

Romans 9:1-16 (ESV)

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.”

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” ¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

There are times when I cringe when I hear people speak glibly about the Christian faith. The God that we worship can’t be reduced to clichés or bumper sticker theology.

The Gospel is not a happy pill that you take when the going gets tough. Being a disciple of JESUS Christ doesn’t solve all your problems or guarantee that you’ll get what you want, even if your desires are noble.

What the Gospel does guarantee is that God will keep His covenant promises. He is good and faithful, therefore we can trust Him, because He will always do what is right.

Nothing will test your faith more than when you plead with God for the salvation of a loved one, but nothing seems to change. It is painful to see someone you love reject

the Gospel or walk away from the faith. Some of you carry that burden every moment of everyday.

Not every person who thinks of themselves as a Christian knows this kind of anguish. This is an evangelical kind of grief.

Evangelicals believe that apart from saving faith sinners are lost and are justly deserving of God's judgment.

At the end of today's service we'll be receiving new members and hearing the profession of faith of some young people, and that's the first question we ask them to affirm.

Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?

If you believe that to be true, and you live your life and faith on that premise, then you're pretty much guaranteed that you will experience what the apostle Paul described in our text.

Romans 9:1-2 (ESV)

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.

Great sorrow and unceasing anguish of the heart. There are those who have learned to avoid this anguish. Unitarians, and many mainline churches.

In the end, everything is going to turn out fine. God is love, and eventually everybody is going to be welcomed into heaven.

It's called universalism. But even evangelicals have found ways to soothe this anguish.

If someone goes forward at an altar call, or raises their hand and an evangelistic meeting, or repeats the magic words of asking JESUS in your heart, then that person is heaven bound no matter how they have lived their lives.

I have officiated at a good number of funerals where the departed had shown no outward signs of being a disciple of Christ, but the family was convinced that their loved one was now in a better place, because they once tipped their hat to JESUS.

There's nothing more artificial than trying to talk an unregenerate person into heaven. It never comes across as genuine. JESUS himself recognized that.

Matthew 7:21-23 (ESV)

“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. ²² 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?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

If that passage doesn't shake you at the core of your being then I don't know what will.

The evangelical anguish of faith is knowing that God is righteous and just. He always does what is right. There are no loopholes in the Gospel, no second chances, no alternative routes.

There is appointed for every son of Adam and daughter of Eve a time to die, and then comes judgment. Apart from saving grace, the sinner is lost.

Sitting among us this morning are husbands and wives, who love their spouse dearly, but know that they aren't believers.

There are parents and grandparents here who would give anything for their loved ones to come to faith in Christ, but it is yet to happen.

Many here have relatives who have said the right things about JESUS, but it's very evident that it has had little if any affect in their lives.

And there are those who at one time professed faith, (in the born again sense) but they have since walked away from Biblical Christianity.

What Paul says in this passage resonates with your spirit. You know the anguish of faith.

The Gospel is the good news of JESUS Christ and nothing is more precious to you. But the truth of the Gospel is also painful.

When JESUS was on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city of Jerusalem, he felt the same thing.

Matthew 23:37 (ESV)

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

Lament is a part of the Christian faith. You can't avoid it. If you love JESUS, you will grieve over those who reject Him.

- If you love the way of righteousness, you will grieve when God's law is rejected and ridiculed.
- If you love His church, you will be saddened when the bride of Christ is ignored and the means of grace neglected.
- If you respect the covenant of marriage, then it will trouble you greatly when its vows are broken.
- When you see people you care for deeply harden their hearts and openly defy God's rule in their lives, you will experience the lamentation of the heart.

As we've said countless times before, the Christian life does not shield you from the full range of human experiences in life.

If anything, we will go through them all with greater intensity. The highs and the lows. The anguish and the exhilaration. Mountains and valleys.

The exodus and the exile. The valley of the shadow of death, and Mt Zion. Sinai and Calvary. The cross and the empty tomb.

When Paul writes of the people who are close to his heart, his fellow Hebrews, you can almost see the teardrops fall upon the parchment.

Nothing pains him more than to know that so many of them have either rejected the Gospel or they've never heard it.

They have had so much in their heritage that ought to lead them to the Messiah; the patriarchs, the covenants; the law and the temple worship.

It's all there in type and shadow pointing to the reality and fulfillment in Christ. But they didn't see it, and were often hostile to it.

Godly sorrow is the anguish of heart that you experience when you see people you know and love reject the Gospel.

You don't feel superior to them; you don't think that you're better than they are; you don't consider them bad or immoral people. Yet they need Christ.

The Gospel isn't just for those who are in deep trouble and facing a crisis.

- The Gospel is for those like the rich young ruler who wanted to know if he was going to heaven.
- The Gospel is for those like Mary who sat at the feet of Jesus and those like Martha who are busy with the duties of life.
- The Gospel is for those like the disciples who were the common blue collar workers of the day and for those like Nicodemus who was a learned scholar.

The young and the old; the rich and the poor. Men and women. The common man and the powerful. All of us need to be reconciled with God.

There are no doubt some who are here today who are being prayed for by someone who deeply loves you. When they pray for you they have deep Godly sorrow and unceasing anguish in their hearts. Some of you may be thinking,

"I wish they'd stop and leave me alone. I'm perfectly happy just the way I am. I don't want their faith. I wish they would accept me the way I am and quit trying to change me."

That's the thing you haven't understood yet. They do love you just the way you are. They're not trying to change you. They simply want you to know Jesus; the Jesus of the Bible.

In the culture wars of today, those who are immersed in alternative lifestyles are often the most defensive and the most hostile toward Biblical Christianity.

Sometimes we who are believers bring that on ourselves by being unloving and harsh with those who we are in disagreement with.

JESUS was actually much better with those who were living in sin than the Pharisees were.

But at the same time, remember what JESUS said to the woman caught in adultery, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more."

What believers pray for is that their loved ones come to know this same JESUS. Because His grace is far more powerful than our arguments.

Therein lies the challenge. Don't argue with people about JESUS, it will do you and the other person no good at all. But be unrelenting in pointing them to Christ.

The world is full of lost and very confused people, out of which God sovereignly chooses to save some. Our second point is THE LOVING CHOICE OF GOD.

Romans 9:6-7 (ESV)

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."

As children of God, we are to love all people, from every tribe, race and nation. There is a special love that we have for the Hebrews, the children of Abraham.

All of us who are Gentiles should sense a special kinship to the Jewish people. We have been grafted into that family.

Wherever we see anti-Semitism, we ought to be the first to come to their defense. The covenant was established through Abraham.

Genesis 12:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This was God's loving choice to bless the children of Abraham, and through that seed to bless all the nations of the earth. Why did God choose the Jews?

Deuteronomy 7:6-9 (ESV)

"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷ It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸ but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,

God chooses His elect unconditionally. It's not because of any merit we possess, or any foreseen faith. God sovereignly and lovingly chooses those who are to be his own.

JESUS put it this way, "You didn't choose me, but I chose you." It is by grace that any sinner comes to faith. God regenerates those who are dead in their trespasses and sins, and turns our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.

If God is the one who does the choosing, then what is our responsibility and what good comes from our prayers?

Our responsibility is to trust Him completely, while we continue to pray and witness. We are to leave in His hands that which is out of ours. The God that we worship will always do what is right.

Jesus is the fulfillment of all the promises that God ever made to His people Israel. Everything that God wanted to do through Israel He did through Christ.

His righteousness becomes your righteousness when you place your trust in Him. That's what we want to convey to our loved ones.

We're not out to change people so that they become just like us. We are as flawed and messed up as anyone else. That's why we point people not to ourselves, but to Christ.

There is no insult intended if somebody is praying for your salvation. They love you just the way you are. But to know Jesus Christ is to know who you are as a child of God.

If you reject the Gospel, you're saying that you would rather stand on your own merit before the only true God who is absolutely holy. I don't care who you are or what good things you've done, nobody can stand before the holiness of God on their own.

To know Jesus is to know the infinite value you have in the eyes of your Creator. If Jesus was willing to die to secure your salvation, what does that say about your worth and significance to God?

How many people do you know who could say, "I would die for you so that you can have everything I have." That's the kind of love that's offered in the Gospel.

The prayer of just about every parent is that their child will know that they are loved. From the time you pick them up in the crib to the day you send them off to college, you do your best to convey that love.

No matter how many hardships you face, no matter how many setbacks you endure, you are dearly and unconditionally loved.

But our love isn't perfect, because we're not perfect. Our love can't redeem you from your sins because we have our own sins to deal with. That's why every one of us needs Christ.

Our final point is THE HEART OF FAITH. Can you trust the one who is sovereign over all? God makes sovereign choices, and He doesn't make mistakes.

God chose Isaac, not Ishmael. He chose Jacob, not Esau. Next week we'll deal more directly with that part of this passage.

But for today the heart of faith is to know character of God, and to place your absolute trust in Him.

Romans 9:14-16 (ESV)

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

The God that we worship is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and rich in mercy. But He will not let sin go unpunished.

Trusting in His grace and mercy, we appeal to those outside the faith. Our message is simple. Come home to JESUS Christ.

The pleasures of this life will come and go. You need that which will not fade with time.

The world has its pecking order. If you have what it takes, you'll do well. Money, looks, talent, status. You know the rules.

The Gospel is different. If you realize that you don't have what it takes, but you trust Christ, you will be given what you could never have on your own.

Close:

For those of you who are praying for loved ones, don't give up, and keep on praying. Prayer is meant to draw you nearer to God, and that should never stop.

The Word of God will accomplish everything that it sets out to do. It can soften the most harden heart, and it can plant a seed that will germinate and grow in its season.

Children of the promise come to faith because God does a work in their hearts. It's not by might or power, or human ingenuity, or pressure, but by my Spirit says the Lord.

For those of you praying for a loved one, focus not just on outward conformity and a change of behavior, **but focus on the faithful promises of God.**

The heart of faith is always leading you back to your Savior. Trust him. He will always show Himself to be faithful.