence and the failures and actually people who are rather unpleasant God says yeah here's the meal why don't you come in and share it the people who I prepared it for for hundreds of years can't be bothered what about you guys mercy and this has a number of effects and I don't think I can work my way through all of them but here's one thing it removes human confidence it really kicks the legs from underneath anybody who would like to say look at me God look how good I am look at me because God says I'm really not

impressed I don't do it that way so stop trying to build yourself up in that sense

I'm interested in people who come to me saying Lord have mercy on me a sinner people who say I know I've failed think of the woman at the well that Jesus spoke to he didn't have to make her feel like a piece of rubbish but he just said I know where you're at I know what you're like she said yeah I know too and Jesus said come and drink living water from me it removes human confidence and it leaves room for real hope because maybe you're sitting there thinking actually this is interesting because I actually haven't done particularly well and if you look at my CV it's not particularly inspiring and you might even be thinking I've done a lot of things wrong in my life a lot that I look back on with great regret but are you telling me that that doesn't disqualify me because God offers mercy so you see that gives you some hope doesn't it it's not a guarantee because we haven't got to that bit yet but it does open the door doesn't it actually God could be interested in people like me maybe God might bless me if he's not doing it on a beauty contest but some other way maybe I can maybe there's room for me well we didn't deal with is God unjust and perhaps we'll look at that when we come to the next part of the passage next week but what I think we can conclude even this far is that it's a bit daunting to us isn't it it puts us in the place where God demands reverent humility from us

I don't mean that in a dehumanizing way but in a properly humanizing way the God who really exists is not a God whom we control he's not on our level that we can negotiate with him and he's got a few weak points that we can exploit he's high above us he's not a God whom we can control but he is a!

in whose hands we can rest he's a God who is big enough and wonderful enough that we can rest in his hands and we can rest in his hands I suppose gladly that would be a great thing you're actually in his hands if you're reluctant I don't think that's the right way to be doing it we can rest in his hands trustingly we can rest in his hands with wonder and worship oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor who has ever given to God that God should repay him for from him and through him and to him are all!

[54 : 02] things and to him be the glory forever and let's add to that what Paul had right at the beginning of the passage a genuine gospel concern we long to see other people share the riches of this as well let's stop there