

Romans 9:1-5

Paul's heart challenges our hearts.

- With chapter 9 we begin a new section of Romans. Ch.1-8 have addressed the question of the righteousness of God as it relates to the individual. We now will see how the righteousness of God is related to Israel. While the questions addressed in ch.9-11 may not find the same kind of direct application to our lives as ch.1-8, they were very important to Paul's original readers.
- In Acts we see that Paul was viewed with suspicion by some Jewish leaders because of his inclusion of Gentiles in the Kingdom of God. Did Paul have a personal dislike for the nation Israel? Did he not appreciate the fact that they were God's elect? How could the promises of God to Israel be valid if Paul's Gospel was true?

The Righteousness of God and faithfulness to Israel. (9-11)

“¹ I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed, {separated} from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, ⁴ who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the {temple} service and the promises, ⁵ whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”

- **A testimony to Paul's heart.** Paul starts by making it very clear that he has no personal disdain for the nation Israel. What he has said and is about to say is not motivated by a personal disrespect for Israel according to the flesh. This is remarkable given the way the Jewish leaders had treated him (We observe in the book of Acts that Paul was misunderstood, had his motives challenged, and his life threatened by the Jewish leaders. We also might note that Paul's personality was likely to seek justice if not revenge rather than self-sacrificing mercy. His zeal for justice as Saul led him to be a persecutor of the church.
- **A testimony to Israel's condition – finding security in the wrong place.** This chapter begins with the same point that was made in ch.1 - we are all shut up under the wrath of God because of our spiritual rebellion. Rom.1:18 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,” Rom.3:19 “Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those whole are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God;” Jews (according to the flesh) who do not believe the Gospel, are accursed and separated from God in spite of their zeal for religion and God.

- **A testimony to Israel's virtues.** Israel had two impressive claims to God's Kingdom blessings. (1) The promise of God. His election or choice of Israel from all the nations to be His people. (2) Their zeal for God and steadfast commitment to His Law.

Paul affirms that the Israelites were given special favor by God in many ways and that they had a zeal for God, but this did not insure their salvation. In Rom. 10:1-4 “¹ Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for {their} salvation. ² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. ³ For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

We might ask ourselves at this point - Are we finding security in our zeal for the things of God? or perhaps in our understanding of being chosen by God?

We also see Paul's response to personal attack as a challenge to us. Do we view those who have hurt us as Paul did?

Paul's heart challenges us – empathy

1. **- to look at our own story** - Paul could reflect back on his own life and empathize with the plight and blindness of the Jews.

Phil.2 “⁴ although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.”

- Paul's identification with his fellow Jews was deeper than the blood relationship. He had been “kin and brother” in spirit as well. As Saul, he had persecuted the “Paul types” just as they had tried to kill him.
- Empathy is a key to Christian community. Paul's teachings concerning the diversity within the Body of Christ is a call to empathy for differences. He also encourages forbearance, grace, and forgiveness all of which suggest empathy.

I Pet.3:8-9 “To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.”

- Empathy comes not only from seeing others as they are but seeing ourselves in them. If we could see a videotape of how we relate we would get it.
- Empathy for critics of the Christian faith should extend to those who are concerned for the disadvantaged but through politically different means, those who mock the injustice of society but attack it through lawlessness, those who value the worth of the individual but express it in the rejection of all external authority.

grace

2. - **to offer grace as we have received grace** - Paul had been forgiven and shown mercy. He now wanted others to share his path.

Eph.4:32 “And be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

II Cor.5 “¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; ¹⁵ and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”

I John 4:19 “We love because he first loved us.”

- Our call is to respond to personal injustice with a blessing. (not revenge, not justice, not retreat).
- The test of the integrity of our faith in God's grace toward us will be seen in the way we offer grace to others. Matt.18:23-35 (the parable of the unmerciful servant)

sacrifice

3. - **to share in Christ's suffering** - Paul counted it a blessing to be able to know Christ through the sharing of his suffering.

Phil.2 “⁷ But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, ⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from {the} Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which {comes} from God on the basis of faith, ¹⁰ that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” Paul

- In a culture that sees suffering, sacrifice, and pain as inconsistent with the will of God it is all the more important to demonstrate that “It is not about me but about the purpose of God.”
- God wants us to find our hope in the Kingdom to come rather than in the comforts of this life.
- We should expect to meet and know Christ in the sharing of His suffering.

warfare

4. - **to fight the real enemy** - Paul saw spiritual warfare in terms of the dynamic element behind the actions of his Jewish opponents.

Eph. 6 “¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual {forces} of wickedness in the heavenly {places}.”

- Our anger should be directed at Satan not at our brothers or others who bear God's image.
- This does not mean that discipline or confrontation of others is never appropriate but that it must be motivated by love not hostility. We are not qualified to confront and discipline another until we love them.