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# Romans

**...that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. Romans 9:2**

This is the continuation of the previous half of Paul's thought. He had stated that he was speaking the truth and that his conscience bore witness in the Holy Spirit to this fact. His heart truly had "great sorrow and continual grief." The reason for this pain will be explained as the chapter unfolds and as he writes his great dialogue on the state of Israel during this time of their rejection of Christ Jesus.

What Paul shows us here, and what we will find throughout the New Testament, is that there truly is a time for grief. As Solomon puts it in Ecclesiastes 3:4 -

A time to weep,

And a time to laugh;

A time to mourn,

And a time to dance;

At the same time as bearing his grief, Paul was also filled with joy continually (e.g. 2 Corinthians 7:4). From this we learn that there is room for both states in the heart at the same time and that there is nothing wrong or deceptive with it. Our lives can be filled with joy immeasurable at the prospect of eternity with Jesus and yet broken at the unsaved status of those we love. Paul shows us that this is

so and therefore we can confidently live in the same manner without belying the joy of our salvation.

Life application: There is nothing wrong with grieving. In fact, it would show a failing in us if we didn't grieve over the lost. Let your heart be broken for that which breaks the Lord's heart.

**For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,... Romans 9:3**

Here we have the explanation for Paul's comments in verses 1 & 2 which stated that he was being truthful in Christ and that his conscience bore witness in the Holy Spirit concerning his sorrow and grief of heart. And what was the reason? It was for the sake of his fellow "countrymen according to the flesh," meaning his Jewish brethren, the people of Israel.

His burden was so great for them that he says, "For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren." It is astonishing how many scholars come to this verse and reject the plain sense of what Paul is saying. It is simple, direct, and to the point. If he could, he would trade his own place in Christ for the sake of the salvation of his people. Scholars simply cannot conceive that he means what he says and they go into great and lengthy discourses on why he doesn't really mean this.

The verb Paul uses for "I could wish" is *ēuchomēn*. It is in the imperfect tense, indicative mood, and middle or passive voice. The translation "I could wish" is exactly what he is saying, not "I did wish" or "I would, but" or any other forced translation. Paul truly meant what he said, just as Moses meant the same thing after Israel's great sin of idolatry at the base of Mount Sinai -

"Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, 'Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive

their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written."  
Exodus 32:31, 32

Paul was fully aware that one cannot take the place of another in eternal damnation. However, it didn't change the feelings he had concerning the matter. This is the reason for invoking the name of Christ and the witness of the Spirit in the first two verses of chapter 9. The person who truly understands the state of the afterlife for those who fail to receive Christ's gift is then impelled by the highest sense of responsibility to share that message. And his heart should be so broken for their state that they would likewise be willing to take their place rather than see them perish.

As we move through chapters 9-11, we will see Paul's thoughts on Israel, both in his present and into the future. When one sees the church as replacing Israel, then of course they would try to force a translation other than what Paul clearly intended. But when we see that their rejection of Christ is not the end of the story for them, Paul's words make all the more sense.

Life application: How broken is your heart for the lost around you? And not just those whom you love or are close to, but those with whom you have no affiliation at all except the bond of humanity. When we look at ourselves as sinners saved by grace, then how can we not look at those around us and feel the pain of a broken heart at their fallen state?

**...who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises;... Romans 9:4**

Verses 4 & 5 now describe Paul's "countrymen according to the flesh" mentioned in verse 3. In these verses nine terms are used to describe them:

Israelites - the direct, blood descendants of Jacob who became Israel. This includes the following sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. Also included in the list are Joseph's two sons - Manasseh and Ephraim. These are the people Israel. Israel is not the church, though there are Israelites in the church. And the church is not Israel; it is a separate working of God during a particular dispensation.

To whom pertain the adoption - God adopted this group of people, bringing them into a covenant relationship and calling them His own special people. Among other verses pointing to this is Deuteronomy 7:6 "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth."

The glory - Time and again, the glory of God was manifest to the people of Israel. It occurred in a pillar of cloud and of fire at the Exodus. It happened at the dedication of the tabernacle in the wilderness and again at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem at Solomon's time. The glory was manifest in particular appearances to select people as well, such as to the father and mother of Samson at the announcement of his birth. The glory was also manifest to Israel in another way. The radiance and glory of God, was manifest to Israel in the Person of Jesus (e.g., John 1:14).

The covenants - the covenant promises of God have come through this specially chosen line of people - through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (who is Israel). The covenant at Sinai was directed to them and for them. David was given a covenant promise as well. Later a New Covenant was promised to the people in Jeremiah 31:31 and it was instituted and realized through the shed blood of a Son of Israel - Jesus.

The giving of the law - This was a unique moment in history when God brought a single group of people near to Himself, displayed His glory before them, and gave them a corporate body of laws which the people agreed to uphold. The law, being the fifth dispensation of God's workings in human history was given to show

God's righteous standards "which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord." (Leviticus 18:5).

The service of God - This is speaking of the temple service and functions which were performed by the priests and Levites for the people of Israel. God's presence dwelt first in the tabernacle and later in the temple. Sacrifices, offerings, and devotions were presented to Him, serving Him during the dispensation of the law.

The promises - Promises of blessing for obedience, of punishment for disobedience, of exile and return, of God's faithfulness even through Israel's unfaithfulness - such promises were made to and through this group of people. And the greatest promise was made to them as well. It is the promise of the coming Messiah foretold in Genesis 3:15 and who was anticipated by each faithful generation since Adam. And despite their rejection of Him, this Messiah has promised to return to this wayward and obstinate group of people when they finally call on Him -

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'" Matthew 23:37-39.

Life application: Israel is a distinct group of people, descended from the patriarch Jacob. The church is not Israel and yet there are those from Israel in the church. Mixing these categories will lead to faulty theology, so don't mix these categories.