

OUR RELATIONSHIPS

ROMANS 9-16

KENNETH SCHENCK



Indianapolis, Indiana

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CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Week 1. Everyone Who Calls Is Called	7
Week 2. The Mystery of God's Ways	24
Week 3. Renewed Minds	41
Week 4. Daytime Living	58
Week 5. Purity of Intention	75
Week 6. Solidifying Relationships	92

INTRODUCTION

Paul wrote Romans as he neared the end of a decade-long ministry in Greece and Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). He first believed in Christ sometime around the year A.D. 33, so the book of Romans came some twenty-five years later as he neared the end of his ministry. Now Paul felt the Spirit calling him west to Spain. He hoped to use Rome as a launching point for a mission there, where the gospel had not yet made a significant impact.

It was in this context that Paul wrote Romans. He wished to introduce himself to the Roman churches and perhaps defend himself against those who condemned his teaching. Accordingly, Romans is the most systematic presentation of Paul's understanding of why non-Jews, Gentiles, could be part of God's people without becoming circumcised and converting to Judaism. Paul may also have heard a few rumors about the Roman churches. He wrote to the Romans with sound advice on how "conservatives" and "liberals" could best get along with one another.

This book presents six weeks of Bible studies on Romans 9–16. Originally, Romans did not have chapter divisions; those were added more than a thousand years after Paul died. I have divided Romans this way for practical reasons, so that this collection of Bible studies covers roughly half of Romans. Following Paul’s format, we would group the first eleven chapters as Paul’s more theological teaching and the last five chapters as Paul’s more practical exhortations.

Each week of this book follows a particular theme and covers a chapter or more of Romans. Within each week, there are five days of reflection on the text, looking at a few verses each day. The first two weeks work through Romans 9–11, the end of the first major section of Romans, its “theological” section. Romans 9–11 have given rise to some major debates among Christians, but we also find some of Paul’s clearest statements on how one “signs up” to escape God’s coming judgment.

Then the last four weeks work through Romans 12–16, the more practically focused section of the letter. In these chapters, Paul addressed matters that were directly relevant to the Roman churches to which he was writing, matters that also relate either directly or indirectly to our world today as well. The aim of this book is to experience life transformation by studying the words of God revealed to the Romans through Paul. The goal is to hear God speak to you through Scripture and then live faithfully to his Word through the power of the Holy Spirit.

WEEK 1

EVERYONE WHO CALLS IS CALLED

Romans 9:1–10:13

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”

—ROMANS 10:9–10

DAY 1

ANGUISH FOR ISRAEL

Romans 9:1-5

INTRODUCTION

In the first eight chapters of Romans, Paul argued that only faith can make one right with God, no matter if one is a Jew or Gentile. In chapters 9–11, Paul mourned Israel’s rejection of the Messiah, but he also looked forward to its eventual salvation.

ENGAGE

Paul wanted to make it clear that he did not hate Israel. In fact, if he could have taken the place of those who had not accepted Jesus as Messiah, he would have. He was simply presenting the truth—that his people had not believed. How tragic for this great people with whom God had made such covenants and given the law! These were the people to whom God entrusted the temple, the focal point of his presence on

earth. They were the people of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the people to whom God gave such key promises. Even Jesus has his human ancestry through Israel. How unbelievable that God’s people by and large had not believed!

EXAMINE

We can translate the second half of Romans 9:5 in two ways. The NIV translates it as “from them is . . . Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!” By contrast, the New American Standard Bible reads, “From them . . . comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever.” Certainly we believe both as Christians. But since the original Greek did not have punctuation, we have to determine which meaning Paul more likely had in mind. Most translations go with the first option, because we as Christians believe that Jesus was in fact God. However, Paul almost never flat out called Jesus “God.” In the end, we cannot know with certainty which meaning Paul originally had in mind.

EXPLORE

It is not easy to speak with a prophetic voice among your own people, although certainly some people enjoy causing problems and stirring up controversy. However, this does not seem to be the case with Paul, who did not start out following Jesus and paid a great price when he finally did answer God's calling. Paul's first choice was clearly that his people would believe. He would willingly have traded places with them if he could have. But he chose to be obedient, to be faithful to the message despite opposition, persecution, and accusation. Could you do the same? Are you bold enough to speak the truth in love even when your own family, church, or people might reject you for it?

“Those who think Paul has reneged on his heritage, Paul would insist, have misunderstood both the heritage and Paul. Paul's claim is precisely that he is being *true* to his heritage in taking the gospel to the Gentiles.”

—JAMES D. G. DUNN

PRAYER

Father, give me the courage to share the good news of your anointed One, even when it brings opposition from those closest to me.