

# What about Israel?

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Romans 9:1-5

We go from such heights in Romans 8 to such depths in Romans 9. We agreed with Derek Thomas that Romans 8 is the best chapter in the Bible. But Romans 9 might just be the most controversial! How do we go from such certitude and fortitude to the moans and groans of 9:1 and following?

The reason for the chapter is not hard to see. If God has shown such great grace in His gospel, how do we explain the failure of the Jews to apprehend their own Messiah? How is it that redemption which means ‘no condemnation’ leaves the Jews lost and under God’s wrath? If salvation is of the Jews, how do the Jews not find salvation?

This brings us to the heart of these next three chapters. Paul has said all along – to the Jew first, and then the Gentiles. But now we see the Jews last. What is going on?

This is the problem of *Jewish unbelief*. And Paul explains this unbelief is not new. The Jews were never all saved in the past. Never! That’s chapter 9. Only the elect Jews were saved. And that will continue.

Jewish unbelief in the present is neither surprising nor unfruitful. The OT foresaw the Jews hardening their hearts when Jesus came. The freeness of the gospel to the Gentiles then is contrasted with the self-righteousness of unbelieving Israel. That’s chapter 10.

And chapter 11 speaks of Jewish unbelief in the future. Now is a time when the Jews have been broken off. But this breaking off is not full – some believe, like Paul. And this breaking off is not final. They will be grafted in again. A new day for Israel according to the flesh is coming.

Now Paul does not approach this matter in a cold or detached way. His Spirit-led teaching is drenched with tears! He sees so clearly those who were in the front of the line are now not in line at all!

There are two parts then these 5 opening verses – the great privileges of his kinsmen, in 4-5, and the great failure to take a hold of those privileges in 1-3, which breaks his heart.

Let us look briefly at these Jewish Privileges, and we can put them under three categories:

1. Israelite **Nearness** to God; this is repeated in the Mosaic covenant. All of verse 4 points in the same direction, to a life-giving adoption as sons, to salvation, to having God's glory and the covenants which bring them into his presence, and the authority of the Law of God to them on how to be God's people, hearing, believing and doing the word, knowing his mercy and forgiveness through the sacrificial system, and being promise-receivers!

This shows us the supernatural nature of being saved. All these things in themselves SHOULD have brought them to the gospel. But coming to the gospel is a supernatural thing, and not a natural one. Just as there can be a thief on a cross snatched from the gates of hell for

heaven, so there are those like the devil lifted to the heights of heaven's gates and yet wind up in the depths of God's eternal wrath!

2. Notice then the first line of verse 5 – Israelite **Heritage** – “whose are the fathers”. This takes us to Genesis 12-50. These are children of Abraham who do not look like their father when it comes to the faith or believing the promises. The Jews did not rejoice to see the coming of Jesus's day like Abraham did. They did not fear God like Isaac, or repent like Jacob, or rest in God's providence like Joseph!

3. Then worst of all, they did not accept their own, Israelite **Savior**. Israel was chosen to bring forth the Christ from their family. But when He came according to the flesh, in the line of David, born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem; and when He demonstrated that He was indeed God over all, in His miraculous deeds, in His rule over all demons, in His teaching and claims, in His divine love and kindness to all, and then capped off in his resurrection and the power of His Spirit – the Jews said NO.

Let me paint you a picture.

A great king has opened his halls to all of his family, his friends and his neighbors. even strangers. He puts on the greatest feast his world has ever seen. A table of pure gold, and fine, throne-like chairs surround it – enough for all – in his great dining chamber. Beautiful lights illumine the place, and even more beautiful music fills it with joy and gladness. At the head of the table his own Son, though weak in appearance, is the honored guest. On the table is loaded every delicious food imaginable – the finest, the most tasty of meats and sides and desserts and drinks.

And on all the chairs are the names of his dear family etched in them.

The doors are opened and the guests file in to take their places – but when the family members see the riches enjoyed even by the commoners and strangers, sitting with their elder brother – they stop and are put off. They will not accept Him to be their king; they will not share their father’s hall with these people, sitting in equal places with themselves.

Now see them stick their heads up in the air and turn away into the night; rejecting the rich kindnesses and love and provisions of their own father.

This is a very dim picture of what is happening in Romans 9. The great fellowship hall and feast of the Son are Romans 8. A fellowship, hall and Son the Jews rejected, and even were party to His death. Yet the Son now welcomes them freely to His table.

But instead of humbling themselves and accepting and believing his grace – they leave and announce their own feast, their own table, their own dinner of self-righteousness – and they do it with a great zeal and opposition to all else.

What then does Paul do? Does he say, “Don’t let the door hit you on the way out?” Does he give them a word of spite?” Nope!

He follows after them as far as he can, urging and pleading their return, their salvation, their acceptance of the mercy that has been spread to all mankind!

Let us say at the outset how the gospel not only dries up our tears, it also brings them. You are saved from the sorrows of sin and guilt; an ocean of hellish tears is dried up in the cross. But you must be in heaven for all tears to be done away. Jesus changes your heart all the way through. You exchange false joy for true, so you replace false sorrows for genuine. You leap for joy at the glory of God in your life – but do you not feel the pain of his glory rejected? Having tasted the mountain of love in Romans 8, it is not surprising to find the vale of tears when men fail of that love in Romans 9.

So let us draw some lessons from an Apostle's Tears, and get some honey from this rock.

1. Number one, we should be saddest about the worst things in life if we see what are the best things in life. The eternal things, the things of God, is where Paul's grief begins. This arises from his conscience in Christ, his conscience before God, his conscience with the Holy Spirit testifying. He piles five strong assertions of his inward condition of honesty and sincerity. There is no bitter soul against his kinsmen at all. I tell the truth, I lie not, in Christ, my conscience bearing witness and the Holy Spirit witnessing.

How greatly, deeply, genuinely, and thoroughly grieved should we be on account of the lost condition of our own people! These were so close and yet so far!

When a soul is saved, what a wonder, what a miracle takes place! The Bible says angels rejoice in heaven! What blessings abound to the world at the conversion of a life turned to godliness! And who knows what evil is halted? And what more could we say of eternity – the

differences between eternal blessings of heaven over eternal curses of hell!?

See here then the tear-filled eyes of Paul, and of all faithful followers of the Lamb, are so because of God's eyes. We see as He sees – what is most important, and what isn't. God Himself, our God and Savior Jesus rejoice!

What is it that pierces you most? Breaks your heart the most? Is it worthy? Is it in line with the cross?

This leads us to our second point:

2. We will have great-hearts if, like Paul, we are alive to such riches in these privileges - when they are mixed with faith.

Paul's heart was not moved by these things occasionally or superficially but greatly, deeply, continually! What depths of sorrow and unceasing grief in the heart!

This is no doubt part of the Apostolic pattern to which Christ called Paul. He was a pattern of suffering and zeal and godliness and faith, but also of brokenness and prayer for the lost. This is part of offering one's life up a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.

I have two questions here then:

First, to you who have been plucked as a brand from the fire yourself, and found everlasting life in the Christ who loved you and gave himself for you – who do you have great sorrow and unceasing pain over?

Such a sight of perishing relatives would crush us if it were not for the sovereign work of God done in our hearts, which now beats for things above.

God is to be loved so supremely because he loved you so supremely – that you in turn look for those in your circles who need the love of God to reach them. And we know what it is – as Paul did – to see those we call brothers in the flesh, to enter a Christless eternity! But we do not lose heart, and press on to pray and struggle for their salvation. Turn such affections forward and upward.

Secondly, whose heart are you breaking if you have not turned to the Lord in faith yourself? Our families outside of Christ may have little concern over their souls; but they should be able to look at you and say, “well, if I don’t care, he does, or she does!”

Whose heart are you breaking, unbeliever? A mother’s heart, a father’s – a wife or husband, a sibling or child or grandchild?

You see as God sees, and so grieve; and your heart is pained deeply constantly, because your heart is indwelt and filled by the Spirit.

3. Thirdly, Paul is willing to offer up his own life to perish and be accursed, if possible, if it would save them. Which, of course, he isn’t, but at the same time, is the measure of his love.

Paul is like Moses in Ex. 32 – and even beyond Moses. Moses interceded for Israel, saying to God, if you will not forgive them, then blot me out of your book!

But Paul goes that far and more. He would be blotted out of eternal life and accursed from his Savior if that were to save his kinsmen.

The apostle is not teaching that he can be lost. Nor is he teaching that he could be damned in a substitutionary fashion. He has just written of the only Savior Jesus in Romans 8 and that all who believe can no way be lost!

Nevertheless, redeemed love has a self-sacrificing heartbeat to it. Paul acts out of the love which Jesus has. He has the eye of God, the heart of the Spirit, and love of the Son of God who gave himself for sinners.

“It was a proof, says John Calvin, of the most fervent love that Paul did not hesitate to call on himself the condemnation which he saw hanging over the Jews, in order that he might deliver them.”

This should be the heartbeat of every Christian, not counting the cost but doing all for him, doing all like him! Are you a cross-bearing believer - is there any other kind?

Paul's grief was not simply that his soul gripped the painful subject; no, rather he was himself gripped by that subject. Such an emotional life led him to pray all night at times for the church and for the lost.

This led him again and again to walk into the the storm of Jewish rejection, in Jewish Synagogues, town after town, city after city, and event to Jerusalem!

No earthly obstacles slowed his pace. All eternity yawned before his brief day, a fiery eternity was swallowing up his kinsman. With great bravery, he rushed into the flames to snatch as many branches he



could from sure destruction. He was God's firefighter, showering the waters of love that even death could not destroy!

Let us close then with these two considerations.

If you can view, unmoved, the perishing condition of your fellow men; your neighbors, your countrymen, your fellow employees and friends, even your family. And if you are not moved by such a prospect as utter, full, eternal, perdition; not only should we question our salvation but we should question our very humanity! We should question whether we are even alive at all! What kind of life have we then if we can fiddle while souls perish!?

2. If we are unwilling to make sacrifices for their eternal benefit, placing our own inadequacies or pride ahead of the Lord's great commission, what are we to say? Are we to place our own priorities, even good things— such as spouses, children, parents - such as employment, such as country - placing these before God's divine call to reach the lost for Christ – if these are of greater importance to us than Christ's final command to the church, do we not prove ourselves unworthy of His kingdom and need to repent?

I recall a story where a man who was not a Christian, but recognized the realities at stake, he said if this were true, he would be willing to crawl across burning coals and broken glass to bring the gospel to the perishing.

But let us not be merely saddened about this, but be up and doing. How can I further the gospel? Support the gospel? Pray for the gospel feet to march forth? And join them myself?