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Romans 9:1-5; 10:1 “A Burden for Lost Souls”

Intro. Paul begins a new section of his letter to the Romans in chapter 9, which continues through chapter 11. In this section, Paul deals with the problem of Jewish unbelief. To the modern reader chapters 9-11 seem to form a parenthesis in the course of Paul’s argument. Had he proceeded straight from the end of chapter 8 to chapter 12, we would have been conscious of no gap in his reasoning. However, we should not minimize the importance of these three chapters.

There are several reasons why he paused to take up the problem of Jewish unbelief in chapters 9-11. One, the situation in the Roman church required it. The original believers in Rome appear to have been Jews, but by this time they were becoming outnumbered by Gentile Christians. It had become clear that most Jews had rejected the Christian gospel, in spite of many evangelistic and missionary efforts. So there was perhaps a tendency on the part of some of the Gentiles to look down on their Jewish brethren because they were among the few who had been rescued from an apostate nation (11:18). Two, it was of the essence of Paul’s argument that the gospel which he preached was no innovation. He said in the opening verses of Romans that his gospel was the gospel *of God*, which was “promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures.” Well, if that is the case, how is it that so many of Abraham’s descendants refused to believe the gospel? Paul answers that question in this section. Three, Paul had argued in chapter 8 that the believer is secure in Christ and that God’s election would stand. But someone might ask, “What about the Jews?” They were chosen by God, and yet now you tell us they are set aside in unbelief. If their election did not secure *their* personal salvation, how do we know that *our* salvation is secure? But in Romans 9-11 we see that God is not by any means through with Israel. Paul’s answer to his question, “Has God rejected his people?” (11:1) is a sharp negative: “By no means!” God’s election of Israel *as a nation* still stands, and God will ultimately so work that the prophecy of Romans 11:26 shall come to pass, “all Israel shall be saved,” when they turn to Christ in their distress in the last days. Ultimately then, Romans 9-11 is more about God than Israel and concludes with a doxology of praise to God.

Now with that introduction of this section of Romans, I must now briefly introduce our text today. One thing that stands out in these verses is Paul’s burden for Israel. Most of his Jewish brethren had rejected Jesus as their Messiah and Savior. But as we shall see, he had great sorrow and concern over the lost condition of his nation.

I must contrast the apparent lack of concern that many professing Christians have today about the lost condition of our nation and world. For the most part we are either not concerned about lost souls, or we fail to translate that concern into action. *Are* you concerned about the lost in your family? Was their someone at your Thanksgiving table that is not a true believer in Christ? Was there someone *not* present for that very reason? Are you concerned about the lost right here in our church? Are you concerned about the lost in our community? Are you concerned about the lost in our world? Probably none of us have the same concern and passion for the lost that Paul had. So let’s look into our text today, and I hope that we will be challenged by Paul’s great example here.

Now the first point I wish to draw from our text is this:

I. WE SHOULD HAVE A BURDEN FOR LOST SOULS

Paul gives a great example of this in v.2. Yet he feels compelled to preface expressing his burden for Israel with the strong statement affirming the truthfulness of what he was about to say. He probably did so because many Jews questioned his loyalty to his nation because he became an apostle to the Gentiles. Yet he said in Romans 1:16 that his gospel was for the Jew first and never neglected an opportunity to share the gospel with fellow Jews. So listen as Paul expresses his love and concern for his own nation in v.2. He says, “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.” He does not confront Jewish unbelief with angry condemnation but with sorrow of heart. “Sorrow” is from a word (*lupe*) that often refers to the grief and sorrow of losing a loved one. “Anguish” is from a word (*odune*) that refers to consuming grief, emotional pain, sorrow. It is from a word that is used of the setting of the sun. Have you ever felt your heart sink when you heard some bad news about someone you cared about? Paul’s heart just felt like it was sinking into emotional darkness for his fellow Jews.

The intensity of this pain and sorrow is indicated in v.2 by the words “great” and “unceasing”. Paul’s heart was constantly burdened and concerned for his Jewish brethren. I believe that was one driving force of Paul’s missionary work. And concern for the lost is the driving force behind many who go to the mission field today. Of course, a desire for God’s glory and praise among the nations is a driving force as well.

What was Paul so concerned about? Why did he feel such deep grief and ongoing sorrow? Paul said elsewhere that the lost are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), and Paul grieved over the spiritual deadness of his fellow Jews. Many times he preached the Gospel to his fellow Jews, only to see them walk away in unbelief, and sorrow would grip his heart all over again. But his sorrow was not due to a feeling of personal rejection. Rather, it was sorrow over what he knew would happen to them. Without Jesus they were on their way to a devil’s hell. Without Jesus they were lost. Paul knew they were walking away from the gospel to continue in spiritual deadness and emptiness of soul, and it just grieved his spirit tremendously. He knew they needed to be saved. In fact, look over to chapter 10, v.1, and we will see what Paul was burdened about. He says, “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.” His main concern and burden was that his people Israel “be saved.”

Yet there are quite a few who say that Jews do not need to be saved. They say that the practice of their Jewish religion is good enough. But that’s not what Paul says in that verse I just read you. That’s not what the Bible teaches elsewhere. Jesus Himself said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (NKJV). When Peter stood before the leaders of Israel, he said in Acts 4:12, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (KJV). Oh, how they needed to be saved from sin, but they had rejected their one and only Savior, Jesus Christ. In fact, all people need to be saved. Religion is not enough. Good works are not enough. The greatest enemy of having a concern for the lost is the belief that almost everyone is ultimately going to heaven and nothing could be further from the truth. And so Paul was burdened and sorrowful of heart because he had his theology right, that people without Jesus are lost.

Take a look at your own heart this morning. Are you only slightly concerned for the lost, or does God see in you a great and continual burden for the lost? When we have a loved one who is very sick, we get very concerned and ask everyone to pray for them. If we found out that our neighbor’s house was on fire, would we be unconcerned, and just sit back and do nothing? No! We

would get up and go see if we could do anything to help. We are usually more concerned about someone's *physical* well-being than their spiritual well-being.

So let us pray that we will become more like Paul and have a passionate concern for the lost. Secondly, from Paul's example we also see that:

II. OUR BURDEN FOR THE LOST SHOULD EXPRESS SELF-SACRIFICE

This is indicated in v.3, where Paul says, "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." We see Paul's self-sacrifice first in terms of:

A. A Willingness for Self-Sacrifice – The word "wish" (*euchomai*) either means "pray" or "wish". Both meanings would fit in the context. "I could wish" is an imperfect tense, which refers to ongoing past action. Paul expressed such a wish or prayer several times. Paul's wish is a hypothetical wish to the effect that if it were possible for his self-sacrifice to avail for the salvation of his kinsmen, he would be willing to be accursed on their behalf. That word "accursed" is from the Greek word *anathema*, which means "set apart or devoted to destruction." That word is used several times in the New Testament to refer to judgment. For example, in 1 Cor. 16:22 Paul says, "If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed" (see also 1 Cor. 16:22; Gal. 1:8-9). *Anathema* along with its verb form is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to refer to apostate people and property that were to be utterly destroyed as a divinely ordained judgment.¹ So Jews were very familiar with this term. Thus, Paul understood that unbelieving Jews were on their way to death and destruction, but Paul was willing to take their place if doing so would save them. In fact, notice that Paul was willing to be "accursed and cut off² from Christ for the sake of my brothers." The word translated "for" (*huper*) means "on behalf of," or even "in place of." What Christ-like love, for this is what Christ did. He was willing to be sent to earth for the express purpose of suffering death and wrath in our place.

There are several reasons why Paul was expressing a wish rather than a reality. In the first place, he had just written in Romans 8 that nothing can separate or "cut off" the believer from the love of God. So to wish what Scripture plainly makes impossible would be futile. Secondly, no sinful man is eligible to die for others. Only the sinless Son of God could die for others. He became a curse for us, separated from God on the cross (Gal. 3:13, 14). Nevertheless, we do see in Paul's wish a spark from the fire of Christ's substitutionary love.

The heart of Paul for Israel was also expressed by Moses. In Exodus 32 the people of Israel had committed a great sin in making that golden calf and engaging in debauchery and worship of a false god. God was ready to destroy His people for their sin. So Moses said in vv.31-32, "Alas, this people have sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written." Note that the translators inserted a dash. They sense that there must have been a long silence at this point, or perhaps Moses began to weep for his people. He understood that sin had to be punished and he did not want his people to be punished. Then his cry began again, "but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written." Could he have been saying, "Blot me out of your book of life

¹ For example, these words are used in the LXX of Deut. 13:15-16, describing the destruction of an Israelite city that turned from the Lord to worship other gods. See also Lev. 27:29; Num. 21:3, Deut. 20:17, where *anathema* is used in the verb form to translate the Hebrew word for utter destruction.

² "Cut off" in the ESV is implied in the meaning of the word but not explicitly stated in the Greek text.

instead"? Paul indeed placed himself in good company with Moses, and his Jewish readers were aware of this.

Abraham Bininger immigrated to the United States from Switzerland with his parents. He came on the same ship that brought John Wesley. The father and mother of the lad both died on the voyage and were buried at sea, and he stepped alone from the gangway on to a strange continent, where there was not a single familiar face. When he had grown to manhood, he asked to be sent to tell the story of the cross to the black slaves on St. Thomas Island, having heard of their great misery and degradation. When he arrived at the island, he learned that a law had been passed that only a slave could preach to other slaves. So he wrote the governor, agreeing to become a slave for the rest of his life and serve faithfully provided he could preach to the slaves in his free time. The governor sent the request to the King of Denmark, who was so touched by the willing sacrifice of this young man that he decreed that Abraham Bininger could preach to whomever he wished.³

What an example of self-sacrificing concern for others! Are you willing to make personal sacrifices to see others saved? Whatever sacrifices we make would fall short of the sacrifice Paul was willing to make!

Having a desire and willingness to sacrifice self for others is not enough. We should also express that desire:

B. In Action - Paul's willingness to put the interest of others ahead of his personal interest resulted in self-less action on his part. By his example, Paul teaches us about two of the primary ways concern for the lost should be translated into action. First of all:

1. We Need to Pray for the Lost – Again, in chapter 10, v.1, Paul says, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved." That is one of the first ways we should express our burden and concern for lost souls. When we are truly burdened for the lost, we will go to God in prayer on their behalf. We will ask others to pray as well. This is so important, for no one will get saved on their own. It requires outside intervention. Romans 3:11 says, "There is none who seeks after God." Jesus said in John 6:44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...." God must work in their life. And one main way we can have a part in getting God to work in the lives of people is through prayer.

The great evangelist Gypsy Smith used to tell the story of the conversion of his uncle Rodney. Among gypsies, it was not considered proper for a child to address his elders unless spoken to. This would be doubly true if a child spoke to an elder on spiritual matters. So young Gypsy prayed and waited for his opportunity. One day, the lad's uncle took note of Gypsy's worn trousers. "Laddie," said Uncle Rodney, "How do you account for the fact that the knees of your trousers have worn nearly through, while the rest of the suit is almost like new?" Gypsy replied, "I have worn the knees through praying for you, Uncle Rodney." Then he added tearfully, "I want so much to have God make you a Christian!" Uncle Rodney put his arm around Gypsy in fatherly embrace, and a few moments later fell on his knees, confessing Christ as his Savior!⁴

Even so, we ought to be praying for the lost on a regular basis. Let me ask you something. Can you name at least 3 people that you are praying for to be saved? If not, can you truly say that you are burdened for souls?

Believe it or not, praying is not enough. There is something else we should do:

2. We Need to Witness to the Lost – People will not be saved unless someone shares the gospel with them, and God will not do so directly or by an angel. He has chosen believers to be

³ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #5180* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979).

⁴ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #5878*.

instruments of sharing the gospel. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “He called you by our gospel...” (2 Th. 2:14) and it is clear from the previous verse that he is talking about God’s effectual call. 1 Peter 1:23 says that we “have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” There is life-giving power in the gospel of the Word of God (cf. Heb. 4:12; Jas. 1:18). Now look over to Romans 10:14-15. There Paul said, “But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’” Paul certainly translated his concern into many attempts to share the gospel with the Jewish people. He was even willing to suffer harsh persecution in order to witness to them.

Nevertheless, most Christians and most churches are not doing very well at being concerned about the lost and sharing the gospel to them. A 2004 research project, led by Thom S. Rainer, showed that it takes 86 church members in America one year to reach one person for Christ! In 2005 his team discovered that the vast majority of the unchurched with whom they spoke have *never* had a Christian share their faith with them. We Christians tend to isolate ourselves from the lost, and we are not doing enough to break down the barriers to get the gospel to the lost in our communities. Very few confessed unbelievers are coming to church to hear the gospel there.

Is your burden for the lost great enough to make personal sacrifices? Will you sacrifice your time to pray for the lost? Will you give up some time to go visiting or sharing the gospel in some other way, such as passing out gospel tracts? Will you take the time to come to a witnessing class when offered? Will you give financially to support missionaries and others who are sharing the gospel? Plan now to give sacrificially in support of our Lottie Moon Missions offering next month.

Finally, let us consider together:

III. THE REASONS FOR THIS BURDEN FOR SOULS

In addition to what I have already mentioned, I believe Paul gives two reasons why he was so concerned for the Jewish people in vv.4-5. If we grasp and apply these reasons, I believe we will share his burden for the lost. The first reason sets the stage for the second and main reason. Paul was concerned for his Jewish brethren:

A. Because of the Greatness of their Privileges - The incomparable gifts of God to Israel are bittersweet reminders of the extent of Israel’s spiritual tragedy. And Paul’s attachment to Israel is not merely due to natural ties. It is accentuated by the place Israel occupied in the history of redemption and revelation. What a shame it is for a people who had been so blessed, to end up rejecting their own Messiah and to suffer the consequences. So notice what Paul says about their privileges:

1. Israelites - The first privilege mentioned in v.4 is that they were “Israelites”. This name harks back to Gen. 32:28 and is reminiscent of the dignity bestowed upon Jacob in the reception of the name “Israel”, a dignity also conferred upon his seed (Gen. 48:16). The name means, “Prince with God.” God turned a self-seeking deceiver into a Prince. Thus, God bestowed honor upon him and his descendants.

2. Adopted (v.4a) - The adoption spoke of here was national. There were many nations upon the earth, but God chose to adopt only one. The only nation that God ever called His “son” was the nation Israel. He did so at least three times in Scripture (Ex. 4:22-23; Deut. 32:6; Hos. 11:1; see also Dt. 14:1; Isa. 63:16).

3. Glory of God – In v.4 Paul merely says, “the glory,” but he is talking about the fact that the glory of God was manifested to Israel in their wilderness marches (Ex. 13:21-22; 14:19-20; 16:10; 24:16-17). Psa. 105:39 says, “He spread a cloud for covering; and fire to give light in the night” (NKJV). He also manifested His glory in the tabernacle (Ex. 29:43; Lev. 9:6, 23) as an indication of His presence with them. Exodus 40:35 reveals, “And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” The children of Israel are the only people who have ever had the visible presence of God. The glory that belonged to Israel was something very special. It came upon Israel from the beginning of its march as a nation, stayed through many centuries, was taken from them in judgment, but shall be theirs once again in the future. The glory was not seen again until the moment the infant Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Lk. 2:9-11). Sadly, most in Israel failed to recognize the glory of God in the character (John 1:14) and miracles of His Son, the Lord Jesus (John 2:11). The glory will appear again when Christ returns (I Th. 4:17; Mt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7). His glory will then be eternal (Rev. 21:23).

4. The Covenants (v.4a) - God has made certain covenants with the nation Israel, including the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants. Imagine that! The exalted God was willing to enter into a covenant relationship with Israel. Most blessed of all was the new covenant given through Jeremiah (31:31-34), that was graciously extended even to us Gentiles (Mt. 26:28; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8-13; 9:15; 12:24).

5. Giving of the Law (v.4b) - The Law of Moses was certainly the highest moral law of that day. It reflected the character of God and served as a great moral guide for the people. When the people followed God’s law, they were blessed above every nation on earth. The Law was also given to prepare them to see their need of Christ, whose saving work was pictured in the sacrificial worship prescribed by the Law (v.4b).

6. Service of God (v.4b) - This had to do with the priestly service in the tabernacle and temple, offering sacrifices to atone for sin. Israel was to be a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:6). The nation failed God, but God took the tribe of Levi and gave them the responsibility of serving. No other nation had this privilege. At one time, if the Gentiles wanted to worship God, they had to worship and sacrifice to God through the ministry of the Jews.

7. Recipients of the Promises (v.4b) - The Old Testament abounds with promises made to these people. Israel received great blessings through these promises.

8. Descendants of the Fathers (v.5a) - This refers primarily to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Some people boast in who their ancestors are. The Jews can boast that they are descendants of some of the most well-known men and women of ancient history.

But of all the privileges and advantages that were ever given to God’s chosen people, the greatest by far was that they should be the people:

9. Through Whom the Messiah Came (v.5b) - In fact, every privilege given to them was in preparation for this supreme privilege. There are many reasons to believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah. He fulfilled so many promises in the Old Testament by His first coming. There is some emphasis on the fact that Jesus came through Israel “according to the flesh.” When He came to this earth, He was a Jew, born of Mary. The woman at the well called Him a Jew (see John 4:9). Nathanael called Him “an Israelite” (John 1:47). Romans 1:3 says that Jesus “was born of the seed of David according to the flesh.”

Paul not only spoke of the humanity of Jesus, but also His deity. In the last of v.5 Paul ascribes a doxology to Christ “who is God over all, blessed forever.” Though the Jews rejected Christ, Paul affirms that He is not only the promised Messiah, but also God! God had done so much

to reach out to Israel, but they still rejected not only their Messiah but also God Himself! Oh, what terrible judgment awaited those who failed to properly use such spiritual advantages, and even rejected their Messiah, God's Son!

I believe we can make application to those of Christian heritage living here in America. God has blessed us with a rich spiritual heritage. God has blessed this land with great preachers, like Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield, John Wesley, D.L. Moody, W.A. Criswell, Billy Graham, and Adrian Rogers. Every citizen can have a Bible, and most of our citizens have access to a Gospel preaching church. We have had so many spiritual privileges as a nation. Ah, but this leads to the next reason why Paul was so concerned for Israel:

B. Because Great Privileges Can Lead to Great Judgment – The very fact that in v.3 Paul wished that he could be “accursed and cut off from Christ” on behalf of Israel implies what will happen to them if they remain in unbelief! Yet many remained in unbelief in spite of their religious privileges. They had religion but not righteousness. And the sad thing is that all their privileges only added to their condemnation when they rejected Christ. When they turned their back on Christ, there was no other way of salvation (cf. Heb. 2:3). Only great judgment awaited them. Knowing this, Paul was very concerned and burdened about his people.

Jesus said the same thing basically when He told those cities in Galilee that had rejected him that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah will be better off in the day of judgment. They heard the greatest teacher that ever lived. They witnessed many of His great and glorious miracles. Yet they did not repent! (Mt. 11:20-24). Within 10 years of writing these words, the Romans came in and absolutely destroyed the nation of Israel and killed almost a million Jews. Many others were carried off into slavery and the nation was scattered to the four winds of the earth. Great privilege rejected leads to great condemnation, and it grieved Paul's heart.

May I say that many church members in our nation are not saved. Like the Jews of Paul's they, they are religious, but not truly converted. They are in rebellion against God in that they will not accept the righteousness God offers in Christ. Instead, like the Jews of old, they cling to their own righteousness. You can be religious and lost. Whoever you are, your social position, your church membership, your good works will not help you.

Oh, we ought to be concerned about the many in our country who have been privileged to be raised up in churches. They have the opportunity to hear fine preaching from God's Word in their churches, or on radio, TV and the Internet. Many have had good, godly parents or grandparents. Yet what are we seeing in our country today? We're seeing a spiritually privileged nation turn from Christ in greater and greater numbers. We should be burdened about the greatness of judgment that awaits them. We can only hope that God will spare our nation great judgment for the sake of the millions of true believers that yet remain.

Conclusion: We should not only be concerned for our own nation but also for the billions of people around the world that are lost and on their way to hell. Do you share Paul's concern? Do you remember a time when you were more concerned and burdened about the lost than you are now? Has your concern grown cold? As we have seen, a real test of your level of concern can be seen in your action. Are you praying for the lost? Are you witnessing to the lost, or at least inviting them to church?

If you realize that your burden for the lost has been minimal, or grown cold, then I ask you to take a fresh look at what happens to lost souls. Right now, they are dead in trespasses and sins. They try to fill the emptiness of their souls with sinful pleasures and worldly possessions. Then, the

day will come when they will die, and their soul will be carried far away from God, to a place of outer darkness, to suffer *anathema*. Hear the cries of agony and regret. Put the face of some unbeliever that you know into this picture. That should give you the kind of concern that Paul expresses in v.2.

So *do you care* about the lost? I'm calling upon Christians today to pray for the lost, or to seek from God a new or renewed passion for the lost. I trust that you will make a commitment to witness to the lost. Finally, if there is anyone here today who needs to be saved, I call upon you to respond to the love of Christ for you. He died in your place. He cares for you. I care for you. This church cares for you. Come to Jesus today! The Elders and I will be available to talk to you about a faith commitment to Christ after the service.

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957); Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 4, "God's Covenants" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Hershel Hobbs, *Romans: A Verse by Verse Study* (Waco: Word Books, 1977); H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on Romans* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1928); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's New Testament Insights on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Crossway, Good News Publishers, 2001).

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