Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Sorrowful Unbelief of Israel, Part 1
Scripture: Romans 9:1-4
Code: 45-69

We return tonight in our study of God's Word to Romans chapter 9...a very very favorite passage of mine is this section of the epistle to the Romans, and I trust it will be one of your favorites as well by the time we've completed our study. A new adventure really awaits us as we embark upon the journey through Romans 9, 10 and 11. It is a fascinating section, a section filled with great and practical and essential doctrine. And you're going to thrill to the assets of this portion of Scripture, I'm quite confident, by the time you're through.

Now this has been, I confess, a misunderstood part of the Word of God. In fact there are some commentators who in writing commentaries on Romans stop at the end of chapter 8. They'd rather not write another volume than try to tackle these three chapters. We don't need to do that. They are essential to Paul's argument.

Some have said in treating this section that it is a parenthesis, that for some reason Paul was diverted from his major theme of justification by faith and he just drops in this sort of closed package, discussing Israel, and then gets back to his main subject in chapter 12. In fact, they argue that if you'll notice the end of chapter 8 it says, "Nor height nor depth nor any other creation shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," and they say that is climactic. That is the great paean of praise reaching its pinnacle and should be really followed in thought by chapter 12 verse 1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, on the basis of these great mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice," and so forth and so forth.

In other words, they say the logical sequence is between chapter 8 verse 39 and chapter 12 verse 1, therefore 9 to 11 is just a parenthesis dropped in that really doesn't have anything to do with the major subjects, it's just something that Paul wanted to deal with and so he put it here.

Now in response to that particular view, chapter 12 could have come after chapter 8 and we really would have understood it. The flow would have been there logically. If the end of chapter 8 fills the believer with anticipation about the future, fills him with a sense of security, lets him know what God has planned for him in Christ that can never be altered, then what better thing than that to know than to give us impetus to behave and to live as we ought to live. And so there is a logical connection between chapter 8 and chapter 12.

But as reasonable as that case may be, that's not the case because there is chapter 9 and there is chapter 10 and there is chapter 11. And Paul cannot go on to chapter 12 until he deals with the subject of these three chapters. He has to deal with it. Paul has learned because he's taught these things before, no doubt, he has learned what the objections are to his teaching. These things that he teaches and writes to the Romans though inspired by the Holy Spirit here are not being taught by Paul surely for the first time. The first time in this Spirit- inspired form, yes, but not the first time in terms of their truth and content. And on other occasions when he has taught justification by grace through faith, he has faced some strong objections. In other places where he has taught the fact that God's salvation is a forever salvation and nothing will ever separate the redeemed one from his redeemer, he has faced some strong objections.

And so, by experience he has learned that there are some questions he has to deal with before he can move on...leaving the subject of justification by grace through faith and talking about its implications. There are some things he must discuss. There are some questions raised by objectors that have to be dealt with. Now Paul is very logical in Romans. He's like a lawyer arguing his case and he wants to leave no stone unturned, no loop holes in his presentation.

Now I want to help you to understand why he writes these three chapters because if you understand this, you'll understand what they're about. If you don't, you really get lost. And I think as I tried to catalog in my mind the features of 9, 10 and 11, the best way to get them across to you is to link them up with a prior portion of the epistle to the Romans. In other words, there are some things that he says earlier in Romans that make it mandatory that he say what he says in 9, 10 and 11. He's got to cover his tracks.

The first passage I call you to is in chapter 1...the first five verses. Chapter 1 verses 1 to 5, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an Apostle, separated unto the gospel of God which He had promised before by His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead, by whom we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith...here it comes...among all nations...among all nations."

Now here at the very outset of the letter he affirms the fact that he is the Apostle to the nations. You can translate the word "nations" Gentiles. He is the Apostle to the Gentiles. And the gospel here is said to be given to the nations, to the Gentiles. Now one of the questions that is going to come up in the mind of a Jew is this, does that mean that God has set aside His people Israel? Does this mean that they are no longer worthy to participate in God's salvation and God's Kingdom? Are the Jews being written off? Is justification by grace through faith a Gentile gift, not for Jews? Has this nation of people who for all these centuries has been God's chosen people now been permanently and totally set apart as an unworthy nation and God has turned to the Gentiles?

Well Paul needs to deal with that. And he does in chapters 9, 10 and 11, in that section he deals specifically with that. Look at chapter 11 verse 1. And I'm going to give you an overview of these chapters. "I say then, hath God cast away His people? May it never be, no, no, no, no, no way." Strong adversative. God forbid. "For I also am an Israelite of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin, God hath not cast away His people whom He foreknew." Look at verse 26, "And so all Israel shall be saved. As it is written, there shall come out of Zion the deliverer and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes but as touching the election...that is the election of God...they are beloved for the Father's sake."

No, God has not set apart Israel from blessing, no. But, you see, he has to say that. He can't just preach the message of justification by grace through faith to the nations without dealing with the fact that some Jews are going to say, "Does this mean we're left out?" Before he can go on to discuss the personal implications of the gospel, he must under...he must explain to them the national implications of this gospel to the nation Israel.

Now I want you to look at second thing that he said in chapter 1 verse 16 that brought some queries from Jewish listeners. He says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile." Chapter 2 verse 10, "But glory, honor and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first and also the Gentile."

Now the Jew is going to say, "Look, didn't you say that the gospel was to the Jew first? Didn't you say that? And was not the early church made up primarily of Jews?" And truly it was...Acts chapter 2 tells us that. "Well of the gospel was primarily to the Jew and if the early church is primarily made up of Jews, how does this square with the present unbelief and apostasy of the nation Israel?" That's the question. The deeper question is this, "How can your message of salvation be the true message when the people whom you've said it is for have rejected it?" You see their question? "How can you be articulating a salvation by grace through faith to the Jew first when the Jews have rejected your message?" Oh, it started out as a Jewish thing but it proceeded from there to become a Gentile thing...may be the thinking of this objector. You see, what they're saying is that the statement of 1:16 and 2:10 lacks historical verification, in a sense. If the nation is rejecting it, how can it be for them? How can it be right when the people you say it is primarily for do not accept it? In fact, under the Apostle Paul himself the Jews set about to remove Christianity from the face of the earth.

Well, Paul has to answer that. How can this message be for the Jews when the Jews refuse it? And he does that. For example, look at chapter 9 verse 30, and I'm just giving you a feel for these three chapters and what they deal with. "What shall we say then, that the Gentiles who followed not after righteousness have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith? But Israel,

who followed after the law of righteousness have not attained to the law of righteousness, why? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law." And they stumbled at the stumbling stone, "As it is written, Behold I lay in Zion a stumbling stone, a rock of offense and whosoever believes on Him shall not be ashamed." In other words, what he says here is it isn't that the message wasn't for them, it is that they refused to believe it. The Gentiles would accept it by faith, the Jews thought they could save themselves by works. And then in chapter 10 he begins by saying, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved, for I bear them witness, they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge, for they being ignorant of God's righteousness are going about to establish their own righteousness, having not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." You see, it isn't because God didn't want them to have it, it isn't because God didn't give it to them, it's because they refused to believe it.

Chapter 11 verse 11, "Have they stumbled that they should fall?" In other words, is this irreparable, is this permanent? "God forbid." Israel didn't believe but that's not the end. "Through their fall salvation is come to the Gentiles...now listen to this...to provoke them to jealousy." What you have is Israel falling, no believing. The gospel then is opened to the Gentiles and when the Gentiles all believe the Jews become jealous and are drawn to what the Gentiles have. So ultimately their fall leads to their salvation. And verse 12 says it, "If the fall of them be the riches of the world and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fullness?" If the Gentile world receives the gospel because of the fall of Israel, what's going to happen when they believe? Well I'll tell you what's going to happen, in Revelation, they're going to be so many people saved they can't count how many they'll be, Revelation 7. And you can follow that all the way through the eleventh chapter. And he gives an illustration of how that the original branches were the Jews and they were cut off and a new one was grafted in but some day Israel is going to be grafted back into that branch of salvation blessing, or that trunk of salvation blessing.

So, Jewish unbelief doesn't militate against the priority of Jewish evangelism. The gospel is to the Jew. It isn't that God turned against them, it's that they turned against Him they don't receive it. But ultimately they will receive it. It is and was intended for them.

A third passage I would draw to your attention is in chapter 2. And it gives us another insight into what might come into the mind of an objector to this gospel. He says in verse 28 of chapter 2, "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh, but he is a Jew who is one inwardly and circumcision is that of the heart in the spirit, not in the letter whose praise is not of men but God." And what he's saying here is that the one who is really a Jew isn't a Jew on the outside, he's one on the inside. He isn't marked simply by the sign of circumcision, he's marked by a circumcised heart. That is, he's stripped away ungodliness, he's stripped away unbelief, he's stripped away evil from his heart.

And so, he is saying in a sense that the majority of the Jews, the majority of Israel are circumcised on the outside but not on the inside. Something has to happen on the inside. And it's really nothing new, would you notice that? Nothing new. A Jew has always been a Jew who is one inwardly, not outwardly. Notice chapter 3 verse 21. "Now the righteousness of God apart from the law is manifest, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe for there's no difference." Now what he's saying here again is the same thing. The gospel is the same thing. It's not external keeping of the law, it's internal righteousness. It's always been that way. I'm not telling you anything new. A Jew has always been one who was inwardly a Jew and now I give you a gospel that is inward and you think it's new, it isn't new. It's the same message God has always given to you. And God's concern has always been that the heart is the issue. Go to chapter 3 verse 29, "Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes of the Gentiles also, seeing it is one God who shall justify the circumcision by faith and the uncirumcision through faith."

In other words, it's always been the same way. By faith...it's an inward thing. So as Paul comes along and preaches salvation by grace through faith, that isn't anything new. It's brought to fullness and fullness of understanding in Christ, but it's not new. And that was at the heart of Paul's argument, that the plan of salvation by grace through faith was not new. But it is affirmed in the Old Testament because it's always been God's way to deal with the heart of a man, deal with what's inside of a man. And in verse 20 of chapter 3 he says the deeds of the law can't justify a person, never could. So it's not something new. It is the fulfillment of the same promise of salvation God gave to all the fathers of the Old Testament. And it's the same for Gentiles as it was for Jews. It's the same today for the whole world as it was for the whole world then. God wasn't isolating salvation in the Old Testament to Israel, He was using them as a channel to reach the world, right? And so he says there's no difference. Salvation is an act of faith, it's an inward thing, not an outward thing. It isn't being Jewish, it's being right with God.

Well, if you're preaching a no difference salvation, the objector might say, if you're talking about something that makes everybody equal and that brings everybody to God on the same terms, then where does this leave Israel? Where does this leave us as a unique nation? If our very unique mark of circumcision is no more important, if it doesn't matter if you're circumcised because God judges the circumcised and the uncircumcised on the basis of faith, then where do we stand? You could go right back to the question of chapter 3 verse 1, "What advantage in being a Jew?" Why bother? What good is it?

So you can see what they're saying. They're saying if you're the Apostle to the Gentiles and you're preaching this message to Gentiles, is that to say that Israel is set apart? He says no, no, no. Well, if you're talking about a gospel that is a gospel that makes no difference, that's it's inward and it's not outward and everybody who comes to God by faith inwardly is equal, what are you doing to the Jewish nation? Are you setting them apart? And his answer again is no, no...no, no.

For example, look at chapter 9 and see what he says. Verse 4 he says the nation of Israel is unique. "To the Israelites pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, the promises, the fathers and of whom is concerning the flesh Christ came who is God over all blessed forever amen." And he reiterates the wonderful reality of what it is to be a Jew but then he says, "Not as though the Word of God has taken no effect for they are not all Israel who are of Israel." In other words, what he is saying there is again the same thing, it's inward. Not everybody who is a Jew is true Israel because the true Jew is the one whose heart is right with God.

What advantage to being a Jew? Many advantages, verses 4 and 5. And the sort of leveling inclusive reality of the church does not obviate the unique place of Israel. God is still the God of Israel who gave Israel all these wonderful things. But just because you're a Jew doesn't mean they're all yours automatically because not all Israel is Israel...not all outward Israel is inward Israel, is what he's saying.

And he had so much more to say about that. Verse 27 of chapter 9, he says, "It's always been a remnant that would be saved...a remnant...a remnant." And over in 11 as we saw earlier, God has not cast away His people. There will always be a remnant, always. Verse 5, there is a remnant now, according to the election of grace. So God still has a special and unique love for His people Israel, even though the gospel is a leveling thing and even though it brings all men down to the equal level of faith and even though it makes them all without difference, as it were, in terms of the gospel, it doesn't mean that Israel has no uniqueness left. Because Israel never was uniquely God's outwardly, it's always been an inward issue. So he wants to make that clear. And I'm just touching base with some of these things, it will become even more clear as we go through verse by verse.

God's covenant has not been broken, verse 29 of chapter 11 says, "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." In other words, God will never change His mind and if He called Israel to a special unique place, that's where they'll always be and the place they'll always occupy.

And another question that might have come up, go back to chapter 4 for a moment. And we're just kind of studying these things together. But notice he brings up Abraham here and he talks about Abraham our father as pertaining to the flesh, justified by faith, verse 3, Abraham believed God, it was counted to him for righteousness and so forth. So Abraham is a very important person. And verse 11 says that Abraham is the father of all them that believe. He's the father of all them that believe. And the question might come like this, if Abraham is the father of those who are truly saved, how in the world can Abraham's descendants reject the message? Or to put it another way, if yours is the true message, how come the one who is the father of all those who are supposed to accept that message finds that his descendants reject it. It doesn't make sense. It's an absurdity to them. I mean, the nation that is uniquely out of the loins of Abraham who is to be the father of their faith rejects the message.

So they're struggling with all of these things. And I've maybe separated them out more than they need to be but the general theme is very clear. How can justification by grace through faith explain what is currently a reality in the nation Israel that they reject the gospel? How can that be if it was to be for them first? How can that be if their father was Abraham and he's to be the father of all the faithful? And are you saying as an Apostle to the Gentiles who is preaching a gospel in which there's no difference and it's only internal anyway that the Jews have no longer any unique place with God? Are you saying that? And they might even add this, and what does this do to the unique promise given to us that we will have a Kingdom? That the Messiah will come and establish His Kingdom in Jerusalem? What does this do with say Daniel 2, Daniel 7? What does this do with Psalm 2 where the Messiah comes and makes His enemies His footstool? What does this do with many passages in Isaiah? Are you saying there's no more Kingdom, there's no more literal Kingdom, there's no more millennium to be anticipated? There's no earthly hope for the nation to be restored, rejuvenated, redeemed and to have Messiah reigning and its enemies made subject, is that all obviated, is that all eliminated now in the church? That, by the way, is what covenant theology tells us. That's what amillennialists believe. Has God cancelled the Kingdom for Israel in favor of a universal internal Kingdom? Has He cancelled His earthly Kingdom? Has He cancelled all the promises to the Jews in favor of the church?

In fact, it could well appear that Paul's gospel, Paul being a missionary to the Gentiles, speaking about a gospel that made everybody equal by faith, that Paul's gospel which was supposed to be the Jew first but the Jewish people rejected it, that was supposed to belong to the sons of Abraham but the sons of Abraham rejected it, was nothing more than a fatal blow at Judaism. And that's what they thought. And if you don't think that's what they thought then you watch Paul as he returns to the city of Jerusalem after his missionary journeys and they say to him, "You are the one who is against the law and against the prophets and against the covenants." They saw him as the enemy of Judaism.

How can Abraham be the father of a movement which eliminates the very hope of Abraham's people? How can Abraham be the father of a movement that has no Kingdom? Where Israel loses its identity. It really sounds like a condemnation of Judaism. And in fact in chapter 2 he was pretty hard on Judaism. I mean, he was very hard on them. Chapter 2 verse 17 he says, "You call yourself a Jew, you rest in the law, you make your boast of God and you know His will. You prove the things that are more excellent, you're instructed out of the law. You're confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to them who are in darkness. You think you're an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes who has the form of knowledge in the truth and the law. Though therefore who teachest another, teachest thou not thyself. Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that have abhorest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law through breaking the law dishonorest thou God?" Listen to this, "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you." Now that's pretty indicting. You think you know it all, you don't know anything.

Instead of drawing people to God, you drive them away.

So, he comes across as pretty condemning. Now the original believers in Rome in the Roman church to whom he writes may well have been Jews...very likely they were. But it wouldn't take very long for them to become out numbered by the Gentiles. And this may have added to sort of salt to the wounds because it may have existed in the church that some of the Gentiles looked down upon the Jews as poor relations, second-class citizens mercifully rescued from the apostate Judaism. Is Israel now a second-class nation? Are they on the outs? Do they lose their unique identity? Do Gentile Christians have a right to look down on them as bran snatched from the burning and nothing more? Well he needs to settle that issue and he does that in Romans 9. He doesn't look down on them. He lifts them up. Verses 4 and 5, I read them a moment ago, theirs are the adoption, the promises, the covenants, the fathers, all those things he lists there. And it was through them that Christ according to the flesh came. And they're yet to be grafted in, he says in chapter 11. And they're yet to be saved. So we don't look down on them. God is not finished with them.

Now there's one final objection that may appear here. We've just gone through chapter 8, look at the end of chapter 8 for a moment. And as you look at the end of chapter 8, we're just in the...we're really overawed by the monumental things that have been said about the security of the believer, right? I mean, we've been going over this week after week after week after week. And we feel so secure, more secure than we've ever felt in our lives, no doubt. And all of this great sense of security overwhelms us, nothing shall separate us, God will never condemn us, Christ will never condemn us, nothing in this world can ever condemn us, no angel can ever condemn us, no miraculous event can ever condemn us. I mean, we are so secure, it's marvelous.

And some objector is going to say this, "How could...how could Paul promise to you in the church that you're so secure when God broke all of His promises with Israel? If in fact He did. I mean, if God set Israel aside, who are you to think He's not going to set you aside when He decides to? You say you're the church and you say you're secure, well we were Israel and we thought we were secure. And God set us aside and how do you know He won't do the same to you?"

And the Gentile might ask the same question. "If God set aside those Jews, how can I be secure that He's not going to set me aside? If God didn't keep His eternal promises to them then why should I trust His eternal promises to us?" There's a lot at stake here. So Paul has to deal with that.

And he does. And the way he deals with it is by reminding them that God didn't break His promises to the true Jews, He broke no promises. He didn't break any promises to the Israelites who were Israelites at heart. And the promises were only given really, the promises of salvation and blessing were only given to those who truly knew God in their hearts, right? It's always to the remnant. And that's again back to 9:6 where he says not all Israel is Israel. It's the true Jew in the heart and God never broke a promise, never. And he says the same thing over in chapter 11 where he goes back

through the fact that the Lord is going to bring the nation back in. So look at it this way, God never breaks a promise. His promise is simply this, I'll bless you if your heart's right with Me, and He never broke that.

The Jews that got cut off, the Jews that got separated, the Jews that were broken off from God were broken off because of what? Unbelief. But even that can't change the fact that ultimately God's going to bring the whole nation back. And so when somebody might argue, "Well God cut them off, how do you know He won't cut us off?," the only ones that ever got cut off from God's blessing were the ones who refused to believe in Him. They were Jews outwardly but not inwardly. And then you can look at it nationally, ultimately even though the nation is temporarily set aside, they're going to be grafted back in, chapter 11.

So these things will give us a feel for what it is that the Apostle is going to say in chapter 9, chapter 10, chapter 11. He's going to try to answer these objections that rise in the heart of one who listens to what he says. And the end of this section, the last little section, look at it, chapter 11 verse 33, when he gets done with this he just launches off into praise, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out, for who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been His counselor, or who hath first given to Him and it shall be recompensed unto Him again for of Him and through Him and to Him are all things to whom be glory forever, amen." I mean, he's literally carried away to ecstasy as he realizes that yes it's true, Paul is an Apostle to the Gentiles, yes it's true that the gospel is a gospel of salvation by grace through faith to all and there's no difference. Outward circumcision isn't the issue.

Yes it's true that temporarily and partially Israel is set aside by unbelief. That yes it's true God is gathering a new people, a no people and making them His people. But it is also true that God has not ever set aside the true Jew. There's always been a remnant according to grace. And ultimately it is also true that God will regather the whole nation, chapter 11 says, and they'll be saved. And God will keep every promise He ever made to Israel...never break one of them. And if He ever did or ever does, then we'll have reason to shake because we'll lose our confidence in the fact that He would keep His promise to us but it will never happen...never ever happen.

So, basically 9, 10 and 11 are to help us understand how Israel fits into this perspective. And we're going to understand it as we flow through. Let's take a look at the first part of chapter 9. And we'll just get a little bit of a start.

He begins in chapter 9 with a discussion of Israel's unbelief. It is a discussion of Israel's unbelief because that's the key. You see, the Jew is saying, "Why have we been set aside? Why has God not kept His promise with us?" And the ringing answer is it's because of your unbelief...that's basically the theme. And he starts out in the first five verses by showing that their unbelief is sorrowful. And then in verses 6 to 13 that it is planned. Their unbelief was planned. It didn't take God

by surprise. And thirdly, that it is just because somebody's going to say, "Well how could God let them fall into unbelief?" And he shows that it's just. It's sorrowful. But it didn't overwhelm God by surprise, it was planned. And the way He handled that nation is just. And we begin with this marvelous first five verses. Let's look at it.

"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not. My conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart for I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren and my kinsmen according to the flesh." We'll stop there.

People, I believe that's one of the great statements in all the Bible. It's a statement that brings great conviction to my own heart. You see, something has to happen here. Paul has just given eight chapters of a message that's devastating to a Jew, an unbelieving Jew. He feels like he's been eliminated. He feels like the whole thing is written off. He's no longer God's chosen people. He's set aside. And he looks at Paul as the enemy. Paul, who was once the greatest persecutor of Christians, therefore the greatest champion of Judaism, did a total switch. And now he's the enemy of Judaism. And so he is the Judas of Judaism. He is the epitome of traitors. He was selected out of all the leading Jews to be the point man for the persecution of the church, to obliterate that non-biblical sect, as they saw it, that threat against traditional Judaism. He was chosen to be the point man to lead that attack and he turns around to attack Judaism. He is a traitor of all traitors, the worst..the worst.

Now you know that from that vantage point you've got to say a few things to hook back up with the people that hate you, right? And so first in those three verses he gives his heart. It's not theological, it's personal. And what he is saying here is he loves the nation Israel. And he loves them for two reasons. Reason number one, his personal connection. Reason number two, their divine connection. That's in verses 4 and 5. He loves them because he's one of them and he loves them because God loves them. And so what he's talking about here is love. He's trying to link up with them on an emotional level if he can. He's got to build a bridge to these people who have been alienated by his message. They're not going to listen to chapter 12, "And now present your bodies a living sacrifice," they're not going to jump from 8 to 12. They've got all these questions. What happens to us? And how can this be a gospel to the Jews when the Jews reject it? How can God say this is to the Jew first when the Jews don't even accept it? And how can it be that Abraham is the father of the faithful when the children of Abraham don't even believe this message? And they see him as the enemy...obliterating their great tradition, their religion.

And so, he has first of all to give them his heart. They've got to know that he's not leading an anti-semitic conspiracy. They have to know that. Because he has denounced Israel's false securities, because he has identified Israel's facade of religion, because he has shown that outward religion and outward circumcision and outward ritual doesn't redeem doesn't mean he doesn't love the people. But it does mean that they would have hated him. And so he spells out his love. And he does it in

the most powerful terms that you can find anywhere in Scripture. Now I want you to listen to what he says.

Verse 1, "I say the truth," that's the opening statement, "I say the truth." That's a claim to personal honesty. I'm telling you the truth. This is how I really feel. Now that would have been sufficient. I'm telling you the truth, he says. We would say, "Oh, that's fine, Paul. We can accept that. You're a man of integrity. You're a man of deep passion. You're not known to lie. You're telling us the truth?" Yeah, I'm telling you the truth. But he adds an incredible certification. Look what he says. "I say the truth...what?...in Christ." That is certification of the highest kind.

"What do you mean by that, Paul?" I'm in Christ. I'm in Christ. What does that mean? I'm one with Him. What does that mean? "In Him I live and move and have my being, He knows everything I think, everything I do, everything I feel and I'm telling you I say the truth to you and Christ is in me and I'm in Him to verify that what I say is what I really mean." That's strong, isn't it? Can you do that? When you say the truth to somebody, I'm telling you the truth in Christ...what you're saying is Christ is my witness. Christ who is omniscient. Christ to whom I am united. Christ who is, John Murray calls Him, the orbit in which my emotions move and the spring from which they proceed. Christ who is my very life knows, He knows I'm telling the truth. It's calling on Christ to witness to the honesty and the integrity of the heart. That's quite an oath, that's quite a vow. I know my position in Christ. I know my union in Christ. I know Christ sees and hears everything. I know He walks intimately with him. I know I live every moment in His holy presence. I know He knows everything about me, I know He reads my mind, He reads my heart. And in the light of that knowledge I can say I'm telling you the truth and Christ is witness to it.

Boy, what an affirmation. What a strong way to affirm. This is not uncommon for him. Chapter 1 of Romans, do you remember verse 9? He says this, "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers."

Do you ever say to somebody, "Oh, I'm praying for you?" Paul says, "I pray for you unceasingly." I haven't heard too many people say that to me. And some people have said it to me on occasion but I haven't heard them say, "God is my witness, that I pray unceasingly for you." Boy, there's a tremendous integrity in this man. I mean, if he says he prays for you and calls God to give testimony that that's exactly the case, he's an honest man. We should be able to call God to affirm the things we say are true also. Certainly we should.

And this is not something that's isolated with Paul. It was a way of life. Second Corinthians 1:23, "Moreover I call God for a witness upon my soul that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth." And again he wants to give testimony that God can affirm, that God can corroborate.

So listen, and I say this because I think it can be misunderstood, this is not political expediency. He's not sitting down saying, "Boy, I've got to get these Jews on my side so I'll say something that will really hook them." He's not conning anybody. There's no political expedience...there's no condescending speech, it's just the opening of an honest heart. He isn't saying he cared so that he could win their affection. He isn't saying he cared so that he could get their attention for the message. He's saying he cared because...what?...because he cared. He really cared. And he calls Christ to affirm the testimony.

Then he comes with a negative statement. You'd say, "Well that's enough, we understand." He says, "I say the truth in Christ," then he turns the table and he gets negative, "I lie not...I lie not." That's also a common Pauline statement. That's not the first or the last time he says that. He says in 2 Corinthians 11:31, "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who is blessed forever more knows that I lie not." What is he talking about there? He says, verse 30, "If I have anything to glory about I'll glory in my infirmities." You say, "Oh, come on. You're not that spiritual...glory in your infirmities. Oh joy of joys, I'm in pain again." You say, "Wait a minute." So he says, "I call upon the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ to attest to the fact that I lie not, I really glory in my infirmities." This guy's got tremendous integrity. And I didn't hear anything out of heaven in any of these occasions saying, "You're wrong...that's not how we see it up here." He called God to testify. We testify for the Lord, I wonder if we could call the Lord to testify for us. Think we could? You think you could call Jesus Christ in to affirm the things that you claim to be true about you and your spiritual life?

So, he says, "I lie not." You say, "Okay, Paul, we believe you...we believe you." Oh he's not done. "My conscience also bearing me witness." Now he brings his conscience in. And he often did that. Conscience is that little voice within you that commends or condemns you and Paul says in Acts 23:1, "I have lived in all good conscience before God till this day." Again that's an amazing statement. I've lived in all good conscience before God to this day.

What do you mean, Paul? Well, I live a life that's free of an accusing conscience. Why? Because I do what's right. I do what's right. Amazing...amazing. His conscience was clear. Second Corinthians 1:12, "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience that in simplicity...that means single mindedness...and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God we behaved ourselves in the world." We live the way we ought to live and we have a clear conscience.

You say, "Well, can you trust your conscience? I mean, just basically can we trust our conscience?" The answer to that is no. No, you can't trust your conscience and I'll show you why. Just listen to this. "Unto the pure all things are pure, but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure but even their mind and conscience is defiled," Titus 1:15. You can't trust your conscience if it's defiled. If it's just a normal human conscience, you can't trust your conscience. That's why you can't say to somebody who is not a Christian, "Let your conscience be your guide." Send them to hell.

You can't trust a defiled conscience. You see, the conscience fell with everything else, right?

You say, "Well what good then does it do to say, `My conscience bears me witness?'" I'll tell you, you have to read the rest of the verse. "My conscience bears me witness...what?...in the Holy Spirit." Who's in control of his conscience? The Holy Spirit. Now let me tell you something about the conscience. The conscience is not a motor, the conscience is a flywheel, something else has to energize it. Something else has to start it moving. And if you're unregenerate and without God, without Christ, your conscience is controlled by the evil that exists in your life. If you're under the control of the Holy Spirit, He controls your conscience. The conscience is only a tool, that's all. It's a flywheel set in motion by the engine who is the Spirit of God. As we live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, obey the Spirit, we can trust our conscience cause it's under His control. And He'll trigger that conscience to commend us or condemn us.

So, this is an amazing statement. I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit. So now he's got Christ and the Holy Spirit both affirming that what he says is true. You say, "Boy, he must have something important to say." That's right. That's right. He has something very important to say. What is it? Verse 2, "That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart." That's what he says. Great heaviness, continual sorrow in my heart, I'm not just saying this. He's called two out of the three members of the trinity to affirm that this is really how he feels. And I frankly, folks, I stretch to grasp even the fringes of this kind of a heart attitude, I really do. I mean, he really loves these people. He's not bitter against Jewish people. His heart is broken over these people and he calls everything he can to attest to the integrity of his heart and says, "I have great heaviness...great heaviness." That's just what it means, great weight, a tremendous burden and continual sorrow. The great heaviness has to do with continuous pain. I'm under constant pain, he says, constant pain, unending sorrow, never stops. Oh, I understand what it is to rejoice but there's always that tension with me, always. But while I'm rejoicing in my relationship to God, I am continually in pain over this unending sorrow in my heart. And I'm not just saying what's expedient, I'm telling you exactly what's in my heart, God the Son, and God the Spirit be witness.

And then verse 3, it's an unbelievable verse, "I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." Who are they? Verse 4, "Who are...what?...Israelites." You see, this man was a great evangelist because he had the heart of God. It's a great lesson here. You see, evangelism is the sob of God. That's the heart of it all. It isn't methods. If we who claim to love Christ and love souls and desire their salvation, if we really loved like Paul loved and could call Christ to affirm that and the Spirit to affirm that, we would turn the world upside down. And I can't say that I love souls unless I can say I love souls and, Christ, You come and witness to the fact that I love souls. And, Holy Spirit, You bear witness with my conscience that what I say is true. In an unceasing pain, in an unending sorrow of heart, like John Knox who cried through his tears, "Give me Scotland, O God, or I die." Or Henry Martine, said, "O that I were a flame of fire in the hand of God." Or David Brainard who said, "Now let me burn out for God," and he was

dead before he was 30. That was Paul's constant sorrow that provided the holy tension with an unequalled, unceasing joy. It's a shocking statement.

What is he saying in verse 3? My sorrow and my pain over Israel who are my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, the Israelites, causes me to say I could wish on myself were anathema from Christ. You know what that means, folks? If I could I would go to hell if it would get the Jewish people saved. That is an amazing statement. You see, his sorrow is in direct proportion to the seriousness of Israel's unbelief.

Notice what he says in verse 3, "For I could wish..." It isn't that he says "I do wish." It's one step short of that. It's hyperbole. But nonetheless reveals the heart. He says, "I could wish," it's expressing a hypothetical situation. "I could wish myself accursed if it could bring salvation to my brethren." Now obviously it couldn't, could it? One man's damnation is not another man's salvation, except in the case of one man, and who was that? Christ, not Paul. Paul can't die for the world. He can't go to hell for the world. He can't suffer the pains of chastening and judgment for others, he can't. But he says I could if it were possible wish that I myself was anathema, the word means devoted to damnation...accursed. From Christ...oh, those words are haunting words. He has just finished a whole chapter on how he could never be separated from Christ. And that which he exalts in more than anything else is his relation to Christ, his intimacy with Christ, his kinship with Christ, his union with Christ, his oneness with Christ. And now he says I could give that up if it could mean the salvation of my people.

Now if somebody just came along and said, "You know, I care so much about your salvation, if it were possible I'd go to hell if you could be saved," you'd look at them and say, "Wait a minute, you're...that's nice, those are just words." And you'd say that to Paul, too, unless he had verse 1 there and called two of the three members of the trinity to attest to the fact that this is really how he felt. You wonder why you don't have an effective evangelistic ministry, you wonder why you don't reach out to people and see them saved. Well, maybe it isn't because you don't know a good method, maybe it's because you don't understand this kind of a heart. It's a heart-searching text.

By the way, the word "anathema" means to be cut off or separated. It's usage is always applied to things which could never be redeemed. They were killed and cut off and never able to be redeemed. He's saying, "I abandon my own redemption if it could mean that of my people, Israel." What a heart...what a heart.

And, you know, it may be something beyond what we can understand. But there have been others who felt similarly. In Exodus chapter 32 I would remind you of a most fascinating statement. Exodus 32:32, and Moses is interceding for his people. They have broken God's law. They've worshiped the golden calf and God comes down and says, "I'm going to kill them all. I'm going to wipe them out." And so in verse 31 Moses goes to the Lord and says, "O this people have sinned a great sin and they

have made them gods of gold, yet now if Thou wilt forgive their sin." And he can't even finish the statement. "If Thou wilt forgive their sin...and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written." If they die, O God, I'll die with them...I'll die with them. That's a heart of great compassion...not unlike the expression of Paul in Romans 9.

But there's a greater illustration. Galatians 3:13, listen to what it says. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law." How? "Being made accursed for us." Now listen carefully. What Paul couldn't ever have done, Jesus...what?...did. Jesus did. "He who knew no sin was made sin for us."

It's really an incomprehensible love to many of us. And maybe it seems distant. Let me see if I can bring it into perspective. Tuesday in our staff meeting, Tracy shared with us that he had a friend named Mitch Salene(?) whose wife recently, I guess in the last week or so, went out of their apartment in Simi Valley to go jogging and a man jumped out of bush and rammed a knife in her and killed her...just one wound and it was enough to take her life. And I guess we ask the question...why? How bizarre, how horrible a young Christian couple, the flower of life just beginning to bud and such a stupid senseless vile thing. But as Tracy shared with us more we sort of got a perspective. Kathleen had a great burden for her unsaved parents and she had said prior to the stabbing, of course, that her burden was becoming so heavy for her parents that if her own death could bring about the salvation of her parents, she would be willing to die. And she died...and her mother came to Christ after the memorial service. Now maybe that's a more contemporary glimpse of something of the heart of the Apostle Paul...who could have wished himself accursed for their sake.

So, beloved, would you listen, please. Don't ever accuse the Apostle Paul or those who preach the gospel of Jesus Christ of being the enemies of Judaism or Jewish people. No, it is their salvation we seek. And the heart of the evangelist is not the heart of one who is angry but the heart of one who is loving. That was the heart of Paul. One writer of old said, "Unlimited...or our limited reason doesn't grasp this kind of love as a child cannot grasp the courage of a warrior." But we could seek to love like this, couldn't we?

You say, "How could you ever love like that?" Simple to explain, extremely difficult to attain. How can you love like this? Who alone loves like this? Christ. How can you love like Christ loves? You have to have the mind of Christ. The closer you draw an intimacy to Christ, the more you obey His Word, the more you walk in His love, the more you will love the way He loves so that you can love the world as He loves the world when you see the world as He sees the world as Paul did.

Who are his brethren? And that's such a tender term. His kinsmen according to the flesh? They are the Israelites for whom he cares.

That's just the introduction. But he knows that if he has anything to say to these people he has to give them his heart before he gives them his theology. And so he unveils the great love that he has.

That's the first reason that he loves them, because they're his kinsmen, they're his brethren, they're his people. The second one, because of their unique relationship to God, that's verses 4 and 5 and that's for next time. Let's bow together in prayer.

We seem so indifferent in our hearts compared with this. Here was a man, O Lord, who suffered inconceivable pain, anguish of heart because he loved so much, like Jesus who loved so much that He wept over the city. Here's a man who loved so much that he bore rods on his back and whips that he knew no earthly comfort, that he pursued the lost with every ounce of strength in his body, that he had no thought of pain or embarrassment, no thought of rejection that could withstand his aggressiveness. Here was a man who loved with the very love of Christ. Father, we pray that somehow we might draw nigh unto Christ as he did and experience that love. Teach us to see the world through the eyes of Christ, to love them as He loves and out of that love to carry the message of hope as Paul carried it so faithfully to not only the Gentiles but his own brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh.

And may we love because these are our people. May we love the people around us who are like we are, human, who have the same deep and hurting needs that we have, who have the same eternal choice that we have, who face the same hell that we faced. May we love with the love of Christ that relentlessly pursues. And, Lord, even when our gospel is strong and hard- hitting and penetrating and condemning and when our gospel damns the false religionists and the immoral and the godless and the Christ-rejecters, though our message be strong may our hearts be tender. And may we speak with boldness and yet weep over the lost. Give us the heart of Christ as Paul experienced it, that our lives may be given over to one great glorious task of communicating the gospel to those who so desperately need to hear who are on Your heart, may they be on ours as well. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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