

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 9, Verses 1-13
Notes from Tuesday January 11, 2011
Last Revised on January 17, 2011

Songs

Opening Prayer

Introduction

This evening we continue our study of the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

Several weeks ago, just before our long holiday break, we completed Chapter 8.

Tonight we will begin Chapter 9.

But first let's review briefly.

Please open your text now to Chapter 1 and follow along with me as I review.

Review

Remember the **overall** theme of Paul's letter to the Romans is ... the **gospel**.

The letter begins (please look):

(Chapter 1, Verses 1-4)

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

We must never lose sight of the fact that the Gospel is God's good news concerning his Son Jesus who was and is the Messiah of **Israel** promised beforehand, first to them through their prophets and Scriptures, and only later to us.

Several verses later Paul say:

(Chapter 1, Verse 16)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

The gospel (Jesus) comes first to the Jews, in fulfillment of all that God has promised to them, and (only then) **also** to the Greek.

I am reminding us of these things now because in Chapters 9-11, which we are about to study, Paul returns and examines in some detail the relationship between the gospel and the Nation of Israel.

(Continuing our review) In **Verse 18** of Chapter 1 Paul begins to examine the **ungodliness** and **unrighteousness** of men. This examination continues through the end of Chapter 1.

In **Chapter 2 and the first 20 verses of Chapter 3**, Paul explains that such ungodliness and unrighteousness has **always** pervaded **all** of humanity, including **even** the most **law-abiding Jews**.

Paul's point is **not** that there is something **wrong** with the Jews.

There are many things right with the Jews. The point is that **even** the Jews with all of their special gifts and advantages did not possess the righteousness which God requires.

The Jews therefore were and are exemplary of the irremediable unrighteousness of **all** men

As Paul explains in **the remainder of Chapter 3**, **nobody** ever has been or ever will be saved from sin and death, **except** by the free gift of God,

The gospel is that God gives this gift **freely** to all who have faith in Jesus Christ.

There is therefore no room for anyone to **boast**, except in Christ.

None of us are ever saved because of who we **are** or what we **do**. We are saved through our **faith** in who Christ is and what he has done.

Faith is, **itself**, a free gift from God. It is **how** he saves us.

This has always and everywhere been true --- as Paul illustrates in **Chapter 4**, which is all about **Abraham**. When we come to believe in God our Savior, he credits this to us as righteousness.

In **the first 11 verses of Chapter 5**, Paul speaks of the peace, joy, hope, and love we experience as we come to understand that God in Christ actually came down to **suffer, with us** and **for us** while we were all **still** his enemies.

In the remainder of **Chapter 5 (Verses 12-21)** Paul explains how God in Christ has finally, eternally, overcome the Fall of Man, of which we read in Genesis, Chapter 3.

In Chapter 6, and in the first six verses of Chapter 7, Paul makes it plain that the gospel is not an invitation for Christians to **continue** sinning, but just the opposite --- an opportunity for them to be finally **free** of sin.

And in the remainder of Chapter 7 Paul makes it clear that religion (i.e. law) does not make us sinful. On the contrary, religion is good insofar as it helps us to understand just how sinful we are, and how much we need a savior.

In **Chapter 8** Paul speaks much of the **Holy Spirit**, especially in the **first 27 verses.**

All who truly call on Jesus as Savior and Lord have been set **free** from the law of sin and death.

The Holy Spirit **dwells** in them. These are God's **children.**

It is the indwelling Holy Spirit who makes us **aware** that we are God's children and gives us **faith** and **hope.** None of these things are possible **apart** from the Spirit. These are **His** work in us.

Furthermore the spirit **leads** us to live **according** to the Spirit and **not** according to the flesh,

Life lived according to the Spirit may be a life **characterized** by **suffering,** after the example of Christ.

However such suffering is as **nothing** compared to the glory to be revealed in us,

and in all **creation** because of us,

we who are **children** of God, and **brothers** of the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

We therefore learn to **wait patiently** for that to which we have been **called,**

for which we have been **justified,** and to which we **shall** be glorified.

And while we **wait,** the Spirit, who is God Himself, stays and **helps** us

For those who love God, absolutely everything is OK, and way more than OK, now and forevermore.

That is the sense of the amazing **concluding verses of Chapter 8**, which we read just before the holidays and which I will now read again by way of review and introduction to the following section.

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 8, Verses 28 -39

Please follow along with me now as I read Romans, Chapter 8, Verses 28-29

- 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**
- 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.**
- 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.**
- 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?**
- 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?**
- 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.**
- 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died---more than that, who was raised---who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.**
- 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?**
- 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."**
- 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.**
- 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,**
- 39 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.**

Thank you.

So, then, we see that those who belong to Jesus, whatever their present circumstances, during the brief remainder of their present earthly existence, must be filled with joy and hope and eager expectation, because before the beginning of the world they were chosen to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ and to live in his perfect kingdom forever.

Such is the conclusion of the Gospel presentation which Paul has, by now in the first 8 chapters, fully developed.

Although the gospel is primarily a message of eternal salvation, Paul has also, in these first 8 chapters which we have studied, laid out all or most of the general ethical principles we must follow during the brief remainder of our life on this earth.

And in Chapters 12, 13, and 14 Paul will give some more particular advice and admonition about life within the church within this present age.

Had Paul omitted Chapters 9, 10, and 11 entirely and jumped straight from the end of Chapter 8, which we have just read, to the beginning of Chapter 12 there would, I think, have been no obvious gap in his argument.

Absent Chapters 9, 10, and 11 Romans would still have been a great letter.

And the absence of Chapters 9, 10 and 11 would have made Romans a much less difficult letter.

Yet here are Chapters 9, 10, and 11 written as it were by the finger of God.

And they are important.

And finally necessary.

We can only do our best, by God's grace, to understand them.

Rather than introducing these chapters with comments of my own, or with the opinions of other commentators, I think it best to let them speak for themselves.

The only introductory comment I will make is this: these three chapters need to be read and understood together, and in the full light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is easy to go badly astray in these chapters, I think, if we react to isolated passages and forget what we already know about God from the whole of Scripture, in particular what God

has revealed about himself in Christ.

As with all of holy Scripture, Christ is the key to proper understanding of what we read.

OK so, with this caution, let's begin.

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 9, Verses 1-5

Will someone please read Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 9, Verses 1-5, in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read these some verses in English.

1 I am speaking the truth in Christ---I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit---

2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

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.

4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.

5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

Thank you.

Let's begin by noticing the stark contrast between the end of Chapter 8 and the beginning of Chapter 9.

Chapter 8 ends triumphantly:

(Chapter 8, Verses 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.

Yet in Verse 2 of Chapter 9, we read that Paul, the Apostle of Christ who has been set apart to proclaim this gospel is in great **sorrow!**

Q. Why?

A. This will become clearer as we read on, but already we sense that Paul's great sorrow is occasioned by the fact that the Gospel he proclaims has not been accepted by the Nation of Israel, to which it came first and primarily.

And so the Nation of Israel stands outside of the joyous, eternal salvation described at the end of Chapter 8, which belongs to all who believe in Christ Jesus.

Paul has not said that the Nation of Israel shall refuse the gospel forever.

And he does not mean to say that, even in his own time, all who are in Israel have refused it.

But most in the Nation of Israel had not yet accepted the salvation which is found only in Christ.

And this explains Paul's sorrow.

Verse 1 reads

(Verse 1)

I am speaking the truth in Christ---I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit---

Q. Why does Paul need to say this?

Q. Do people have any reason to suppose that Paul is a liar?

A. It is possible that some have accused Paul of a lack of concern for his fellow Jews, because of his ministry among the Gentiles and, perhaps even, of expressing a concern for them which he did not truly and deeply feel.

A. There is, after all, a rhetorical anguish in which we all sometimes indulge and a polite concern which we all often express but rarely feel deeply. I am sure that many of us do not have "a great sorrow and unceasing anguish in our hearts" for those around us who are lost.

A. But I believe that Paul does. And Paul needs for his readers to really believe in the truth and the depth of his sorrow and anguish, not primarily for the sake of his own reputation, but because their salvation depends on it, and because the gospel itself depends on it, and God's glory depends on it.

A. Paul here, in effect, swears an oath for the benefit of those to whom he bears witness.

He claims to be speaking the truth “in Christ”

This may mean only that he speaks the truth in a manner befitting one who represents the Son of God.

I think it also means that, as an Apostle of Christ, he speaks the truth of Christ...

...that the anguish which Paul feels for Israel is the same anguish which Jesus felt for Israel and the same anguish which God feels for Israel

This latter notion is reinforced, I think, by Paul’s expression that his conscience bears him witness in the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul looks inside himself and finds that the spirit within himself, which is in communion with the Holy Spirit, is most truly and deeply disturbed by the present condition of the Nation of Israel.

In plain language, I think that Paul feels this way because God feels this way, and Paul knows that it is important for his readers, including us, to understand the depth of this feeling and concern.

He says in Verse 2

(Verse 2)

that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

This estrangement between God and Israel is no small matter if it can place in the heart of the Apostle Paul great sorrow and unceasing anguish.

I think this points even to the cosmic significance of this estrangement.

Until Israel has been reconciled with God in Christ there will be great sorrow and unceasing anguish.

If you doubt the cosmic significance of Paul’s anguish, consider Verse 3.

Paul says:

(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.

Feel the tension here with the last verse of Chapter 8, where Paul sang that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ...

Yet if such separation were Possible, Paul would sacrifice his own eternal salvation, in order that the Nation of Israel could be reconciled with God.

Here truly is the Spirit of Christ expressing himself in the mouth of his Apostle Paul.

Here is the love of God the Father Almighty which stands behind and above all of creation and human history, that He would resolve in advance to send his son as a sacrifice, so that first Israel and then the entire world could be reconciled with Himself.

God in Christ takes the salvation of his people **personally**.

This is not a game for Paul. It is certainly not a game for God. This is the most serious thing.

God has always taken the salvation of this people with utter seriousness.

And the salvation of his people means first and foremost the salvation of the Jews, from and to whom the gospel had primarily come.

Jesus was a Jew, Paul and all the Apostles were Jews, and all or most of the first several thousand men and women who accepted Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the World were Jews.

None of them stopped caring for other Jews who were slow to see the light.

From the cross itself Christ forgave them.

Paul is willing to lose his eternal salvation to save them.

How can any follower of Christ feel otherwise!

It is, I think, impossible to accept Christ and reject the Jews.

Verse 4 reads

(Verse 4)

They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.

Paul reminds us of things we know but all too easily tend to forget.

The Jews are descended from Jacob and he from Isaac and Abraham.

God chose them and adopted them as his children, his special people.

Not only that. God caused his presence to dwell among them.

Not only that, God spoke with them and made solemn agreements with them.

And God gave them the law by which to live

and ordained lawful means of worship,

and he made them many promises besides.

How can all of this come to nothing?

If all of this comes to nothing, what are we to think about God and his glory?

As we ponder this, we begin to appreciate Paul's misery over their estrangement.

And we begin to understand why Paul had to include Chapters 9, 10, and 11 in this letter.

Verse 5 reads

(Verse 5)

To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

God's long history of special dealings with this people culminated in the coming to them of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, who is the Lord of all Creation.

It is helpful and, I think, important to grasp the fact that the coming of Christ was predestined before the creation of the universe.

Therefore the creation of the world, and the fall of man, and the whole history of Israel and the world beyond all happened in the shadow of the cross to come.

The most important thing about Israel is that she prepared the way for the coming of the Lord.

And the Lord and Savior of the World certainly does not lack concern for Israel.

Jesus wept for her.

He came and gave his life for her!

He forgave her.

Paul's anguish is Christ-like and appropriate.

But this anguish does not signal God's failure in and through Israel.

Rather it displays God's love and compassion --- that he would expose himself to such grief!

We read on.

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 9, Verses 6-13

Will someone please read Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 9, Verses 6-13, in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read these some verses in English.

6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,

7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."

8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

9 For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son."

10 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac,

11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad--- in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls---

12 she was told, "The older will serve the younger."

13 As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Thank you.

Paul grieves for those within Israel who are separated from God, because he loves them, and because God loves them! And God grieves for them too!

Yet, Paul wants to make it clear that the fact of their grievous estrangement from God, which is their refusal of Christ, is not proof that God's plan has somehow gone awry.

God's plans never go awry. Humanly speaking, God knew for certain that Israel would give him grief before he called Abraham out of Haran, just as he had known that all mankind would give him grief when he created Adam.

To put a point on it, God knew that the sons of Adam and, in particular, the sons of Abraham would spit on him and haul him up and nail him to a tree before he ever said, let there be light!

This is how much anguish God is willing to tolerate to establish **for us** his eternal kingdom.

In ways beyond our understanding, God works through human history to accomplish this purpose. He is free to work where, and when, and how he wills.

His freedom is constrained only by his goodness.

His goodness is demonstrated in Christ.

The history of Israel is the history of the coming of Christ.

Christ sprang from Israel like a fresh shoot from a tree which seemed near death.

While the tree and all its branches including Christ may rightfully be called Israel,

it is possible to draw many distinctions among the branches,

which include Jesus, Paul, and all the Apostles (including Judas) and many gentiles who have been grafted in because of Christ,

but which also include many branches which appear to sick or dead or to have fallen from the tree entirely, and can no longer be found

and we can only trust that God knows exactly what he is doing with all of this branching, and sorting, and falling out, and grafting in.

It is quite beyond our ability to comprehend it all.

Yet Paul illustrates some of this in what follows:

Verse 6 reads:

(Verse 6)

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,

We can look at the whole family tree which grew out of Abraham. There are several branches in that tree which may be called Israel in the broadest and most general sense, of having descended by birth from Jacob,

But among these not all of them by any means, are the same. And some are so different from the rest that we might say that they do not really belong to Israel any longer, at least not in any way that we can understand

And Paul reminds us that this differentiation began at the very beginning.

Indeed the broadest formal definition of Israel (i.e. descendants of Jacob) is an off-shoot of an off-shoot of the descendants of Abraham.

Verse 7 reads

(Verse 7)

and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."

The quotation is from Genesis 21:12 where Abraham's wife has told him to send away her slave woman and the son which she has born to Abraham.

God told Abraham not to worry about that. He would be merciful to Sarah and give her a son, Isaac, through whom the offspring of Abraham would be named.

Here a distinction is begin drawn between **biological offspring** and **offspring in another sense**

Sometimes those who are biological offspring are not reckoned as children of the household.

Sometimes those who have been adopted as children of the household are not biological offspring.

Sometimes we examine just one branch of a large family tree and ignore the other branches.

Such differentiation is common in human history, including Biblical history.

Jesus himself was reckoned a son of Joseph, although he was the begotten son of God!

God's freedom is not constrained by human biology, or genealogy, or rules of succession.

Verse 8 continues, saying much the same thing:

(Verse 8)

This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

God is not constrained by biology or human custom, but he is constrained by his own word.

That which he foresees is foreordained.

That which he promises is predestined.

Although human beings are very often (one might say usually) wrong in understanding how God's promises will be accomplished!

We only know for certain that which God promises for certain.

Verse 9 reads

(Verse 9)

For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son."

Because God worked through Abraham's descendants through Isaac differently than he worked through Abraham's descendants through Ishmael, and differently than he worked through Abraham's descendants through Keturah.

we must not suppose that Sarah's displeasure with Hagar and Ishmael somehow frustrated God's original plan to bless Abraham and his descendants,

and caused God to give Abraham a second Son through Sarah.

Whatever happens is God's eternal plan, including the parts that are difficult, and even including the parts that grieve God!

God's freedom is not related to human behavior as either cause or effect.

God is the primal origin of the whole sweep of human history.

Paul illustrates all this with a second example, which is better in some respects than the first, for making his point.

Isaac and Ishmael had different mothers and, so, some may have thought that God's blessing was conditioned by that difference...

That he somehow needed to bless the descendants of Isaac because he was the son of Sarah,

Or that the descendants of Isaac were somehow superior because of their mother Sarah.

Neither of which is true.

But in the case of Isaac's wife Rebekah, she bore him twin sons: Esau and Jacob

Verse 10 reads

(Verse 10)

And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac,

So on what basis would God's blessings be apportioned to these two boys?

Why would the Nation of Israel come to recon itself as being of the seed of Jacob, while the descendants of Esau, the Edomites, would occupy another branch of the tree, another road through human history?

Paul Illustrates the problem, in Verse 11

(Verse 11)

though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad---in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls---

We know that God ordained that what would become the history and the nation of Israel would come through certain of the descendants of Jacob,

we know this was not because the two boys had a different mother or father.

we know that it was not because Esau was a few minutes older,

indeed the younger son, Jacob, took the prominent place in salvation history,

we know it was not because one of the boys was better than the other,

since the decision was made even before they were born,

and furthermore we know that Jacob's character later in life was highly questionable

in short, Jacob was preferred, because God simply determined this in advance.

Verse 12 recalls what God told Rebekah after she had conceived:

(Verse 12)

she was told, "The older will serve the younger."

and so it came to pass,

although we note that God's preference (in some sense) of Isaac and Jacob did not remove Ishmael or Esau from God's blessing, either in this world or, so far as we know, in the world to come.

Here we have in view only, so far as I can see, why the salvation of the world through Christ came through the branches of the tree which it came,

rather than through some other branches.

And the answer is buried in God's freedom.

Which, again, is limited only by his goodness,

which is made manifest in Christ.

Christ comes to sacrifice himself to save the whole world

It is within this context that we want to read a verse like Verse 13:

(Verse 13)

As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

This is from the prophet Malachi who clearly is speaking of the nations of Israel and Edom and not of the persons Jacob and Esau individually.

The point is the same as what has gone before,

that in salvation history, the descendants of some who appear to us to have the same standing within the scope of the promise of God (e.g. Ishmael and Isaac --- both descendants of Abraham, Esau and Jacob --- both descendants of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Rebekkah) are observed to have different subsequent histories.

That God's plan works itself out along certain lines: through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and onward through David to Christ.

This necessarily implies that God's plan does not work itself out along all other lines.

In this sense the choice of some, implies that others have not been chosen.

It does not signal the failure of God's plan, certainly.

Neither does it anything about the fate of individuals.

At this point all that it tells us is that the sad state of the Nation of Israel in Paul's day is of a piece with the whole sweep of history of Israel and the World.

It has very often happened that some who were descended from Father Abraham went on to play a central role in Salvation History, while others did not.

Very often the majority were lost and only a remnant remained.

The same thing has happened in the time of Christ, Paul means to say.

The remnant of Israel is gathered round Christ and, now, all the nations are coming in.

Paul cries for the part of Israel that has not come in,

For those whom Christ came to save but who have yet to accept him.

Closing Prayer