

Romans Session 130

The Tragic Unbelief of Israel 1

Romans 9:1-5 (NASB)

¹ *I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit,*

² *that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.*

³ *For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,*

⁴ *who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises,*

⁵ *whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.*

We move on now to the next section, where Paul speaks of his concern for the Jews.

Romans chapters 9-11 is one of the most fascinating passages in the New Testament, filled with essential and very practical doctrine and focused on Israel, God's chosen people.

Throughout church history, however, this passage has often been greatly misunderstood. Some commentators and expositors all but ignore it.

Others treat it as a parenthesis, that has little, if any, connections to the rest of the letter.

They take it as an aside in which Paul expresses personal concerns and insights about his fellow Jews.

According to those interpreters, the central message of justification by faith is interrupted at the beginning of chapter 9 and resumes at the beginning of chapter 12.

They argue that Paul's beautiful and climactic paean of praise, hope, and assurance in 8:38-39 flows naturally into chapter 12:1

Now it is true that if Paul had left out chapters 9-11, the argument and the flow of the letter would still seem unbroken.

But, as we will see, it is also true that these three chapters are integrally related to the rest of the letter.

Paul did not want to continue his teaching on justifications by faith until he clarified some related truths regarding Israel and Israelites.

As part of that clarification, the apostle needed to contradict some prevailing falsehoods over which many Christians, especially those who were Jews, were stumbling.

Paul no doubt had taught the basic truth of Romans 9-11 many times, and, although he had yet to visit Rome in person, many of the believers there had known Paul personally and had heard those truths spoken from his own lips.

It is also possible that some of his letters to other churches had been read by Christians in Rome.

And because Paul had received previous opposition to these truths, he anticipated the questions and arguments that some of the Roman church members were sure to raise and answers them in the inspired words of these chapters.

An initial look at these questions and a brief suggestion of their answers may provide a helpful start to this section.

First, he anticipated the argument that, if the gospel of Jesus Christ offered salvation to all Gentiles, then God must have forsaken His ancient people Israel.

Jews who had heard the gospel concluded that the doctrine of justifications by faith was a new idea that was valid only for Gentiles and that Christians believed the ceremonies and works righteousness of Judaism had no merit before God. They were sure the gospel implied that Jews no longer had a unique place of purpose in God's plan of redemption.

These Jews were quite right, of course, that the gospel discounts Jewish ritual and works righteousness as a means of salvation.

But the ritualism and legalism, even the keeping of God's divinely revealed law, had never been a means of salvation, only means of expressing or symbolizing obedience to God.

As Paul makes clear earlier in this letter (chapters 3-5), God has never justified any person, Jew or Gentile, not even Abraham on any other basis than His grace made effective by personal faith.

It was also true that the New Covenant in the blood of Christ had replaced the Old Covenant and that God was calling out anew people for His name from among all nations and peoples.

In his introduction to this letter, Paul states unambiguously that Christ had given him a unique apostleship to the Gentiles.

Romans 1:1-5 (NASB)

¹ Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

² which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,

³ concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh,

⁴ who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,

⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,

But the book of Acts also clearly states the he also was called to bring the gospel to the sons of Israel.

Acts 9:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

It is therefore not strange that, whenever possible, this apostle to the Gentiles began a new ministry by first preaching the gospel to Jews, in a synagogue or other meeting place

Acts 9:20 (NASB)

²⁰ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."

Acts 13:5 (NASB)

⁵ When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.

Acts 13:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

Acts 14:1 (NASB)

¹ In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks.

Acts 16:13 (NASB)

¹³ *And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.*

Acts 17:1-2 (NASB)

¹ *Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.*

² *And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,*

Acts 19:1-8 (NASB)

¹ *It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples.*

² *He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."*

³ *And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism."*

⁴ *Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus."*

⁵ *When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*

⁶ *And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.*

⁷ *There were in all about twelve men.*

⁸ *And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.*

Paul was genuinely, passionately concerned for Israel's spiritual condition and so was eager to answer the questions he knew they were asking.

Near the end of Romans 11 Paul asserts with divine authority that the Savior of the world came from Zion (that was the Jew) and that ultimately, "all Israel will be saved" just as the prophet Isaiah had declared;

Isaiah 59:20-21 (NASB)

²⁰ *"A Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," declares the LORD.*

²¹ *"As for Me, this is My covenant with them," says the LORD: "My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring," says the LORD, "from now and forever."*

Romans 11:26 (NASB)

²⁶ *and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB."*

Early in His earthly ministry, Jesus told the Samaritan woman that salvation is from the Jews;

John 4:22-26 (NASB)

²² *"You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.*

²³ *"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.*

²⁴ *"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."*

²⁵ *The woman *said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us."*

²⁶ *Jesus *said to her, "I who speak to you am He."*

Paul was doubtless familiar with that declaration by His Lord, and he assures the Romans that it is inconceivable that God could reject and forget His people Israel.

True Christianity and anti-Semitism are therefore contradictory terms in the most absolute sense.

Paul anticipated and answered a second question he knew would arise in the minds of many of His readers, namely, “If salvation is from the Jews and is first of all to the Jews, why did Israel including her highest religious leader, reject Jesu as their Messiah, Savior, and King?

If, as Paul said, “the gospel” is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Rom 1:16), and if God grants “glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Rom 2:10), why are most Jews still in unbelief?

Why is the uniquely chosen and blessed nation of Israel, who knows the law and the prophets so well, not only rejecting the gospel of Jesus Christ but zealously persecuting fellow Jews who believe it?

As we will study in detail in a later chapter, Paul’s response to such thinking was:

Romans 9:30-32 (NASB)

³⁰ ***What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith;***

³¹ ***but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law.***

³² ***Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone,***

Continuing his explanation, the apostle says,

Romans 10:1-4 (NASB)

¹ ***Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.***

² ***For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.***

³ ***For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.***

⁴ ***For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.***

Because Paul well understood that most of his fellow Jews trusted in their descent from Abraham and in their good works, he asserts in unmistakable terms that;

Romans 2:28-29 (NASB)

²⁸ ***For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.***

²⁹ ***But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.***

In other words, a true Jew is a spiritual Jew, a Jew whose heart and mind have been cleansed and purified by the Spirit and who therefore belongs to God by faith.

Neither physical circumcision nor physical lineage from Abraham can save a person. They can, in fact easily become barriers to salvations by giving a false sense of spiritual security.

Trusting in such human things kept Jews from receiving Jesus Christ.

Because the gospel is clear that both Jews and Gentiles are saved by faith, the Jews must turn from their trust in their own religious achievement, humbling themselves, rejecting the intimidating pressure of the tradition they live by. They rejected that gospel and thus rejected their Messiah.

This salvation was not new, Paul says;

Romans 3:21-22 (NASB)

²¹ ***But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,***

²² ***even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;***

The individual Jew has never been saved on any other basis than personal faith in God, no matter how pure and well documented his physical descent from Abraham;

Romans 3:28-30 (NASB)

²⁸ ***For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.***

²⁹ ***Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,***

³⁰ ***since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.***

God creates Jews and Gentiles alike, and He saves them alike, in faith, apart from works and rituals.

The Jews were not saved because the barriers of ceremonies, traditions, and legalism in general blocked their way.

The Apostle later asks rhetorically,

Romans 11:11 (NASB)

¹¹ ***I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.***

In other words, Israel's failure to come to Jesus Christ in faith, tragic as it has been, is not permanent or irreversible. In fact, because Israel's failure opened the door of the gospel to the Gentiles, jealousy of the Gentiles eventually will have a part in leading Israel to turn to the Savior God through faith in Christ, to receive at last the Messiah they rejected at His first coming.

Not only that but Paul says;

Romans 11:12 (NASB)

¹² ***Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be***