

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 9:1-3

- **Two Views of Romans chapters 9–11**

A large parenthetical passage ... fraught with issues. "As full of problems as a hedgehog is full of prickles".

Bishop Stendahl -- Romans 9-11 is actually the "heart of the letter"; that what comes before and after these chapters is prelude and postscript.

Paul's Larger Objective: Addressing the Jewish situation under the New Covenant. He tells us what the relationship is between both Jews and Gentiles under this new arrangement.

A major theme: Jewish unbelief – and the problems that ensued.

- **Paul's Questions:**

1). Has God's word to Israel failed? 6a

2). Isn't God unjust to exercise his sovereign choices? v. 14

3). Why then does God still blame us? v.19

4). "What then shall we say in conclusion? (v. 30)

- **Paul's introduction to this passage: vv.1-2:**

"I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit— I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart."

Given his experience in the ministry, Paul no doubt feels like an enemy of the Jews. The man who was once the greatest threat to Christianity became its greatest proponent.

- **Paul's Assurance to His Jewish-Christian Audience:**

1). "I speak the truth in Christ..."

Paul is adding this layer – "In Christ" -- as a strong affirmation. It's not just his word on the line. He is using the strongest confirmation he can think of. It's like putting your hand on a Bible and swearing to tell the truth. See: Romans 1:9

2). "I am not lying". Similar to 2 Corinthians 11:31: "God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, who is worthy of eternal praise, knows I am not lying."

3). "My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit." -- There is an important statement there. Paul knows that the human conscience is both capable of error and culturally conditioned.

Again, like in the first phrase, Paul adds "in the Holy Spirit". He is once again pointing to the higher power. The first time he pointed to Christ, whereas, this time he refers to the Holy Spirit.

These three affirmations all support Paul's love for the people of Israel – despite their overall rejection of the very Gospel Paul is an apostle for.

- **Paul's Heart Towards Israel: vv. 3-4:**

"For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel."

Paul calls the Israelites, "my brothers, those of my own race." Becoming part of the family of God does not cancel our natural family ties or nationality. Inclusion in the family of God supersedes these things, but it doesn't eliminate them.

Paul listing of his own biography in Philippians 3:

“If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 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, persecuting the church; as to righteousness under the law, faultless.” – Philippians 3:4-6

Paul mindset of “the loss of all things” didn’t mean that he was no longer identified with the people of Israel.

- **Paul’s Deep Expression:**

“For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers...”

Paul says that if he could, he would choose to be cursed (anathema) and cut off from Christ for the sake of Israel. This is one of the strongest statements in all the New Testament.

Paul is not saying such a thing is possible. After all, in chapter 8 he made it clear that nothing could ever separate us from the love of God in Christ.

“If it were possible” ... expresses that Paul would be willing to exchange his place for theirs.

Martin Luther: “It seems incredible that a man would desire to be damned, in order that the damned might be saved.”

Next Time: Paul contextualizes his grief over Israel’s failure to believe by pointing out seven unique privileges that they had.