

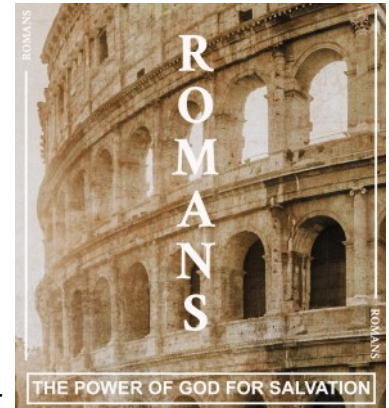
Birthmarks

Romans 9:14-16

Big Idea: God’s mercy and judgment are never arbitrary—they are purposeful and revealing. When we’re faced with them, especially under pressure, they expose what’s truly in our hearts. Our responses reveal our spiritual “birthmarks”: either the humility and gratitude of a child of promise, or the entitlement and blame-shifting of a child of the flesh.

1) The Example – Moses & Pharaoh (Romans 9:17-18)

- Paul uses the story of Moses and Pharaoh to illustrate how God’s glory affects different people in different ways.
- **Moses** hides behind the Rock (God’s mercy) and lives.
- **Pharaoh** stands in defiance and is hardened and judged.
- Both men display God’s glory—one through mercy, the other through judgment.



Key Truth: The Rock that shielded Moses is Christ. Without Him, God’s glory is devastating. *When the glory of God shows up, your response shows who you are.*

2) The Explanation – What Does it Mean That God “Hardens”?

- God’s hardening of Pharaoh didn’t implant evil—it lifted restraint and revealed the true condition of his heart.
- Like **ice hardens without the sun**, the human heart hardens when God’s restraint is lifted.
- Pharaoh hardened his own heart—and God confirmed it (Exodus 8:15 + Romans 9:18).

Key Principle: *God doesn’t put the hardness in; He lets the hardness out.* The restraint God gives is undeserved mercy.

3) The Exhortation – Examine Your Heart (or birthmark!)

Scripture urges us not to harden our hearts (Hebrews 3:12–13). When the truth presses in—especially hard truth—our response reveals what kind of heart we have. Do you respond with **ownership and humility**, or **entitlement and blame**?

Children of **promise** increasingly see their lives through the lens of God’s mercy:

- They know that much of their “goodness” is really restraint, not righteousness.
- They realize God placed limits—like consequences, weakness, fatigue, aging, even hardship—to **hold them back from ruin**.
- They don’t take credit; they give thanks. They look at others with compassion, not superiority.

Children of **flesh**, however, do the opposite:

- They shift blame for their sin—to others, to their circumstances, even to God.
- They see themselves as good people held back by external forces.
- When things fall apart, they rage against God rather than repent (Proverbs 19:3).

Check your birthmarks:

- What dominates your heart when life gets hard?
- Is it gratitude or grumbling? Ownership or excuses?

Small Group Discussion Guide

Romans 9:14-19

Warm-Up Questions:

1. “What’s something unique about you (a physical trait, family tradition, etc.) that reminds people you’re part of your family?”
2. What was something from this week’s sermon that stood out or stuck with you?
3. Were there any parts of Romans 9 that were hard for you to understand or accept this week?

Text-Focused Questions (*Read Romans 9:14–19*):

1. What do you observe about Pharaoh and Moses in this passage and the story it is referencing? What contrast is Paul drawing?
2. What does it mean when God says He “hardens” Pharaoh’s heart? What clarification or insight did the sermon give on that idea?
3. Verse 19 raises a hard question: “Why does He still find fault?” What’s really at the heart of that question?

Heart Check Questions:

The **child of the flesh** says with entitlement: *“How could He NOT love me!”* & *“How could he judge me!”*

The **child of promise** says with awe and gratitude: *“How could He possibly love me!”* & *“I can’t believe He doesn’t judge me!”*

1. When pressure hits your life—hard circumstances, confrontation, loss—what comes out of your heart?
2. Do you tend to view God's mercy in your life with gratitude or entitlement?
3. When you sin, is your first instinct to blame others or own it before God?
4. How has God “restrained” you in your life? Are there specific ways you can see His mercy at work—even in limitations?

Application Points:

1. **Mirror Check:** This week, look in the “mirror” of your reactions—especially to hard truths or trials. What do they reveal about your heart? Are you owning your sin or justifying it?
2. **Mercy Inventory:** Take time to write down the ways God has restrained or protected you. Think about situations, relationships, pain, or even missed opportunities that shaped you.

Prayer Points:

1. **Thanksgiving for Restraint:** Thank God for the specific ways He has restrained your heart, protected you from ruin, and brought you back from rebellion.
2. **Soft Hearts:** Pray for hearts that are soft and responsive to God’s Word, even when it’s hard to understand.
3. **Personal Ownership:** Ask God to reveal any areas where you're blaming others or feeling entitled—and help you turn instead to humility and repentance.
4. **For Others:** Intercede for those who are resisting the gospel, that God would remove their blindness and soften their hearts.

Resources

Romans: Righteousness from Heaven | R. Kent Hughes

www.blueletterbible.org

www.biblehub.com

www.preceptaustin.org