

Romans Session 133

The Tragic Unbelief of Israel 4

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,*

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)

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.

It was that same kind of grief that the prophet Samuel had for Saul.

We read:

1 Samuel 15:35 (NASB)

³⁵ *Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.*

By his own arrogance and disobedience, Saul had made himself an outcast before God and his people.

But out of deep love for the Lord's anointed, Samuel never stopped grieving on the king's behalf.

In the massive psalm that so highly exalts God's Word, the writer confesses:

Psalm 119:136 (NASB)

¹³⁶ *My eyes shed streams of water, Because they do not keep Your law.*

Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet because of his deep grief over the unbelief and wickedness of his people;

Jeremiah 9:1 (NASB)

¹ Oh that my head were waters And my eyes a fountain of tears, That I might weep day and night For the slain of the daughter of my people!

Later he implores;

Jeremiah 13:15-17 (NASB)

¹⁵ Listen and give heed, do not be haughty, For the LORD has spoken.

¹⁶ Give glory to the LORD your God, Before He brings darkness And before your feet stumble On the dusky mountains, And while you are hoping for light He makes it into deep darkness, And turns it into gloom.

¹⁷ But if you will not listen to it, My soul will sob in secret for such pride; And my eyes will bitterly weep And flow down with tears, Because the flock of the LORD has been taken captive.

Israel's rejection of her Messiah weighed so heavily on Paul's heart that he called on two members of the Trinity to attest to his unrelenting anguish. And he knew that, but for God's gracious intervention on the Damascus road, he not only would still be among those unbelieving Jews but would still be leading them in persecuting those who had acknowledged their Messiah.

The full depth and genuineness of Paul's grief is expressed in his almost unbelievable declaration that **I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my Brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.**

As indicated by his opening qualifier, **I could wish**, Paul knew he could not reject his salvation and again become **accursed** (devoted to destruction in eternal hell) and thus forever **separated from Christ**.

It was for the salvations of his fellow Jews that Paul expresses himself in hyperbole, saying he was willing even to forfeit his salvations if, somehow, that could save them from God's condemnations.

No one knew better than Paul that salvations is a believer's most precious treasure and that only Christ's sacrificial death has the power to save.

But here he is speaking emotionally, not theologically, and there is no reason to doubt that his awesome statement of self-sacrifice was the expression of a completely honest heart.

Paul felt such love that he was willing to relinquish his own salvations and spend eternity in hell if somehow that could bring His fellow Jews to faith in Christ!

He knew, of course, that even if such a thing was possible, his being separated from Christ would have no power in itself to bring a single person to Christ.

The apostle also knew that the obvious impossibility and worthlessness of such a sacrifice would cause some of his critics to accuse him of safely offering to sacrifice that which he knew was impossible to lose.

It was doubtless to counter such accusations that he had called Christ and the Holy Spirit to witness his sincerity.

Paul's passion to offer such an ultimate sacrifice reflected the gracious heart of God, who so loved the unloving and evil world that He sent His only begotten Son to provide for its redemption (*John 3:16*)

It also reflected the equally gracious heart of the Son, who, in obedience to the Father, gave His life that others might live.

Paul had just finished rejoicing in the believer's absolute security in Christ, from which;

Romans 8:38-39 (NASB)

³⁸ *For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,*

³⁹ *nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Yet his love for the lost in Israel gave him the willingness to surrender those intimate, inestimable, and eternal blessings, if doing so would bring his Jewish brethren to Christ.

It was exactly Paul's great love for the lost that made him such a powerful instrument in the hands of God. Evangelism has little effect if the evangelist has little love for the lost.

John Knox reflected Paul's great love when he prayed,

"Give me Scotland or I die"

And Henry Martyn when he said,

"O that I were a flame of fire in the hand of God,"

And Davit Brainerd, who prayed,

"Óh! that I may burn out for God" (which he did before he was thirty years old)

Moses loved the fickle, ungrateful, and disobedient Israelites in much the same way that Paul loved them centuries later. Interceding for them after they built and worshiped the golden calf during the very time, he was on Mount Sinai receiving the tablets of the law from God, Moses pleaded with the Lord on their behalf,

Exodus 32:32 (NASB)

³² *"But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!"*

Some years ago, a young woman was stabbed and killed while jogging near her apartment. Both the woman and her husband were Christians, but the woman's parents were not, and she had a great burden for their salvations. Shortly before she was killed, she had confided in her husband that she would be willing to die if her death could be used by God to win her parents to Himself.

After the memorial service, in which the gospel was proclaimed, her mother did indeed receive Christ as Lord and Savior. Only Christ's own gracious love in the hearts of those who belong to Him can produce such self-sacrificing devotion.

The more we obey His Word and surrender to His Will, the more we will love as He loves.

So, we see how Paul reveals his love for his people. With witnesses called to testify to the sincerity of his love and his heart.

GOD'S PERSONAL CONNECTIONS WITH UNBELIEVING ISRAEL

Romans 9:4-5 (NASB)

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.

After opening his heart concerning the Jews and his love for them, he then expresses his deep sorrow over Israel's unbelief because of their personal connection with God.

He not only loved the Jews because they were his physical kinsmen but even more because they are God's chosen people. He loved whomever God loves, and because God loves Israel uniquely, Paul loved Israel uniquely.

In these two verses the apostle sets forth nine marvelous privileges that belong to Israel, graciously bestowed on them by a loving God.

- 1. They are privileged simply to be Israelites, descendants of Abraham through Isaac and then through Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel.**
- 2. It is the Israelites to whom belongs the adoption as sons. Beyond their patriarchal ancestry, Jews are privileged to have adoption as God's sons.**
- 3. God blessed Israel by revealing to them His own presence in the Shekinah glory. In that unique and inexplicable way. God dwelled in the midst of Israel, His people.**
- 4. Israel was privileged to have been given the covenants. Abrahams covenant, Moses covenants, David's eternal covenant of a kingdom. Etc**
- 5. Israel was privileged by the giving of the law of God to them through Moses.**
- 6. Israel was uniquely blessed by being entrusted with the temple service, through which she worshiped and dealt with sin before the Lord.**
- 7. Israel was given the promises of God in a distinct and unique way.**
- 8. It was from Israel that God raised up the fathers, beginning with the first great patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel. It was through these men that the foundation was laid for all the blessings to come.**
- 9. Israel was privileged to provide the lineage of Christ according to the flesh. Christ was not accidentally born a Jew, but was preordained to be a human descendant of Abraham and of David.**

Now having outlined these nine privileges we want to begin to take them one at a time and fully explore their meaning.

First, they were privileged to be Israelites, descendants of Abraham, through Isaac, and then Jacob/Israel

Genesis 32:28 (NASB)

²⁸ *He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed."*

Throughout history, Israelites (or Jews, as they came to be called after the exile in Babylon) have distinguished themselves in virtually every field of human endeavor, in science, the arts, music, business, education, political leadership, and countless other areas.

They have always been a noble people and have produced a disproportionate share of the world's geniuses. When God prepared His special earthly vineyard, it is said,

Isaiah 5:1-2a (NASB)

¹ Let me sing now for my well-beloved A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.

² He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it And also hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes,

What a privilege they had as a people, God's Chosen people.

We will follow on with this next time.