

XIX. Covenant Blessings

August 30/31 & September 1, 2016

Romans 9:1-5

Aim: To review Romans 1-8—describing the gospel of Jesus Christ and its many benefits—and to introduce Romans 9-11, where Paul deals with the question of God’s relationship to Israel in light of the New Testament gospel.

A. Review of Romans 1-8

1. Introduction to Romans (1:1-15)

Paul made three extensive missionary journeys, reported in Acts 13:4-21:17, and then a final journey to Rome to be heard before Caesar (27:1-28:16). On the third journey he went a third time to Corinth, a thriving but wicked port city in the province of Achaia, in what is now southern Greece. It was probably during that stay in Corinth to collect another offering for needy believers in Palestine (15:26) that Paul wrote the letter to the church at Rome.

If the authorship of Romans is not in doubt, neither is the general situation in which it was written. Paul tells us in 15:22-29 that three localities figure in his immediate plans: Jerusalem, Rome, and Spain. Jerusalem is his immediate destination. Paul has completed his collection of money from his largely Gentile churches and is now on his way to Jerusalem to deliver the money to the Jewish saints there. This collection was an important project for Paul, as may be gauged from the fact that he talks about it in every letter written on the third missionary journey (cp. 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9). Its importance goes beyond meeting the material needs of the poor Christians in Judea; Paul views it as a practical way to cement the fractured relationship between the Gentile churches of the mission field and the Jewish churches in the ‘home’ country.

Rome is the second stage in Paul’s itinerary (15:24, 28). But, while sincere in his desire to visit the Christians in Rome, Paul views Rome as little more than a stopping-off point in his projected journey to Spain. This is not to minimize the importance of the Christian community in Rome but reflects Paul’s understanding of his call: ‘to preach the gospel in regions where Christ has not yet been named’ (15:20). Paul has set his sights on virgin gospel territory in the far western end of the Mediterranean.

The epistle of Romans has several purposes, and these various purposes share a common denominator: Paul’s missionary situation. The past battles in Galatia and Corinth; the coming crisis in Jerusalem; the desire to secure a missionary base for his work in Spain; the need to unify the Romans around ‘his’ gospel to support his work in Spain – all these forced Paul to write a letter in which he carefully rehearsed his understanding of the gospel, especially as it related to the salvation-historical question of Jew and Gentile and the continuity of the plan of salvation.

These may have been another reason for Paul to give such prominence to these particular issues. Paul’s battle against Judaizers (cp. Galatians, 2 Corinthians) had gained for him a reputation as being ‘anti-law’ and perhaps even ‘anti-Jewish.’ Rumors of Paul’s stance on these matters had probably reached Rome, as 3:8 might suggest. As Paul introduces his gospel to the Roman community, he is aware that he must defuse these rumors and perhaps even win over some who were already hostile toward him. But, unlike the situations he faced in Galatia and elsewhere, at Rome these doubts about Paul and his gospel did not, apparently, come from only one side. Hence Paul fights on two fronts: criticizing Judaism for its overemphasis on the law and its

Romans – Lesson 19

presumption of ‘most favored nation’ status, while affirming Israel as the ‘root’ of the church and emphasizing its continuing place within the plan of God.

That Paul was dealing in Romans with immediate concerns in the early church we do not doubt. But, especially in Romans, these issues are ultimately those of the church – and the world – of all ages: the continuity of God’s plan of salvation, the sin and need of human beings, God’s provision for our sin problem in Christ, the means to a life of holiness, and security in the face of suffering and death. We need to recognize that Romans is God’s word to *us* and read it seeking to discover the message that God has for us in it.

2. Theme of Romans (1:16-17)

What is the theme of the letter? The gospel. The word ‘gospel’ and the cognate verb ‘evangelize’ are particularly prominent in the introduction (cp. 1:1, 2, 9, 15) and conclusion (15:16, 19) of Romans – its epistolary ‘frame.’ And this is the word that has pride of place in Paul’s statement of the theme of the letter: 1:16-17. Paul goes on to speak of the interplay of salvation, the interplay of Jew and Gentile, and justification by faith; and each had been advanced as the theme of the letter. But they are all elaborations of the main topic of these verses, the gospel. And we require a theme as broad as ‘the gospel’ to encompass the diverse topics in Romans. Romans is Paul’s summary of the gospel he preaches.

In Rome no one had every preached the complete gospel. Therefore, the Roman letter can be said to be a unified statement of what the Old and New Testament present concerning our situation before God and in the world. The entire truth is summed up in the theme verses of 1:16-17. The rest of the letter is an unpacking of these two verses: why they are true, what is the dilemma, what is the solution, and how to live now. Paul declares that there is no reason to be ashamed of Christianity, neither intellectually nor in the experience of life under God.

3. Sinfulness of Man (1:18-3:20)

Before Paul can discuss the gospel – the righteousness of God that is being revealed and is the power of God unto salvation, to be received by faith – he must first discuss the ‘bad news’ that all mankind is under the power and condemnation of God. Paul does this in the very next verse after declaring his epistle’s theme: ‘For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth’ (1:18).

Paul then goes on to describe how all men – both Gentiles and Jews – are under this wrath and condemnation. The pagan has no excuse, because God’s power and divine nature are clearly made manifest in the creation. Instead of displaying gratitude toward his creator, he ‘exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator’ (1:25). For this reason, God has given ungodly mankind over to their depravities and lusts, and they stand condemned before Him.

But the self-righteous Jew is no better off. Although the Jews had the law of God and all its benefits, including the sign and seal of the covenant in circumcision, they did not have faith in God but instead relied on themselves and their works to have standing and merit before God. Their sinful and arrogant hearts demonstrated them to be hypocrites and blasphemers. God promises to judge all men – both Gentile and Jew – according to their works and without partiality. This means that all men stand condemned before the just wrath of a holy God.

Romans – Lesson 19

Paul demonstrates from the Old Testament that ‘none is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God’ (3:10). The conclusion of this lengthy section on the wrath of God is clear and sobering: ‘For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin’ (3:20). The law of God has no power to justify or save sinners, because all it does is reveal our sin – it has no power to change our hearts.

4. Righteousness of God (3:21-4:25)

After having laid the foundation (to use a business term – ‘the case for change’), Paul picks up again in 3:21 the theme he first stated in 1:16: ‘But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the Law’ (3:21). Having proved that the Law cannot save, he now reveals God’s eternal plan of salvation that does not depend upon our keeping of the Law. Instead, it depends on Jesus and His perfect righteousness. Jesus takes our place; He redeems us by paying the price for sin demanded by the Father, which is death. The blood of Jesus thus serves as a propitiation, or satisfaction of God’s justice, turning away His wrath from us. Jesus is our covering or mercy seat. We receive this salvation provided by Christ through faith alone. Faith is the alone instrument by which we are saved, and even that faith is not a work of ours, but is a gracious gift.

‘Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone’ (WSC 33). Justification is a judicial act by which we are declared righteous and receive the imputed righteousness of Christ in our account, while Christ receives our imputed sin and pays the penalty for it on the cross. In this manner, God demonstrates that he is both ‘just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Christ Jesus.’ God’s righteous demands are met, His wrath is satisfied, and his justice is maintained through the death of Jesus Christ; at the same time, His grace and mercy over-abound in loving-kindness towards those sinners whom He justifies through faith in the Savior.

Because the righteousness we receive through justification is wholly and completely an act of God, there is nothing we can do on our own to merit salvation: ‘For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law’ (3:28). To demonstrate what this means, both for the Jew and for the Gentile, Paul offers up the example of Abraham in Romans chapter 4. Was Abraham saved by his works or by his faith? Paul, quoting Genesis 15:6, affirms the latter: ‘For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”’ (4:3). He was not saved by his works, by his circumcision, or by law keeping. Abraham, the father of the Jews, and the father of faith to all who believe, was saved only by his faith in the promises of God. And we are saved in exactly the same way: ‘But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification’ (4:23-25).

5. Life In Christ (5:1-7:25)

In Romans chapter 5, Paul begins to work out what it means to be justified by faith alone. In verses 1-11, he lists seven blessings that we experience right now in our present lives as a result of having righteousness imputed to our account: 1) peace with God; 2) access by faith; 3) grace in which we stand; 4) hope of the glory of God, despite current circumstances; 5) the love of God poured out on us; 6) assurance of salvation from the wrath of God; and 7) joy through

Romans – Lesson 19

reconciliation with God. Although we do not have the fullness of the promised glory that awaits us – the tension between the ‘now and the not yet’ – we do have real, actual benefits in this present age. These blessings (and more) are ours right now by faith for those who have been justified through the blood of Jesus Christ.

In the second half of chapter 5, Paul changes subjects to give us a framework for understanding how God has justified us. This is the ‘Two Adams’ model. Essentially, all of humanity is under or in one of two federal heads: the first man, the first Adam; or the second Adam, Jesus Christ. All who are in the first Adam share in the results of his original act of disobedience. They receive the consequences of Adam’s sin: they are made sinners, they are condemned under the wrath of God, and they are doomed to die. Sin, trespass, transgression, condemnation, wrath, law (which condemns), death – these are all associated with the first Adam and his descendants. However, all those who are in the second Adam, Jesus Christ, receive the benefits of his many acts of obedience. Free gift, grace, justification, righteousness, obedience, life, eternal life – all these are inherited by Christians because they are united to Jesus.

This framework of the two Adams pervades Scripture. There are only two lines of humanity: the seed of the Serpent and the seed of the Woman. There is the ungodly line and the godly line. There are those who trust in the promises of God and are saved, and those who reject God and are condemned. All mankind since Adam are in Adam and share the consequences of Adam’s sin: sin, condemnation, and death. But for those who believe in Jesus Christ for salvation by faith alone, they are transferred from one kingdom to the other, from one master to the other, from one Adam to the other. All that Paul has said in chapters 1-4 about the wrath of God condemning all men and the righteousness of God apart from the law being revealed to save some men fits within this foundational understanding of the two lines of humanity.

Paul uses this framework of the two Adams in the next two chapters to interact with and refute four objections to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The ‘Two Adams’ model is the key structure for understanding Romans 6 and 7, and even the first part of chapter 8. In all likelihood, Paul had encountered these objections many times in his ministry, particularly from Jews who rebelled against Paul’s apparent ‘disregard’ for the Mosaic Law. The Jewish religion relied on Law-keeping for righteousness; Paul’s teaching of a ‘righteousness apart from the law’ deeply offended his fellow countrymen. The first two objections in chapter 6 attack the graciousness of God’s justification; the second two objections in chapter 7 attack Paul’s concept of the law and its inability to justify.

The first objection to the doctrine of justification by faith alone is in the first verse of chapter 6: ‘What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?’ This objection mistakenly tries to attack the graciousness of God in justifying sinners apart from the works of the law. ‘If law keeping is not required to be right with God, if God justifies sinners who break the law through his grace, why bother trying to keep the law? Why not continue sinning and breaking the law, so that even more of God’s graciousness is required?’ Paul points out the fallacy of this argument by demonstrating that those who are in Christ, the second Adam, are united to Him through his death and resurrection, and that we have been set free from slavery to sin and death and have been called to walk in newness of life with Christ. Paul then pleads with the Christian: ‘Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness’ (6:12-13).

Romans – Lesson 19

The second objection to the doctrine of justification by faith alone is closely related to the first: ‘What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?’ (6:15). Paul again answers this objection by describing how we have been transferred from one master to another. When we were in Adam, we were slaves of sin, which leads to death. But now, if we are in Christ, we are slaves of obedience, which leads to righteousness and life. And because we have been transferred from one master to another, we must live as befits our new circumstances. ‘But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (6:22-23). Clearly, Paul’s explanation here makes sense when we consider it against the backdrop of the ‘Two Adams’ framework.

At the beginning of chapter 7, Paul takes a small interlude to describe our transfer from one Adam to the next in terms of death severing the covenant of marriage. Just as two spouses are to remain faithful to each other until the death of one allows the surviving partner the freedom to remarry another, so we too have been freed by the death of Christ from the law of sin and have been united by the Spirit to serve a new master. Here we see Paul using both union and covenantal language to describe our transfer from one ‘spouse’ – sin and death under Adam, under the law – to another spouse – Jesus Christ our Lord.

The third objection to the doctrine of justification by faith alone is in verse 7 of chapter 7: ‘What then shall we say? That the law is sin?’ Paul immediately objects to this thought, and his conclusion would please the orthodox Jew: ‘So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good’ (7:13). The law is holy and righteous and good because it is a reflection of the holy, righteous, and good character of God. However, the problem with the law is that it does not have any power to save us. Although the law of God is not sin – quite the opposite! – it does interact with sin in a way which ultimately condemns us. First, the law reveals what sin is. When the law tells us not to covet, it defines for us what coveting is. Further than that, the law arouses sin in our sinful hearts. By placing boundaries, our rebellious natures naturally want to break the law. And when sinners break the law, the law then condemns them as sinners who deserve death. The law remains holy and righteous and good, but sinners remain sinful and corrupt and condemned.

The fourth and final objection to the doctrine of justification by faith alone is: ‘Did that which is good [i.e., the law] bring death to me?’ (7:13). In other words, how can the good law of God sentence me to death? The answer is that we are already sinners under Adam. The law does not cause our death: ‘it was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure’ (7:13). The law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh (two more words to put in the ‘Two Adams’ categories). The latter part of Romans 7 is very controversial. It describes a struggle between the *egō* (‘I’) and sin. Many commentators and Christians believe that Paul is portraying the struggle that the Christian has with indwelling sin. Others believe that it depicts the inability of the unbeliever (e.g., the unbelieving Jew who still has a high regard for the Law of God) to keep the law. Regardless of your viewpoint, the message is very clear as Paul cries out at the end of the passage: ‘Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?’ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!’ (7:24-25a). Our answer to the struggle with sin is always Jesus Christ.

Romans – Lesson 19

6. Hope in the Spirit (8:1-39)

Chapter 8 of Romans is one of the most glorious chapters in the entire Bible. In it, Paul describes for us the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, both present and future. Paul's description of the Spirit's work in our sanctification leads naturally into the hope of our future glorification. Paul ends the chapter and the first half of his magnum opus with a hymn of praise to God with the theme of the believer's ultimate assurance in the hope of glory.

Chapter 8 starts out with a bold and assuring statement of the completeness of our justification by faith: 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (8:1). We no longer need to fear that we remain condemned under the wrath of God, under the headship of Adam, if we have been transferred to the headship of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Those who are in Christ walk according to the Spirit, have minds set on the Spirit, and live according to the Spirit, while those who have not been saved remain in the flesh under Adam. Although some people try to construct a 'carnal Christian' theology whereby you can be 'saved' from hell, but not yet fully submitted to the Lordship of Christ, Paul will have nothing of that in this passage. 'Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him' (8:8-9).

The Spirit of God is seen by Paul as the key motivating force or power in the Christian's life. The Spirit 'sets you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death' (8:2). The Spirit is our pattern for life, both action and thought (8:4-6). The Spirit of God dwells in believers who belong to Christ (8:9). The Spirit is the power of resurrection and gives life to our 'mortal bodies' (8:11). The Spirit enables us to mortify the deeds of the body and live (8:13). The Spirit leads us as sons of God (8:14) and is the power of adoption whereby we can cry out to our Father God (8:15). Further, the Spirit bears internal witness and gives us assurance that we are children of God and heirs to all His promises (8:16-17). The Spirit is the firstfruits of our inheritance, a down payment that all the promises of God will be ours (8:23). And finally, the Spirit intercedes for us with 'groanings too deep for words,' because He knows perfectly the will of God for us, even when we don't (8:26-27). Surely the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is a marvelous gift of the grace of God!

In the second half of Romans chapter 8, Paul points us ahead to glorification, the final stage of the Christian experience. He does so in terms of our present situation, the 'now and the not yet': 'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us' (8:18). Paul then points out that the creation is eagerly awaiting the revelation of the sons of God, just as we are anticipating the fullness of our adoption, the redemption of our bodies. Glorification will be a wonderful restoration of creation and humanity to a state of holiness, righteousness and truth, an eternity of perfection, freed from the curse of sin. But until that time, we are to wait patiently and eagerly for the completion of God's salvation in our lives.

As we wait, Paul gives us assurance that even in the midst of our sufferings, God is in sovereign control: 'And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose' (8:28). Paul backs up this assertion of God's sovereignty with a reminder of the Golden Chain of salvation that no one is able to break: 'For those whom He foreknew He also predestined.... And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified' (8:29a, 30). Our glorification in eternity future is just as sure, just as complete, as our

Romans – Lesson 19

election in eternity past. All of history is moving towards our glorification, in order that we might praise and worship and glorify our Savior, Jesus Christ. This doctrine of God's sovereignty should give us mighty assurance as we suffer the pains and sorrows in this present age that nothing can deny us the inheritance of glory that God has promised for those who love Him.

Paul's finale in chapter 8 is a series of rhetorical questions that continually hammer home the truth that the Golden Chain of salvation cannot be broken. 'If God is for us, who can be against us? 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? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?' (8:31b-33a). 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, or 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' (8:35, 37-39).

Amen!

B. Overview of Romans 9-11

1. Moo

Paul's celebration of God's faithfulness and love in 8:31-39 is a fitting end to his theological exposition. We might now expect Paul to solidify and apply his theology in a series of exhortations of the kind that often conclude his letters. But these exhortations do not begin until chapter 12. What fills the gap between the end of chapter 8 and the beginning of chapter 12 is Paul's anguished wrestling with the problem of Israel's unbelief. Is this section, then, a detour from the main line of Paul's argument in Romans, an excursus that disrupts the natural flow of the letter? Not at all. Romans 9-11 is an important and integral part of the letter.

Paul's presentation and defense of 'his' gospel to the Roman Christians occurs against the backdrop of controversy over the relationship between Judaism and the church. Paul, the 'apostle to the Gentiles,' found himself at the center of this debate. A decade of struggle to preserve the integrity and freedom of the gospel from a fatal mixture with the Jewish torah lies behind him; a critical encounter with Jews and Jewish Christians suspicious of him because of his outspoken stance in this very struggle lies immediately ahead (cp. Rom. 15:30-33). And the Roman Christians themselves are caught up in this issue, divided over the degree to which, as Christians, they are to retain the Jewish heritage of their faith.

Paul frames chapters 9-11 with allusions to the key tension he is seeking to resolve: the Jews, recipients of so many privileges (9:4-5), are not experiencing the salvation offered in Christ (implied in 9:1-3); they are the objects of God's electing love, yet, from the standpoint of the gospel, they are 'enemies' (11:28). Paul's aim is to resolve this tension. The tension arises from the *historical* circumstance that the majority of Jews have rejected the gospel. But the tension has *theological* roots also. Paul's own explanation of the gospel in chapters 1-8 is partly responsible for this theological tension. He has denied that Jews are guaranteed salvation through the Mosaic covenant (chapter 2 especially). What, then, becomes of their TO status as 'God's chosen people'? Magnifying the problem is Paul's repeated insistence that what once

Romans – Lesson 19

apparently belonged to, or was promised to, Israel now belongs to believers in Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. If Jewish rejection of the gospel creates the problem Paul grapples with in Romans 9-11, Gentile acceptance of that same gospel exacerbates it. Paul earlier categorically but briefly rejected the conclusion that his teaching implied the cancellation of all the Jews' advantages (3:1-4). Now he elaborates.

The Jewish claim to privileged status arises not simply from a self-generated nationalistic fervor; it is rooted in the OT: 'The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people' (Dt. 7:6b). Paul must, then demonstrate that the God who chose and made promises to Israel is the same God who has opened the door of salvation 'to all who believe.' To do so, Paul must prove that God has done nothing in the gospel that is inconsistent with his word of promise to Israel; that the gospel he preaches is not the negation but the affirmation of God's plan revealed in the OT (see, e.g., 1:2, 3:21). It is for this reason that Paul quotes the OT so often in Romans 9-11.

Therefore, Romans 9-11 is an integral part of Paul's letter to the Romans. These chapters contribute to Paul's exposition of the gospel by showing that it provides fully for God's promises to Israel, when those promises are rightly understood.

As he has throughout the letter, Paul in Romans 9-11 writes to both Gentile and Jewish Christians, both of whom are represented in the church at Rome. Paul's complex theologizing in chapters 9-11 has a very practical purpose: to unite the squabbling Roman Christians behind his vision of the gospel and its implications for the relationship of Jew and Gentile. As so often in Romans, Paul's approach is balanced. He insists, against the presumption of many Gentiles in the community, that the gospel does not signal the abandonment of Israel (chapter 11, especially). But he also makes clear that Jews and Jewish Christians, who think that they have an inalienable salvific birthright, are in error (chapters 9 and 10, especially). Paul therefore criticizes extremists from both sides, paving the way for his plea for reconciliation in chapters 14-15.

2. MacArthur

Throughout church history, Romans 9-11 has been greatly misunderstood. Some commentators and expositors all but ignore it. Others treat it as a parenthesis that has little, if any connection to the rest of the letter. They take it as an aside in which Paul expresses personal concerns and insights about his fellow Jews. It is true that if Paul had left out chapters 9-11, the argument and the flow of the letter would still seem unbroken. But, it is also true that these three chapters are integrally related to the rest of the letter. Paul did not want to continue his teaching on justification by faith until he clarified some related truths regarding Israel and Israelites. As part of that clarification, the apostle needed to contradict some prevailing falsehoods over which many Christians, especially those who were Jewish, were stumbling.

Paul anticipated the questions and arguments that some of the Roman church members were sure to raise and answers them in the inspired words of these chapters. First, he anticipated the argument that, if the gospel of Jesus Christ offered salvation to all Gentiles, then God must have forsaken His ancient people Israel. Jews who heard the gospel concluded that the doctrine of justification by faith was a new idea that was valid only for Gentiles and that Christians believed the ceremonies and works righteousness of Judaism had no merit before God. They were sure the gospel implied that Jews no longer had a unique place or purpose in God's plan of redemption.

Romans – Lesson 19

These Jews were quite right, of course, that the gospel discounts Jewish ritual and works righteousness as a means of salvation. But ritualism and legalism, even the keeping of God's divinely-revealed law, had *never* been a means of salvation, only a means of expressing or symbolizing obedience to God. As Paul makes clear earlier in this letter (see especially chapters 3-), God has never justified any person, Jew or Gentile—not even Abraham—on any other basis than His grace made effective by personal faith. It was also true that the New Covenant in the blood of Christ had replaced the Old Covenant and that God was calling out a new people for Himself from among all nations and peoples.

Near the end of Romans 11 Paul asserts with divine authority that the Savior of the world came from Zion (that is, was a Jew) and that ultimately 'all Israel will be saved,' just as the prophet Isaiah had declared (Rom. 11:26; cp. Is. 59:20-21; 27:9). Early in His earthly ministry, Jesus told the Samaritan woman that 'salvation is from the Jews' and that He was the promised Jewish Messiah who would offer salvation not only to Jews but to all mankind (Jn. 4:22-26). Paul was doubtless familiar with that declaration by His Lord, and he assures the Romans that it is inconceivable that God could reject and forget His people Israel. True Christianity and anti-Semitism are therefore contradictory terms in the most absolute sense.

Paul anticipated and answered a second question he knew would arise in the minds of many of His readers: 'Why are most Jews still in unbelief? Why is the uniquely chosen and blessed nation of Israel, who knows the law and the prophets so well, not only rejecting the gospel of Jesus Christ but zealously persecuting fellow Jews who believe it?' Neither physical circumcision nor physical lineage from Abraham can save a person. They can, in fact, easily become barriers to salvation by giving a false sense of spiritual security. Trusting in such human things kept Jews from receiving Jesus Christ. Because the gospel is clear that both Jews and Gentiles are saved by faith, the Jews must turn from their trust in their own religious achievement, humbling themselves, rejecting the intimidating pressure of the tradition they lived by. They rejected that gospel and thus rejected their Messiah.

Paul knew that a third and closely related question would also arise in the minds of Jews: 'Granted that individual Jews must be saved by personal faith, what about the *nation* of Israel? Has God discarded His ancient chosen nation?' Paul's response to that question is given in chapter 9. In this section Paul shows that God temporarily set the nation of Israel aside because of her continued impenitence and unbelief, most especially for her rejection of the Messiah. In His gracious sovereignty, however, and with divine certainty, God will preserve for Himself a remnant of Israel. That nation, in the form of an ordained remnant of its people, will be brought by faith not only into the purified and restored kingdom of 'David's greater Son' but into the eternal kingdom of God.

In those answers to fellow Jews, Paul also answered a question he knew would arise in the minds of many Gentile believers. 'If God did not keep His promises to His chosen people Israel,' they would wonder, 'how can we expect Him to keep His promises to us as Gentile believers?' The problem, of course, is in the question. God *did not fail* in His promises to Israel or to individual Jews. His promises were given to *faithful* Israel and to *faithful*, believing Jews, to those who were spiritual, not simply physical, descendants of Abraham.

3. Barnett

In Romans 9-11 Paul addresses the problem of Israel's rejection of her Messiah. From a Jewish quarter – perhaps articulated by Jewish members of the house churches (prompted by

Romans – Lesson 19

unbelieving synagogue friends?) – comes the shrewd accusation that Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles assumes that Israel is no longer God’s covenant people and that Paul himself is a renegade Jew.

Such an idea is unthinkable, responds Paul, otherwise God Himself would have failed to keep his promises to His people. Nor does this mean, as the accusation really implies, that Paul’s gospel is fatally flawed. Through chapters 9-11, Paul rejects both propositions; throughout Israel’s history only a remnant had ever been responsive to God. True, at this time Israel as a whole is unresponsive, even hostile. Yet the divine promises to the patriarchs still stand. There will be a future ingathering of Israel.

A related matter is the arrogance of some Gentile believers in Rome towards Israel into whom they have been ‘grafted.’ Paul warns Gentile believers that they may be removed from the ‘olive tree’ and the ‘natural branches re-grafted in.

Paul concludes these chapters in an outburst of praise to God for His wisdom and mercy towards humankind, Jews and Gentiles.

C. Prelude to Romans 9-11 (Romans 9:1-5)

1. Paul’s Introduction to the Jewish Situation (9:1-5)

Paul signals a break in his argument by the abrupt transition from chapter 8 to chapter 9. No conjunction or particle connects the two chapters, and the tone shifts dramatically from celebration (8:31-39) to lamentation (9:1-3). Paul begins his exposition of the gospel and Israel with an impassioned assertion of his own concern for his ‘kindred according to the flesh’ (vv. 1-3). Implied by this concern, as the word ‘accursed’ in verse 3 makes especially clear, is a circumstance well known among the Roman Christians: the great majority of the Jewish people have not responded in faith to the gospel. But Paul’s concern is not the result only of a natural love for his own people; nor is it directed only to their salvation. As the rehearsal of Israel’s privileges in vv. 4-5 makes clear, Paul is also concerned that Israel’s unbelief has ruptured the continuous course of salvation history: the people promised so many blessings have, it seems, been disinherited. It will be Paul’s task to show that this is not the case.

Paul begins this section on Israel (chapters 9-11) by declaring his personal grief over the unbelief of his beloved kinsmen. He has just presented eight chapters of divine truths that are thrilling to those who believe but devastating to all unbelievers, particularly so to unbelieving Jews, who felt totally secure in their racial heritage from Abraham, in their legalistic performance of ceremony, and in their adherence to rabbinical traditions. An unbelieving Jew who took seriously Paul’s words in chapters 1-8 would likely feel that the gospel rendered him an utter outcast, written off by God. To unbelieving religious Jews, Christianity would be viewed as an anti-Jewish conspiracy. In their eyes, Paul utterly contradicted the teaching of Moses. Paul, a former Pharisee (Acts 23:6; Phil. 3:5) and zealous defender of traditional Judaism (Acts. 8:1, 3; 9:1-2), was now considered the traitor of traitors to his people, more despised than a pagan Gentile. He was the great betrayer, the Judas of Judaism, and the archenemy of Israel (see, e.g., Acts 9:23; 13:50; 20:3; 2 Cor. 11:24).

Paul had great concern not just for Israel as a nation but an incredibly profound love for Israelites as individuals. And he knew that before unbelieving Jews would listen to anything else he had to say, they first would have to be convinced that he truly cared for them and was far from leading

Romans – Lesson 19

an anti-Jewish conspiracy. In his preaching and writing the apostle irrefutably undermined the two basic pillars of popular Judaism, physical descent from Abraham and works righteousness under the law. Like Jesus during His earthly ministry, Paul stripped bare the hypocritical and legalistic sham of rabbinical Judaism. Also like Jesus, he knew he had to assure unbelieving Jews of his genuine love for them. He had to show them his heart before he could give them his theology.

Paul hurt so much at the thought of Israel's rejection of Christ that he was willing to forgo Heaven and suffer damnation if that would bring their salvation. Though Paul knew such a bargain was impossible, his emotions were intensely real. Why? He loved his fellow countrymen and longed for their salvation. He was proud of his Jewish heritage. His hurt was intensified by his awareness of the vast privileges from which they had not benefitted—especially the fact that the Messiah 'who is God over all, blessed forever' (v. 5) came from them. Luther put it this way: 'Love is not only pure joy and delight, but also great and deep heaviness of heart and sorrow.' Paul's immense heart bore an ache for all Israel.

2. Paul's Lamentation for the Jewish Condition (9:1-3)

a) Paul's Sincerity (9:1)

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

(1) What Paul Says

Paul begins by assuring them of his personal honesty and integrity. He called his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as an indisputable witness (cp. also Rom 1:9-10; 2 Cor. 1:23; 11:31). He was saying that everything he thought or did or felt was done for and through His Lord. Paul's union with Christ was the orbit within which his emotions moved and the fountain from which they flowed. In other words, Christ, who was the apostle's very life and breath, would attest to the truth of what he was about to teach. His omniscient, righteous, sovereign, and gracious Lord, who perfectly knew Paul's heart and motives, would affirm the truthfulness of the apostle's limitless love for his fellow Jews.

Paul further insisted 'I am not lying.' He was not trying to entice his Jewish readers to accept what he said by flattering them or by making insincere and exaggerated claims for himself. He would not say anything that was untruthful or hypocritical in order to gain their attention or their agreement. His words exactly expressed his mind and heart. He calls his own conscience as a witness (cp. Acts 23:1). It was not Paul's conscience in itself that was reliable. His conscience was consistently clear and uncondemning because he lived in consistent obedience to the Lord (cp. 2 Cor. 1:12). Contrary to the common advice, 'Let your conscience be your guide,' the natural human conscience is far from being a reliable guide (cp. 1 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:15). Through neglect of fellowship with God and disobedience to His Word, even a believer's conscience can become insensitive and unreliable. All believers should be able to say with Martin Luther, 'My conscience is captive to the Word of God.'

A conscience surrendered to God's Word is a conscience that is subject to the Holy Spirit, whom Paul next invokes as a witness to his truthfulness and to the reliability of his conscience. The human conscience by itself is neutral. It is activated by and according to the nature of the person to whom it belongs. The conscience of an evil, unregenerate man is no guard against sinful thoughts and actions. The conscience of a faithful believer, on the other hand, is reliable,

Romans – Lesson 19

because it is activated by the truths and standard's of God's Word and is energized by the power of God's indwelling Holy Spirit. When we live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, and obey the Spirit, we can trust our conscience because it is under divine control.

Paul draws his readers' attention to what he is about to say by forcefully proclaiming his sincerity. He emphasizes the point by putting it both positively – 'I am speaking the truth' – and negatively – 'I am not lying.' And he adds conviction to his assertions by joining to each a reference to the Christian reality from which he speaks. The truth that Paul speaks (the word for truth in the Greek comes first for emphasis), he speaks 'in Christ,' 'as one united with Christ.' Moreover, his assertion that he does not lie is confirmed to him by the witness of his conscience. 'Conscience' in Paul is an inborn faculty that monitors a person's conformity to a moral standard. Paul assures the Romans that he has a good, or 'clear' conscience about the truthfulness of what he is about to tell them. But one's conscience is only as good as the moral standards that it monitors. Hence Paul reminds the Romans that, as a believer with a 'renewed mind' (12:1-2), his conscience testifies 'by means of' the Holy Spirit.

Although Paul's opening statement falls short of a vow or oath, Paul is giving a declaration with the deepest solemnity he can muster. He is about to deal with issues that are problematic for the Jews. Before Paul looks at how God has taken the gospel from the Jews to the Gentile community, grafting Gentiles in the place of Israel (Romans 9-11), he wants to make sure the Jewish community in Rome might read his epistle through his tears. He is not angry or hostile towards his kinsmen—quite the contrary. Paul is speaking in Christ, in the Holy Spirit, from the depths of his conscience. In other words, Paul's conscience witnesses to him that he speaks the truth. There is no deceit or malice. He is speaking the sober, unvarnished truth to those in Christ, and he is doing so by the Holy Spirit.

Paul's words, while not an oath, nonetheless, are uttered in the power of the Holy Spirit, because he knows that God will be his judge. His conscience tells him this.

(2) Why Paul Says It

Why has Paul stressed so strongly the truth of his concern for Israel (v. 2)? Almost certainly because he knew that his passionate and well-known defense of the law-free Gentile mission had earned him the reputation – in Rome, as elsewhere – of being anti-Jewish. To the Jewish Christians in the church Paul therefore wants to make clear that his focus on the Gentile mission has by no means meant the abandonment of his concern for, and, indeed, plans for, the salvations of their fellow Jews. But he also wants to dispel any notion that he might have joined with the Gentile Christians in Rome in their sinful disdain for the Jewish people (cp. 11:13-24).

But why must Paul promise his truthfulness in such absolute terms? Most likely because numbers of his Jewish readers in Rome did, in fact, suspect him of lying. They may have believed that since Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles he was of necessity against the chosen people. In short, it appears that many Jews regarded Paul as a liar (cp. also 2 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 1:20; 1 Tim. 2:7). To this day some Jewish people hold Paul to be an apostate against his fellow-Jews, a renegade and an enemy against the people and religion of his birth.

b) *Paul's Sorrow (9:2)*

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

Romans – Lesson 19

What is this ‘truth’? It is that he feels profound grief and unceasing sorrow for his brother Jews, his kinsmen. That grief is, of course, that the Jews *as a nation* have not responded to their rightful king, the Messiah Jesus (see vv. 32-33).

Paul is declaring a solemn truth. He is going through what the text calls *dolor*, ‘grief or pain.’ Paul’s grief is not passing. It attends his life and perturbs his heart continually (cp. Mt. 23:37).

Because what he is about to say seems so unbelievable—at best, highly exaggerated—Paul has an important reason for summoning such an array of witnesses. His introductory statement is believable enough. Few Christians who knew Paul would doubt that he had ‘great sorrow and unceasing grief’ in his heart for his unbelieving fellow Jews. Israel’s rejection of her Messiah weighed so heavily on Paul’s heart that he called on two members of the Trinity to attest to his unrelenting anguish. And he knew that but for God’s gracious intervention on the Damascus road, he not only would still be among those unbelieving Jews but would still be leading them in persecuting those who had acknowledged their Messiah.

The rhetorically effective doubled expressions of verse 1 continue in verse 2: ‘great pain’ / ‘ceaseless anguish.’ Paul’s grief over the spiritual state of Israel (cp. v. 3) is similar to laments over Israel’s sinful or fallen state in the OT prophets (e.g., Jer. 4:19; 14:17; Lamentations; Dan. 9:3). In these texts, lament over Israel’s fallen condition generally gives way to expressions of hope for her future. Without, then, calling into question the reality of Paul’s grief, we can see how naturally his lament fits into the subject that he develops in these chapters.

c) Paul’s ‘Sacrifice’ (9:3)

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.*

Paul now gives the reason for his sorrow: the condemnation under which so many of his fellow Jews stand by reason of their refusal to embrace the gospel. To be sure, he does not state this as his cause for concern in so many words. But that no less than eternal condemnation is the issue is plain from his expressed wish to be ‘accursed’ and ‘cut off from Christ [or the Messiah]’ for the sake of his fellow Jews. ‘Accursed’ translates the Greek *anathema*, which, transliterated, has entered ecclesiastical English to denote a person who is excommunicated. Paul, however, applies the word to the underlying spiritual reality of which the church’s excommunication is but the response: eternal damnation. Paul’s willingness to suffer such a fate himself makes sense only if those on behalf of whom he offers himself stand under that curse themselves.

The full depth and genuineness of Paul’s grief is expressed in his almost unbelievable declaration in verse 3. As indicated by his opening qualifier, ‘I could wish,’ Paul knew he could not reject his salvation and again become ‘accursed’ (devoted to destruction in eternal hell) and thus forever ‘separated from Christ.’ It was for the salvation of his fellow Jews that Paul expresses himself in hyperbole, saying he was willing even to forfeit his salvation, if, somehow, that could save them from God’s condemnation. No one, of course, knew better than Paul that salvation is a believer’s most precious treasure and that only Christ’s sacrificial death has the power to save. But here he was speaking emotionally, not theologically, and there is no reason to doubt that his awesome statement of self-sacrifice was the expression of a completely honest heart. Paul felt such love that he was willing to relinquish his own salvation and spend eternity in hell if somehow that could bring his fellow Jews to faith in Christ! The apostle also knew that the obviously impossibility and worthlessness of such a sacrifice would cause some of his critics to accuse him of safely offering to sacrifice that which he knew was impossible to lose. It was

Romans – Lesson 19

doubtless to counter such accusations that he had called on Christ and the Holy Spirit to witness his sincerity.

Paul escalates the description of his pain to a degree unprecedented in his writings. Paul loves his people so much that he would be willing to give up his salvation for his brothers and sisters, his fellow Jews. The word Paul uses is *anathema*, which means he would willingly place himself under the very curse of God and be delivered to total destruction if by doing so his people would know Christ (cp. Gal. 1:8). It goes back deeply into the Old Testament. At the time of the conquest of Canaan, God put the Canaanites under the ban, which meant that He forbade the people of Israel to spare Canaanite lives or to take their goods. God delivered them to absolute destruction. That is the meaning of *anathema*, and Paul was willing to know it personally if that would save his kinsmen.

‘Accursed’ (*anathema*) picks up the language of the book of Joshua where the defeated, godless city of Jericho was ‘handed over to God’ for destruction (cp. Jos. 6:17). By Paul’s time, however, ‘devoted to the Lord for destruction’ meant nothing less than ‘consigned to hell.’ Easily missed are the prepositions ‘from’ (*apo* – ‘away from’) and ‘for’ (*huper* – ‘on behalf of’). Paul would prefer to be *anathema*, separated ‘away from Christ’ ‘on behalf of’ His people. Prompted by the example of Jesus Himself, Paul would prefer to be eternally lost ‘from Christ’ and His Kingdom ‘in place of’ his fellow-Jews if only they would find salvation in their Messiah.

Paul’s prayer that he become *anathema* for the sake of his fellow Jews strikingly demonstrates his love for his own people. Paul uses a Greek tense that usually denotes past action (the imperfect), and we should probably ascribe a hypothetical nuance to the imperfect tense, as in this paraphrase: ‘I would pray (were it permissible for me so to pray and if the fulfillment of such a prayer could benefit them).’ Paul was likely influenced in this situation by the example of Moses, who, after the Golden Calf incident, prayed that God would forgive the people of Israel and asked that his own name be blotted out of ‘the book’ if God chose not to forgive (Ex. 32:30-32). Allusions to Moses’ history and person elsewhere in Romans 9-11 (e.g., 9:14-18; 10:19; 11:13-14) make it likely that Paul does see Moses as, to some extent, his own model. As Moses, the leader of God’s people, offered himself for the sake of his people, so Paul offers himself.

Paul’s passion to offer such an ultimate sacrifice reflected the gracious heart of God, who so loved the unloving and evil world that He sent His only begotten Son to provide for its redemption (Jn. 3:16). It also reflected the equally gracious heart of the Son, who, in obedience to the Father, gave His life that others might live. Paul had just finished rejoicing in the believer’s absolute security in Christ (Rom. 8:38-39). Yet his love for the lost in Israel gave him the willingness to surrender those intimate, inestimable, and eternal blessings, if doing so would bring his Jewish brethren to Christ.

The unbelieving Jews for whom Paul grieves are his ‘kindred’ in the sphere of human relationships – ‘the flesh.’ Paul applies ‘kindred’ to his fellow Jews to demonstrate the degree of his continuing identification with, loyalty to, and concern for them. ‘Apostle to the Gentiles’ he may be; but a Jew he remained.

3. Paul’s Recitation of Jewish Privileges (9:4-5)

Paul next expresses his deep sorrow over Israel’s unbelief because of their personal connection with God. He not only loved Jews because they were his physical kinsmen but even more

Romans – Lesson 19

because they are God's chosen people. He loved whomever God loves, and because God loves Israel uniquely, Paul loved Israel uniquely.

In verses 4-5, Paul enumerates some of the divine privileges given to his 'kindred according to the flesh.' This suggests that Paul's willingness to sacrifice himself for unbelieving Israel (v. 3) arises not only from love for his own people but also from love for the truthfulness of God's word. Paul's concern is not just that so many of his own people seemed doomed to hell; it is also that their fate seems incompatible with the many privileges and promises granted to Israel by God in the OT. Thus Paul's listing of Israel's blessings prepares the way for the question that is central to this whole section: Has God's word failed (v. 6a)? While Paul's inventory of Jewish privileges has as its main purpose the explanation of his willingness to sacrifice himself for his people, it also hints at why that sacrifice will not be necessary: God 'has not rejected His people whom He foreknew' (11:2).

Paul's list of Jewish privileges reflects a careful organization. The first term, 'Israelites,' stands in its own clause and is the heading for the whole series. There follows three clauses, each connected to Israelites with the relative pronoun 'whose.' The first of the clauses that unfolds the significance of the word 'Israelites' lists six privileges. The Greek suggests an arrangement in two series of three.

a) The Prerogatives (9:4)

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

Paul's selection of the term 'Israelites' to head this list is significant. For, in contrast to the colorless, politically and nationally oriented title 'Jew,' 'Israelite' connotes the special religious position of members of the Jewish people. It is therefore no accident that Paul in Romans 9-11 generally abandons the word 'Jew,' which has figured so prominently in chapters 1-8, in favor of the terms 'Israelites' and 'Israel.' Paul is no longer looking at the Jews from the perspective of the Gentiles and in their relationship to the Gentiles but from the perspective of salvation history and in their relationship to God and His promises to them.

By 'Israelites' Paul is thinking of God's unique relationship with that 'people' whom He chose, saved, and instructed. In the course of two millennia this people benefitted from God's mercy in many tangible ways, some of which Paul now lists.

(1) Adoption

The first prerogative is also the most striking. 'Adoption,' Paul has just informed us, is the Spirit-conferred status of all those who have been justified by faith in Christ (8:15, 23; cp. Gal. 4:5 and Eph. 1:5). Paul's attribution of this blessing to the Israelites, most of whom are unbelieving (cp. v. 3), is surprising – particularly since the word is not used in the OT or in Judaism. Clearly, then, Israel's 'adoption' here must mean something different than the adoption of Christians in chapter 8. The term is Paul's way of summing up the OT teaching about Israel as 'God's son' (cp. Ex. 4:22-23; Dt. 14:1-2; Is. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1; Mal. 1:6; 2:10). The privilege is one that adheres to the nation as a whole, branding the people as set aside by God from other peoples for blessing and service. God's 'adoption' of Christians gives to every believer in Christ all the rights and privileges that are included within new covenant blessings. God's adoption of Israel, on the other hand, conveys to that nation all the rights and privileges included within the Old Covenant. These blessings, as Paul indicated earlier (2:17-3:8) and as he

Romans – Lesson 19

will reiterate again in the next paragraph (vv. 6-13), do not include salvation for every single Israelite. Nevertheless, Paul's choice of the term 'adoption' is a deliberate attempt (after 8:15, 23) to highlight the continuing regard that God has for Israel, despite her widespread unbelief.

It is clear from the context of Old Testament verses such as Ex. 4:22 and Hos. 11:1, as well as from countless other parts of Scripture, that the *nation* of Israel was, in some respect, God's child. Salvation has always been on an individual basis. One person cannot be saved by another's faith. Yet, while not in the sense of salvation, it was as a nation that God sovereignly bestowed on Israel His special calling, covenant, blessing, and protection. The Old Testament does not refer to God as the Father of individual Jews—in the way the New Testament does of God as Father of individual Christians—but as the Father of Israel. But Israel poorly fulfilled that calling, wasting its privilege (cp. Is. 46:3-4).

The adoption pertains to the Israelites. We think of adoption almost exclusively in New Testament categories; it is the great benefit received by all who are justified and welcomed into God's family. The idea of God's adopted children, however, goes back into the pages of the Old Testament. Israel was the adopted son of God. The original reference to adoption is found at the exodus, when God redeemed His people from the yoke of slavery under Pharaoh, calling the nation His son (Hos. 11:1; cp. Mt. 2:15). The Israelites were those who had been called to enjoy adoption, and it pains Paul that they had missed their privilege.

(2) Glory

The second privilege that adheres to the Israelites is 'the glory.' It is difficult to know whether this term, like 'adoption,' is picked up from chapter 8 and refers therefore to eschatological blessing (e.g., 5:2; 8:17, 18, 21, 30), or whether it is historically oriented to the manifestation of God's presence with the Israelites in the OT – 'the splendor of the divine presence' (cp. Ex. 16:7, 10; 24:16; 40:34-35; Lev. 9:6, 23; Num. 14:10, 21; 16:19, 42; 1 Kgs. 8:11; Ez. 1:28). But they are not mutually exclusive alternatives. Granted the other items in this list, 'glory' probably refers basically to God's presence with the people of Israel.

God blessed Israel by revealing to her His own presence in the Shekinah glory. In that unique and inexplicable way, God dwelt in the midst of His people (Ex. 16:16; 24:16-17; 25:22; 29:43-44; 40:34; Lev. 9:23; 1 Kgs. 8:11).

Glory is also on Paul's list of privileges. The Greek word for 'glory' is *doxa*. From it we get 'doxology.' The Latin equivalent is *gloria*, from which we get the Gloria Patri. Glory attributes supernatural majesty to God. His glory is so brilliant that human eyes are not permitted to behold it, yet God allowed His glory to dwell in the midst of His people Israel. The Old Testament glory hovered over the mercy seat and the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. Glory in Israel was connected to the *shekinah*, a blazing light that manifested God's glory and made him a consuming fire. Ezekiel saw the glory of God rising from the city of Jerusalem and departing (Ez. 10). At the birth of Jesus, the glory of God flooded the landscape (Lk. 2:8-9). That *doxa* or *gloria* pertained to Israel. God first manifested His glory in the community He formed from the slaves of Egypt.

(3) Covenants

Paul's use of the plural 'covenants' is unusual, the singular being much more frequent in both OT and NT. Paul is referring to the several covenants mentioned throughout the OT (with Noah, Abraham, the people of Israel at Sinai, and David). Intertestamental passages that use the plural

Romans – Lesson 19

‘covenants’ generally refer to all the covenants that God had made with the ‘fathers’ (Sir. 44:12, 18; Wis. 18:22; 2 Macc. 8:15). Paul uses the plural ‘covenants’ in the same sense in Ephesians 2:12, where he refers to ‘the covenants of promise’ that mark Israel as God’s special people and from which, therefore, Gentiles were alienated.

Israel had been given the covenants—with Adam, with Noah, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with Moses, and with David. The covenants we inherit come from the Jews, not the Gentiles. They come from Paul’s kinsmen. The covenants belonged to them.

The first covenant was with Abraham, the physical father of all Jews (Gen. 12:15-17) and the spiritual father of all who believe (Rom. 4:11). Through Moses, Israel was given the covenant of law at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19-31; cp. Dt. 29-30). Through David Israel was given the covenant of an eternal kingdom (2 Sam. 7:8-16). It would even be through Israel that God’s supreme covenant of redemption through His Son would come (Jer. 31:31-34; Ez. 37:26). No other nation has or ever will be blessed with such covenants. No aspect of Israel’s history pointed out their uniqueness as the recipients of redemptive revelation more than these covenants.

(4) Law

Paul begins his second triad of Israelite privileges with mention of the ‘giving of the law.’ The word Paul uses can refer both to the act of giving a law or to the results of that act, the law or ‘legislation.’ May scholars adopt the second definition here, but the first definition has better lexical support and fits Paul’s argument better: he wants to focus on the law as given to Israel by God, not on its negative effects on the people as a result of the power of sin.

Israel was privileged by ‘the giving of the Law’ of God to them through Moses. In that Law Israel not only was taught the Ten Commandments but countless other principles and standards, the obeying of which would honor God and bring blessing on the people. They were shown the way of blessing and prosperity, not only morally and spiritually, but also materially. To disobey was to be cursed (Dt. 27-28).

The Israelites had also been given the law. The law did not come through Hammurabi; it came through Moses. The law did not come from Babylon, Phoenicia, or Egypt; it came from the people of Israel through the mediatorial work of Moses. We owe our law to the Israelites.

(5) Worship

‘Worship’ could refer broadly to Israel’s worship of God wherever and however that was carried out. But it is more likely to focus more narrowly on the Israelite sacrificial system. The importance of the temple cult and the worship associated with it is seen in one of the most famous statements of the Mishnah: ‘By three things is the world sustained: by the Law, but the [Temple]-service, and by deeds of loving-kindness.’

Israel was uniquely blessed by being entrusted with ‘the temple service,’ through which she worshiped and dealt with sin before the Lord. ‘The temple service’ refers to the entire ceremonial system that God revealed through Moses—the sacrifices, offerings, cleansings, and other means of worship and repentance administered by the priests and Levites.

The Jews had been given the service of God. Paul uses the word *latrīa*, which actually refers to the worship of God. Our instructions about how to bring praise sacrifices to God in corporate worship did not come to us from the Greeks or the Romans. The principles of worship that

Romans – Lesson 19

shape our devotion were born in Israel. God delivered to Israel the principles by which He is to be worshiped, adored, and sanctified.

(6) Promises

‘The promises’ conclude Paul’s initial list of prerogatives enjoyed by the Israelites. To the Israelites God made many *promises* for the future, in particular as noted in Romans to Abraham (e.g., 4:13) and regarding David (e.g., 1:2). Paul’s characteristic emphasis on the promises given to Abraham and the other patriarchs suggests that these are the promises that he here has in mind.

Israel was given ‘the promises’ of God in a distinct and unique way. Although Paul does not explain the nature of these promises, it seems likely that he was referring to the promised Messiah, who would come out of Israel, and to His promised kingdom, as well as to eternal life.

The promises we have also began with the Jews. The promises we stand on did not come *de novo* from the mind of Paul or John or Peter in the New Testament era. The promises of God came through centuries of prophetic utterances going all the way back to the *protoevangel* in Genesis 3:15. The thousands of promises of the one to come out of Israel from the root of Jesse pertained to the Israelites.

All these things—the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship of God, and God’s promises—came through Paul’s kinsmen, Israel. Do we wonder, then, at the weight of Paul’s tears?

b) The Patriarchs (9:5a)

⁵*To them belong the patriarchs...*

Paul highlights the last two Jewish privileges in his list by giving to each a separate clause. The first is a final privilege ‘belonging to’ the Israelites: ‘the fathers,’ or ‘the patriarchs.’ Descent from the patriarchs is valuable because God gave promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that were valid both for them and their descendants. The meaning and extent of these promises are the linchpin in Paul’s interpretation of salvation history; see 9:6b-13; 11:15; and especially 11:28. Much of what Paul says in Romans 9-11 is an attempt to explain just what the Israelites legitimately can expect to inherit from their founding fathers.

Paul reminds his readers that it was from Israel that God raised up ‘the fathers,’ beginning with the first great patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel. It was through these men that the foundation of all the blessings were laid.

c) The Promised One (9:5bc)

(1) According to the Flesh (9:5b)

...and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ...

The last privilege mentioned by Paul not only occupies its own clause but is introduced in a different construction. Rather than ‘belonging’ to the Israelites, the Messiah ‘is from’ them. The shift is significant, suggesting, as do vv. 2-3, that the Israelites, for all the privileges they enjoy, have not, as a group, come into genuine relationship with God’s Messiah and the salvation that He has brought. As Paul qualified the meaning of his own relationship to the Jewish people (‘kindred according to the flesh,’ v. 3), so he now qualifies in the same way the descent of the Messiah from the Israelites. The Messiah, Paul is pointing out, comes from the people of Israel only in respect to that relationship which is strictly and narrowly human – ‘the flesh.’

Romans – Lesson 19

Finally, Israel was privileged to provide the lineage of ‘Christ according to the flesh.’ Christ was not incidentally born a Jew but was preordained to be a human descendant of Abraham and of David.

What primarily pertains to the Israelites is Jesus, a Jew, from the seed of David. Paul notes that Christ came from the seed of David ‘according to the flesh,’ *kata sarka*. Paul affirms Jesus’ Jewish ancestry, but he does not stop there.

Here it is not the name ‘Christ,’ but His title, ‘*the Christ*’ (or in Hebrew, ‘the Messiah’). We learn that the Christ (1) is an Israelite man, (2) is ‘over all,’ that is, as the risen and exalted Lord of all, and (3) astonishingly, is called ‘God’ and ‘blessed forever’ (as in standard benedictions of God, for example in 2 Cor. 1:3).

(2) God Over All (9:5c)

...who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

(a) Punctuation

Does Paul explicitly complete the picture by denoting in the last part of verse 5 another aspect of Messiah’s person: His deity? Exegetes and theologians since the inception of the church have been sharply divided over this question. The issue is one of punctuation and therefore of interpretation, for Greek manuscripts of the NT rarely contain punctuation marks, and the marks that are found tend to be sporadic and irregular. There are two main choices:

1. A comma could be placed after ‘flesh,’ meaning that the words following the comma would modify ‘Messiah.’ The words following ‘Messiah’ can then be punctuated in two different ways:
 - a. ‘...from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen’ (NRSV; cp. also KJV; JB; NASB).
 - b. ‘...from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen’ (NIV; cp. ESV).
2. The second general approach to the punctuation of these words places a period after ‘Messiah’ and takes what follows as an independent ascription of praise to God. Again, two possible translations result, depending on the punctuation adopted within the clause:
 - a. ‘...of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed forever. Amen’ (RSV; cp. also NEB; TEV).
 - b. ‘...from them, in natural descent, sprang the Messiah. May God, supreme over all, be blessed forever! Amen’ (NEB; cp. also TEV).

The Christological implications of this issue are great, for if the first alternative is adopted, Paul here calls Jesus ‘God,’ and Romans 9:5 becomes one of the most important ‘proof-texts’ for the deity of Christ. Such evidence from Greek manuscripts that we possess favors slightly the second view. Most of the church fathers, on the other hand, favor the first interpretation. Ancient translations almost all take ‘God’ as a designation of Christ; modern translations, as we have seen, are divided, as are modern commentators. Despite this difference of opinion, arguments in favor of taking ‘God’ as an appellation of ‘Messiah’ greatly outweigh those that support the alternative.

Connecting ‘God’ to ‘Christ’ is exegetically preferable, theologically unobjectionable, and contextually appropriate. Paul here calls the Messiah, Jesus, ‘God,’ attributing to Him full divine

Romans – Lesson 19

status. The frequent association of God with ‘blessed’ makes it likely that these should be kept together, and the whole taken in apposition to ‘the one who is over all.’ ‘Christ, who is supreme over all things, God blessed forever’ (thus, essentially option 1.a. above).

(b) Exposition

This is one of a small number of passages in the New Testament where Jesus is directly called ‘God’ (see e.g., Heb. 1:8; Jn. 1:1). There are many passages, however, where indirect deity claims are made, whether by Jesus (Mk. 2:10) or about Jesus (1 Cor. 16:22; cp. Dt. 6:5).

Paul affirms Jesus’ Jewish ancestry, but he does not stop there. He gives one of the clearest and most decisive affirmations of the deity of Christ that we find anywhere in Scripture. Christ is over all things, the entire universe. The Jews used this expression to refer to God’s dominion over the entire creation; He is the Most High God. Here Paul says that Christ is over all. Some attack the biblical concept of Christ’s deity by trying to change the syntax of the verse, translating it ‘Christ who is blessed eternally by God.’ In other words, Jesus’ lordship was God’s gift to Him, a manifestation of divine blessing rather than a mark of divinity. That is a tortuous approach to the syntax of this particular passage because the same could be said of any Christian—that he or she is blessed of God. The apostle is referring to Jesus as *the* eternally blessed God.

In closing this abbreviated by comprehensive account of Israel’s special blessings, Paul declares that Jesus Christ—by far their greatest blessing, the blessing in whom all others find their full meaning—‘is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.’ These words are not so much a benediction as an affirmation of Christ’s divine majesty and lordship. Without exception in Scripture, both in the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament, a doxology always places the word ‘blessed’ *before* the name of God. Here, Paul uses the reverse form ‘God blessed,’ indicating beyond doubt that the apostle intentionally equates Christ with God. The antecedent of ‘God’ is ‘who,’ and the antecedent of ‘who’ is ‘Christ.’ He was the supreme blessing, yet they rejected Him! Tragic unbelief that grieved the heart of Paul and grieves the heart of God Himself.

After Paul makes this profound affirmation of the full deity of Christ, he interjects ‘Amen,’ which is the word the Jews use to affirm the truth of a statement. ‘Amen’ is the term Jesus used when prefacing His teaching to the disciples: ‘Amen, amen, I say to you.’ We translate ‘Truly, truly I say to you’ or ‘Verily, verily I say to you.’ The word *amen* comes from *emut*, which means ‘truth.’ Paul punctuates his profound affirmation of the divine nature of Christ with this word, which every Jew understood to be a clear affirmation of the truth. Here Paul says ‘amen’ about his own words: ‘Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.’

In short, in verses 1-5 Paul has (1) by his list of tangible evidences reaffirmed that the Israelites are God’s elect people, but (2) as a fellow-Israelite assured them he is heartbroken that as a race they have not embraced their Messiah. Such is his love for his own people that he even prayed to be cursed by God eternally if that would mean their salvation.

For next time: Read Romans 9:6-18.