

ISRAEL'S PLIGHT AND PRIVILEGE, ROMANS 9:1-5

Pax Romana #21

◆**Intro:** There's a salesman on your drive trying to sell you a new weed-wacker. He's telling you all the benefits of this new model: it has an extendable spine; it has a reversible head; you can edge with it because there is a set of little wheels and a guard rail that keeps you along the edge of the cement. It comes in bright orange so you will notice if you leave it in the yard. The battery is lithium-ion so its charge is longer and more consistent than NiCad batteries...

◆That's when you see your neighbor George, standing on his sidewalk. He's holding this very model. Oh, look, why is he throwing the spool of line into the yard in disgust? How come there is a separate part of the machine in each hand? Why is he stomping on that battery and can you hear that vocabulary!? Suddenly you think to yourself, "Well, maybe all the stuff the salesman is saying about this trimmer is just not true. It certainly seems untrue in light of next door George!

◆This is the scenario Paul is addressing in Romans 9-11. Paul is the salesman on your driveway, and God's unfailing love that you cannot lose(ch8) is the product he's showing you. The neighbor is the nation of Israel for whom the love of God seems to not have worked out well. And you, the reader of Paul's letter to the Romans, are the skeptical buyer who's heard of all the great features of God's love (per last week: unstoppable, eternal, irresistible, all-encompassing, unchanging). But you're wondering about Israel, your neighbor. Sure doesn't seem like

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God's unstoppable love worked out for the Jewish race at this point. They don't even want it! *So why should we buy it? If it didn't work out for God's people, how can we be sure all the promises of Romans 8 can be counted on to work out for us?* Paul wants you to be sure this product (God's electing love) is really what he says it is. Hence he must explain something about your neighbor, George (the nation of Israel). That's Romans 9-11.

◆[Some scholars claim that Romans 9-11 is not really a part of Paul's original letter but an later addition. So they don't deal with it. When I read Max Lucado's book on Romans, I was disappointed to see that he stopped with the last verse of Romans 8. I have two books on my shelves each entirely on Romans 9. One is called *The Most Neglected Chapter in the Bible!* That's because it isn't easy to understand. And it talks very clearly about God's election of individuals, and his passing by of others and this is not popular in a country of self-made, proud people who demand freedom at all costs. So a lot of folks just skip over it. But what is taught here is also taught throughout the Bible and it's pretty foundational to our understanding of God.]

◆One of the first things we notice in chapter nine is a characteristic of God, as displayed in Paul himself, somewhat reminiscent of Moses in Exodus when he pleaded with God for Israel. Bear in mind that this is not the main point of Romans 9, but since we're walking through it slowly, we will pause to observe it. The main point of Romans 9 is that God's word can be trusted (cf v6). And consequently Paul will show that Israel remains chosen of God and special to God, and that the spiritual

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Israel is bigger than the ethnic Israel. But in the process we see an example to follow in dealing with people who reject God. That's what I'd like to look at today.

◆1. Israel's Plight:

◆Paul shows us that anguish is more godly than anger toward lost people. The news reported recently that a transgender man (a female human with a womb who wants to be called a man) recently **gave birth** to a baby in the UK. British law states that those who give birth to children can only be noted as mothers on official documents. This mom has complained of discrimination. As a result, the baby could become the first person born in England and Wales not to have a legal mother. What happens inside you when you hear news like that? Full disclosure here: part of me wants to whine and say "Come on! Really? This is ludicrous!" But I see in Paul's letter a caution to respond instead of react. Lets say your favorite cop show now includes a subplot where your once admired heroin openly asserts that she is interested in using another character in the show merely because she thinks he'd be fun in bed? All of these things break God's laws. And if you are a person trying hard to raise your children to respect God's way, *it is very easy to react to any of these with disgust and/or anger.* These things threaten a god-honoring life. But is that how Jesus would react? Perhaps. He did clear the temple after all, but then that was not his usual style. Lets make it even more concrete. Suppose a gay couple

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walked into church arm in arm and sat down. Would you as a follower of Jesus welcome them? Talk to them? Open yourself to friendship with them? What did Jesus do with the so called "sinners" of his day?

◆ Now some religions openly affirm hatred toward those who threaten them or even disagree. And some folks in history did the same thing under the name of the Christian faith. Remember the holocaust of WW2, when the German war machine under Adolf Hitler tried to eliminate all Jewish people from the earth. Six million Jews were systematically arrested, imprisoned, shot, burned up, buried in mass graves. This is the same people Paul is talking about in Romans 9.

◆ **A.** But Paul is not hoping to wipe them out for not believing in Christ. Paul might understandably be frustrated with his people for this, or for trying to kill him repeatedly, or for being lost in religious ritual when the God they've been seeking all along has walked among them. What's remarkable is that Paul is not angry but in anguish. It is the Christian heart to hurt for the lost and broken, and confused. What did Jesus do over Jerusalem on the day of triumphal entry when he knew in a matter of days they would kill him? He wept over them.

◆ *"But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and*

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you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked." Luke 6:35, NIV.

◆A Christians approach to a follower of a false religion, or a lost philosophy for that matter, is not animosity but urgency. She does not say, "Eh, they'll get what they have coming to 'em." She knows what they have coming is no good thing at all. In terms of our text, they are "cursed" and "cut off from Christ" (v3). Maybe you've heard the term *anathema*. It means to be given over to destruction. We're not talking about having a little bad luck, or a lot of flat tires. To be cut off from Christ, the author of life and the Creator of the universe, it to lose all that is good. Now God is just, and his people desire his justice, but neither he nor we delight in destruction.

◆**B. The truth of God's electing love is no reason for me to disregard the unbeliever!** God's sovereign election of his children is a mysterious truth full of assurance and hope for the believer struggling to obey. However, it is no reason to treat unkindly the currently lost person as though caring for them makes no difference. Some folks wrongly use the truth of election as a reason not to care about witnessing, sharing their faith, doing good to others, going on missions to help. They reason, "Eh, if they are elect God will get them before they die." I know whole denominations who have let this doctrine curtail mission work altogether. We'll talk more about his in Romans 10, but not only does God ordain to save people on purpose but he also ordains

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how it happens and he has told us that it happens to be through us, his family, other believers! God's family is the primary tool through which God's chosen enter into their election!

◆**C.** What does this mean for us? Just this. Do not treat the atheist you know as an enemy. See him as one in deep need, suffering, though he may be unaware of it. Do not consider those who, say, push for gender dysphoria, or the very unscientific assertion of alternate sexuality –do not consider them with disgust as you defend the truth of male and female realities in creation. See them rather as the object of your prayers and kindness just as God sends the rain on unbelievers as well as believers. (Matt.5:45) Do not whisper behind the back of someone addicted to something, or shy away from the sullen, hooded teen who dresses, or paints or pierces herself in shocking manner. Instead try to look at the image bearing human underneath. Long for the goodness of salvation for them. Befriend, share, pray. This one may well be one of God's eternal children but they have yet to be loved onto the path home. And even if they are not, God's name is still honored when we mirror his grace to the unaccepting world. As Paul will write in chapter 12, return good in the face of evil, overcome evil with good, not with more evil. Paul's anguish for his race is for us a godly example to follow.

◆**D.** One additional note. Christian compassion does not negate the Gospel truth. And this is happening with a great number of

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those who call themselves Christian. It is not Christian to just "love everyone, and accept them the way they are." This is a distortion of the Gospel. The Gospel is not that we should affirm every choice, orientation, or tendency. We do not affirm that everyone must follow their own idea of God. "Not all lifestyles are equally honoring to ourselves as humans beings, let alone to God in whose image we are made. (Wright)" We do not help lost people by affirming that it's fine to be lost. NO. To really love the lost is to also want them to be found! The Good News is that Jesus has taken our sins on himself and he can free us from them forever!

◆ *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."*
Gal.3:13

◆ Israel was cursed because they were "cut off" from the only one who could pay for the curse: Jesus. He is who they need, I need, you need, and everyone else.

◆2. Israel's Privileges:

◆ **A.** I think this is a God-appointed-thing that we should arrive at these verse in Romans 9 today, as we welcome new members to the Church family. What Paul points out about Israel is equally true of all followers of Israel's Messiah! Lots of people seem to think there is little or no advantage to being a committed member of a local Christian church. But this is to overlook the gifts that God causes to accompany his covenant family. God's

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family is the primary place to find his blessings. Paul spells out eight of them in our text. Let's run through what Paul mentions of Israel, all of which are true of all believers, as the whole book of Romans has been saying all along.

◆ They have the **adoption**, the being singled out and picked by God as the starting point of his saving activity in human history! They have the divine **glory**. [Some think this is reference to the phenomenal experiences of God that OT Israel was privileged to have: the glowing cloud that descended on the Tabernacle and the Temple (Shekinah), the burning bush, the appearances of angels. That kind of thing alters your life! But more likely]. Paul is referring to glory as he has been in all of Romans: the glory is the eternal final outcome, "the glory that is to be revealed in us" (8:18), the hope of heaven! Israel got to live knowing about this destiny and hope all along! They have the **covenants** and **promises**. Those were the promises God made with the nation through Abraham, Moses, David, Jeremiah, etc. These were appearances of God, visions, words from heaven to specific people! Some of those were the **patriarchs**, fathers of Israel going back 2000 years. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob! They have the **law**, wisdom straight out of heaven for how human life works best if you follow it. They have the **temple** worship where God would guide through priest and prophet. They had all that.

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◆B. That's basically what we're saying when we baptize new Christians and welcome them into God's Church. They have all that! Baptism is God's marking telling the world, and the spirit realm that his graces are at work of these people, and the have all the privileges of family. Just look at all the privileges God gives to his family, their children, and even those associated with them.

◆1 Corinthians 7:14. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy

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◆God has decided to be in their life, in a way he isn't for others. He grants graces that many take for granted.

◆Like what? Well like the fact that maybe your parents because they were followers of Jesus, didn't abuse you like some of your friends' parents. Or like the fact that you found out earlier in life that God's rules work best, rather than later in life after having dragged yourself through a few gutters. Or maybe the fact that many evil things did not happen to you because your home was covered by prayer to the most high God. All kinds of good accompany the family of believers that a lot of people just live without and many of us don't take the time to notice. Not the least of which is finding out about **Jesus**, the one true God come to earth

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among men, instead of being left to decide for ourselves and having to relearn all the lessons of history for ourselves! Israel had that privilege too, as so does the Christian church as spiritual Israel.

◆ Why should I be a part of Christ's church? Salvation comes into the world *through* God's family just as Christ came into the world *through* Israel. People often quip "Going to church doesn't make you a Christian." That's like saying, "*Eating food doesn't make you a human.*" Or "*You can survive without having medicines*". True, but these sure affect your health! How many times haven't you been pondering, or fighting with a sin, but opened your Bible, or came to worship with God's family and had a whole change of mind? And then you didn't even want what before you couldn't stop thinking about? As a Christian, how often haven't you had hatred melt into sorrow after talking with our Lord?

◆ **Conclusion:**

◆ It is the reality of these blessings that makes the fate of those who walk away from God's Church so tragic! [It's like someone in the modern Ninja competition on TV. He made it over the pit. He made it up the rope and across the parallel bars. He swung at just the right time to avoid being knocked down by the pendulum. And then on the last obstacle he slips while waving to the crowd and falls off the platform. And what do we say? "Ooooh, he was soon close!" How tragic. So close.] That's Israel. That's covenant folk who don't progress beyond membership to actually learning to relate to God themselves. It's a tragedy. At this point Israel was a tragedy played out on the stage of history. A people so

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privileged by God and yet so cursed and cut off from him for failure to see their need. They are next-door George: they have refused to read the instructions that came with the weed-eater and therefore can't get it to work! The problem is not in the product or God's promise. It's in the user.

◆ The good news is joining with Christ Jesus will rewrite any tragedy into the best of novels. "When you receive Jesus the Messiah, you receive the One who is over all, God, blessed forever. The deepest tragedy is to fail to see that the Messiah Jesus is God; and the highest privilege is to know God incarnate and spend an eternity seeing so many new and wonderful things about him that you will never cease to bless him." Piper