

God's Message to Us in Romans 9-16

Halifax, NS

3 March 2019, 2:00 PM

Introduction

Last week in our sermon series through all the books of the Bible we came to the book of Romans—Romans is the first of the epistles (or letters) that we find in our Bibles.

- Last week I told you that Romans is the only epistle that gives us a full summary of how Christ saves us.
- The gospels tell us of the gospel itself—of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection...
 - And Acts tells us of the pouring out of the Spirit and has the sermons that Peter and Paul preached, in which they set forth Christ and His saving work and called upon people to repent and believe in Him for eternal life.
 - But Romans goes on from there to speak of how the gospel and faith in Christ actually saves us—how we are sinners who are justified by Christ, how we are sanctified so that we serve Him, how we are not yet perfect, but have hope of perfection as God works in us through our trials.
- But we might wonder why Paul did not lay out this full display of the gospel when he wrote to other churches the way he laid it out to the Romans.
 - It seems reasonable to suppose that he had already done so.
 - Romans was the only church he wrote to that he had not personally visited.
 - We might well suppose that when he went into a synagogue to preach the gospel, he included the kind of teaching we have in Romans.
 - He began, as we can see from his sermon at Pisidia that we have summarised in Acts 13 (which is very similar to Peter's sermon in Acts 2 at Pentecost when it comes to setting forth Christ)...that He told of Christ as Saviour first and of His saving work and resurrection of giving of the Spirit.
 - But then after setting for those basic truths of the gospel, he then went on to the kind of instruction we have in Romans—he showed how the gospel saves us—what it does for us—and how we should respond to it.
 - Whether this is so or not,
 - Romans stands out among the epistles as the only epistle that gives a kind of systematic summary of the gospel.

It is full of the wonderful news of the gospel.

- To think that there is salvation like this for sinners!
 - that God Himself gave His own Son for us...
 - that we are perfectly righteous, and perfectly secure, and will be perfected for ever in Him.

Today we pick up at Romans 9.

- And you see in Romans 9-11 the heart of Paul.
- He is simply delighted with the gospel, with justification, sanctification, adoption, the hope of eternal life.
 - And he yearns for everybody to experience this salvation—especially his fellow Israelites—but the other nations (the Gentiles) too!

That is where we will begin today.

I. In Romans 9-11, see how Paul yearns for both Jews and Gentiles to receive God's righteousness through Jesus Christ.

A. He begins this section with a passionate description of his desire for his fellow Israelites—not just Israel, but each Israelite to be saved.

1. Look at Romans 9:1-5:

- His words are so strong that he actually swears with an oath in Christ that he is telling the truth.

- **¹ I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, ² that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, ⁴ who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; ⁵ of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen.**

2. It deeply burdens him for them to be so near to the truth—to have the gospel right at their doorstep—so accessible to them...

- and yet to be without salvation.

3. This is a distressing thing today as well.

- To this day, the Jews, the people of Israel, are as a people estranged from their own Messiah, the very One who came into the world through them and for them.

- They have rejected their own Messiah.

B. What is wrong with them?

- Paul tells us.

1. In chapter 10, he repeats his burden again, but he tells us how they have gone wrong about Christ.

a. It is actually the same way he had gone wrong. They had sought to establish their own righteousness by works instead of finding righteousness in Christ.

- He says, 10:1-4: **Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. ² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. ⁴ For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.**

b. This points back to what Paul said in Romans 1-3.

1) First, he spoke about how people suppress the truth because they don't like to think about God as He is.

- They want a modified version of Him, so He turns them over to their own way and they do they ridiculous things... they worship idols...

- They suppose that God is like animals or birds... or the sun or the moon.

- Or in extreme cases, they even come to believe that the world was created by a big bang.

- 2) But you remember that in chapter 2, he then addressed the Jews.
 - They think they are better because they have the law of God;
 - but it does not make you righteous just to *have* God's law.
 - When you have God's law, if you understand it, it makes you see that you are a desperate sinner who is unrighteous and who needs to be saved.
 - c. And you see here that Paul is praying for Israel that they would be saved because they are trying to be righteous by obeying the law.
 - Can't they see how far short they come?
 - Can't they see that there is no righteousness without Christ?
 - Paul explains in chapter 10 that Moses wrote about righteousness by the law—that you have to do the law... which no one does...
 - But Moses also wrote about righteousness by faith—which does not ask who can climb up to God—who has done enough...
 - But it asks who has called on the name of the Lord for mercy.
 - It is believing God's promise that saves sinners—it is faith, not works.
 - Look at 10:6-11: **But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*) ⁷ or, “ ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): ⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”**
 - There is no hope if we rely on what we have done, but only if we look to Christ can we be saved.
2. But even though the gospel has gone out to the Jews, they have not believed.
 - a. They keep on clinging to the notion that they can be righteous by keeping the law of God—
 - that they are acceptable to God because they obey His law.
 - In chapter 10:14-21, Paul speaks about how the word of the gospel has gone out to them, the beautiful gospel of grace...
 - but how they have not believed the report (v. 16)... the message of the gospel.
 - b. There are many in the church today who are like this.
 - They are Christians only in name.
 - They do not believe the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - They talk about Him, but they do not actually trust Him for their righteousness—they continue to seek righteousness by works—assuming that God will accept them because they are decent people.

C. There is only one thing that can make a difference for such people... what Paul calls “the election of grace.”

- Let’s look at that. He speaks about it both in chapter 9 and chapter 11.

1. First let’s look at chapter 11.

- He begins by asking if God has cast away His people Israel...
 - And he says, “Certainly not, for I also am an Israelite...”
 - In other words, Paul is an Israelite believer and there are a lot of other Israelites who had accepted Christ, so God has not rejected them all.
- Paul speaks in verse 4 (Rom 11:4) of how Elijah despaired that he was the only believing Israelite left in his day, and how the Lord corrected Elijah and told him that He had reserved 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal.
 - So you see, there were these 7000 because God kept them in true faith... He did a special work of election in them to reserve them for Himself.
 - Paul calls this the election of grace in verse 5-6: **“Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. ⁶ And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.”**
- This points to the fact that even if we are in the covenant people—circumcised before Christ came or baptised after He came as the case may be—
 - we will not believe unless God does a special work of grace in us.
 - If we are left to ourselves, we will pull away from Christ and begin to trust in our own righteousness—that is the first step into idolatry—
- And then Paul takes it step farther and describes those who reject their own Saviour as having been blinded by God as a judgment.
 - It is what we saw back in Romans 1 again—we do not like to retain the truth about God, so over the generations God turns us over to go into deeper and deeper idolatry and wickedness.
 - He takes away the light of His truth and leaves us to wallow in our own darkness and folly—and it gets worse and worse.

2. In chapter 9, Paul speaks about how election works—by sheer grace.

- If we had to do something, no one would be saved.
- a. In chapter 9:6-7, Paul, after describing his sorrow that so many of his fellow Israelites were not saved, points out that there are some Israelites who are saved...much as he does in chapter 11. He says:
 - **Rom 9:6-7: But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel, ⁷ nor *are* they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.”**
 - It is the same today... the church is the assembly of the redeemed people of God, but not everyone in the church is actually redeemed.
 - Only those who (as we saw in chapter 10) believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and call upon Him for their salvation.

b. And then he illustrates election with Jacob and Esau.

- These were the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah, and both were born as God’s covenant people... yet, only Jacob was chosen for salvation... and that choice was made before he was even born.
 - Rom 9:10-12 explains: **And not only *this*, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, *even* by our father Isaac ¹¹ (for *the children* not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), ¹² it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”**
 - As with everyone, Jacob did nothing to get God to elect him... it was an act of sheer grace.
- c. Of course Paul knows from teaching this to others how people object and say, “How can God blame a person if it is He that rejected them?”
 - And the answer is very simple.
 - When God elects someone to salvation, He is choosing to have mercy on them... as He is quoted to say in v. 15, **“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”**
 - In other words, God is under no obligation to have mercy on any member of the human race now that we have turned against Him.
 - Understand that when God has mercy on someone and saves them, He is doing something that is extremely extraordinary and beyond the pale of reasonable expectations!
 - We are not talking about something like the mercy that you show when a person is hungry and you feed them.
 - We are talking about the kind of mercy that goes to hell for someone who hates your guts and would kill you if they could get at you.
 - All God has to do to harden a sinner is just leave him to go in his own way. Who could fault Him for that?
 - That is what He did with Pharaoh...
 - He raised him up, giving him great power and authority, but He did not give him grace... instead He took off His restraint on him so that Pharaoh was hardened more and more until he became ridiculous and refused to let Israel go because of his extreme hatred for God.
 - God made Pharaoh powerful so He could show His glory to His people in delivering them when Pharaoh did not want to release them.
 - It was a baby lesson—of course God could overcome Pharaoh, but it was for our sake that God did this so that *we* could see His glory because we don’t without such baby lessons.
 - Paul explains that God can do what He wants with us—He is the potter and we are the clay.
 - If He chooses to display His mercy by saving us, He can do that; if He chooses to show His wrath by hardening us to go our own way, He can do that.

- We have no claim on Him, especially as a fallen human race, but even before we fell, there was no injustice in His leaving us to go our own way and rebel that His purpose of demonstrating both the glory of His mercy and that glory of His wrath might be accomplished.
3. In the rest of chapter 11, Paul explains that God will continue to save both Israelites and Gentiles—
- He will have mercy on whom He will and He will harden whom He will.
 - But he also explains that this mercy will not ignore the promise He made to His people concerning their children.
 - He is now showing mercy to the Gentiles (the nations), but in part to make Israel jealous because it is in His purpose to restore all Israel... more than just a remnant of them.
 - And when He does that, He will bless the Gentiles even more than He is now.
 - In 11:32, Paul sums up by saying: **For God has committed them all [Israelites] to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.**
 - Now of course we do not know exactly how far this *all* will go—*all* does not mean absolutely *all*—*all* are not disobedient—but the idea is that *many* will be saved.
 - Paul is wound up just thinking about God’s mercy and grace and concludes this section with a doxology:
 - **Rom 11:33-36: Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out! ³⁴“For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?” ³⁵“Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?” ³⁶For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.**

TRANS> But before we move on to the next section of Romans, let me point something out to you.

- D. Consider that in writing all of this, Paul is making a powerful appeal to both Jews and Gentiles—that they would believe.
1. In describing how he yearns to see Israel saved, and how they have missed God’s righteousness,
 - He is reaching out to them.
 - He is pointing out that their rebellion against Christ was prophesied, but that God’s hand of mercy is still stretched out to them, calling them, pleading with them to turn to Christ.
 - It is a powerful, gracious appeal in which the heart of Paul reflects the heart of his Master.
 2. And he also makes an appeal to the Gentiles.
 - He mentions how privileged they are to be brought into this glorious salvation, and speaks of how so many of them have believed and how even more will believe.

- And he warns them not to let their hearts grow hard lest they be cut off for their unbelief (see Romans 11:22)—like Israel has now been...
 - This appeal to continue in the faith takes on added weight when we see how many Gentiles in the church *have* done just that.

TRANS> There is so much grace in God’s saving work—justification, sanctification, adoption, hope of glory, and the election of grace to bring us in.

- God is a God who saves.

II. In Romans 12-15:13, Paul shows us that we ought to respond to all this mercy by offering our bodies as a living sacrifice to the Lord.

A. The first two verses sum up the whole section:

- **Rom 12:1-2: I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service.* ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

1. Having told us what the LORD has done for us in the previous 11 chapters (the mercies of God), Paul now says “present your bodies as a living sacrifice.”

- It is not a sacrifice of atonement—Paul has been clear that righteousness is not in our works but in Christ.
 - This is a sacrifice of thanksgiving... our bodies... a living sacrifice.
- Why does he speak of our bodies?
 - We often speak of our hearts, but Paul wants to make it clear that we serve God not merely by thinking the right way in our hearts,
 - but by serving His people with our bodies.
 - Christian love is not thinking nice things, it is doing good for our neighbour—a sacrifice of service.
 - That is what God accepts.

➤ But it is not as though the inside (the heart of us) does not matter.

2. Verse 2 shows that we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds in a Christian way.

- “Do not be conformed to the world” means that we are not to live for self but for others.
- The world follows the lust of flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.
- It is “me-service”; but we are called to be transformed by the gospel of Christ to “you-service”—my life for yours, like Christ our Master showed us and commanded us.

B. Look at the ways in which Paul describes this service to which we are called—this sacrificing of self to God—this “you-service” that replaces “me-service.”

1. In 12:3-8, he talks of using your gifts for others.

- He starts off by saying, “Don’t think too highly of yourself.”
 - Don’t look at your spiritual gifts as something you have so you can show off and make a name for yourself—you are to die to self.

- See your gifts rather as ways to do good for others as Christ has done good for you... as Paul says in verse 8, **“he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”**
 - In other words, be zealous not for your own glory, but for the good of your neighbour.
2. In 12:9-21, Paul says even more about being others focused...
 - v. 9—**Let love be without hypocrisy...**
 - v. 10—**Be kindly affectionate to one another...**
 - v. 15—**Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep...**
 - v. 17—**Repay no one evil for evil...**
 - He explains that you should let God do the punishing... but that if your enemy is hungry (v. 20), you should give him something to eat.
 3. In 13:1-7, he says to submit to governing authorities...
 - Recognise that even if they are like the Roman rulers when Paul wrote this, they are still exercising God’s authority and are His ministers.
 - So to get down to the practical, obey them, respect them, and pay your taxes for the glory of God!
 4. In 13:8-10, he says to love your neighbour by obeying the ten commandments—no adultery, no murder, no stealing, no bearing of false witness,
 - The only thing to owe them is love—that is your obligation—to live for your neighbour’s advantage instead of taking advantage of your neighbour.
 5. In 13:11-14, he calls you to wake up and get away from the sinful self-indulgent way of living.
 - In verse 12-13, he says: **The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.**
 - There is no place for such selfish behaviour in the Christian life.
 - You are here for God... as a living sacrifice for Him.
 6. In all of chapter 14 and in the first 13 verses of chapter 15, Paul tells us to receive each other.
 - Basically, don’t reject your brothers and sisters in Christ because of their weaknesses...
 - At this time, some of those of Jewish background were still not comfortable eating meat with their Gentile brothers and sisters because all their life they had followed the ritual food laws.
 - And some of them still kept the Jewish Sabbaths (the seventh day along with the feast days—for a time there was a transitional period).
 - Paul basically says, “Don’t let such things come between you.”
 - If you are one who can’t eat certain foods or one who observes Jewish Sabbaths, don’t impose that on your brothers who don’t...

- And if you are one who is strong in your faith and knows that these things are acceptable (Paul says that they are), don't harass your brother who can't enjoy your liberty in good conscience...
 - Don't try to force him to violate his conscience, for that would be sinful for him... and you need to be more concerned about his relationship with God than whether he eats what you eat.
- What matters is that each does what he does for the Lord.
 - In 14:6-8, he says: **He who observes the day, observes *it* to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it*. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. ⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.**
 - Your Christian brother does what he does because he loves Christ, and that is what should make you delight in what he does.
 - For us, it would mean that we don't reject the one who can't drink any alcohol in good conscience, or the one who can't watch a movie that we watch.
- In chapter 15:7-13, Paul explains that Jews and Gentiles should glorify God together in Christ.
 - They should not separate from each other into different churches, but they should rejoice together in each other's salvation and praise God for it.
 - Just think how marvellous it is—
 - that the Lord has shown mercy to Jews who rejected their own Messiah...
 - and that He has shown mercy to Gentiles who worshipped idols and lived in debauchery.

TRANS> The section about giving yourself to God as a living sacrifice ends with 15:13.

- You can see that giving yourself as a living sacrifice to God is not about doing religious rituals—it is about pouring out your life for others in love.
 - That is what Christ did for us, and we honour Him most by doing that for each other.
 - It is so alien to His way for us to quarrel over trivial things—He has something far better for us—a life patterned after His life—my life for you.

III. The rest of Romans (from chapter 15:14 to the end of chapter 16) is about Paul's plans to visit them and includes a bunch of salutations.

A. In this section, Paul reminds them that his great desire is (15:16): **“that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”**

1. Here again is the language of sacrifice—
 - He wants the Gentiles to be a beautiful offering to God in the way that he has described in Romans.
 - In saying this, he is appealing to them to be such an offering.

2. He explains that he wants to come to minister to them on his way to evangelise Spain.
 - He tells them of his plans to go first to Jerusalem (asking prayer as he knows he will face hostility there) and then to come to visit them and then go on the Spain, being helped by them on his way.
- B. Then in chapter 16 there is this warm exchange of greetings and salutations...
 1. Paul sends greetings to his friends in Rome—he has a lot; and he sends greetings from some his friends to them also.
 - You see so many expressions of affection and care here.
 2. And laced through these are several benedictions, Paul wanting them to be blessed of the Lord, culminating in this great concluding benediction:
 - Rom 16:25-27: **Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began ²⁶ but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith— ²⁷ to God, alone wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.**
 - How grand a thing that God should establish us according to the Gospel to the glory of His Son Jesus Christ!
 - What more could we want than this!
 - The glorious gospel brings a life that gives glory to God.
 - May we all know the reality of this gospel in our own lives.