

Romans: The Good News of God

Responding to Rejection of the Gospel

Romans 9:1-5

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Responding to Rejection of the Gospel

Scripture

It is difficult for any of us to receive a hard truth, however necessary it may be for us to hear it. But it is always much easier to hear it if it is told in love.

Pastor and author Ray Stedman tells of a congregation that had dismissed its pastor. Someone asked a member of the congregation why they had dismissed the pastor.

“The pastor keeps telling us we are going to hell,” the church member answered.

“And what does your new pastor say?”

“He keeps telling us we are going to hell, too.”

“So what’s the difference?”

“Well,” the church member replied, “when our first pastor said we were going to hell, he sounded like he was glad. But when our new pastor says it, he sounds like it is breaking his heart.”¹

This is what is going on in Romans 9:1-5. Paul’s heart is broken as he sees his fellow citizens, the Israelites, on their way to hell. Let’s read how the Apostle Paul expresses it in Romans 9:1-5:

¹I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— ²that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. ⁴They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 9:1-5)

¹ Ray C. Stedman, *From Guilt to Glory*, vol. 2, *Reveling in God’s Salvation* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1978), 10.

Introduction

Paul has just finished writing chapter 8 on the note of supreme joy that we who are Christians have in God's salvation. He has written at the end of the chapter in Romans 8:38-39, "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." And at the conclusion of that we say, "What great joy!"

But immediately Paul continues in Romans 9:1-2, "I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart." And at that we say, "What great sorrow!"

Why the difference? Paul is now introducing his readers—and us—to several questions that relate to the Jews. Chapters 9-11 are very important chapters in Paul's letter to the Romans. I will spare you the various technicalities and questions that arise in these chapters; we shall address them in turn as we get to them in our upcoming studies of chapters 9-11. Suffice it to say at this point that Paul's dominant theme in Romans 9-11 is Israel's rejection of the gospel, together with the questions it raises.

Lesson

Today's lesson, Romans 9:1-5, is in a sense an introductory prologue to the rest of chapters 9-11. In these five verses the Apostle Paul bares his soul and shows how we are to respond to those who reject the gospel. Using an outline borrowed from James Montgomery Boice,² we see in Romans 9:1-5:

1. Great sorrow for a great people (9:1-3), and
2. Great privileges for a great people (9:4-5).

² James Montgomery Boice, *Romans: God and History, Romans 9-11*. Vol. 3. 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 1017-1032.

I. Great Sorrow for a Great People (9:1-3)

First, let's notice great sorrow for a great people.

This is how Paul expresses it in verses 1-3: **“I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”**

The Jews saw Paul as a traitor and an enemy. They believed him to be a false prophet and a liar. Why? Because he was proclaiming that God's love and salvation are for *all* people and not just for the Jews. A person no longer had to become a Jewish proselyte in order to know God and be saved (cf. Romans 10:12-13). To the ordinary Jew, Paul was a heretic. He was a man to be utterly distrusted. They hated and despised him, and wanted to kill him and do away with his message.

Paul pleads with his people, the Jews, to believe what he is saying. He says, **“I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit”** (9:1). He carries on and expresses **great sorrow and unceasing anguish in his heart** (9:2). Despite the rejection and ill treatment he has received from his fellow Israelites, Paul deeply loves his kinsmen. And he has a deep desire for them to grasp the truth of the gospel.

In fact, Paul goes so far as to say in verse 3, **“For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”** That depth of concern and love is truly remarkable.

Now, Paul is too careful a theologian to know that he could *literally* be **cut off from Christ** and sent to hell in exchange for the salvation of his **kinsmen according to the flesh**. Paul, as one commentator says, is speaking here not *theologically* but *emotionally*. He is expressing a deep compassion and love for his fellow citizens and their spiritual lostness. And what is so remarkable

about Paul's love is that it is expressed toward those who have a deep hatred toward him! This is a wonderful picture of a true believer's heart.

It reminds us of Moses' words in Exodus 32 where he pleads with God for the salvation of Israel from divine judgment when the nation sinned against God by making a golden calf. God told Moses while he was up on Mount Sinai with God that he was going to destroy the nation of Israel because of their idolatry. But Moses cries out to God in Exodus 32:31-32, "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written." Here again you see the heart of a believer, the heart of one concerned for sinners who are rebelling against God and his ways.

It is also a picture of Jesus' concern for the lost. Just before the Passion Week, toward the end of his earthly life, Jesus was in Jerusalem. While ministering to the crowds and his disciples, most likely on the Temple grounds, Jesus cried out in those most poignant words in Matthew 23:37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" Here we see the heart of the Savior expressing his concern for sinners who are rebelling against God and his ways.

Throughout history, believers have had this heart for the lost. John Knox, for example, reflected Paul's sorrow for his people when he said, "O God! Give me Scotland or I die!"

David Brainerd, the great missionary to the North American Indians in the early years of the 18th century, died at the tender age of 29 while attempting to minister to them amid many difficulties and trials. He wrote of his feelings for the unconverted American Indians in these memorable words, "I dream of lost souls. I care not what sufferings I undergo, as long as I see lost souls saved."

Do you see the heart of sorrow and love for the lost in Paul, Moses, Jesus, John Knox, and David Brainerd? While you and I

might not have their great gifts, we certainly ought to have a heart of sorrow and love for the lost as they did.

Let me ask you this question. Do you have a concern for the unconverted? Do you have great sorrow and unceasing anguish for those who do not yet know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior?

I know that some of you do have a great concern for the unconverted, but I am afraid that most of us do not. Why is that? Is it because we do not believe that the unconverted really are on their way to an eternal hell? Or is it that we really do not believe the gospel?

As I said, we ought to have a heart of sorrow and love for the lost. We should have a great concern for every unsaved neighbor, classmate, colleague, friend, and family member.

The great Charles Spurgeon told a story that demonstrated a person's concern for an unsaved family member. A rather young girl in Spurgeon's congregation who had a terminal illness approached her pastor one day with thoughts about her upcoming funeral. She spoke of her father, who was an unbeliever and who had never accepted an invitation from her to go to church with her.

"Pastor, you will bury me, won't you?" she asked. "My father will have to come to my funeral and hear you speak, and you will speak the gospel. Please speak it clearly. I have prayed for him a long time. I know God will save him."

According to Spurgeon, the father came to her funeral and was indeed converted.³ The girl did not die in her father's place. Of course, she could not because Jesus is the only one who has died to save sinners. But she had a heart of sorrow and love for the lost in that she was willing to die if her death might cause the conversion of one close to her whom she loved very much.

If you do not have a heart of sorrow and love for the lost, you need to develop that attitude. But how do you do that?

Make a note of one unsaved person and start praying regularly for his or her salvation. After a while you will discover that you

³ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "Concern for Other Men's Souls," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 24 (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1972), 418.

will become more concerned for that person, and you will start looking for opportunities to introduce him or her to Christ.

I have encouraged each one of you to read through the Bible in a year this year. Similarly, I would like to encourage each one of you to pray for one unsaved person to come to know Christ this year. Wouldn't it be great if each one of us read through the Bible and saw one loved one come to faith in Christ this year?

II. Great Privileges for a Great People (9:4-5)

Second, let's notice great privileges for a great people.

This is how Paul expresses the great privileges for the great people of Israel in verses 4-5: **“They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.”**

There is a well-known story about Benjamin Disraeli, the conservative statesman who served as Prime Minister of England in 1868 and again from 1874 to 1880. He was elected to Parliament at the age of 33. Shortly after his election Daniel O'Connell, the Irish Roman Catholic leader, verbally attacked him. In the course of his ranting and raving, O'Connell referred to Disraeli's Jewish ancestry in a most disparaging way.

“Yes, sir, I am a Jew,” Disraeli replied. “And I remind my illustrious opponent that when my ancestors were serving as priests in the temple of Solomon and were giving law and religion to the world, the ancestors of that right honorable gentleman were brutal savages eating nuts in a forest!”⁴

Disraeli affirmed that **the Israelites** had tremendous privileges. And it is these very privileges that Paul points out in these two verses. In seeking to show the reason for his great sorrow and unceasing anguish, and his desire that Israel be saved, Paul laments

⁴ *The Little, Brown Book of Anecdotes*, Clifton Fadiman, general editor (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1985), 170. Disraeli's words have been reported in a variety of ways by different writers.

their privileges and lost opportunities. He describes eight privileges that Israel squandered. Let's see briefly what they were.

First, **“to them belong the adoption”** (9:4b). God called Israel his firstborn son (cf. Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 32:18). In effect, Paul speaks of the people of Israel as “the chosen people.” Their failure to recognize their tremendous privilege is even more terrible in light of all that God had done for them.

Second, **“the glory”** (9:4c). This expression most likely refers to the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night by which God miraculously guided the people of Israel through the wilderness to the Promised Land. What a tremendous privilege to have God's daily, moment-by-moment guidance! From Sinai to the Promised Land God's hand was upon them, and yet the people of Israel have now turned away from him.

Third, **“the covenants”** (9:4d). Nothing is more characteristic of God's special relationship with his people than the covenants. The word is so rich that it is used in a wide variety of ways. Here it probably refers to the covenants established by God, first with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and then later with Moses and David.

Fourth, **“the giving of the law”** (9:4e). God had blessed his people with giving them his own law with his own hand.

Fifth, **“the worship”** (9:4f). This refers to all aspects of worship: the priesthood, the offerings, the sacrifices, the tabernacle, and the temple itself. God gave all of this to the people of Israel so that they would know how God was to be worshiped.

Sixth, **“and the promises”** (9:4g). The Old Testament, the Scriptures of the Israelites, is filled with many promises of one sort or another, but in this context **promises** refers to the promises of redemption to be fulfilled by the Messiah, who is Jesus Christ.

Seventh, **“to them belong the patriarchs”** (9:5a). Not least of the privileges of the Israelites are those traditions seen in the lives of the fathers of the faith, men such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. In fact, one might include here all of those mentioned in the Hall of Faith, in Hebrews 11:1-12:2.

And eighth, **“and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.”** (9:5b). What an unspeakable privilege! To have the Lord Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, as one of your closest kinsmen is the greatest of all privileges indeed.

All of these privileges belonged to the Israelites. And yet, the Israelites were not saved. It is true that certain Jews were saved. Paul is going to make that point repeatedly in the next few chapters. But nationally—that is, speaking of the Israelites as a nation—it is nevertheless also true that these great privileges, the greatest spiritual privileges that could possibly be imagined for people anywhere, did not in themselves guarantee salvation, which is the reason for the great sorrow and unceasing anguish that Paul has so intensely and poignantly expressed.

In spite of the adoption, in spite of the glory, in spite of the covenants, in spite of possessing God’s law, in spite of the worship, in spite of the promises, in spite of the patriarchs, in spite of the nationality of Christ—in spite of all these things—no one, not a nation, not an individual, is saved or can be saved apart from faith alone in Christ alone by God’s grace alone.

Let me ask you this question. Are you, like the Israelites, counting on your privileges to save you?

Your spiritual privileges, no matter great they are or have been, will not save you. *You* must have faith alone in Christ alone by God’s grace alone in order to be saved.

Some people think that they are saved because they have Christian parents. Children, your Mom and Dad may be saved. They may have a wonderful relationship with Jesus Christ. You may think that God will save you because Mom and Dad are Christians. Let me warn you: having godly, Christian parents will not save you. *You* must have faith alone in Christ alone by God’s grace alone in order to be saved.

Some people think that they are saved because they have been blessed with a great Christian education, either in a home or in a good evangelical church or in a Christian school. Their educa-

tion has been of tremendous value in giving them a solid grounding in the Word of God. If you are counting on your Christian knowledge, let me warn you: knowledge alone will not save you. Demons know more theology than all of us combined, and not one of them is saved. *You* must have faith alone in Christ alone by God's grace alone in order to be saved.

Some people think that they are saved because they are members in a church. If you are a church member, even a member in a sound, evangelical church like this one, that is a great privilege. But church membership will not save you. *You* must have faith alone in Christ alone by God's grace alone in order to be saved.

Some people think that they are saved because they participate in the sacraments, or because they support the church financially, or because they are involved in a church ministry. Again, let me warn you: none of these things will save you. *You* must have faith alone in Christ alone by God's grace alone in order to be saved.

Paula Webster had been raised in a Christian home, had been given a Christian education, and was settled down in what seemed to be a Christian marriage. She was active in her church, attended Bible conferences, and even had regular times of personal Bible study. She said that if anyone had asked her if she was a Christian, she would have said yes, immediately and emphatically.

Yet something was missing. She knew about God, but she sensed that she did not actually know him. She felt frustrated and unhappy, and as far as her own spiritual life was concerned she knew she was getting nowhere.

Is that a description of you?

As Paula studied the Bible she was particularly attracted to David and Paul, because each man clearly had a heart for God. They knew about God. But in addition they each loved him and wanted to obey him as an expression of that love. As she studied their lives she realized that something was wrong with her own heart, and she asked God to change her.

And God did! He taught her that she had never really trusted in Christ *alone*. She had never really submitted herself to God.

Here, in her own words, is what happened:

At that moment I surrendered my life entirely to God. I knew that he had heard me and accepted my surrender. I was conscious immediately that a great burden had been rolled away. I knew that I had been forgiven and cleansed. I knew that I had been changed. Peace, like a great calm following a storm at sea, and joy unspeakable filled my heart. I knew that the great war within had ceased. The sense that all had been made right replaced the agitation and restlessness I had felt only minutes before. I had finally been subdued and conquered by the Lord of Glory before whom I now gladly and gratefully bowed. And he no longer seemed distant or impersonal, nor I unclean and unsure before him. . . . I had been born again.

Paula confessed that her privileges did not save her. It was only the new birth, expressed by faith alone in Christ alone by God's grace alone that ultimately gave her peace with God.⁵

Do you have this peace with God? You may have great privileges, but it is only faith alone in Christ alone by God's grace alone that will save you.

Conclusion

The Apostle Paul tells us about (1) great sorrow for a great people, and (2) great privileges for a great people.

If you are a Christian, ask God to give you a heart of sorrow and love for the lost.

And if you are not yet a Christian, I encourage you not to trust in the spiritual privileges you have, but rather to have faith alone in Christ alone by God's grace alone in order to be saved. Amen.

⁵ "Personal Testimony" by Paula Webster in William A. Webster, *Must Jesus Be Lord to Be Savior?* (Memphis: Grace Publications, 1986), 58.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAAYER:

Taken from Ray Ortlund's *A Passion for God*:

O Lord God, you have showered great privileges on us. You have joined us to Christ and to his Body, the church, by your Spirit. You have put into our hands your Holy Word, with its great and precious promises. You have marked us as your own through baptism. You draw near to us in fellowship at your table.

O Lord God, these great privileges incur great responsibilities. Do not let us squander these treasures. Let us be wise stewards of your gifts, translating rich opportunity into even richer possession.

And add this one passion on top of all the privileges, dear Lord—that we would have a great sorrow for the lost, especially for those whom we love.

And if there is anyone here today who is counting on his or her privileges to get into heaven, please enable that person to have faith alone in Christ alone by your grace alone.

And for all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.