

ROMANS (9:1-12)

Children of the Promise

PART 40 – JUNE 26, 2005

CURSED & CUT OFF

When Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, the Jewish temple was still operating in Jerusalem. They had repaired the curtain that ripped when Jesus died. Sacrifices were still being offered on behalf of the Jews. And the elaborate rituals of Judaism were still in full swing.

Paul knew that Christianity was the death knell of Judaism. Even before his conversion, he knew the two systems couldn't coexist. That's why he had such a bitter hatred toward Christians and did everything in his power to try and stamp them out.

Last week we left Paul on a "mountaintop":

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Romans 8:38-39 NIV

Today, there is a dramatic, sudden change in Paul's mood as Paul begins to speak to his people - who *are* separated from Christ. We left Paul on a "mountaintop," let's join him in the "valley":

I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. – Romans 9:1-5 NIV

Look how Paul begins: "I speak the truth ... I am not lying"

Q: Why do you suppose he thought this was necessary?

A: Because the genuineness of his love for the Jews was seriously doubted. He said so many things that could sound anti-Jewish.

God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. – Romans 2:24
NIV

Then he adds: "I have ... unceasing anguish in my heart" which serves as a personal expression *and* an echo to an OT prophet:

I am in anguish! Oh, my heart! ... For My people are foolish, they know Me not
... - *Jeremiah 4:19-22 NAS*

And this is precisely Paul's point. Let's look at how he words his next sentence, and take some pointers:

For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers ... - Romans 9:3 NIV

Q: Can you understand what he's saying - *without* saying it?

A: My brothers (Israel) are cursed and cut off from Christ!

- (But) Paul offers compassion instead of condemnation

He doesn't wag a finger when he witnesses. He softens the statement by expressing it in relation to his own anguish. This is the approach and attitude we should strive for.

SIDEBAR: If Paul believed that God *exhaustively* predestined *everything* (every decision man makes), then Paul's anguish and sorrow would be for what *God* was doing and how *God* operates.

For Paul to express anguish and sorrow, he must see the Jew's separation, *not* as a result of God's wisdom and will, but as a consequence of their lack of wisdom, and willful choosing.

Next Paul makes no bones about his strong belief that the Jewish people were marked off by God for special treatment:

Theirs is ... adoption ... divine glory ... covenants ... the law ... temple worship ... promises ... the patriarchs, [**but he sees this special treatment as having a purpose and a destiny**] and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!

Paul sees Christ as the righteousness the law and promises were pointing to; as the final and decisive atoning "temple service" on the cross; and as having fulfilled Israel's destiny.

But all of this creates a crisis. And it was used as a very well conceived argument by the Jews against Paul. Israel was promised salvation through the Messiah ... if Christ *was* that Messiah - and Israel rejected Christ - then God failed in his attempt to fulfill his promise to his chosen people. And since God can't fail ... Christ can't be the Messiah.

Q: So, is God unfaithful to his word?

Q: Or is Jesus Christ *not* the Messiah?

Q: Or are the Jews *not* God's chosen people?

Q: And if God didn't keep his word to his *chosen* people, how can we trust or expect that he'll keep his word to us?

That's why Paul spends the rest of chapter nine answering a vital question: Did God fail to keep his word?

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. – Romans 9:6-7a NIV

Paul's answer is quite simple: Not all *ethnic* Israel is *true* Israel; God never promised salvation to every individual Jew. There is an Israel *within* Israel. This flew in the face of the popular Jewish view that God's covenant with Abraham *guaranteed* salvation to every Jew who didn't separate from Israel by renouncing the law. Paul is coming against this notion.

Just because you had Jewish parents didn't automatically make you a child of God. Salvation is based on grace, not race. We can't inherit salvation from our parents, our spouse, or our spiritual leaders. We must each inherit it through adoption, by being "born again," that is receiving Christ for ourselves.

Paul is contending that God's promises were *always* and *only* meant for *true* Israel (and they embraced Christ as Messiah).

Q: Now Paul would face hostile opposition: "Show us from scripture that every Jew is *not* given the promise!"

On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son." – Romans 9:7b-9 NIV

God had promised Abraham that *all* the people on earth (Jews and Gentiles) would be blessed through him. (*Gen 12:3*) But Abraham was getting old, and his wife Sarah was barren. So, Abraham slept with Sarah's maid, Hagar (sounds pretty!) As you can imagine, God didn't want this kind of help. So He told Abraham "Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac." (*Gen 17:19*) Isaac translates: He laughs!

- God says: *I* make the promise, and *I* bring it to pass.

"Children of the promise" are "born" because of God's will, God's promise, and God's power, not human strength or resource. Salvation is based on God's terms, not mine

Now, there is a very interesting OT verse that Paul's Jewish listeners and debaters knew very well:

A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. –
Deuteronomy 19:15 NIV

It's as though Paul, in making his case, is calling three powerhouse witnesses to the stand: Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob.

Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins [Esau and Jacob] were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls – she was told, "The older [Esau] will serve the younger [Jacob]." – Romans 9:10-12 NIV

A good arguer could've made the point to Paul that the reason God didn't choose Hagar's baby (Ishmael) as the child of promise was because Hagar wasn't a Jew – she was a Gentile. So, Paul emphasizes that Esau and Jacob not only had the same mother and father, they shared the same womb at the same time! Any choice between them would be based on God alone.

Q: And why was it decided "before they were born or had done anything good or bad"?

A: So that "God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls".

God has a plan and a purpose in *how* he calls and *who* he elects, and it will not be based on works of any kind. Salvation is based on God's provision not my performance.

Esau was the eldest, he was a rugged, skillful, hunter; his whole body was like a hairy garment. (Gen 25:24-27) Jacob had smooth skin, did the cooking, and liked to "stay among the tents". His name meant deceiver. (Gen 25:27-29; 27:11; 27:36)

SIDEBAR: Some interpret this scripture as saying that God wasn't just foretelling that Esau would serve Jacob, but that he was pre-determining their decisions to make this happen.

The problem with this is that Jacob used *deception* to *con* Esau out of his birthright and his blessing. God wouldn't do that!

Q: Why Isaac (a guy named "He Laughs")?

Q: Why Jacob (a weak and despised man)?

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 comes to mind:

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. – 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 NIV

God hasn't failed to keep his word; he's building for himself a *true* Israel filled with children of the promise (Jew & Gentile).

To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God ... – John 1:12 NIV

What makes me a child of God is not any *external* ceremonies, religious symbols, strength of will, or heritage. It's the *internal* condition of our heart expressed through faith in Christ that empower us to become "children of the promise".