

Paul Wishes a Curse on Himself

Romans 9

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The following is an excerpt from
The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Romans 9.

For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, (9:3)

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 salvation of his fellow Jews that Paul expresses himself in hyperbole, saying he was willing even to forfeit his salvation, if, somehow, that could save them from God's condemnation. No one, of course, knew better than Paul that salvation is a believer's most precious treasure and that only Christ's sacrificial death has the power to save. But here he was 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 salvation 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 were 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 "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing" can "separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38–39). 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," Henry Martyn when he said, "O that I were a flame of fire in the hand of God," and David Brainerd, who prayed that he might 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, "Now, if Thou wilt, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Thy book which Thou hast written!" (Ex. 32:32).

Some years ago, a young woman in our area 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 salvation. Shortly before she was killed she had confided to 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.

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