

## Romans 9:1-5

**9** I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying—my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit <sup>2</sup>that I have great sorrow and continuous pain in my heart. <sup>3</sup>For I almost wish that I myself could be cursed and separated from Christ in place of my brothers, my relatives according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup>those who are Israelites. Theirs are the adoption as sons, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. <sup>5</sup>Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, came the Christ, who is God over all, eternally blessed. Amen.

## Don't Throw it All Away

### I.

Things had been going this way for a long, long time. The situation wasn't good. In fact, it was far from good; it was ominous. The consequences were dire. They were throwing it all away.

He watched in growing frustration. He had once been like them. *He* had once marched to the tune of a different drummer—the wrong drummer. They were going down a dark path. He had learned things—many things. He had spoken about them quite eloquently. Most of those who should have been overjoyed to hear the truth did not listen to his words. It was depressing to see.

“I wish I could go to hell in their place.” Isn't that what Paul says? Listen to his own words: “For I almost wish that I myself could be cursed and separated from Christ in place of my brothers, my relatives according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup>those who are Israelites” (Romans 9:3-4, EHV). Paul was a Jew who had once been a persecutor of Christians. He had misunderstood all the promises of the Old Testament and how they had come to fulfillment. Now he wished he could be cursed and separated from Christ for those who were still like he once was—lost because they didn't understand Christ and salvation. Being cursed and separated from Christ means to be separated from God in eternity—it means hell. Paul has the pastor's heart to the extreme. How do you even get to a place like that?

The Jewish people were not lacking in spiritual opportunities. “Theirs are the adoption as sons, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs” (Romans 9:4-5, EHV). Theirs are the adoption as sons. The Jewish people were chosen by God—adopted by him—as the special nation that would bear the promise of the Savior.

Theirs the glory. What awesome sights the people of Israel had seen! Pillars of cloud and fire had led them through the wilderness, and stood immovably behind them when they needed a defense against their enemies. The glory of God himself rested in their midst in the tabernacle and in the temple. People like Elijah in the First Lesson for today got to see that the soft, whispering voice of God was even more awe-inspiring than wind or earthquake or fire.

Theirs the covenants and the giving of the law. The people heard and felt the power of God as they stood at the foot of Mount Sinai and thunder crashed and lightning lit up the mountain. Moses was permitted to go up and speak with God and receive the law from his hand there.

Theirs the worship. Every detail of the proper Old Testament worship of God was given very specifically to his people by the hand of God himself. All the sacrifices and all the

attention to their sin was to point them ahead to the future sacrifice that would change and fulfill their worship.

Theirs the promises and the patriarchs. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob received promises that pointed ahead to the Savior. The promise was that the Savior would come through this very nation.

“I have great sorrow and continuous pain in my heart” (Romans 9:2, EHV). All those advantages and the people rejected Jesus. Special worship that pointed ahead to the Savior, the promises that detailed what he would mean for the people, their special adoption as God’s people and they seemed to pay no attention. Worse than that, really—they actively rejected what they heard and saw about Jesus.

## II.

What is stunning about these depressing verses is that they come *immediately* after last week’s Second Lesson. There is no interlude.

Last week Paul said: “I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powerful forces, <sup>39</sup>neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39, EHV).

*Nothing*, we said last week. No loopholes. Not one thing has the power to separate us from God’s love shown in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And then, with his next sentence—though it is a new chapter in our Bibles there is no break in his stream of consciousness writing—with his next sentence he begins this sad expose of the people of Israel.

It is a warning, really. It is absolutely true and without loophole or doubt that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. But it is also true that people with every advantage have thrown away God’s goodness and love. God never left *them*, but *they* abandoned *him*.

For Israel, all those advantages faded as time slipped away. The glory of the pillars of cloud and fire were only seen personally by the generations of Israelites who were in the wilderness. Most of those who saw God’s glory that way were never allowed to enter the Promised Land because of their disobedience. The special worship of God as he instructed became something they simply performed as a ritual. Even when they followed all the “rules” of worship, it was merely something done by rote, not with any feeling or belief in their hearts after a time. And the promises? Rather than a *spiritual* deliverance, they started to see only a *political* deliverance—they looked for a restored nation of Israel, not the spiritual kingdom God promised them.

In the verse after today’s lesson Paul says: “This does not mean that God’s word has failed” (Romans 9:6, EHV). Paul didn’t lie in last week’s Lesson; *nothing* can separate. But it is possible to walk away from God.

When worship becomes only a chore you attend to on Sunday morning or Wednesday evening and not something that is part of your daily existence, maybe its time for reevaluation of your worship. When the physical blessings of this life dominate your evaluation of the fulfillment of God’s promises to you, you have begun to set your sights too low—to the things of this world, rather than spiritual things and heaven that God promises you for eternity. Will the changing habits of worship via livestream start to make worship seem optional or unessential?

Nothing can separate, but it is possible to walk away from God. Warning. Don’t do it.

### III.

Does it seem that everything about these verses from Paul is a downer? Does it seem to be all law and no gospel? I hope you could see the love Paul had for the people and the deep longing he had for them to see the truth, especially when he spoke about his continuous pain for them and his “almost wish” that *he* could take their place in hell so that *they* could see the truth and go to heaven. After all, “Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, came the Christ, who is God over all, eternally blessed. Amen” (Romans 9:5, EHV).

According to the flesh came the Christ. Jesus came to actually *do* what Paul would have been willing to do for the people. Paul couldn't trade his own salvation so that his countrymen could go to heaven. As great a preacher as he was, Paul was not the Savior.

Jesus did it. Jesus gave his perfect life. Jesus spilled his own precious blood as the sacrifice all that Old Testament worship had been looking ahead to. He did it even though so many would reject him.

Paul said: “I have great sorrow and continuous pain in my heart” (Romans 9:2, EHV). Jesus had that sorrow and continuous pain for all people. Jesus was the One who was able to actually *do* something about it. Jesus saw all the pain in your heart and all your sins. Jesus didn't have to say: “I almost wish that I myself could be cursed and separated from Christ in place of my brothers, my relatives according to the flesh” (Romans 9:3, EHV). He *was* cursed and separated from God to suffer hell in your place on the cross.

What Paul *wished* could be done for his people, Jesus *did* for all people.

### IV.

Have you ever gotten a gift at Christmas or your birthday and torn the paper off with great excitement, but then felt let down? Especially as children we didn't really think about the cost or what care might have been taken in selecting just the right one. Sometimes the gift just isn't what we were looking for or hoping for. A few minutes later or days later, the gift finds its way into the trash.

Not so the gift of salvation in Christ Jesus. This is the greatest gift ever given. Don't throw it away. You know what it cost the Heavenly Father. You know what it cost Jesus, who gave his own life to purchase it.

You, like Paul, want to make sure those close to you have every opportunity to see and understand and believe that same gift is theirs. With Paul, speak this truth about Christ. Amen.