
“For The Sake Of My Brothers”

ROMANS 9:1-5

JANUARY 7, 2024

PASTOR BRIAN SMITH

WILDWOOD CHURCH

EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS

AT A GLANCE

Can you imagine saying to God, “I’ll give up Heaven for the sake of my brothers who have rejected me, beat me, and would ultimately be complicit in my death?!” That’s exactly what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 9:1-5. Romans 9 is all about God’s sovereignty in election and in it Paul says some difficult things. But before he did, he wanted the readers to know that he had a deep, sincere love for his fellow Israelites. We, too, ought to love our enemies and those who persecute us in hopes that one day they will see Jesus as their glorious Savior!

INTRODUCTION

“Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose...’” Isaiah 46:8-10

We move into a new section of Romans today. Romans 9-11 can be summed up as God’s sovereignty in election. Romans 1-3 was Paul’s treatise on our sin; Romans 4-5 on God’s grace in our salvation. Romans 6-8 focused on the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, culminating with those soul-anchoring words of *Romans 8:37-39*, “*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 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.*”

I am unashamed of God’s sovereignty; is beautiful to me. It serves as the very basis on which we can speak those comforting words of Romans 8 so confidently. God’s sovereignty is our assurance and it is full of His glory. I love the sovereignty of God and I want you to love it, for it is the plainly taught revelation of God in His Word. Though it is evident from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, Romans 9 is perhaps the bastion of defense of God’s sovereignty in election in the scripture.

I encourage you to read Romans 9 through 11 many times as we work our way through. For as Paul concludes chapter 11, “*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*” *Romans 11:33-36*

Romans 9:1-5

I 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.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS MY WITNESS

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— Paul is saying that he had worked through this with the Lord and the Holy Spirit assured him that his conscience was clear about what he was about to say. This is a great reminder of what I preached last week. Before we speak a ‘hard truth’ to or about another person, we need to be very sure our conscience is clear. Paul was.

What is this **truth in Christ** to which the **Spirit bears witness**? Paul said in **verse 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart**. The issue he is addressing here is Israel’s rejection of the Messiah. The fact that his own kinsmen rejected the Gospel was not just a matter to be explained theologically, nor was it something he hoped would be coldly debated in seminary classrooms. It pained him deeply.

He continues 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**. He hated that they had been cut off from Christ. They were his own flesh and blood; his kin. Perhaps you have kin that reject the Gospel. You know the unceasing anguish. You lose sleep over it. You want so badly for them to be saved.

Far from hating the Jews, Paul wished that he could be cut off if it meant all of them could be saved. He echoed the sentiment of Moses in the wilderness who told the Lord he wished the Lord would remove his own name from his book if the people of Israel be not forgiven of their sin with the golden calf. (cf. Exodus 32:32-33)

‘Better to be cut off myself than that all your people be cut off.’ That was Moses’ heart, and that was Paul’s heart. But that’s not how it works. Paul knew that. I think Moses might have, too. But it’s the heart of these men that we need to notice. Both had a deep concern for the sake of their lost brothers.

Paul’s concern for Israel was intense and sincere. He longed that his brothers would come to know Christ. Even willing to say out loud, **I wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers**.

NOT MUCH I WOULDN’T DO

I’m sure there’s not much you and I would refuse to do for the sake of our brothers’ salvation. If you knew that doing X meant everyone you loved would be saved, can you think of anything you wouldn’t do for them? But I’m not sure I could even say the words Paul said. I’m not sure I could even vocalize a willingness to suffer eternal punishment separated from God for someone else’s salvation.

That’s what he meant when he said **accursed and cut off**. The word **accursed** is the Greek word *anathema*. He used the same word against the false teachers among the Galatians. *“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.”* Galatians 1:8

The concept of *anathema* comes from Israel’s conquest of Canaan in which God subjected the Canaanites to the curse and forbade that any of them should be spared, they or their goods. Complete destruction.

And Paul says he could wish that he was accursed, that he was completely destroyed for the sake of his brothers. I don’t know about you, but that convicts. Is that how you feel about your loved ones

and neighbors? Is that how you feel about the unreached people groups around the world? Lord, cut me off, curse me, let me be anathema for the sake of my brothers.

We pray for Israel's salvation, but no one knew the struggle like Paul did. Remember that Paul was at one time a Gospel-rejector. He denied the Christ. He even persecuted the church. But Paul was saved by Jesus and in his salvation, he came to see what you and I see, how tragically ironic it is that the Israelites would reject Him.

SO MANY SQUANDERED BLESSINGS

Paul underscores why this is so tragically ironic 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. ⁵To them belong the patriarchs...**

To be an Israelite meant being part of the people of God. There were so many things implied in that one term. Note that Paul used the term **Israelite** rather than Jew. Jew was a term given by outsiders and was not their preferred designation.

Israelite, on the other hand, implied much. First of all: **the adoption**. The Israelites were adopted as sons. In *Exodus 4:22* the Lord told Moses to tell Pharaoh, "*Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son...*"

In Deuteronomy 1:31 the Lord compares His deliverance of Israel to a man carrying his son. In *Deuteronomy 14:1*, He says, "*You are the sons of the LORD your God...*"

Israel was given adoption as sons and it pained Paul that they tragically missed the privilege to know *the* Son of God and receive His salvation.

Theirs also was **the glory**, which likely refers to the *shekinah* glory that led them through the wilderness and that ultimately came to fill the tabernacle, and later Solomon's temple.

The Greek word for glory is *doxa*. When we sing the doxology, we sing of the glory of God. We give glory to God. This is why the church gathers – to give glory to God. The Israelites were the first witnesses of God's glory.

They were the recipients of **the covenants**. That is, the covenants from Noah to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. This is a solemn reminder that the covenant promises we received did not come from Gentiles. We aren't standing on covenants made to the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Greeks, the Romans, the Brits, the Danes, or the Americans.

Theirs was **the giving of the Law**. It was through Moses on Mt. Sinai that we have the first five books of the bible. This is how we know the character of God, the Creation of the World, the purpose of life, and depth of our sin.

They received **the worship**. It is because of Israel that we know how to worship the One true living God. R.C Sproul says, "Our instructions about how to bring praise sacrifices to God in corporate worship did not come to us from Greeks or the Romans. The principles of worship that shape our devotion were born in Israel."

They received **the promises**. It is the promises that God made to Israel that we treasure and upon which we stand in hope of eternal life. The concept that God is a promise-keeper cannot be overstated. It is because He sent Jesus to the people of Israel that we can be confident that God is a promise-keeping God.

Verse 5 begins **To them belong the patriarchs...** That is Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, & David. These were flawed men, but they were the men God used to establish the human foundations of Israel. It was through Abraham's offspring that the nations are blessed, namely Jesus.

CHRIST CAME FOR ALL MANKIND

All of these privileges belonged to the Israelites. But notice a subtle shift in what Paul says next in verse 5. **and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.**

All of these other privileges were said to **belong** to Israel, but not the Christ. He came **from their race, according to the flesh**, but He does not belong to Israel. Jesus was born of an Israelite woman. According to the flesh, biologically, Jesus was born an Israelite.

When Luke, who travelled with Paul, wrote the lineage of Jesus in his gospel, he went from Mary's father's line back to David through Nathan and continued beyond Abraham all the way back to Adam. Jesus came **from their race**, but He came *for* all who would believe in Him and receive His salvation, the Jew first and also the Greek.

That is what is implied when Paul said He **is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.** Jesus is the Christ, the Savior, the Messiah, the rescuer. He is the One promised in Genesis 3. But more than that, Jesus is **God over all, blessed forever.** What a high Christology! Jesus is the Christ and He is God over all.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:1-2, 14

"For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily..." Colossians 2:9

"He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high," Hebrews 1:3

Jesus knew He was God and demonstrated that confidence when he forgave sins, allowed people to worship Him, and taught that where a person spends eternity hinges on their response to Him.

Because He is God, Paul says that **Christ is over all.** That is, Christ is preeminent. *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Colossians 1:15-20*

GENUINE LOVE

Paul loved the Jews with a deep and earnest heart. He hurt for them. He longed for them to know their Messiah. It was important for Paul to express this here because what follows in chapter 9 is some of the most difficult and most God-glorifying language found in scripture. Paul wanted to make it clear that it was far from hatred of the Jewish race that he said what he did. He deeply hurt for the sake of his brothers. *"Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved." Romans 10:1*

How difficult it must have been as the Apostle to the Gentiles to not write the Jews off completely and say, "Your blood be on your own head." It's incredibly difficult to be hurt by people, rejected by them, and to still love them in Christ. And indeed, to love them *to* Christ. Paul's example should stir in us a deep sympathy for the lost, for those who have hurt us, who have mocked us, and even those who have or would harm us. "Love your enemies," Jesus commands us.

I wonder who in your life your heart breaks for. I wonder for whom you could wish that God would give your salvation in exchange for their eternal destruction. The Lord, and the Apostle Paul,

resonate with you. Poetically, the Psalmist records, “You put my tears in your bottle.” (Psalm 56:8) He knows and He cares for you. And I believe it honors Him that you know and your care for your kin. Let the tears fall for them. Feel the anguish. Bring it to Him, the only one who can save.

Paul’s final word in this doxological statement is **amen**. You ever wonder what you’re saying when you say “amen”? Or why I ask you in my sermons, “Amen?!” I’m asking you, do you agree this is true? That’s what we’re saying when we say amen. This is true! This is right! We agree! Let’s practice, shall we? Jesus Christ is God over all, blessed forever...Amen?!

THAT ALL NATIONS HEAR OF JESUS WHO IS OVER ALL

It is our joy and delightful duty to ensure that all nations hear of this Jesus, who is over all. It is our pleasure to take the Good News of Jesus Christ to every tribe and tongue on the planet. Lord, would you fill us with the kind of sincere love for the lost that Paul felt for his kinsmen. May we live like we believe what is written on our wall, Every Member a Missionary, taking the Gospel across the street and around the world! Not that we reduce what it means to be a missionary, but that we elevate what it means to be a member of the body of Christ!

May we be filled with such zeal to see God’s glory cover the earth as the waters cover the sea and with such love for the lost that we would say as Paul said, **I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers.**

Thankfully, while that is a sincere sentiment, the Lord would never exchange your salvation for someone else’s. Salvation is for all who believe the Gospel. Jesus invites you, whether Jew or gentile, to come to Him by faith and to receive His grace and forgiveness of sin; then to follow Him as Lord over all wherever He leads you!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bruce, F. F. (2008). *Romans: An introduction and commentary*. Inter-Varsity Press.
- Doriani, D. M. (2021). *Romans*. P&R Publishing.
- Hughes, Kent R. (1991). *Romans – Righteousness from Heaven*. Crossway.
- Kruse, Colin G. (2012). *Paul's Letter to the Romans*. W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Longenecker, Richard N. (2016). *The Epistle to the Romans*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- MacArthur, John. (1991). *Romans 1-8*. Moody Publishers.
- MacArthur, John. (1991). *Romans 9-16*. Moody Publishers.
- Moo, Douglas J. (2018). *The Letter to the Romans, Second Edition*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Mounce, Robert. (1995). *Romans*. B&H Publishing.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. (2018). *Romans, Second Edition*. Baker Publishing Group.
- Sproul, R. C. (2019). *The Righteous Shall Live By Faith – Romans*. Ligonier Ministries