

Romans Session 132

The Tragic Unbelief of Israel 3

Romans 9:1-3 (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,*

We have been talking about Israel's unbelief, and Paul now speaks of his own feelings for Israel, and his love for the people. He has a personal grief over his kinsmen.

He has just presented 8 chapters of divine truths that are thrilling to those who believe but devastating to all unbelievers, particularly so to unbelieving Jews, who felt totally secure in their racial heritage from Abraham, in their legalistic performance of ceremony, and in their adherence to rabbinical traditions.

An unbelieving Jew who took seriously Paul's words in chapter 1-8 would likely feel that the gospel rendered him an utter outcast, written off by God.

Paul had once been the most zealous persecutor of Jews who named the name of Jesus, relentlessly; here is a description,

Acts 9:1a (NASB)

¹ *Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord,*

Now he had been completely transformed, gladly counting himself among the disciples of Christ and strongly condemning the legalism and false security of traditional Judaism.

To unbelieving religious Jews, Christianity would be viewed as an anti-Jewish conspiracy in their eyes. Paul utterly contradicted the teaching of Moses, preaching such things as;

Acts 13:38-39 (NASB)

³⁸ *"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,*

³⁹ *and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.*

Paul a former Pharisee;

Acts 8:1 (NASB)

¹ *Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*

Acts 8:3 (NASB)

³ *But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.*

Acts 9:1-2 (NASB)

¹ *Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest,*

² *and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*

So now he was considered a traitor of traitors to his people, more despised than a pagan Gentile. He was the great betrayer, the Judas of Judaism and the archenemy of Israel so;

Acts 9:23 (NASB)

²³ *When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him,*

Acts 13:50 (NASB)

⁵⁰ *But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.*

Acts 20:1-3 (NASB)

¹ *After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he left to go to Macedonia.*

² *When he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece.*

³ *And there he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.*

2 Corinthians 11:24 (NASB)

²⁴ *Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.*

Still today, Jews look upon Christianity as inherently anti-Semitic. When they hear Jesus proclaimed as their long-awaited Messiah, the great savior and Deliver of Israel, they become highly incensed.

Instead of seeing the Gospel as the perfect fulfillment and completion of Judaism, they see it as a destructive threat. Unfortunately, their many persecutions throughout history at the hands of professed Christians exacerbates that resentment.

Paul had great concern not just for Israel as a nation, but an incredibly profound love for Israelites as individuals. And he knew that before unbelieving Jews would listen to anything else, he had to say, they first would have to be convinced that he truly cared for them and was far from leading an anti-Jewish conspiracy.

In his preaching and writing the apostle irrefutably undermined the two basic pillars of popular Judaism, physical descent from Abraham and works righteousness under the law.

Like Jesus during His early ministry, Paul stripped bare the hypocritical and legalistic sham of rabbinical Judaism. Also, like Jesus, he knew he had to assure unbelieving Jews of his genuine love for them. He had to convince them that he proclaimed the gospel as a friend who wanted to protect and rescue them, not as an enemy who sought to condemn and destroy them. He had to show them his heart before he could give them his theology.

So, he begins by assuring them of his personal honesty and integrity, saying, **“I am telling the truth I am not lying.** Paul certified his genuineness by declaring that this **truth** was told **in Christ.**

He called his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as an indisputable witness.

He was saying that everything he thought or did or felt was done for and through His Lord.

Paul’s union with Christ was the orbit within which his emotions moved and the fountain from which they flowed. In other words, Christ, who was the apostle’s very life and breath, would attest to the truth of what he was about to teach. His omniscient, righteous, sovereign, and gracious Lord, who perfectly knew Paul’s heart and motives, would affirm the truthfulness of the apostle’s limitless love for his fellow Jews.

In the words of the nineteenth-century Swiss commentator and theologian Frederic Godet,

“in the eyes of Paul there is something so holy in Christ, that in the pure and luminous atmosphere of His felt presence no lie, and not even any exaggeration, is possible” (Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the romans [New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883], p 338).

Paul frequently called God as his witness. In the opening of this letter he assured the Roman church that;

Romans 1:9-10 (NASB)

⁹ ***For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you,***

¹⁰ ***always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.***

For Paul, a promise made was a promise kept.

In his second letter to Corinth, he wrote,

2 Corinthians 1:23-24 (NASB)

²³ ***But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth.***

²⁴ ***Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm.***

Later in the same letter he again assured his readers of his truthfulness by declaring,

2 Corinthians 11:31 (NASB)

³¹ ***The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.***

Now, giving the same assurance in 9:1 of Romans, Paul insisted **I am not lying**.

The Apostle would not do or say anything simply for the sake of expediency or to make a favorable impression.

He was not trying to entice his Jewish readers to accept what he said by flattering them or by making insincere and exaggerated claims for himself.

He would not say anything that was untruthful or hypocritical in order to gain their attention or their agreement.

His words exactly expressed his mind and heart.

Now, not only did Paul call the Lord as his witness, but also, he called his own **conscience** as a **witness**.

While defending himself before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem;

Acts 23:1 (NASB)

¹ ***Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day."***

It was not Paul’s conscience, in itself that was reliable. His conscience was constantly clear and uncondemning because he lived in consistent obedience to the Lord.

2 Corinthians 1:12 (NASB)

¹² ***For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.***

Contrary to common advice, “Let your conscience be your guide” the natural human conscience is far from being a reliable guide. It can be seared;

1 Timothy 4:2 (NASB)

² *by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, or covered over with scar tissue.*

Like every other aspect of man's fallen nature, it is tainted and corrupted by sin.

Titus 1:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ *To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.*

Through neglect of fellowship with God and disobedience to His Word, even a believer's conscience can become insensitive and unreliable. That is why Paul does not allow for believers to violate conscience, even regarding nonmoral things.

To do so is to train yourself to reject conscience

Romans 14:20-23 (NASB)

²⁰ *Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense.*

²¹ *It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.*

²² *The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.*

²³ *But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.*

All believers should be able to say with Martin Luther, "*My conscience is captive to the Word of God*"

A conscience surrendered to God's Word is a conscience that is subject to **the Holy Spirit**, whom Paul next invokes as a witness to his truthfulness and to the reliability of his conscience.

The human conscience is by itself neutral. It is activated by and according to the nature of the person to whom it belongs. The conscience of an evil, unregenerate man is no guard against sinful thoughts and actions.

The conscience of a faithful believer, on the other hand, is reliable, because it is activated by the truths and standards of God's Word and is energized by the power of God's indwelling **Holy Spirit**.

When we live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, and obey the Spirit, we can trust our conscience because it is under divine control. The Spirit's perfect prompting will either commend or condemn what we are doing or are planning to do.

So, it is because of what Paul is about to say that, and the fact that it is so unbelievable, at best, highly exaggerated that Paul has an important reason or summoning such an array of witnesses.

His introductory statement is believable enough. Few Christians who knew Paul would doubt that he had **great sorrow and unceasing grief** in his **heart** for his unbelieving fellow Jews.

As noted, that he was specially appointed apostle to the Gentiles, he also was commissioned to proclaim the gospel to the "Sons of Israel" The Lord told Ananias about Saul.

Acts 9:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

Paul makes it clear here that it would have torn his heart out were he not to have opportunity to proclaim the way of salvation to his fellow sons and daughters of Israel.

But even with the opportunity to do so, he could not assuage the **great sorrow and unceasing grief** he felt for those Jews who refused to believe.

We will go forward with this next time.