

The Heart of Evangelism: The Privilege of Every Believer

Eric C. Coher

Romans 9:1-5

Romans chapter 9 brings us off of the mountaintops of God's love and into the valley of sorrow and heavy-heartedness. Paul ended chapter 8 with some of the sweetest truths that could ever ring in the ear of a believer. He said, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, 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" Romans 8:38-39. Paul wants us to be thoroughly persuaded that God has an immovable purpose for His people and nothing in the created order can stay His sovereign hand.

As Paul rejoices in the sweet blessings of our union with Christ, he is at the same time broken as he considers the spiritual state of his brothers – the Jews. The question that Romans 9-11 raises is, "What about Israel"? It appears as if the Gentile church is flourishing while God's chosen people, the Jews, have by in large, rejected their Messiah. Does this mean that God is not faithful to His Word? Has He rejected His people? If God is not faithful to His word, then what assurance do we have that he will make good on the promises of Romans 8? What assurance is there that I might not be severed from God's saving love? In Romans 11:1-2 Paul asks, "Has God rejected His people?" His answer is, "By no means! God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew". God will lose not one, Gentile or Jew, whom He has foreknown, predestined, called and justified.

In the next three chapters of our study in the book of Romans, we will wade out into the waters of some pretty deep doctrine. We will be forced to square up to and deal with some truths, namely God's sovereign election, that are undoubtedly challenging to us in our finiteness; this is a good thing. We need to be challenged to deal with any man-centered presuppositions and theology that we may hang on to and come to an understanding that God's thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8). I pray that as we study the righteous character of God in these three chapters, we will be able to sing with the psalmist in Psalm 135:3, "Praise the Lord, for He is good".

Paul is going to labor to demonstrate that far from being unfaithful to His Word, God has a plan for Israel – and that plan has not changed. God has sovereignly used Israel's rejection to advance the gospel to the Gentiles. In Romans 11 we will see that when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, God will soften Israel's hard heart and pour out His grace. The Jews will look on Him whom they have pierced and respond in repentance (Zechariah 12:10). As Paul considers the

glory of God's ways he'll conclude chapter 11 by declaring, "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen" Romans 11:33–36. With that context in mind, let's turn our attention to this morning's text – Romans 9:1-5. Paul, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says:

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 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. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. Romans 9:1–5

The title of this morning's message is *The Heart of Evangelism*. I see three clear qualities in verses 1-3 that accompany such a heart:

1. SINCERITY - ARE YOU WILLING TO BE GRACIOUS AND TRUTHFUL? (v. 1)

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

In the opening verse of Romans 9, we see Paul wearing his heart on his sleeve. We see a man who is absolutely broken over the spiritual state of his people. Let me help you connect the dots as to what is more than likely taking place here. First, remember that Paul himself was a Jew. Not only was he a Jew - he was a pious Jew. Remember Paul's testimony in Philippians 3? Recounting what he once gloried in, he said, "[I was] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless" Philippians 3:5–6.

Paul was the poster child for a law-keeping, pharisaical, Christian-hating Jew. That was of course until his conversion in Acts 9. In God's sovereignty, He had great plans for Paul. Jesus speaking about Paul said, "He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel" Acts 9:15. God took this man who was once breathing murderous threats towards Christians and changed his heart so that now instead of persecuting Christians, he was broken over the reality of those who were separated from Christ. That is the power of the gospel to change a life. It's also one of the indications that we ourselves have been truly converted. If there is no brokenness in your heart as you consider those who are separated from Christ, it may be that you have never tasted grace.

Paul's conversion, as you can imagine, was no small issue among the Jews. Here is a man who was once a leader of the pack and now he has turned to follow the very Christ whom the Jews rejected as a blasphemer. To add fuel to the fire, not only was Paul following Christ, he was also passionately proclaiming the gospel of grace apart from the Law, which flew in the face of everything the Jews self-righteously clung to. To say that the Jews hated Paul would probably be an understatement; they considered him an enemy and a traitor. They saw him as one trying to destroy the Judaism that he once professed. They charged him with having abandoned his people and forsaken his spiritual heritage. Needless to say, it's not easy to have a ministry among people who think you have abandoned them and subsequently hate you.

Notice how Paul approaches these people. He doesn't come out of the gates condemning the Jews. The first words on his mouth are not to charge them with rejecting their Messiah. It's not that this wasn't true, but Paul wanted the Jews to know the depth of his love, care, and concern for them. You have heard it said that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. How true is that! A tender heart and gracious words gain an audience. Truth is a whole lot easier to hear when you know that the one telling you the truth loves you and has your best interest in mind.

Paul wasn't being manipulative just to gain converts among the Jews. He loved the Jews, but he was also honest about the truth of the gospel with them. Here is a reality: The people who love you the most are the people who are willing to be the most truthful with you. Likewise, the people that you love the most are the people with whom you are willing to be truthful with. Paul wasn't a slick-tongued man. He didn't use greasy theology to lure in people. He was truthful, but always gracious. His passionate desire was that the Jews repent of their self-righteousness and become recipients of grace. Let me ask you a question: Are you graciously sharing the truth of the gospel? All of our ministries will look different in respect to size, but are you at least fishing? Remember Jesus said, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" Matthew 4:19. Where does your gospel pole have to be in order to catch fish – in the water.

2. SORROW - DOES YOUR HEART BREAK WHEN YOU CONTEMPLATE THE ETERNITY OF THE LOST? (v. 2)

I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

Ray Stedman once told the story of a congregation who had recently let their pastor go. When a member of the congregation was asked why the church had made such a decision, he said, "The pastor kept telling us we were going to hell." "What does your new pastor say?" "He keeps saying we're going to hell, too." "So what's the difference?" "Well," the church member replied, "When our first pastor said we were going to hell, he sounded like he was glad. But when our new pastor says it, he sounds like it's breaking his heart."¹

¹ Ray C. Stedman, *From Guilt to Glory, vol.2, Reveling n God's Salvation*. (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1978), 10.

Paul's heart ached as he thought about the lostness of his people. Look at his choice of words here. He says, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish." This is strong language. I wonder how many of us could say with a clear conscience that we have had unceasing anguish in our hearts this week for the lost. Paul knew what it was to be estranged from Christ – he once was himself.

This is the heart of God. Jesus in Matthew 23:37 said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling." Again in Matthew 9:36 Jesus expressed his brokenness over those who were lost. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. The Greek word translated compassion (σπλαγχνίζομαι | splachnizomai) and it literally means to be so moved with pity that your bowels are turned. Another way to say it might be a gut-wrenching pain.

Paul's heart is even more challenging when we consider his patience in the presence of the Jews' persistent persecution. He didn't write them off or wash his hands of them. What a Christ-like spirit!

When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. There were more than forty who made this conspiracy. Acts 23:12–13

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Danger from my own people. 2 Corinthians 11:24, 26

3. SACRIFICE – WHAT SACRIFICES ARE YOU WILLING TO MAKE THAT OTHERS MIGHT BE SAVED? (v. 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's desire for his fellow Jews to be saved was so intense that, if it were at all possible, he said that would rather be cut off from Christ that they might live. Paul was willing to stay out of heaven for the sake of the saved (Philippians 1:22-24), and willing to go to hell for the sake of the lost. It's important to note that this reflects a heart attitude, not a doctrinal misunderstanding. Paul knew well that to be separated from the love of Christ was an impossibility for the believer – He just taught that in Romans 8:31-39. Rather, this is the brokenness of a man's heart over the spiritual blindness of his people.

We see a similar brokenness in Moses. He was also willing to be forsaken in the place of Israel. After returning from Mount Sinai with the law to find Israel worshipping a golden calf, Moses

cried out, “But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.” But the LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book” Exodus 32:32–33.

Tom Schreiner says, “Paul himself never contemplated the possibility that his desire could become a reality. For he was too well aware of the precedent already established in which Moses’ request was not granted. In both cases the future of Israel depended on the covenantal promises of God, not the immolation (death, sacrifice) of God’s [human] representative.”²

MEN WITH A BURNING DESIRE TO SEE SOULS WON FOR CHRIST

“I cared not where or how I lived, or what hardships I went through, so that I could but gain souls to Christ. When I sleep I dream of them; when I awake they are first in my thoughts...no amount of scholastic attainment, of able and profound exposition of brilliant and stirring eloquence can atone for the absence of a deep impassioned sympathetic love for human souls.” David Brainerd

“If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms around their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled with the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for.” C.H. Spurgeon

“I am contented to consume my body, to sacrifice to God’s service, and to spend all that I have, and to be spent myself, for the souls of men.” Richard Baxter

“Give me Scotland or I die.” John Knox

“O Lord, give me souls or take my soul.” George Whitefield

These statements only seem radical because we are often far from having this kind of heart. Why is it that we are all too often not broken over the lost souls of men like Paul? Why do we lack this heart of evangelism that we see shining so brightly in Paul here in Romans 9? Let me suggest a handful of reasons.

A. We lack intimacy in our walk with Christ.

A burden for the lost and desire to share the gospel are always an overflow of your walk with Christ. When we fail to cultivate a warm heart for Christ, the natural result is that we begin to become inordinately preoccupied with ourselves. In other words, we begin to live self-centered as opposed to Christ-centered lives.

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 480.

B. We get preoccupied with the temporary and lose sight of the eternal.

I've just seen the world and I'll set it to rhyme; the way God sees it all of the time. It's starving for food - number in millions, while those needing life must be counted by billions. There is a green pasture nearby, only a stones throw away; but without a shepherd, in hunger, they'll stay. Where are the shepherds? Where have they gone? They're out pulling weeds in their own front lawn. The shepherds have problems, they'll tell you themselves; the manure from sheep, O how it smells. The problems they debate are important, you see, what color should the drapes in the shepherd's club be? Nike's or Reebok's which should a shepherd wear? Ask the dying and see if they care. But I've seen the world and the way it can be, and these things are no longer important to me. Manure, I must agree, certainly does smell, but what does it matter when sheep go to hell? Once again come the tears, once again I must weep; for no one is listening as the Lord calls, "Feed my sheep."³

C. We don't see people as God sees them.

O sinner! Think seriously about the fearful danger you are in. God is holding you over a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit full of fire. His wrath is provoked and enraged by you as much as it is against the many people who are already damned in hell. You are hanging by a slender thread with the flames of divine wrath burning all around it, and they are ready to singe it and burn all the way through at any moment.⁴

Because we don't see people as God sees them we live as if there is little sense of urgency. Remember what Jesus said to His disciples in John 4:35? He said, "Why do you say there are yet four months, then comes the harvest? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white (ripe) for the harvest."

D. We don't believe God's promises.

John 4:50 - The official took Jesus at His Word!

Question: How many of God's promises that can be applied to evangelism do you know?

Matthew 28 - I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Hebrews 13:5 - I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Isaiah 55 - My Word will not return void, but it will accomplish the purpose for which I sent it.

Exodus 4 (Moses) - I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.

³ Bob McNabb – Campus Outreach.

⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an angry God Made Easier to Read by John Jeffery Fanella*. (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1996), 19.

4. SPIRITUAL ADVANTAGES – NOT EVERYONE WHO SAYS TO ME, “LORD, LORD WILL ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. (v. 4)

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

Part of Paul’s heaviness of heart is the fact that he knows just how privileged the Jews have been as God’s chosen people. Moses speaks about Israel’s blessings in Deuteronomy 14:1-2 when he says, “You are the sons of the LORD your God. For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” Instead of seeing all of the following blessings as pointing to their ultimate fulfillment in Christ, Israel has rejected the very blessings that were meant to lead her to repentance and faith in Christ. What Paul does in verses 4 and 5 is to enumerate the glorious spiritual advantages that were given exclusively to the Jews.

A. Adoption (v. 4)

This is the only place in the New Testament where adoption is used in respect to anyone other than believers. God, in His grace, separated Israel out of all of the other nations and gave them the unique privileges. They were to be the nation that God would use to be a witness to His glory among all the peoples of the earth. It’s critically important to note that even though the nation of Israel was chosen to be God’s adopted child, this didn’t guarantee the salvation of Israel as a nation. Salvation always has been and always will be on an individual basis. Paul makes this clear in verse 6 when he says, “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.” God hasn’t rejected His people – instead His sovereign plan has always been to call some out on an individual basis to be His own. That’s the major theological centerpiece of Romans 9-11.

B. The Glory (v. 4)

Not only was the nation of Israel adopted as sons before God, but they were also blessed to be the people among whom God chose to dwell. The glory of God dwelt among His people in the wilderness years leading them in the day by cloud, and in the night by pillar of fire (Exodus 13:21-22). The glory of God was on Mount Sinai in a cloud of thunder and lightning, a revelation of His holiness, when God gave the law to Moses (Exodus 24:16-17). We also see the glory of God as He filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34-38) and later rested above the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant (Leviticus 16:2).

C. The Covenants (v. 4)

John Murray once said, “Nothing is more characteristic of God’s special relationship with Israel than the covenants.” Abraham – Father of many nations. Moses – If you obey me then I will be your God and you will be my people. David – You will never cease to have a man who sits on the throne. Jesus – The new covenant in His blood.

D. The Giving of the Law (v. 4)

One of the charges made against Paul by the Jews was that he had a complete disregard for the law. Paul was teaching that salvation was by grace through faith in Christ – apart from the Law (Romans 3:28). The law was never given as a means of saving sinners. It was given as a means of highlighting the sinfulness of sin before a holy God. The Law, as good as it is, was not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end – to lead Israel to the saving grace of Christ who perfectly fulfilled the Law's demands, both in keeping its precepts (perfect obedience) and paying its penalty (substitutionary sacrifice). Unfortunately, the Jews have sought to find their righteousness in the broken cistern of law-keeping instead of in the finished work of Christ.

E. Worship (v. 4)

Worship (temple service) refers to the ceremonial system that God instituted through Moses. The means of worship that God instituted was meant to demonstrate the way that a sinful human being had to approach a Holy God. Remember the mercy seat? The mercy seat was a huge picture of substitution that pointed forward to Christ. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the Most Holy Place and make propitiation for the people's sins by sprinkling the blood of a sin offering on the mercy seat (covering) of the ark of the covenant. As God looked at the blood sacrifice, He did not see the broken law of Moses, but the purity of an innocent substitute. Unfortunately, as beautiful of a picture of Christ's sacrifice as this is, Israel missed it.

F. The Promises (v. 4)

The promises that Paul has in view here are more than likely the promises of a coming Messiah. God promised a Redeemer that would crush the head of the serpent. He promised a Savior that would open blind eyes and release the captive from the dungeon. He promised One on whom would be laid the iniquity of us all. Speaking of the promises given to Israel, Paul, in Acts 13:32 told the Jews in Galatia, "We bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus."

G. The Patriarchs (v. 5)

God gave Israel men who, as fallible as they were, would hold the torch and lead the people to walk with God. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David – these are the men whom stood in the gap. These are the men that God used to lead His people and lay the foundations of His blessings. For many of us, we can look back in our own families and see men, who though they were sinners, earnestly desired to love the Lord with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength. By God's grace that heritage has been passed down through the generations.

H. From their race is the Christ (v. 5)

How might this apply to us today 2000 years post resurrection of Christ? We too have been graciously given many spiritual advantages and blessings. Many of us were raised with the influence godly parents (people around us), many of us have been taught the Word of God, many of us have more Bibles laying around than we know what to do with, many of us have parts of the Bible committed to memory. These are all a demonstration of God's immeasurable kindness toward us. But we must be careful that we don't presume on the spiritual advantages that God has indeed blessed us with.

There are many who think they stand in the favor of God based on something other than grace alone. There are many who claim the name of Christ, but who falsely have their hope anchored to their self-righteous accomplishments. Jesus has startling words for us in Matthew 7:21-23. He said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

5. SAVIOR – HE IS GOD OVER ALL. (v. 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.

The greatest blessing that was given to Israel was that Jesus Christ, God in flesh, the promised Messiah was a descendant of her line. Of all of the peoples on the face of the planet, God chose Israel from which to bring forth His son – the Savior. Paul's words here in verse 5 are a clear proclamation of the Deity of Christ. Let me ask you a question - Where would you go in the New Testament to show someone the Deity of Christ?

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:1

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" John 20:27-28

But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. Hebrews 1:8 (cf. Psalm 45:6)

Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Titus 2:13–14

THE GLORIOUS DOCTRINE OF THE DEITY OF CHRIST IN ROMANS 9:5

1. The humanity of Christ – According to the flesh...

Jesus had to be a man under the Law in order to save men under the Law.

2. The Deity of Christ – Who is God...

The blood that was spilled for sin had to be blameless...

3. The supremacy of Christ – Who is God over all...

Jesus is the God *of* all – there is no other. There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12) Jesus is also God *over* all. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:15–17)

4. His worthiness to be worshiped – Blessed forever...

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! (Psalm 150:6)