**Godly Sorrow for the Unsaved**

**Romans 9:1-13**

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Today we come back to our series in Romans. We’ve taken a bit of a break for Easter and we open up our Bible’s today to Romans chapter 9. If you don’t have a Bible, you’ll want one. These next three chapters are huge chapters that teach so many profound truths about God. They elevate our thoughts about God. They help us to see Him for the majestic, sovereign Person that He is. And isn’t it true in a world that views God as someone very, very much like us, that we need to have our thoughts of God aligned with who God really is? I can know no greater remedy to align our thoughts to the lofty, holy, majestic, sovereign nature of God than Romans chapters 9-11. So that’s what we’re going to begin today. If you have questions, don’t be troubled. Everyone does when they come to Romans 9-11. But there’s also some wonderful answers.

We’ve just finished Romans 8 which is one of the most loved chapters in all of the Bible. It is the most loved and read. We’re now entering into Romans 9 which is one of the least loved and seldom read chapters in all the Bible. And there’s a reason for that. There’s some mysteries here that kind of shake us. It will shake our natural way of thinking and align our thoughts with God as God. So let’s be braced for that as we begin this study today in Romans 9. We’re just going to look at the first 13 verses.

***1*** *I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—****2*** *that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart**.* ***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.* ***4*** *They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.* ***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.*

***6*** *But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,* ***7*** *and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”* ***8*** *This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.* ***9*** *For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.”* ***10*** *And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac,* ***11*** *though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—****12*** *she was told, “The older will serve the younger**.”* ***13*** *As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”*

May God encourage us through His Word!

Pastor Ray Stedman, who is now in heaven, told a story of a local church in Texas who had asked its pastor to resign. Someone asked a member of this church why they dismissed this pastor. He said in his southern drawl, “Well, he just kept telling us that we were going to hell.”

The questioner then said, “Well, what does your new pastor tell you?”

“Well, he also tells us that we are going to hell.”

“Really? Well, what’s the difference between these two pastors, the pastor who you used to have and the pastor you now have and whom you love?”

He said, “Well, when our former pastor said we were going to hell, he sounded like he was glad of it. And when our new pastor says we are going to hell, he sounds like it’s breaking his heart!”

Paul’s heart is breaking when he writes these first three verses of Romans 9. There is a very sudden shift in emotional tone from the last verses of Romans 8 to the first verses of Romans 9. It is as though this bright, exuberant joy in the security of God’s love for His people that fills his heart with gladness, is just turned off for a moment as he considers those who are outside of Christ and outside of His blessings. And his heart breaks. He experiences deep heart anguish as he writes these first three verses in Romans 9. Consider the joyful exuberance that he had as he finished Romans 8. It is a whole chapter that is devoted to the securing love of God on behalf of His people. It begins with that great statement:

**Romans 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And it ends with the statement:

**Romans 8:35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

**Romans 8:37-39** No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, 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.

Yet here, as he rejoices in the securing love that he knows to be true for his own soul and for all who are in Christ Jesus, now he turns his heart’s attention toward his fellow Israelites, most of whom continue to reject Christ, and he writes of his heart toward them. He writes of their rejection of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice. He thinks of their stiffened necks against the Lordship of Jesus, their refusal to bow their knee to Him who is the Messiah, the fulfillment of all the promises throughout the Old Testament. As a Jew, he thinks upon his fellow Jews and his heart tumbles into the depths of grief for them.

Though Romans 9:1-13 is written specifically about the Jewish people of Paul’s day who refused to believe in Jesus as their own Savior and Lord, this passage practically applies as we think about unbelief in any person, whether they are Gentile or Jew. This text reminds us of the grievous plight of unbelief. Paul has already made clear that in order for us to connect to all the blessings that Jesus has secured for us through His life and His death and His burial and His resurrection, we simply must believe. So we do not labor with our hands to merit God’s favor, to find access into God’s family. It is faith alone that connects us to God’s grace, that brings eternal life, that brings complete salvation. In Romans 5:1-2 the Apostle Paul has made this so very clear, as he has so often throughout this letter.

**Romans 5:1-2** Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

We have a right standing with God. We’re declared righteous by God on the basis of faith. For Paul, the sad reality is that his fellow countrymen continued to reject Jesus as God’s Son and as their Messiah. This left them outside of peace with God, outside of adoption into God’s family, outside of God’s forgiveness, outside of God’s glory and outside of the future hope of heaven.

And so he anticipates a protest among the readers. He anticipates some, as they listen to this call to believe and this warning that those who do not believe are outside of God’s grace. And he anticipates some saying, “Wait a minute! I’ve read the Bible. I thought that the Jews were God’s chosen people. I thought that God promised every Jew salvation. Is God really faithful if He set aside this people as a chosen race and then so many of them reject Him and remained outside His salvation? Is God faithful?”

So in these first 13 verses, the Apostle Paul is defending God’s faithfulness. And Paul does this by doubling down upon the amazing doctrine of election. That’s why these chapters are so very difficult. It’s because the doctrine of God’s election runs contrary to our natural way of thinking. But this isn’t just simply for lofty thoughts and lofty theological contemplation. These chapters, indeed these very verses that we’re studying today, are most practical. These chapters call us out of unbelief and into faith. They strengthen our confidence in God’s faithfulness and our submission to God’s sovereignty. The central idea behind these first 13 verses in Romans chapter 9 is simply this: We can trust that God is faithful to fulfill His sovereign purposes and promises. We can trust that. We can be guaranteed that that is absolutely true. So let’s not trust in ourselves, not in one small measure. But let us trust in Him who promises salvation and eternal life to each person who believes in Christ Jesus.

If you’re taking notes, we consider four sobering truths about unbelief. It is unbelief that disconnects us from God’s grace and God’s blessings. The first sobering truth about unbelief, a heart that doesn’t cling to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is that

**Truth #1: Unbelief is an immensely sorrowful condition.**

It is the most woeful of conditions. There is no human condition that is more sorrowful, more grievous than the condition of unbelief! While a physician may have to present many, many, many difficult diagnoses to a patient, there is no diagnosis that any medical doctor has ever given to any patient that has ever walked the face of this earth, that is more devastating than the diagnosis that Paul gives of his fellow countrymen here. It’s the diagnosis of unbelief. Every other diagnosis impacts our life here in this temporary sphere, this sphere that is passing away. But this diagnosis of unbelief will impact us for ever and ever and ever. Look at what he says in verses 1 and 2.

***1*** *I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying**; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—****2*** *that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.*

Why? Why do you have unceasing anguish in your heart? “Let me tell you. Let me explain it,” Paul says.

***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.*

In other words, if by my being cut off I can unite my kinsmen according to the flesh to Jesus Christ, so that they would receive His blessings, His joy, His life, I would do it. I would do it in a moment. Notice that the Apostle Paul takes great pains to assert his sincerity regarding his love for his fellow Jews.

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

Why does he have to say that with such repetition? “I’m not lying, I’m not lying, I’m not lying.” The answer is because his fellow Jews believed the Apostle Paul to be a traitor. They believed him to be a blasphemer. They believed him to be an enemy of the worst sort. Remember, the Apostle Paul had been their champion. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He was so zealous that he persecuted the church of Jesus. He actively sought to destroy Christianity and to destroy the individuals who pledged their allegiance to Jesus. The Jewish leadership in particular, cheered him on as he persecuted the Christians. But now, God had transformed his heart.

If you can imagine, sort of the emotion that comes with your champion of your favorite sports team wearing your jersey for a long time and winning many championships, and suddenly strips off that jersey that you love so much and puts on the jersey of the archrival team. And you can imagine all of the emotions. And that’s what they’re feeling. “Here, he was our guy. He was representing us against this new sect called Christianity, and now he becomes a Christian. And more than that, he becomes the chief exponent, the chief preacher of Jesus Christ to the Gentile nations.” So they booed the Apostle Paul at every turn.

In Paul’s missionary journeys to Gentile cities, the Jewish leaders often stirred up mobs to drive Paul from the town. In Acts 23, one incident is recorded in which forty zealous Jews bound themselves with an oath. They said, “We will not eat one little morsel of food, we will not drink one little cup of water until the day that Paul is dead, until we have the opportunity to kill him.” That was the vehemence with which they held him. That’s the reason why Paul said, “I’m speaking the truth. I’m not just writing this to sound nice. The Holy Spirit is a witness to the genuine nature of my conscience. I am not lying.”

As we think of the Apostle Paul’s heart for his fellow Israelite, and in fact we even think of the mistreatment that he suffered at their hands, and yet his love for them enduring. In 2 Corinthians 11:24 Paul records, “Five times I received at the hands of the Jews forty lashes less one.” So not just one occasion, not just two occasions, not just three, not just four, but five occasions, five separate occasions in a short amount of time, the Apostle Paul had his robe taken off of him and received thirty-nine lashes with a whip for being a Christian. Let me ask you: At what number do you start building resentment? At what number do you start feeling like, “I don’t like these guys. I don’t like them at all. I wish that God would just destroy them and wipe them off the face of this earth.” At what number of being whipped and beaten would you say, “I’m fed up. I’m done with them”? It was beyond thirty-nine times five for Paul. Because he says, “My heart is still with them. With every bruise, with every lash, I have anguish in my heart for them, for their blessing, for their loss. I’m speaking the truth in Christ.”

Let me ask you: Do you have any people or any individual that you have a hard time loving in that way? One application we receive from the Apostle Paul’s example is that there is no room for anti-Semitism or racism or hatred of any kind in the heart of a Christ-follower. That is not Jesus and that is not Jesus’ people. When Jesus was reviled, He did not revile in return. He said, “Father, forgive them. For they don’t know what they’re doing.” May the Gospel rid us of any animosity to any group or any individual who hurts us or who hates us. May the Gospel grant us genuine love, true, genuine love for our enemies that is a love that is as sincere as our love for our dearest family and friends. That’s what we’re seeing here displayed in the Apostle Paul.

Only the Holy Spirit can produce this love. And that’s why we must walk with Him every day and depend upon Him. As the Holy Spirit fills us and produces His fruit of love in our hearts, there will undoubtedly be some people who test us. We will have a hard time first, loving them. And then we’re going to have a hard time convincing them that we actually do love them, genuinely love them. What Paul is saying in Romans 9 is it’s worth it to try to communicate this to them. He’s writing to those who might read this. He says, “Listen, I do love you. I have unceasing anguish in my soul for your benefit, for your good.” So why does Paul have such sorrow and unceasing anguish in his heart? He loves them, but he also understands something about their spiritual condition. He understands where they stand in reference to God’s blessing. Skip down with me to Romans 9:30. The Apostle Paul writes this. This is the element that causes him to have such distress as he thinks about his fellow Jew.

**Romans 9:30-10:1** What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousnessdid not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

Israel had the law and they said, “We know what God requires of us and we’re going to try really hard to live up to God’s requirements.” But they did not obtain that righteousness through their efforts to obey the law. They couldn’t! Because they disobeyed God’s law, the wrath of God remained upon them. Why? They didn’t pursue righteousness by faith. They pursued righteousness as if it were based on works. Why do we need Jesus if we are able to meet God’s requirements by obeying the law? Jesus’ very presence is a testimony from God to man that none of us are able to receive the righteousness that is necessary for us to have a right relationship with God just simply through our efforts of obeying the law. God wouldn’t have sent His Son, Jesus, to be our Messiah, if we could have obtained righteousness through our own efforts. But Jesus’ very presence rebukes our sin. It tells us that we need a Savior. And so they stumbled over the stumbling stone. Jesus is a rock of offense. We have to admit that we are helpless in reference to righteousness in order to open our eyes and our hearts to Jesus. And so He’s a rock of offense. Some say, “I will never do that. I’m going to continue in my own self-righteousness and self-efforts.” Paul is not frustrated with them. He’s not angry with them. He’s heartbroken over them. He’s heartbroken over their unbelief because he knows that they will be outside of every one of the blessings that God offers them in Jesus unless they believe. And that’s why he says

***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 is saying, “If me being cut off from Christ would open a door somehow for them to find entrance to Christ, I would do it.” This is remarkable because the apostle Paul has already testified to us that everything that relates to life, he finds in Jesus. He finds that there’s no treasure, there’s nothing of value outside of Jesus. Everything of value is found inside of Jesus.

So for instance, in Philippians chapter 3 the Apostle Paul said

**Philippians 3:7-8** But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

Paul is saying, “I used to be wealthy and now I’m poor. I used to be powerful and influential and now I’m just this humble servant that everybody wants to beat on. I used to be popular and now I have a lot of people that hate me and want to put me to death.” Christ is everything! So it’s remarkable when we come to Romans 9:3 and it says, “I’d be willing to be cut off from Christ. Please understand that He’s everything. That means I’m losing everything of value. I would do it for the sake of my people, that they might be saved.” Now of course, Paul could never be truly cut off from Christ. Paul knows that. He’s just written about that all through Romans 8.

**Romans 8:35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

**Romans 8:38-39** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, 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.

He just stated that at the end of Romans 8, but yet he’s envisioning, “If I could be separated from Christ and it would cause my fellow countrymen to enjoy all the benefits of Christ, yeah. I love them that much!”

What might motivate Paul to make such a declaration? I think the Apostle Paul’s heart broke as he read his Bible. The Apostle Paul’s encouragement to us all is to read our Bible’s with a heart to listen to God, with a heart to receive from God, with a heart to be broken by God, humbled by God and blessed by God. I believe the Apostle Paul, as he writes Romans 9-11 is thinking much about the Scriptures in Exodus. And here particularly, Exodus 32. You might keep your fingers in Romans 9 and turn back to Exodus 32. It provides some context for you.

Moses is on top of Mount Sinai talking with the Lord and receiving the law from the Lord. He’s been up there almost forty days, now. The people down below have seen the mountain shake. They’ve seen the mountain filled with fire and glow with the glory of God, but it’s been forty days. And they were saying, “Well, maybe Moses died up there and is never coming back. We’d better make life on our own. We’re out here in the wilderness. So we better get some gods to protect us because obviously this God doesn’t protect Moses.”

So they go to Aaron and they say, “Hey, Aaron! We want you to make gods for us that we can worship.” And Aaron said, “Okay. Give me your gold.” They chipped in their rings and their earrings and Aaron melted it down and they made this calf. And the people then reveled around that calf in worship. Moses on top of the mountain is still receiving communion with the Lord and the law from the Lord. He’s oblivious to this great sin that the people engaged in at the bottom of the mountain. But the Lord was not oblivious to it. He sees everything.

**Exodus 32:7** And the Lord said to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.

What a devastating condition to corrupt ourselves in the face of God’s grace and presence.

**Exodus 32:8** They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’”

So, they’re exchanging the glory of the true God who redeemed them out of slavery in Egypt, and exchanging His glory for the glory of four-footed creatures, this calf who now they credit with leading them into freedom and out of slavery. The Lord, in zeal for His own name and His own glory said to Moses:

**Exodus 32:9-10** And the Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.”

That’s a sobering word, isn’t it? Now, if Moses were a self-seeking individual, this would have been his opportunity. “What? You’re going to make a great nation out of me? Great! That’s what I’ve wanted all along. I mean, after all, life is about climbing that ladder of success and this now is the golden ladder. God has just given it to me. He’ll wipe out all these people and He’ll make for me a great nation. This is the opportunity!” That’s not Moses’ heart, though. Moses was a man passionate for the glory of God and he was humbled by it. And he intercedes then and he prays that God would be merciful and relent from this disaster against His own people. The Lord listens to Moses’ intercession and He stays His hand. So then Moses makes his way down the mountain and he sees the idolatry that God had told him was happening at the base of the mountain. And when he sees that, now he becomes angry. He confronts Aaron and all of the people. And this is what he says.

**Exodus 32:30-32** The next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” So Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—

And then there’s a break, and in that break this dash is here. In the Hebrew text, it indicates that there is now a gasp by Moses. It is as though Moses is choked up in a tearful plea for his people. “If you will forgive their sin” and then he just couldn’t speak for a moment. And he gathers himself.

**Exodus 32:32** But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.”

He’s saying, “If I could take their place…” Moses knows that he is not sufficient to be an atoning sacrifice. But he says, “If I can, I’d be willing to because I love this people that much.” Moses could not die on behalf of his fellow countrymen because he had sins of his own. But what Moses could not do, God did when He sent His Son, Jesus.

**Galatians 4:4-5** But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

It was so that by his becoming a curse, we could be free from the curse once for all. So now in Romans 9, Paul is emoting his grief over the unbelief of his people the same way that Moses was emoting his grief over the unbelief of his people. He knows that sorrow and hopelessness always follows unbelief. And his heart is reflecting the heart of Jesus. For Jesus, though despised by the Jews, was willing to give everything precious for their sake. One commentator on this passage calls Paul’s declaration “a spark from the fire of Christ’s substitutionary love.” I love that! It’s a spark from the fire of Christ’s substitutionary love. We are a people who are recipients. Christ actually did that. He died! He became accursed so that we would be free from the curse. And the Apostle Paul senses the love of Christ for him. And he says, “I would be willing to do that.” And he’s affected, I believe, by the power of the transformation that Christ’s death and burial and resurrection has on all who are joined to him.

And so, I ask myself the question as I think of that phrase: Do I have the spark from the fire of Christ’s substitutionary love in my heart? Do I have unceasing anguish and sorrow over my unbelieving neighbors and unbelieving friends, unbelieving acquaintances? Love calls us to grieve over the people who are without Christ because theirs is a terribly desperate situation. And so, in our grief, we pray, we pray, we pray and we plead, we plead, we plead the Gospel. And this is not something that we can create in ourselves. It’s not something that I want to lay on you and say, “Hey! You should grieve more.” It is something that is normal for the Christian that is changed by Christ.

When we receive and benefit from the substitutionary love of Christ, our hearts are changed and they’re warmed to have a different perspective of the unbelieving world. And it’s very mysterious because it happens, I believe, normally. Now, there are many Christians who aren’t normal. In other words, they’re cold in their hearts. They no longer have thoughts. They no longer have sorrow. Something has happened to them that’s drawn them away from the fire that is Christ’s substitutionary atonement.

I can remember, and I’ve shared this before, and I say it not in any way to give merit to myself, but only to give praise to the Lord. I remember as a five-year old kid, that that fire of Christ’s substitutionary atonement, of His love, was in my heart. I was burdened for my classmates. I wasn’t told “You need to be burdened,” or “you should feel grief.” It was the Holy Spirit’s presence in a little heart that was open to believe. And I believe it’s that simple for us as a church to be open to the Holy Spirit’s working in our hearts so that we would be changed to have the heart of Jesus.

**Truth #2: Unbelief may thrive in the face of spiritual advantages.**

Paul gives this long list of spiritual advantages. I wish we had time. A whole sermon could be drawn from each one of these advantages. But let’s just read them.

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

Theirs is the adoption, a special relationship with God. Theirs is the glory. They were able to see the glory of God in a physical way through the tabernacle and temple and through the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire and other various ways. God showed them His glory, in other words. He didn’t do that for any other people. Theirs is the covenants, these special oaths that God committed Himself to for this people. Theirs is the giving of the law. They had an understanding of the righteousness of God and of the purpose and plan of God as a result of the giving of the law, as well as the sacrificial system that pointed to a Messiah. Theirs is the worship. God invited this people to draw near to Him and provided for them so that they could draw near to Him. Theirs are the promises of a future Messiah and a future hope of life with Him forever.

And to them belong the patriarchs. In other words, God gave them a model that He didn’t give to any other nation. It was a model of people, men who were flawed, yet men of faith. He gave them men who were sinful, yet men who were saved. They had in their history, people who showed them what faith would bring to a life when it held on to God in belief. And so they saw Abraham and Moses and Joseph and Daniel and David, all these people all throughout their history who believed. They saw how blessed their life was as a result of their faith in God and how God granted them blessing upon blessing upon blessing. These are all tremendous advantages aren’t they? They are tremendous advantages for any people to have if you’re interested in eternal life, interested in overcoming sin, overcoming death.

Now perhaps, you are not a Jew and do not have these advantages that are listed here. But perhaps you have many spiritual advantages because you were raised in a Christian home. You had praying grandparents. You studied the Bible when you were little at Awana or Sunday School. You were or are a member of a Gospel-centered church. You have a spouse who is very devout and devoted to Christ. You’ve participated in the grace of baptism and the grace of the Lord’s Supper. Perhaps you have these advantages and many more. But the point that Paul is making is that all the spiritual advantages in the world won’t save us from our sin. Only Christ can do that. Only a real, living, vital connection to Jesus Christ through personal faith in Him can heal our spiritual disease and wash away our sins.

Paul is telling us that spiritual advantages become liabilities if we trust in them to set us right with God. And that’s very sobering! It’s important for us to consider this. Spiritual blessings actually become curses if they give us false confidence and keep us from trusting in Christ. So, if you’ve been raised in a Christian home, it’s vital that you apply this to your own life. You likely have been given many spiritual advantages. But if these advantages are now causing you to rest in them and feel a calm in your spirit in regard to your salvation, in regard to your relationship with Jesus or with God, then those advantages have become liabilities to you. All those advantages, the very first true benefit of those advantages, is to awaken us to our need of a Savior. It is to awaken us to our need to personally identify ourselves through faith with God’s Messiah.

And so, by way of application, I would ask you: Are you resting in any spiritual advantage to bring you blessing from God? Cast this confidence away! Throw it from you! It is a false hope! It is utterly vain and empty! Only personal faith in Jesus who is, as Paul says in verse 5, “God over all…” That’s who He is! He is God over all. Only faith in Him can rescue us from our sins.

**Truth #3: Unbelief places us outside of God’s family and promises.**

***6*** *But it is not as though the word of God has failed.*

Why would Paul write that? Well, there are some who are thinking as Paul is making this argument for God’s sovereign election, God’s sovereign purposes, God’s dealing with Israel. They’re thinking, “Well, if God set His love upon Israel and then now most of those who identify with Israel by way of race are outside of God’s love, then has God’s love failed? Paul, you just said that nothing will separate us from the love of God when we’re in Christ Jesus. How come then after setting His love on this people, after choosing them as His particular people, now they’re outside of Christ?. How can we say that God was not faithful? How can we affirm that God somehow didn’t fail in reference to people?” That’s the question. So that’s the reason why he writes:

***6*** *But it is not as though the word of God has failed.*

He says, “No. That’s not true. Let me explain to you why God is faithful and God has fulfilled every one of His purposes from the beginning of time until now.” And he lists a number of reasons. The only one we’re going to look at today is found in verses 7-13. As he says at the end of verse 6:

*For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,*

Well, that’s curious. Not all who are physical descendants of Israel belong to the spiritual blessings of God’s chosen people who are called “Israel.” Being a member by blood of the nation of Israel doesn’t connect a person to the promises, purposes or blessings of God. Faith is the connecting point for a person to enjoy the benefits of God’s grace. Without faith, no one receives God’s blessing. Paul has already covered this ground in Romans chapter 4 in reference to Abraham.

**Romans 4:13-16** For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,”

This promise was not just simply those who made efforts, who were part of national Israel. But it came to people who received the righteousness of faith. This matter is so vital that Paul not only covers it in Romans 4, but he returns to it in Romans 9. And the application is that we must be sure that we’re not merely externally part of God’s people by way of association. Many take comfort in their associations with God’s people. That’s what he’s saying. “Not all who are *of* Israel *are* Israel.” In order to be of Israel, you have to have personal faith. We must be sure that we are part of God’s people by way of regeneration that comes to us through faith. So beware of standing close to God’s grace but not standing in God’s grace. Unbelief will keep us outside of God’s family and out of His promises.

In the last truth now, we’re going to open a can of worms. We will not chase every question and every thought that you have to your own satisfaction. So that’s sort of a warning.

**Truth #4: Unbelief does not frustrate the purpose of God’s election.**

We’re going to spend the majority of our time talking about this very truth next week. The concern that is addressed in verses 7-13 is one that arises from the belief that God purposed salvation for every person who is born in Abraham’s family. Paul says, “No, that’s not true! It is God’s purpose to rescue all those who would come to faith. And it’s not true that everyone who is part of the bloodline of Abraham, God purposes to bring to salvation. So Paul says, “Let me explain why it’s wrong to think that God purposed for everyone in the blood line to be part of God’s salvation.” He uses two illustrations from Old Testament history with which every Jew is very familiar. He uses two brothers, Isaac and Ishmael, and two twin brothers, Jacob and Esau, as an illustration.

***7*** *and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring,*

He’s talking about Ishmael. Being a child of Abraham means you are a child of the promise. And Ishmael, while he was physically a child of Abraham, was not a child of promise. Then he quotes from Scripture.

*but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”* ***8*** *This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.*

And thus they are inheritors of the blessing. So who gets to receive an inheritance? He says it’s not every child who is merely a physical offspring, because Ishmael was cut out of the inheritance. And Ishmael is by blood, Abraham’s son.

***9*** *For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.”*

So before Isaac is born, God established that Isaac would be the son of the promise. He would be the one who inherits the blessings of God through the covenant that God made with Abraham. That was before Isaac was born. Isaac didn’t do anything to earn that. It was just God’s choice of saying, “This is the one upon whom I will set My grace and upon whom I give My promise of inheritance.”

But then he moves from the example of Isaac and Ishmael and he moves to the example of Jacob and Esau. We could a little bit understand why Ishmael would be outside of the promise because he was born to a different mom. His mom was not Sarah, to whom Abraham was wed. His mom was Hagar, who was a handmaiden to Sarah. She was a human solution to the problem of infertility. God did not call for Abraham to have a union with Hagar. That was Abraham and Sarah’s idea. So when this child was born to Hagar, that didn’t mean automatically just because he had Abraham’s blood in him that he also was an inheritor of the promise. That’s the point.

But now this next illustration is even more stark. It’s more profound because this subject is that of twin boys. They’re in the same mother’s womb at the same time. And who is normally going to receive the inheritance? It’s the older one who’s going to be given the blessing of the inheritance, or at least the primary focus of the inheritance. And here before these two boys were born, God says that it’s not going to be the older one, it’s going to be the younger one.

***11*** *though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—*

Think about that!

*in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works*

In other words, their inheritance was not connected to their working. What was their inheritance connected to?

*but because of him who calls—*

God’s sovereign election. God’s sovereign purpose. God’s election was not by means of Jacob’s own choice for God, but rather Jacob’s inclusion of the blessing was on the basis of God’s sovereign choice of Jacob. Paul says that this doctrine of election is really important. Why? So that we know that spiritual blessings come to us not because of who we are or what we do. But that we would know that spiritual blessings come to us simply because of God’s mercy and God’s grace. We are left destitute. We are left wholly dependent and helpless before God. If God doesn’t rescue us, we have no hope.

This truth of God’s sovereign election is not contradictory to the truth that Paul also teaches in this very same passage that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Anyone who humbles themselves before God and says, “God, be merciful to me a sinner,” will receive mercy. But it calls us to recognize that we are helpless even in that. We would be absolutely prideful and self-righteous and self-willed were it not for God’s mercy. God’s election is not on the basis of something we do, but it’s on the basis of God’s wisdom and mercy.

The point here is that the Israelites’ rejection of Jesus does not mean that God’s promises to Israel have failed. God’s promises were not these giant shotgun blasts. God’s promises were laser-sharp focused, directed to individuals within the family of Israel, individuals like Isaac, individuals like Jacob. Notice something very surprising there in that little phrase in verse 11. He says this all happened, this election of Jacob happened

*in order that God's purpose of election might continue*

God made the choice to love Jacob in order to teach His sovereign election for generations to come. He says, “I want everyone to know through this story, that My purposes and My plans are never frustrated. That I will do miracles to fulfill every one of My promises.” Now again, I know that for some of us, we’re screaming inside, “But that’s not fair to Esau! How is it that God could say

***13*** *As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”*

Look at verse 18. Here’s God’s answer to the question of fairness. And we’re going to talk about it next week. Like I said, we’re going to scare up a lot more snakes than we can kill here. And by the way, I do not pretend to have all the answers to all the questions about the mystery of God’s sovereign providence. I do not! But I rejoice in those parts that have become clear through Scripture. And I know that some are so troubled by Romans 9 that often as they read it, they think to themselves, “I wish God would have written it this way.” And they have a better way of phrasing. Beloved, if we ever read Scripture and we think, “I think it would have been better if it read this way” please know that the problem is our own hearts and our own willfulness. It is not in the wisdom of God in writing His own Word so that we would understand who He is.

These dual truths of God’s sovereign grace, election, providence in our salvation and in our blessing, and the truth that God calls all men everywhere to humble themselves before Him, to repent. If any person ever humbles himself before God and receives His mercy, God will have mercy upon such a one. These two truths are not contradictory. They fit together in such a beautiful, wonderful, amazing way. And what they do for a soul is they cause our soul to lift up and see God’s lofty majesty and cause us to bow down in lowly humility because we understand that if God were not merciful, none of us would have any hope. So let’s listen to His call upon our lives, admit our need of His mercy, and then receive His mercy. He never shuts anyone out who humbles himself or herself before Him.

Let me just close with a couple quick applications.

1. Remember what a terrible condition unbelief is and feel compassion for the lost.

A Christ-less eternity is the worst of all things. Let us feel deeply about those who do not believe and let us be willing to sacrifice ourselves so that they would hear the Gospel. Let us pray earnestly with anguish in our hearts over them. God will hear us.

2. Remember that spiritual advantages do not bring spiritual life.

We should not assume spiritual life in ourselves or in others on the basis of spiritual advantages that surround us or others. We must be born again!

3. Remember that our salvation is all of God’s mercy.

The Gospel humbles us. It drives us to our knees. We must have God’s mercy or we will perish! “Help me Savior, or I die” is our call.

4. Pray for God to grant us revival.

We cannot manufacture spiritual change in our own lives or in our church. Revival will not come through better programs, better music, better preaching. Revival comes as God has mercy upon His people. And if, as we’ve listened to this message we say to ourselves “I don’t know if my heart has had anguish over unbelievers for a long time,” then that is one of the most clear indications that you need a revival. Because that is a mark of an emptiness of God’s Spirit. And so, call out to God. God is willing and desires to bring spiritual life and revival to His people. But we must see our own need and humble ourselves and receive. May God grant us mercy and grace!