

Sorry and Anguish for the Lost

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Date: 11 October 2026

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[0:00] And Romans is about the gospel. It's about the good news of Jesus' life and death and resurrection. We are now in chapters 9 through 11. Of course, we are starting with chapter 9, which logically follows from chapter 8.

So if you were here kind of late spring, early summer of this year, you'll remember we ended chapter 8. And chapter 8 ends with this crescendo. The very last verse says, Nothing can separate us from the love of God and Christ Jesus our Lord.

And so we're on this high, Romans 8. As I told you, some people consider one of the greatest, the maybe greatest chapter of the entire Bible. But it raises this question. What about the Jews?

If God is so reliable, if he keeps his promises, if nothing can separate us from the love of God, what about his promises to Israel? Aren't the Jews separated from the love of God?

Now, having said that, that's where we're headed in chapter 9. Today, actually not going to talk about God's promises, really, or the Jews much at all. But instead, we're going to take a close look at the Apostle Paul and his heart towards and for the Jews.

[1:14] So we're not so much going to talk about the Jews this morning, although we'll have plenty of time to talk about them in chapters 9 through 11. Really, we're talking about Paul and what his heart is as he thinks about those who have rejected Christianity.

And that's our question. What is our heart? What are our emotions towards those who have rejected Christ? So with that, I invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 9.

You'll find it on page 7 of your worship guide as we go there. Remember that this is God's word.

Jeremiah chapter 23 tells us that God's word is like a hammer that breaks a rock into pieces, which is a way of saying that there is nothing so powerful that God's word is not more powerful still.

And so that's why we read now Romans chapter 9, starting at verse 1. I am speaking the truth in Christ. I am not lying.

My conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 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.

[2:32] I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you this morning that you speak clearly to us in your word.

And we ask that you would do that very thing, that you would pour out your Holy Spirit here and now, that you would help us to understand everything that's written in this passage, that you would use it to open our eyes, to soften our hearts, that you'd grow our love for you, and that you would give us great compassion and mercy towards those in this world who are lost, who do not have you as the light of their life.

We ask all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. If you are anything like me on a regular basis, you have Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses knocking on your door, trying to convert you or to invite you to a Bible study, or the Mormons will say, hey, we just want to share some scripture passages with you.

And if you're like most people, you probably think, please just, you know, leave me alone. I find this a little bit annoying. I actually have a different strategy, which I'll maybe share with you at a different time. But I'm going to tell you about someone who has a little bit of a different perspective about people evangelizing them.

You may have heard of Penn and Teller, the comedy act based in Las Vegas, and one of those men, Penn, Penn Gillette, actually is a little bit offended if you are a Christian and you don't try to convert him.

[4:04] He finds the Bible hard to believe, became an atheist in his teens because of that, but he tells the story about years ago, he ends this comedy show in Las Vegas, and a man comes up to him and brings him a pocket edition of a Gideon Bible.

And instead of being offended, he actually says he's impressed with this man. He says this, I've always said that I don't respect people who don't proselytize.

By the way, proselytize, we don't really use that word today, just a way of saying trying to convert someone to a religion. Okay, that's what you do if you're proselytizing. He says, I don't respect that at all.

If you believe that there's a heaven and hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting to eternal life, or whatever, and you think that, well, it's not really worth telling them this because it's socially awkward, how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize?

How much do you have to hate someone to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? I mean, if I believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming at you, and you didn't believe it, that truck was bearing down on you, there's a certain point where I would tackle you.

[5:18] And this is more important than that. And then he says this about the man who came up to him at the end of the show. He said he cared enough about me to proselytize and give me a Bible.

This is an atheist saying that. And what he's doing is he's highlighting for us that there are at least two reasons that we wouldn't share our faith. Reason one, we're not for real.

We don't actually believe what we say we believe. At the end of the day, we don't actually believe that hell's a real place and people are going there. We don't actually believe that heaven is a real place people are going there.

So maybe we don't really believe what we say we believe. Reason two, our hearts are hard.

Remember what he said. How much do you have to hate someone to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?

Now, we could find other reasons. Those aren't necessarily the only two. We could say maybe it's because of fear. Maybe it's because not knowing what to say. At the end of the day, Penn is raising an important question.

[6:24] Same question Paul's raising for us. What is our heart towards the lost? By the way, the lost is a Christianese term. It's kind of insider language.

So if you're not familiar with it, when we say the lost, what Christians mean are people who've rejected Christianity. People who have rejected Christ. What emotions do we have when we think about that?

Or the feelings that come to us? Paul, in these three verses, is setting us an example of what our posture should be as Christians towards those who don't share our faith.

He's showing his emotions over his fellow Jews, those who've rejected Christ. And what are those feelings that are rising up within him? Well, he tells us, verse 2, I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

He doesn't just have sorrow and anguish. He has great sorrow and unceasing anguish. In other words, Paul is completely devastated. And why is he devastated?

[7:30] Well, because most of the Jews have rejected Christ. If you're familiar with the Christmas readings that often happen in December, you'll remember this from the Gospel of John.

Chapter 1, verse 11 tells us, He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. Of course, some Jews became followers of Christ, but not many.

That's Paul's, that's his heartache here. Now, it gets even more intense in verse 3. So, he's heartbroken. We know that from verse 2. Verse 3 gets more intense. 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.

Now, notice there, he doesn't say, I wish. He says, I could wish. I'll come back to that in a second. But let's just see big picture. What is Paul saying? Paul's saying, I could wish that it were possible for me to go to hell so that my fellow Jews could go to heaven.

That's what it means to be accursed, to be cut off from Christ. He said, I want to trade places with them. That's what he means when he says, for the sake of my brothers. For the sake of is another way of saying in the place of.

[8:49] I, Paul, could wish that I could go to hell if that would mean that my brothers, the Jews, could go to heaven. Now, Paul actually can't wish this because if he did, it would mean that he

loved human beings more than he loved Christ.

Okay? So it's actually impossible for him to truly wish that. That's why translations of verse 3 say, I could wish. In other words, Paul's saying, this is what I would wish if I could.

I could wish it, then I would wish it. That's how distraught I am over my fellow Jews who have rejected Christ. I know trading places with them isn't an option.

I know I can't actually do that. But I would if I could. That's how heartbroken I am. This is a parent's love here.

It's a mother's love to say, I wish I could suffer so my people don't. And that brings us back to our question.

[9:54] How do we feel about the lost? Especially those that we know personally. Paul here is not talking in the abstract. No, he's talking about his family, his friends.

Are we apathetic? Are we angry or resentful because of what they believe? Are we scornful? Do we make fun of them?

Do we mock them? Or are we sad for them? Do we grieve over their unbelief? Do we long for them to come to know Christ?

If I'm honest, I think I'm probably all over the map. Sometimes numb, sometimes frustrated, sometimes sad. I don't think I can say I have Paul's level of love. But Paul is pointing in one direction.

That when he thinks about those who don't know Christ, he is overcome with grief. And Paul's not meant to be an anomaly here. He's actually meant to be an example for us.

[10:54] That's part of why in verse 1 he says, I speak the truth in Christ. In other words, I'm speaking the truth as someone who's being transformed into the image of Jesus.

In fact, we could put it another way, a negative way. If we do not have sorrow over the lost, if we don't have sorrow or sadness or grief over those who have rejected Christ, it reveals in us, it's kind of a test, it's a spiritual test, it reveals in us a certain hardness of heart.

Great preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones tells us that this is actually a test. It's a way we can gauge our spiritual health. And he says this, That's a burn, by the way.

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Martin Lloyd-Jones. He's saying, look, if you don't love the lost, if your heart's not broken over the fact that they've rejected Christ, your faith is theoretical and intellectual.

[12:17] That's not a good thing. But if God's at work in your life, if you have a real faith that is vital in living, this is what it's going to look like.

This is going to be your heart towards those outside the church. So that's the test. What do we do with the results?

What do we do if we look inside and we say, I can't say the same thing that Paul says here. I'm not filled with concern for the lost. I'm going to suggest a few ways that the gospel speaks into this for us.

One reason we might have hard hearts is our own pride and arrogance. We look at non-Christians, especially when there are cultural enemies, we see them promoting things that are wicked, and we think, wow, those people are so evil.

They deserve whatever they get. In fact, maybe I hope they get it, right? Because I'm so frustrated with what they love. The problem is this. Outside of Christ, we would also promote what's evil.

[13:29] It's only God's grace. It's only God's mercy that holds us back. I mentioned to you before when we were in Genesis, what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4, what do you have that you did not receive?

If you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? When we return to the gospel, really understand it, if we really grasp it and believe it, we're going to gain humility.

We're going to say, my situation is actually so bad that Jesus Christ had to die for me. And so I can't look at those outside the church, no matter what they're promoting or believing, and think, oh, I'm better than them.

I hope they get what they deserve. Because in fact, the only reason we're different is because of God's grace and mercy to us.

So you can pray. You can pray that God would give you humility. You can pray he would show you your sin, that you would know deeper and deeper the grace and mercy of God.

[14:43] Remember Jesus' words in Mark chapter 2. The scribes see that Jesus is eating with tax collectors and sinners, and they say, why would Jesus do that? Why would Jesus eat with such awful people?

Jesus rebukes them with these words. Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

If you're a Christian, that's you. You're someone who's sick. You know that you need a physician.

If you're obsessed with how righteous you are, Jesus is actually throwing you under the bus here.

So one reason, one reason we don't have a heart for the lost is our pride and our arrogance.

Another one is our frustration and our contempt. Maybe we look at non-Christians, they're not necessarily fighting for things that are wicked. You know, they're just living their lives, but their sinful decisions have led them to a place of misery.

[15:49] And so we think, you know what? They've made their bed. Let them lie in it. Well, the gospel has something to say about that as well.

We made our beds. Jesus did not make us lie in them. We're full of sin. Jesus doesn't make us face the full consequence for that.

Remember, that's what we talked about with Isaac. All his mistakes, all his sin, God's mercy is greater than all those things. And so if we look at, with contempt at the world around us, we're lost, we're stuck in this place of self-righteousness.

We forget that everything we have is by God's grace. In fact, that's one of the constant threads in the book of Romans, that God's grace is the only reason you're alive and have breath.

God's grace is the only reason you've made any good choice in your life. God's grace is the only thing you have to thank. And so the moment we congratulate ourselves, we've lost the gospel.

[16:57] The moment we think we're better than someone else, we forget God's the one who gives gifts. God's the one who assigns circumstances.

And so the more we see, the more we understand God's grace in our lives, the more we will remember we deserve only judgment, the greater our compassion, our mercy will be towards those who reject God.

So one reason that could block us could be our pride and arrogance. Another reason could be our frustration, our contempt. Maybe you don't identify with any of those.

Maybe you're listening to this and you say, you know what, I know I'm saved by grace. I know that without God's mercy, I would be in hell right now. But I'm just not there.

I just don't feel it when I think about those who rejected Christ. I'm just numb. Okay, I don't look down on them. I'm just not moved for them. I don't feel what Paul feels.

[18:02] Well, the gospel speaks to that as well. Remember, I've told you before, one way to think about the gospel is in these two statements. First, I know I must change.

Second, and, but, I cannot change myself. We'd add to that a third sentence. But God promises to change those who follow him.

I know I must change, but I can't change myself. I'm in this catch-22. But God says, if I repent, if I turn to him for mercy and grace, his Holy Spirit is going to be at work in my life in a supernatural way, transforming me from the inside out, changing a heart of stone to a heart of flesh.

And so you can pray. You can pray that God would give you what you do not have. That's the whole Christian life in a sense. Coming to God and saying, hey, I actually have a heart of stone in this area and I can't change it.

I need you to give me a heart of flesh. You can pray that God would give you a heart for the lost, that what Paul feels, you would feel as well. that the Holy Spirit would be at work in that way.

[19:21] Those of you who are going through the prayer cohort right now with Dennis or went through it earlier this year, you can make a little prayer card about that. You can make a prayer card that God would be showing you people in your lives who need the gospel and that he would not just show you, but he'd give you a heart for them, give you compassion for them.

Now, we haven't talked about verse 1 much. I mentioned it briefly. Paul says he tells us these things in Christ. And the simplest way I can explain it is this. Paul is saying, I feel these things because of God's work in my life, because I'm a Christian, because I'm connected to God by the Holy Spirit, sanctified and chosen because God's been at work in my life, in my heart, in my mind.

This is why I feel this way. Not because I'm some weepy guy. Not because I cry at every movie. No, because this is what righteousness looks like.

Righteousness looks like a heart for non-Christians. This is one test of God's work in our lives that we're growing more and more in our compassion for the world around us as we see them, people walking in the dark who need light.

final answer is this. We've talked about pride and arrogance. We've talked about frustration and contempt.

[20:49] We've talked about asking God to be at work in our lives by his Holy Spirit. Of course, last of all, we look at Jesus. has thou heard him, seen him, known him, is not thine a captured heart.

And what does Jesus do? Most famously in Luke chapter 19, Jesus looks out over Jerusalem, he thinks about the Jews who've rejected him, and what does he do?

He weeps. Back in chapter 13 of Luke, Jesus says, I would have gathered you under my wings as a hen, but you were not willing.

Ultimately, our heart for the lost is because of Jesus' heart for the lost. When we look to him, see him, and also remember him looking at us and seeing us, not choosing us, we'll talk about this more in Romans chapter 9, not choosing us because we're great or better because we're not, choosing us because he chose us.

God's mercy and grace to us causes us to overflow with mercy and grace. Of course, all this grace available because Jesus did what Paul can only suggest.

[22:22] Remember, verse 3, I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers. What did Jesus do? Jesus didn't wish that he could be accursed or cut off from God the Father.

No, Jesus was accursed and cut off from God the Father so that for the sake of his brothers, the sake of you and me, for Christians, for those who follow after him in faith.

Jesus did become accursed. He did trade places with us. Jesus did what Paul only wishes. And that's the foundation of all of this.

That is what gives us compassion for the lost. And so we can sing as in our closing hymn, every soul we long to reach, every heart we hope to teach, everywhere we show his peace, only by his grace.

let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you for your great mercy and love and grace in Jesus Christ. We ask that you would soften our hearts, that you'd remind us of the truth of the gospel, that we were so hopeless that Jesus had to die for us, that we didn't seek you out of our wisdom or skill, but instead you sought us, that you'd use that to change us from the inside out, that as we look at the world, stumbling in darkness, we would be filled with great love and compassion and sorrow, that it would move us to share with them about you.

[24:05] We ask all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.