

GOD'S SOVEREIGN MERCY



ROMANS 9-11



**TERM 4
GROWTH GROUP STUDY**

INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS

WHO:

Paul identifies himself as the author of this letter in Romans 1:1. In Romans 1:7 he addresses the letter to 'all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people'. This is a letter from the great apostle to the Christians living in in one of the greatest cities of the ancient world. There was probably more than one gathering in the city, but there was at least one gathering meeting in Priscilla and Aquila's house (16:4-5).

Paul did not establish the church in Rome. We are not told in the New Testament exactly how the gospel made its way to the city, or how the church was established, and yet there are clues which can help us form something of a picture.

There is evidence of a Jewish community in Rome from the second century B.C. The Jewish population of Rome grew significantly after Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem in 63 B.C., when he captured Jewish prisoners and led them back to Rome, where they were eventually granted freedom.

According to Acts 2:10, some of these Jews were in Peter's audience at Pentecost. It's possible, although not explicit that these were among those converted and baptised in Acts 2:41.

In any case, given the importance of Rome (all roads lead to Rome) it was inevitable that the Christian message would reach the city. After Saul (later Paul) persecuted the church, we read in Acts 8:1-4 that believers were scattered and 'preached the word wherever they went'. Somewhere between Acts 8 and 18, the gospel gets to Rome, most likely by unremarkable means – people being converted and taking the message about Jesus back to Rome with them. Acts 18 seems to suggest that by this stage (the summer of AD 50), the church has been established in Rome. Acts 18:2 notes in passing that the Roman Emperor Claudius 'had ordered all Jews to leave Rome', and Paul goes to meet two of these Christian Jews in Corinth – Priscilla and Aquilla (18:2-3). Paul serves alongside them during their stay in Corinth before their apparent return to Rome. It appears that they were already converted, and in fact were well trained leaders in the church, able to instruct others (Acts 18:26). The Jewish expulsion from Rome finished with the death of Claudius in AD 54, and it appears (given Romans 16:3-5) that Priscilla and Aquila returned to Rome again at this point.

This four-year expulsion period of Jewish people from Rome would no doubt have had an impact on the Christian church there. A mixed church of Jew and Gentile suddenly became a gentile-only church, and then, 4 years later, the Jewish arm of the church returned. As Paul writes, most likely in AD 57 (see below), the pressures resulting from these political and sociological factors would have shaped the lens through which the Roman church heard his teaching on Jew/Gentile relationships.

Despite the fact that Paul had not visited the city at the time of writing, Romans 16

contains the longest of all his greeting sections (16:1-16). It appears Paul knew many of the believers there personally.

WHEN AND WHERE:

We can narrow the date of composition using clues from both the letter itself, as well as other parts of the New Testament. In Romans 15:19-23, Paul writes that ‘from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ’, going on to suggest that there is not scope for any further ministry there. This suggests that at the time of writing, he had already completed his three missionary journeys. In Romans 15:25 Paul mentions that he is just about to take a collection of aid money to with him to Jerusalem – the same collection and journey recounted in Acts 20-21, a journey that he undertook in the first half of 58 A.D.¹

The most likely time for writing something the length of Romans then would be during Paul’s stay in Corinth (Acts 20:1-3) where Paul spent 3 months ahead of his journey to Jerusalem.

We can also note the little detail in Romans 16:1, where Paul’s commends to the Romans the apparent carrier of the letter – Phoebe – who hailed from the harbour suburbs of Corinth (Rom 16:1).

Finally, at the very end of the greetings section, Paul sends greetings from Gaius and Erastus (Rom 16:23). It appears Paul is enjoying Gaius’ hospitality wherever he is, while he notes that Erastus is the city’s director of public works – in whatever city Paul is currently in. We know that both of these men resided in Corinth. Paul baptised Gaius in Corinth (1 Cor 1:14) and 2 Tim 4:20 tells us that Erastus remained in Corinth (most likely because of his job there). With all of these hints, we can fairly confidently suggest that Romans was written from Corinth in the summer of AD 57, just before Paul’s journey to Jerusalem.

WHY:

There are various opinions about the purpose and nature of the book of Romans. There is a popular view that Romans primarily serves as a theological manifesto for the apostle Paul – a kind of extended doctrinal treatise². Romans is indeed rich in doctrine, and contains some of Paul’s clearest expositions around issues such as sin, justification, righteousness, the cross, faith, the flesh, Israel, and assurance among others.

And yet, if Romans is Paul’s doctrinal manifesto, he seems to have left out topics which he expounds at length in other letters. Romans simply does not venture into some key Pauline doctrines such as Christology, the church, the Lord’s supper or the end times.

And so, in order to make good sense of the book, we need to first acknowledge that Romans is in fact a letter, written to real people, with a real context, which includes some of the richest doctrinal thought in the New Testament.

1. Acts 20:16 tells us that Paul wanted to arrive in Jerusalem by Pentecost (May 58)

2. For example, The Gospel Coalition website says of Romans: “The letter of Romans serves as a grand theological blueprint for the gospel doctrine undergirding the rest of the New Testament”

Three key points stand out as we consider the purpose of the letter.

Firstly, Jew/Gentile relationships stand out throughout the letter. We have already noted the political context of Rome – no doubt the theological and pastoral issues around Jews and Gentiles in the church ran as hot in Rome as they did in other towns with a Jewish diaspora. This issue forms some of the backdrop to Paul's teaching on justification. He wants the Romans to understand that there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile either on the issue of total depravity (3:9), or on the topic of justification (3:22) or salvation (10:12-13). All alike need Christ Jesus.

One way that Paul teases out the issues surrounding Jew and Gentile relationships is to use an imaginary debating partner to explore any Jewish objections to the gospel from first principles. Romans seems to have an alternating structure, by which on one hand, Paul lays out ideas from his gospel on the 'front foot', and then responds to an imaginary set of (predominantly Jewish) objections to his gospel on the other. Noting this structure, often introduced by questions³ is key to understanding the argument of Romans.

Secondly, and following logically from the first point, Paul is at pains throughout the letter to show how God's plan has always been to fulfil his promises in Christ. Whether it be his teaching on the law (chapters 2-3) or his teaching on faith (chapter 4), freedom (chapter 6-7), assurance (chapter 8), on Jews and Gentiles (9-11), on the transforming power of the gospel (12-15) – Paul consistently returns to the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ has always been God's plan from the beginning. This is most clearly stated in Rom 10:4 – 'Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes'.

Thirdly, in the 'frame' of the letter (1:1-15 and 15:14-16:27) Paul is concerned for the Roman church to understand his travel plans, in light of his broader evangelistic goals. Paul wants to preach to the gentile world, as per his commission from the risen Jesus (Acts 22:21). This is one of the reasons he is so keen to visit Rome itself (1:14-15).

Paul's plan at the time of writing (which never came about), was to travel to Rome, spend some time building the church there, and then use Rome as a base from which to launch a new mission into the currently unreached Spain (16:24). This desire to secure a missionary base in Rome for a push into Spain issues forth in this letter in which Paul carefully lays out 'his' gospel especially as it relates to questions of Jews and Gentiles in God's plan for salvation.

And yet, as much as these observations can help us make better sense of the letter, we need ultimately to remember, that like any other part of the scriptures, Romans is finally God's living word to us here and now. It is just as relevant to 21st Century Sydney as it was to 1st Century Rome.

We need to hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and receive the righteousness that flows from faith in Jesus Christ, just as the Roman church, and every age through church history has needed this letter.

³ E.g 3:1 "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew?" Or 4:1 "What shall we say that Abraham our forefather according to the flesh discovered in this matter" Or 6:1 "What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?"

INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS 9-11

At the end of Paul's exposition of the gospel and its implications in Romans 1-8, there is an understandably triumphant tone to Paul's writing. The gospel is God's power of salvation to all who believe (1:16-17), because God has graciously made the way for us to be declared right with him through the blood of Christ (3:21-4:25). Though we have an ongoing struggle with sin in this age, we are no longer slaves to sin - the power of sin to rule us has been broken (chs. 6-7). We have the love of God poured into us by the Holy Spirit as he enables us to grow in pleasing God (Rom 5:1-5, 8:1-17), and we eagerly await the glorious and final restoration of all things when Christ returns. Nothing will break us or drive us to despair, "for I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (8:38-39). Amen and hallelujah!

After these joyful heights, we might expect Paul to go straight on to his application section in Romans. So why then instead is he instantly plunged into the darkest depths of despair in Romans 9:2? "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart." Paul's dramatic turn here introduces a crucial issue and question that Paul wrestles with in this central section of his letter (Romans 9-11). If the gospel is God's power of salvation first to the Jews (1:16), then Paul has to confront one of the glaring questions of his 1st century context: why have his countrymen, the Jews, not embraced their Messiah? Since they were the people God first made his promises to in the Old Testament, there's a question of God's faithfulness and commitment wrapped up in this issue. This section of the letter puts this question in its starkest terms: has God's word failed (9:6)?

The answer that flows out is a complex reflection on God's sovereign right to choose whom he will (9:6-29), his purpose in opening wide the gates of salvation through a righteousness that is by faith/belief, not the law (9:30-10:13), and his longsuffering mercy in holding out a message of salvation even to those who were obstinate and hardened (10:14-11:10). We will find ourselves wrestling with the profound mysteries of God's sovereign purposes in salvation, particularly in how they relate to Jews and Gentiles over the course of salvation history. Paul unfolds the bigger eschatological plan of God, and how we Gentiles come into it too: the Jews were "broken off" the olive tree to allow Gentile branches to come in, but in turn God's mercy to the Gentiles will provoke Israel to jealousy, so that they too will come to the Messiah and be saved (11:11-32). Through all these wrestlings, may God help you and your Growth Group to praise God for the unsearchable judgments of God's wisdom (11:33-36)!

HOW TO USE THESE STUDIES

We suggest you follow these studies along the following schedule:

Growth Group Material			Sunday Preaching		
Week	Date (Tues)	Content	Date (Sun)	Passage/topic	Preacher
T4 W2	Oct 12	Rom 9-11 intro	Oct 17	9:1-29	Jack Day
T4 W3	Oct 19	9:1-29	Oct 24	Predestination topical	Sam Russell
T4 W4	Oct 26	9:30-10:13	Oct 31	9:30-10:13	JD
T4 W5	Nov 2	10:14-11:10	Nov 7	10:14-11:10	SR
T4 W6	Nov 9	11:11-24	Nov 14	11:11-24	JD
T4 W7	Nov 16	11:25-36	Nov 21	11:25-36	SR

As always, we encourage you to use these studies as an aid to your preparation, not as a substitute for it. These passages of Scripture are complex, and we have certainly been wrestling with them as we have prepared these notes! In some ways the studies below try to strike a balance between preparing you as a leader to lead your group and actually providing questions that could form the basis for your studies. If you feel these studies are too long (especially on Zoom!), then please feel free to adapt and shorten them as you see fit.

We hope and pray that these studies in Romans 9-11 will encourage and serve you and your group as you seek to prayerfully grow in your trust and joy in God's sovereign mercy.

Jack Day and Sam Russell

August 2021

STUDY 1: ROMANS 9-11 OVERVIEW

This first study is designed to give you a broad overview of the section of Romans that we are about to study. It can be a challenging section, but it rewards the reader who is willing to take the time and follow the Old Testament links, at which point they start to see the wonderful sovereign mercy of God to the world.

Tonight, we'll be staying at a high level, rather than getting into the nitty-gritty details. That's for the weeks ahead!

You'll need to have printed out (or share on screen) a copy of the manuscript of Romans 9-11. You'll also need to have some different coloured pens or highlighters to highlight different things in the text (see below).

Before you get going, pray that God would help you listen, understand and delight in trusting and doing his word as you read it in this study.

1. Using the attached manuscript and the instructions below, Read Romans 9-11 in the following 'chunks'

- 9:1-29
- 9:30-10:13
- 10:14-11:10
- 11:11-24
- 11:25-36

As you read through each 'chunk', highlight (in different colours) verses that contain:

- Rhetorical questions (what point is Paul introducing with these?)
- Anything about God's sovereignty in offering mercy to people
- Promises of God/statements of the gospel (Praise God for these in prayer!)
- Old Testament quotations
- Discussion about Jews and Gentiles receiving (or not receiving!) God's mercy

Note in the sidelines:

- Any questions that you have (these don't need to be answered yet!)

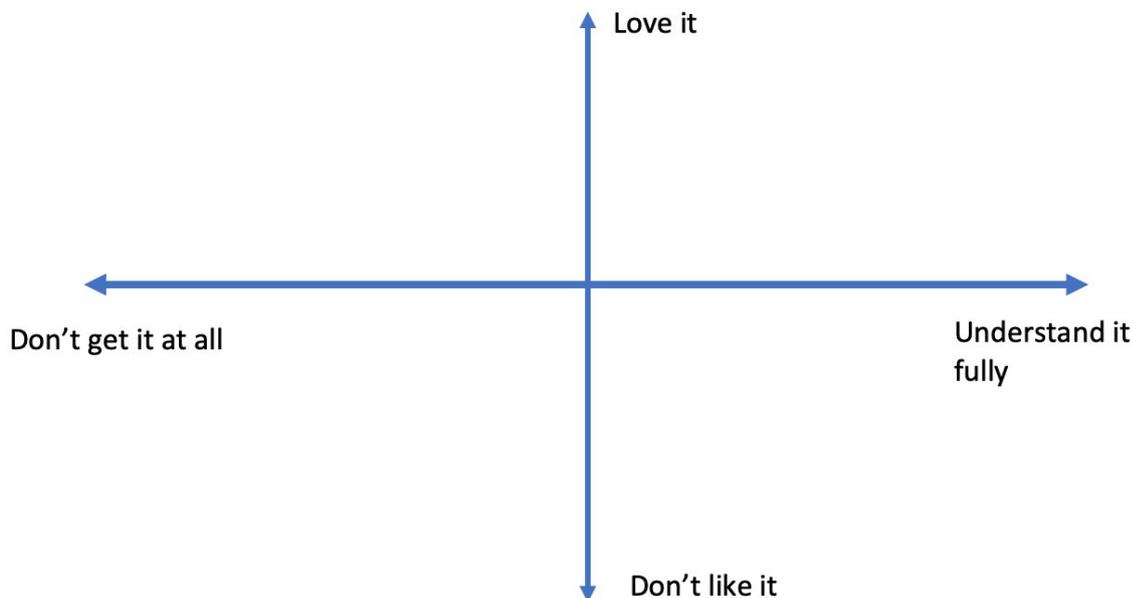
At the end of each section work as a group to come up with a 1-2 sentence summary of the sentence and then pray in thanks for these truths before moving on to the next section.

2. Once you have finished all the sections look back over each of your summary statements. What do you think this section of Romans is all about?

STUDY 2: HAS GOD'S WORD FAILED? (ROMANS 9:1-29)

1. God's sovereign mercy (i.e. predestination or election) can be challenging to understand, and challenging to our hearts. How well do you feel you understand this truth at the moment, and how well do you like it? Feel free to be frank and honest – it's good for us to share how we are wrestling with God's word.

You could share this diagram on your screen and have everyone plot themselves on the graph with an annotation or a stamp. Ask a few group members to explain their choice.



OBSERVATION AND INTERPRETATION

Read Romans 9:1-5.

2. Romans 8:31-39 ended on this note of great and joyful confidence in God's unbeatable love for us in Christ... So why is Paul so full of sorrow at the start of chapter 9?

3. Why is the rejection of Jesus by most Jews such a big problem? (vv. 4-6a)

Read Romans 9:6-13.

4. How does Paul begin to answer the charge that God's word might have failed (v. 6)? How is this illustrated in the lives of Abraham and Rebekah and their families in Genesis?

5. How do you feel about the idea that God has always chosen some people to be part of his true spiritual people, but not others? What questions does this raise for you?

Read Romans 9:14-18.

6. God choosing like this can seem unjust or unfair to us. How does Paul begin answering this objection?

7. How does the example of the hardening of Pharaoh (from Exodus 4-14) add to the answer?

Read Romans 9:19-29.

8. These challenging verses take us deep into the mysteries of God's sovereign choice. What do vv. 20-21 teach us about our standing before God?

9. According to vv. 22-23, why does God bear with "objects of wrath" – i.e. those sinful people on whom he will not have mercy?

10. To finish this section, Paul lists a number of different quotes from the OT prophets. What point is he making through them? How do you think this addresses the question originally raised in v. 6?

APPLICATION

11. Consider again what Paul says about his fellow Israelites. How do you feel about your fellow Australians (or people of your own culture) who are cut off from Christ? How does Paul's sorrow challenge you?

12. In this chapter, and especially in verses 19-23, Paul sets forward a radically God-centred view of the universe. How does that fit or clash with the way you see the world?

13. In light of v. 20, are you still tempted to "talk back" to God about these issues? Are you willing to humble yourself before him? What would that look like?

14. We've seen today how God sovereignly chooses some people to receive his mercy. What questions do you still have about this? Text them now to 0491 767 357.

STUDY 3: TWO WAYS TO SEEK RIGHTEOUSNESS (ROMANS 9:30-10:13)

1. Recap what we've seen so far over the last few weeks. What issue is Romans 9-11 about? How have we seen Paul begin to tackle it in Romans 9 so far?

OBSERVATION

2. Look back at your Romans 9-11 manuscript from two weeks ago. Our passage today is absolutely brimming with conjunctions (words like then, that, but, because, for, since, as). Highlight all the conjunctions you can find and think about the logical links Paul is making. Which ones make sense to you so far? Which need further discussion and pondering?

INTERPRETATION

3. Remind each other, what does "righteousness" mean? (Romans 3:9-18 and 4:1-8 may be some helpful background.) Paul contrasts Jewish and Gentile attitudes to righteousness in 9:30-31. How are they different?

4. In 9:32-10:3, what reasons does Paul give for why the Israelites failed to attain righteousness?

5. What does it mean that Christ is the "culmination" of the law? (To think through what this does and doesn't mean, Romans 6:14, 7:4, 13:8-10 may be helpful)

6. Paul contrasts these two ways to seek righteousness again in 10:5-8, using two different quotes from Moses. Again, how are these two ways different?

	Romans 10:5	Romans 10:6-8
OT quote		
Difference in way to seek righteousness		

7. In 10:9-13, how do we obtain the righteousness that is by faith? What do you think is the significance of declaring/professing faith here?

APPLICATION

8. Are there ways you are still tempted to pursue righteousness by works and not by faith (9:32)?

9. What do you think “zeal not based on knowledge” looks like today (10:2)? How can we avoid it?

10. In the language of 10:9, what would it look like to declare but not to believe? Or conversely, to believe but not to declare? Where do these two options fall down?

11. During lockdown, there are fewer opportunities for us to see people, to encourage others, to serve formally, to share Jesus – we may feel bad about “doing less for God”. Do you relate to that? How can this passage help us think this issue through?

12. Spend some time praising and thanking God for this righteousness and salvation he has offered us freely in Christ!

STUDY 4: FAITH, HEARING, AND HARDENING (ROMANS 10:14-11:10)

Recap: Last week we explored the two ways for people attempt to 'call upon the name of the Lord and be saved' (10:13) One way was ignorant and impossible, based on works of the law (10:1-3). The other was based on knowledge, and leads to righteousness through faith in Christ (10:4-11). This week we pick up Paul in mid thought as he reflects on the reality that people need to declare Jesus as Lord in order to call upon the name of the Lord and be saved.

SECTION 1

Read Romans 10:14-15

OBSERVATION

1. Look back at your Romans 9-11 manuscript from two weeks ago. Our passage today is absolutely brimming with conjunctions (words like then, that, but, because, for, since, as). Highlight all the conjunctions you can find and think about the logical links Paul is making. Which ones make sense to you so far? Which need further discussion and pondering?

INTERPRETATION

2. What makes some feet 'beautiful'? What is Paul's point with this imagery?

Pray: that God would make St Paul's a church full of people with 'beautiful feet'.

SECTION 2

Read Romans 10:16-11:6

OBSERVATION

1. Verse 16a lays out the 'problem' that Paul is wrestling with in this section. What is the problem?

a. Which people group do you think he has in mind in particular? Note 10:1, 10:21

Throughout the rest of this section 10:16-11:10), Paul runs through some possible reasons (and then finally the real reason) as to why many in Israel have put their trust in Jesus the Messiah.

2. Before we dig into the text, brainstorm as a group: What are some reasons that you have observed why many people haven't yet put their trust in Jesus as the Christ?

3. Use the table below to consider the possible reasons that many of Paul's fellow Israelites didn't yet trust Jesus.

Verse	Possible reason for many Israelites rejecting the gospel.	Paul's argument why this isn't the real reason	Old Testament passage to back up the point (Look these up in their context if you have time!)
10:18			Psalms 19:4
10:19-21			Deut 32:21, Isaiah 65:1-2
11:1-6			1 Kings 19:9-18

4. Which of Paul's reasons matched your list of reasons above?

SECTION 3

Read Romans 11:7-10.

These verses lay out the real reason that many Israelites have rejected the message about Jesus.

OBSERVATION

1. What does Paul say is the real reason behind the Israelite rejection of Jesus?

INTERPRETATION

2. What do you think it means to be 'hardened'? Compare Exodus 8:15 to Exodus 9:12. See also Heb 3:7-13

3. Does this 'hardening' mean that these Israelites will never know God? (hint - read ahead to next weeks passage - Rom 11:11)

APPLICATION

4. Should the fact that God hardens or soften hearts encourage or discourage us in our evangelism?

5. Think of people that you know who have had some of the privileges of hearing about Jesus (whether a Christian family, or membership in church in the past, or having been taught the Bible), but are now 'hardened' against Christ.

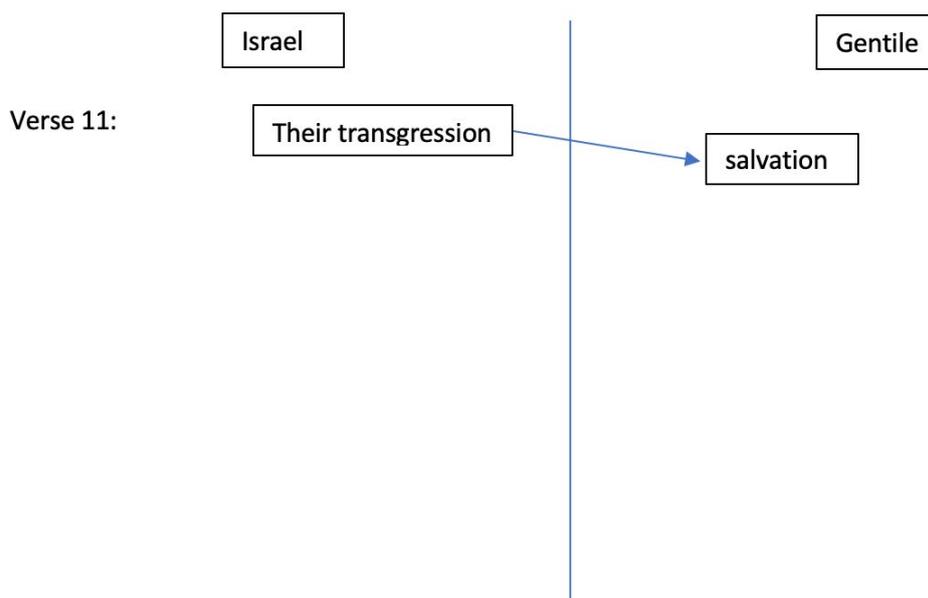
- What are your feelings towards them? Sadness? Resignation? Frustration? Apathy?
- How might this chapter encourage us not to give up on them?

STUDY 5: ROMANS 11:11-24

OBSERVATION

1. Verse 11 begins with the next question Paul is raising (and answering) in this section. Who are the “they”, and how did they “stumble”? What is God’s purpose behind all this?

2. Look carefully at verses 11-15 and use this diagram to capture the different movements between Israel and the Gentiles. (Zoom: share this diagram on your screen and encourage your group to annotate it)



INTERPRETATION

3. How did Israel’s stumbling lead to salvation for the Gentiles? Break up into smaller groups and have each group look at one of the following passages:

a. Matt 27:21-26

b. Acts 13:44-49

c. Acts 18:5-8

d. Acts 28:16-17 and 23-31

(Zoom: you could put people into Breakout Rooms in groups of 3 or more)

APPLICATION

4. What do you think of Paul's tactic of seeking to save Jews by making them envious? How does that challenge us as we think about how we share the gospel today in our context?

a. Bonus material – if this idea of envy seems wrong to your group, consider what John Stott says below as he comments on this passage. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

Not all envy is tainted with selfishness, because it is not always either a grudging discontent or a sinful covetousness. At base, envy is 'the desire to have for oneself something possessed by another', and whether envy is good or evil depends on the nature of the something desired and on whether one has any right to its possession. If that something is in itself evil, or if it belongs to somebody else and we have no right to it, then the envy is sinful. But if the something desired is in itself good, a blessing from God, which he means all his people to enjoy, then to 'covet' it and to 'envy' those who have it is not at all unworthy. This kind of desire is right in itself, and to arouse it can be a realistic motive in ministry. (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001, p. 297.)

OBSERVATION

5. Paul continues explaining these Israel-Gentile relationships in vv. 16-24 with one main metaphor. Draw your own picture of the processes he describes. (Zoom: you could get people to do it on a piece of paper and then hold them up to the camera, or you could do it together on a whiteboard)

INTERPRETATION

6. Why should Gentile Christians not be arrogant or consider themselves superior to Jews?

APPLICATION

7. Thinking on this passage but also what we've seen in the whole series so far, how do you feel as you "consider the kindness and sternness of God" (v. 22)? How could you reflect further on the character of God in these matters?

8. What hope is there for those branches who have been broken off (vv. 23-24)? How does that help you think about people you know who are currently persisting in unbelief?

STUDY 6: ROMANS 11:25-36

SECTION 1

Read Romans 11:25-27

1. What does Paul say has happened to Israel?

2. What does Paul say will happen to Israel?

3. What questions does this raise for you, if any?

Watch this little video from Sam to help us get into some of the issues of this passage.

<https://youtu.be/HDLVumjCDw0>

SECTION 2

Read Romans 11:28-32

1. On what Basis are Israel loved, even though they are disobedient?

2. Using verse 30-31 as your guide Draw a simple line chart to show how disobedience and mercy have worked for both Jews and Gentiles? Draw a simple line chart to show this for both Jews and Gentiles. (Try and plot Disobedience on one axis and time on the other)

3. What is the relationship between God 'handing people over to disobedience' and God 'showing mercy'? What questions does this raise for you?

4. Looking back at Paul's comments on Israel in 9:6, and what we have seen tonight, how might you answer Paul's questions in Romans 10:1 and 11:1?

5. How does verse 32 summarise how God has chosen to work with 'all' people?

Watch Sam's second video:

<https://youtu.be/inrxHW9qkCo>

APPLICATION

1. In verses 33-36, Paul breaks out in praise in light of God's mercy, and in particular the pattern of mercy that God in his wisdom, shows mercy even to those who have been disobedient.

a. Paul writes his own praise in response to God's mercy. try writing a poem or prayer to God to express your praise for how God shows his mercy – spend some time doing that now.

OR

b. Spend some time praising God for his mercy to you, in light of your own disobedience to God.

2. How might this passage encourage you to keep evangelising someone who is currently ignoring God or particularly opposed to God?