



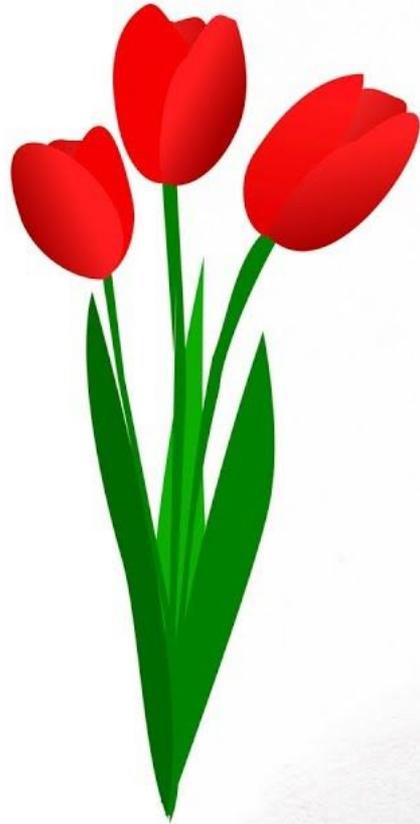
A grace worth saving: Introduction to Romans 9

Finny Kuruvilla
The Historic Faith
Lecture 3

A bit of review

We looked briefly at the history of Calvinism, the Remonstrance of the Arminians, and the development of the 5-points of Calvinism at the Synod of Dort.

Those five points are summarized with the acronym: TULIP.



Total Depravity

Unconditional Election

Limited Atonement

Irresistible Grace

Perseverance of the Saints

The problem of love and goodness in Calvinism

At the last day, people will be able to fairly and accurately say that the rock-bottom, most fundamental, root-cause reason they are being condemned is that it was God's decision.

Before the foundation of the world, God decided they would be reprobate ("Unconditional Election").

Like all humans, they were born dead in their sins ("Total Depravity").

Then, they never were able to believe because God did not regenerate them ("Irresistible Grace").

So God condemns them to eternal damnation?

"In what sense was God good if he had done something like creating people so he could damn them? Pardon the pun, but if that is good, what the hell is bad?" (Austin Fischer)

One of the best stories to understand historic theology...



Be careful with my book recommendations...

Nearly all of the books that I'm going to recommend (including yesterday's) are written by Protestant evangelicals.

This requires much discernment because there is quite a bit of error in their books among many excellent statements.

Beware of a "steady diet" of such material.

Make your staple solid teaching from kingdom-minded Christians.

Genesis 12:1-3

What was the purpose of the election of Abraham?

Gen 12:1-3:

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

The descendants of Abraham will be a blessing to the world! This sounds like election to service!

Exodus 7-11

Moses and Aaron commissioned

7:3 "I will harden Pharaoh's heart"

7:13 "Pharaoh's heart was hardened"

First plague of the Nile turning to blood

7:14 "Pharaoh's heart is hardend"

7:22 "Pharaoh's heart remain hardened"

Second plague of frogs

8:15 "He [Pharaoh] hardened his heart and would not listen to them"

Third plague of gnats

8:19 "Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them"

Fourth plague of flies

8:32 "Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go"

Fifth plague of livestock dying

9:7 "The heart of Pharaoh was hardened"

Sixth plague of boils

9:12 "The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh"

Exodus 7-11

Seventh plague of hail

9:34-35 "He sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened."

Eighth plague of locusts

10:1 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants"

10:20 The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart

Ninth plague of darkness

10:27 The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart

A final plague threatened

11:10 The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart

Patterns from Exodus 7-11

When it is specified, the first examples of hardening are Pharaoh hardening his own heart.

Later on, the Lord hardens his heart

Hardening is not necessarily final!

Notice that hardening isn't a "once and done" event – it had to be done multiple times. So it's a continuum and a process.

And don't forget that before it all begins, Pharaoh has enslaved and mistreated God's people.

Two types of hardening

Self-hardening: a person becomes stubborn or calloused in their sin. See Zechariah 7:11-13 for a powerful example of this.

Judicial hardening: God blinds the rebellious person in order to achieve a greater purpose. We see this in the case of Pharaoh.

Analogy: the policeman sitting in his car in a hidden place in order to catch those speeding.

What is the motive of “hiding the truth”? To stop speeders for the safety of all. Does the police officer cause people to speed? Of course not!

Modified from

<https://soteriology101.com/2015/02/07/judicial-hardening-gods-sinless-use-of-sinful-action>
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Slide 11

Case study of Joseph and his brothers

“God’s ultimate purpose, like that of police officer, is only good. The brothers intention, like that of the speeders, is not good. God’s sovereign plan is to use their evil choices to accomplish His redemptive purpose, much like the officer’s plan to accomplish his purpose through the free choice of speeders. God’s intention is ONLY to redeem, save, and restore throughout this entire event yet to do so he must permit evil men to fulfill their own evil desires. There is no reason to suggest God determines the desires of the brothers anymore so than there is to suggest the police officer determines the desires of the speeder.”

The importance of Romans 9 for Calvinists

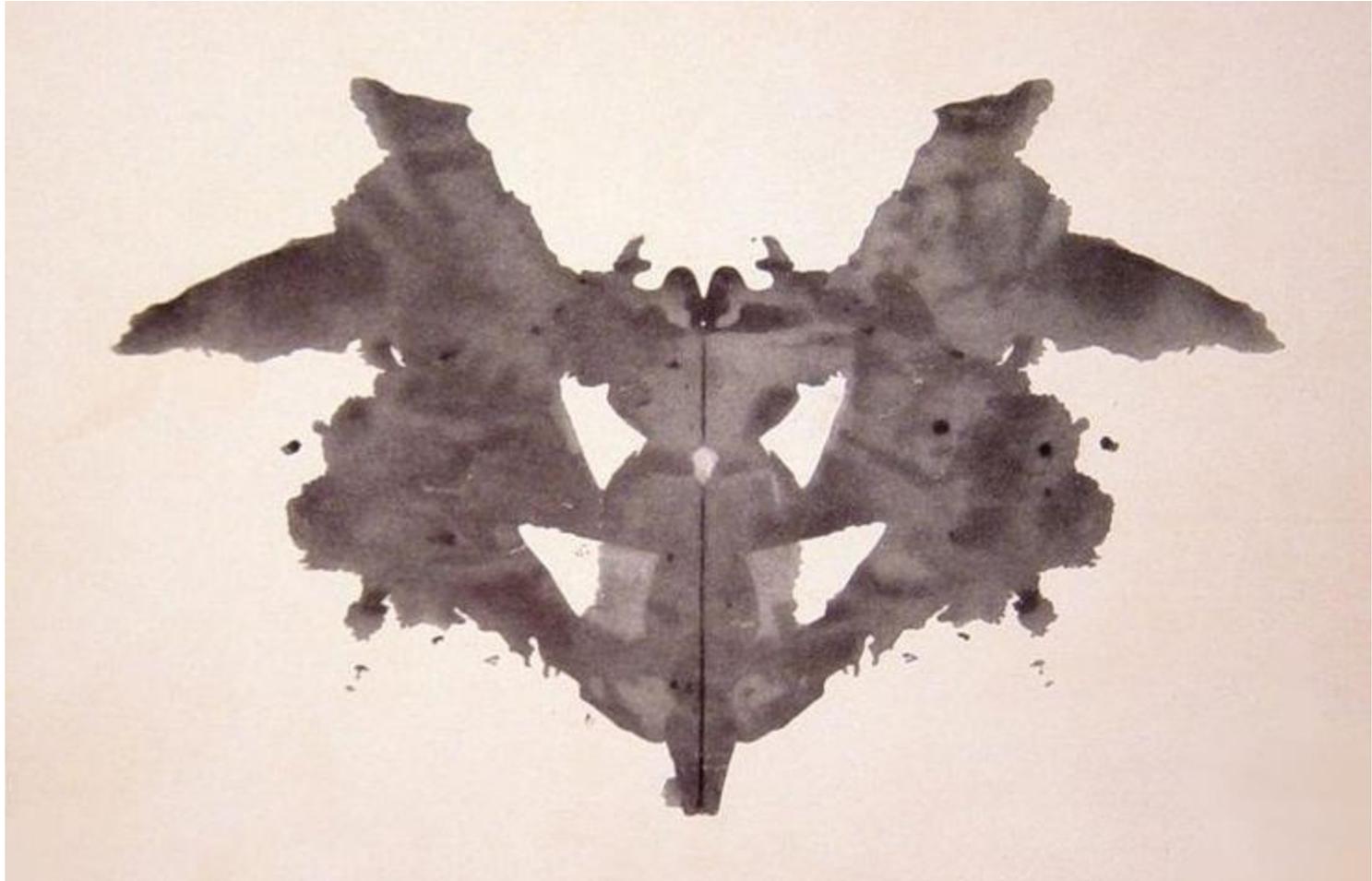
But at the end of James Morgan's theology class, I wrote in a blue book: "Romans 9 is like a tiger going around devouring free-willers like me." And it did. (John Piper)

Tom Schreiner remarks that "Calvinists typically appeal to Romans 9 to support their theology of divine election. In particular, they assert that Romans 9 teaches that God unconditionally elects individuals to be saved."

Romans: a terribly misunderstood book

“Never is bad evangelical Bible reading—characterized most by our aversion to particularity, chronological snobbery, and egoism—more on display than in Paul’s letter to the Romans.” (Austin Fischer)

“It is common to list saints and Christians whose lives have been radically changed by reading this letter; the catalog could be balanced by a similar number who have radically misunderstood it. Troublingly, the lists overlap.” (NT Wright)



Romans 9-11

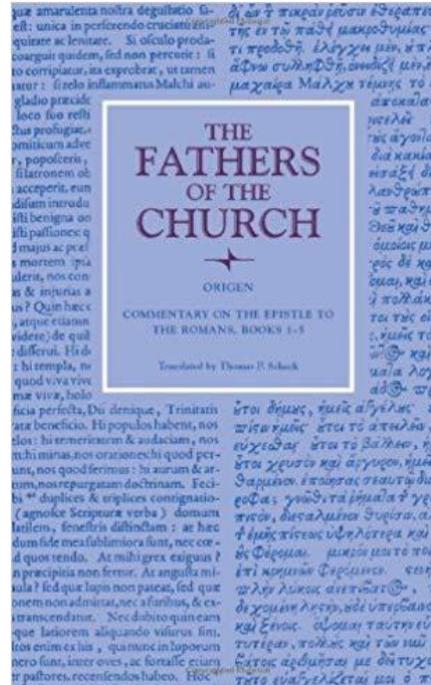
The driving question of this portion of Romans is: What about all of God's promises to Israel in the OT? Most of the Jews in Paul's day were enemies of the gospel—did God's promises fail? Does the unfaithfulness of most of Israel nullify the word of God?

We're simply not bothered by the question of God's faithfulness to the promises made to Abraham. Because we're not bothered by it, that must not be what Paul is writing about?

It's crucial to look up passages referenced in the OT. So many Calvinist exegetes fail to honor the context from which the passage is drawn.

I will say that there are 2-3 good non-Calvinist interpretations of Romans that end up in the same place, but with somewhat different approaches.

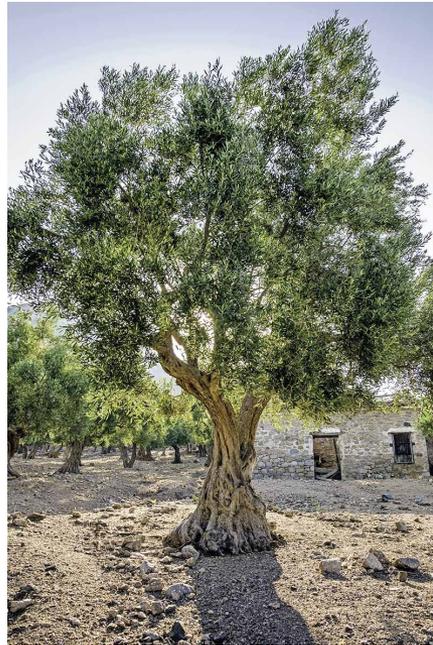
A difficult book, but an amazing book



Pay attention to the beginning and ending

Paul opens up with an intense statement of his desire to see Israel saved. Is it reasonable that he is now going to articulate how God is electing much of Israel to be eternally damned? Is Paul seeking Israel's salvation more than God is seeking?

The final picture that Paul gives:



It's even more clear with Paul's summary

The very last verse before the doxology reads:

"For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all." (Romans 11:32)

Romans 9:1-4 (NKJV)

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

This kind of language is used again at the beginning and end of Romans 10

Romans 10:1

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.

Romans 10:21

But to Israel he says: "All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people."

Romans 9:6-13 (NKJV)

6 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, 7 nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." 8 That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. 9 For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son."

10 And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac 11 (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), 12 it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." 13 As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

Let's go back to Genesis and look up the citation

Gen 25:23

And the Lord said to her:

“Two nations are in your womb,

Two peoples shall be separated from your body;

One people shall be stronger than the other,

And the older shall serve the younger.”

Let's look up another reference Paul makes:

Malachi 1

1 The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.

2 "I have loved you," says the Lord.

"Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?'

Was not Esau Jacob's brother?"

Says the Lord.

"Yet Jacob I have loved;

3 But Esau I have hated,

And laid waste his mountains and his heritage

For the jackals of the wilderness."

4 Even though Edom has said,

"We have been impoverished,

But we will return and build the desolate places,"

This is corroborated by Obadiah.

Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom

(We have heard a report from the Lord,

And a messenger has been sent among the nations, saying,

“Arise, and let us rise up against her for battle”):

2 “Behold, I will make you small among the nations;

You shall be greatly despised.

3 The pride of your heart has deceived you,

You who dwell in the clefts of the rock,

Whose habitation is high;

You who say in your heart, ‘Who will bring me down to the ground?’

...

10 “For violence against your brother Jacob,

Shame shall cover you,

And you shall be cut off forever.

11 In the day that you stood on the other side—

In the day that strangers carried captive his forces,

When foreigners entered his gates

And cast lots for Jerusalem—

Even you were as one of them.

There is something else going on here...

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The Calvinist interpretation is strange indeed

You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. (Deut 23:7)

So far, does what we've read seem like it's about the eternal salvation or damnation of individuals? Or about 1) God's unconditional choice for Israel and 2) God's conditional opposition to those who attack God's people.

In addition, be careful with love / hate language

When the Lord saw that Leah was **unloved**, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. (Gen 29:31)

That word in the KJV is more literally translated as “hated.”

Jesus used love / hate language in a similar way. Where?

The problems go on and on with Calvinist interpretation

And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. (Gen 17:20)

Abraham had six other sons besides Isaac and Ishmael. Under the typical Calvinist interpretation, because only Jacob is “elected” – seven of his other sons are eternally damned!

"A strong distinction was made between those blessed to bring the Word and those who may or may not choose to believe in that Word. It is not consistent to interpret these passages as God's choice to effectually save one brother to the damning neglect of the others." (Leighton Flowers)