

Romans 9:1-3 I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites...

With the flow of Romans, it is imperative to understand why this section on Israel is here. The Jew is mentioned in Romans nine times, specifically in Chapters 1-3.

Romans 1:16 – The Gospel is primarily to the Jews, but Gentiles are also offered eternal life

Romans 2:9-10 – The basic concept is that God is impartial — the Jew is primarily the focus of wrath if unbelieving, but also the Gentile.

Romans 2:17-24 – The Jew is set on the fact that they are the ones with the Law. But having the Law and then preaching the Law, rather than using it appropriately, has brought discredit to God and His Perfect Law.

Romans 2:28-3:3 – Paul here condemns the Jew for their uncircumcised heart. They had every advantage, being entrusted with the revelation of God, yet they did not believe.

Romans 3:9 – The Jew and Gentile are both equally guilty, all are under sin.

Romans 3:27-31 – The justification by God is by faith, not by national identity, and not by knowing or keeping the Law

Romans 4 – This entire chapter is very direct on how to obtain the righteousness of God, it is in the likeness of the faith of Abraham. Verses 9-17 dismantle the notion that one must be a Jew or come to the Jews in order to obtain the righteousness of God. The righteousness of God is not for one national people; it is provided by promise, by grace through faith.

The promise of Abraham has been passed down to the believer. Now the lessons of Romans 1-4, especially concerning the Jews, is the question of personal righteousness. The choosing of the nation is not personal righteousness. It is about God completing his purpose and promises to the nation, but that may not (and often does not) include personal salvation.

The tone that Paul takes in these references seems to be saying that God has disavowed His chosen people, leaving them in the same state as all other nations. But the national promises and blessings are not forgotten; rather they are set aside until the time of the Gentiles is complete. Due to Paul's obvious frustration and tone concerning the Jews, it sounds like Paul is forsaking the Jews even though God will not. But, as Paul will explain, that is not the case.

Paul's prayer is a reflection of God's passion and a reflection of Paul's heart. The intensity is not solely from the fact that he is also an Israelite. This passion comes from the fact that it is God's passion and reflects God's choice. We know this is because Paul does not speak to reasons of a personal nature in the prayer, rather it is based upon the fact that they are Israel and all of the privileges they were granted.

The beginning of verse 9 Paul states that he is telling the truth and is not lying. Usually when someone begins with this, it usually conjures up suspicion. But this is an English phenomenon, not a biblical or Greek one. Paul actually used this phrase many times (2nd Corinthians 11:21-33; Galatians 1:15-24; 1st Timothy 2:3-8).

To begin the review of this passage, we need to begin with this first phrase. The first word here is "truth" – **ἀλήθεια** *alētheia* (*ah-lay'-thay-ah*)." Normally, the nominative noun or 1st person verb (implying the nominative "I") is positioned first. Here, the accusative, direct object, is first. This creates a point of emphasis. We do this in English as well. It is the truth that I speak. This is not a "Yodaism" but rather an attempt to place a high emphasis on the fact it is truth. The emphasis is not on "I say."

ἀλήθεια *alētheia* — truth is not simply an anti-lie but that which is dependable. The Greeks used this pre-biblically as "that which really exists." By emphasizing "truth," what he is saying is that this is an absolute and is reality and is solidified not in Paul's veracity but "in Christ." These are not just words but solidified in the character of Jesus Christ. This is not Paul saying, "I swear to God," but rather this means that Paul has the mind of Christ and it has influenced him to this truth.

The statement is restated in another way — "My conscience testifying with the Holy Spirit." "My conscience" is **συνείδησις** *suneidēsis*," a compound word that means with vision, to see completely. It is a perception word where Paul's thoughts are completely in view when making this statement. The point at this time is that the emotion that is found in the next verse begins with a full thought in view. Truth is not what feels right or good but that which is right and good. It can and does create feeling. Today's world has it backwards. Paul has thinking that influences his emotions not the other way around.

This should be an example lesson. We need to evaluate our thoughts to see if they are in agreement with the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, and the Word of God. Then we foster those true thoughts and allow them to influence our emotions. In fact, this is the goal of biblical, apostolic teaching (1st Timothy 1:3-7). The letter to the Hebrews speaks to correcting the Jewish conscience (Hebrews 9:8-10; 13-14). In Hebrews 10:22-25, the Hebrew believer is to have full assurance of the doctrine they believe to be true (sharpened faith). And based upon the truth, break from the dead works of the old covenant because of the confession of their hope,

understanding the promise, stimulating fellow believers to good works, encouraging one another, knowing the day is drawing near.

Paul's passion within his prayer is captured in verses 2-3. The description of the Israelites is in verses 4-5. Verse 5 also concludes the prayer (amen).

Verse 2 is about what truth Paul is speaking. This is in two points. The first is that his sadness is great. The second is that he has an unceasing pain in his heart. This is for the sake of his brethren, Israelites.

This is not exclusive — Paul had a great sorrow for Epaphroditus when he almost died due to illness (Philippians 2:25-27). The word for sorrow is “λύπη *lupē (loo'-pay)*” – to be vexed, sorrow, sad. This word is used of the disciples in John 16 for the sorrow that they were feeling because of the impending death of Jesus. Paul also contrasts good and bad “sorrow,” pointing to a conviction (2nd Corinthians 7:9-11). Conviction and an emotional grief due to a response from the teaching of the Word of God produces a profitable response. Conviction, sorrow, from the world (guilt trips, taboo) produces a reaction based on false truths and expectations of human expectations and only leads to a fake Christian (a believer that functions out of fear of not pleasing man).

Paul's sorrow is founded in Jesus Christ. He has enacted the mind of Christ and has taken on His attitude (Luke 13:31-35). In John 11:20-27; 32-44, Jesus knew Lazarus was dead (v14). He knew that He was going to raise him from the dead (v11). Martha's emotion did not “move” Jesus because she had an understanding of who Jesus is. The Jews who were with Mary did not believe and when Jesus saw the results of their unbelief, mourning without hope, He was moved because of their unbelief. But after the resuscitation of Lazarus, many of those Jews believed (John 11:45-46). This is the emotion of Jesus Christ. His desire was to be accepted by Israel as their God for their benefit.

Paul also uses an adjective to describe his sorrow. “μέγας *megas*” is not a word for quantity but for great in quality. A large degree of sorrow, this indicates intensity. Paul's sorrow was not many but extreme. The “and” (kai) can indicate something in addition to or it can restate the idea in a different way. Sorrow and grief are both in the nominative singular feminine (not Granville Sharpe Rule) and this seems to imply that Paul is saying the same thing but in a different way for emphasis. He states that he has a constant or unceasing (2nd Timothy 1:3) grief.

Grief is “ὀδύνη *odunē (ah-doon'-ay)*.” Most lexicons have this as a synonym of “λύπη *lupē*.” But it does have a variation in meaning. This literally means pain. The New Testament only uses this word twice and refers to

emotional pain (1st Timothy 6:10). The verb “ὀδύναω *odunao* (*ah-doon-ah'-oh*)” is used for both physical and emotional pain (Luke 2:48; Luke 16:22-25; Acts 20:36-38). This may better be understood in our vernacular as being “put through hell.” This may be appropriate concerning what Paul says next. (Constant pain in my inner thoughts)

In verse 3, Paul states that he could wish to be anathema from Christ on behalf of his fellow Israelites. The idea of a desire is being captured here. This begs a question, is Paul speaking in hyperbole? He knows there is but one mediator between God and man. Any gesture he puts forth really is pointless in regards to the benefit of his countryman.

The word is “εὐχομαι *euchomai*,” which means to ask, beseech, invoke. Even within secular Greek, it means to request to a deity. The verb is in the imperfect indicative. In Zerwick’s Grammar, it states that the usage of this word in the imperfect replaces an optative (desire). This is why the NASB translates this “I could wish.” The only other use of this word in the imperfect indicative is in Acts 27:29, which seems to justify this observation. Therefore, this is not hyperbole, but an actual desire. “I wish I could request.”

Paul’s heart for the unbeliever is well stated in 1st Corinthians 9:19-23. But for the unbelieving Jew, it was all the more. His desire for the unsaved is extreme and emotional. Paul is called the Apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7-9), but at every opportunity, he always went to the Jew first (Acts 17:1-3; Acts 18:4-8). Even in our text today we saw that Paul repeatedly stated to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Paul’s desire is for Israel, even though most of his success was to the Gentiles. Knowing the truth and seeing the chosen nation forsaking and disbelieving, literally tore Paul up emotionally. This can only be attested to the fact that Paul was entwined with the mental attitude of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5-9).

Here is the challenge that I pondered, “How do I develop such a passion?” I found that when I meditate on the Gospel and then I pray for those who do not believe the truth, that passion becomes real in me. But that takes intent; it is not a natural flow but a forced “bringing to mind” about God and others. It means that I must willingly and purposely ponder the Gospel and then willingly and purposely pray for those whom I know do not believe the truth so as to be saved.

The second challenge I had for myself is, “How do I develop such a passion for Israel?” That not only for their individual salvation but for the national salvation as well. This can only come from a dedication to the Word of God, both the Hebrew Scriptures and an appreciation of Romans 9-11. Paul stated that the Gentile believers for Messiah came by means of true Israel (Romans 15:25-27).