

9:1 I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 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. 4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. 5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

Introduction

We are beginning our journey through Romans 9-11. There are many amazing doctrines in these chapters that will stretch our minds and our hearts. Here in Romans 9 Paul is in anguish over the fact that the Israelites, Paul's brothers, have not come to Christ in repentance and faith. They are lost and Paul wishes he himself could be Christ for them and take the punishment of God so that they might be saved.

Now, in Romans 9 Paul gives us two reasons why the vast majority of Israelites were lost.

1. In verses 6-29 Paul argues that not all physical Israel is spiritual Israel. That is, not all of the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were promised spiritual salvation.
2. In verses 9:30-10:4 we see that Israel sought salvation by works or performance rather than by faith. They sought to establish their own righteousness before God by doing the law rather than submitting to the righteousness of Christ by trusting in Him and His work on the cross.

30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 as it is written,

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

10:1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them 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, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Before we jump into some deep waters—which we will in weeks to come—I want to consider something very obvious in the opening of these verses that has challenged me and that I hope will challenge you.

Paul's Anguish

Paul is in anguish for the salvation of the Israelites. He is in emotional turmoil. He is groaning. Buff has just finished helping us think through Romans 8. We have seen there that the Christian life is one that is lived in dependence on the Spirit of God. It is a wonderfully secure life but it is also one that has “groaning.” Now as we step into Romans 9 we see something that Paul groans about to God. He has Spirit inspired affections toward the Jewish people. He has Spirit produced tears for their lack of repentance. He longs for these people to know Jesus and it is killing him that they are not bending the knee to Christ. When I read Paul's words here “sorrowful” “unceasing anguish in my heart” I think to myself, “Is Paul exaggerating his true feelings for effect?” I say this because most of the time I don't live in this kind of anguish. I don't live in a state of groaning for others.

Setting up the Problem

Now let me tell you a bit about my background. My dad is a wonderful man but not an emotional man. I grew up without much expression of emotion when something wonderful or something horrendous happened. Therefore, I have struggled in my life having and showing proper emotions. Then, when I became a Christian I came into a particular theological circle that basically believed that God doesn't command us to “feel”—after all, how can God command you to “feel” since you can't whomp up feelings. God commands us to do and to say the right things and are not responsible for how we feel.

So when I read about Paul's overflowing emotions for the lost I have a burning question:

Am I commanded to be in anguish for those who are lost?

We all have heard of people who have had or presently have burdens for “people groups.” William Carey had a burden for the people of India, Adoniram Judson had a burden for the people of Burma, Hudson Taylor had a burden for the people of China, and George Muller had a burden for orphans. Burdens, according to a popular view, are special outpourings of love and compassion that God puts on certain Christians' hearts (missionaries) and not on the hearts of others. This is a popular notion and I believe one that I have “caught” to some degree but I was never taught this per se. But now that I get a chance to think about it, I am convinced that it is fundamentally wrong.

The fact is, Jesus tells us that at the very weightiest two commandments intimately involves our emotions and these commandments are for ALL Christians:

36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:36-40)

How could I have missed this? How could I have given myself a pass and simply said “I guess I am just not wired to be an emotional person that is in anguish for lost people”? It isn’t true. I have emotions when it comes to love for myself. Threaten me and I will get mad. Torture me and I will scream like a girl and cry like a baby. Convince me that my soul is in danger and I will be in anguish over myself. According to this text, I am supposed to, I am commanded to, “feel” the same intense emotions about others when they are threatened, tortured, or in eternal danger.

So, this biblical foundation leads me to **my thesis: I believe that if you and I do not have unceasing anguish in our hearts for some individuals as well as some people groups, we are in serious spiritual trouble and need take emergency action immediately. It is a spiritual crisis. I believe that God’s Spirit works with our spirit as we cultivate our sensitivity to GOD’S LOVE FOR US because of Christ’s work. This leads to a passionate love for God and for others. God brings real groan-inducing, heart-wrenching, love-soaked burdens to his children for individuals and groups of people that leads to prayer and action. But we must cultivate this love in our often cold and almost dead hearts!**

I am convinced that we all want a passionate love for the lost. I have never met a Christian who did not want more love for people. I have never met a Christian who did not want more passion in his prayers for lost people. I have never met a Christian who did not want more of a willingness to sacrifice for others so that they might be saved. The problem is we don’t know how to get to that place. We even wonder if it really exists. So, our attempt to solve our dilemma is either to live in denial of our problem or to wait for God to zap us with this love. Neither of those attempts work.

So how do we get there? How do we get to that place of real, heart-felt, soul shaking love for the lost?

The first step is that we must admit that we have a problem.

We need to confess to God that our hearts are not where they should be. In the process of thinking about this topic I asked myself a series of questions that brought to light the fact that I have a problem:

Question: Why don’t I weep, groan, and passionately wrestle with God more (or at all) for some people group?

Answer: Because I don’t know these people. I don’t weep for those I don’t know.

Question: Why don’t I do this or feel this for Americans, then?

Answer: There are too many of them. It is still too general to affect my emotions.

Question: Why don’t I at least do this or feel this for my extended family?

Answer: They live in Arizona. Out of sight, out of mind. And to be honest, some of them bug me so I am glad to be far away.

Question: Well then, for the love of God, why don’t I do this or feel this for my immediate family?

Answer: Well, cough, sputter, hmmm. Good question. There is a problem. A real problem. I admit it. I don't weep and spend hours on my knees wrestling with God for the lost, not even for my own kids, not even for the sanctification of my wife.

So, what is wrong with me?

The second step is to identify the nature of the problem.

A. The nature of the problem is internal. It has to do with my nature or the core of who I am- I am fallen...all of me. The fall did not simply affect my actions. It did not simply cause me to become one who does sinful things. The fall made me into a person who does not love righteousness and who does not hate sin. I do not love mercy and hate suffering. I recognize that Jesus has redeemed me and I am forgiven of my guilt and liberated from the absolute power of sin. But I am still a mess when it comes to my emotions. My emotional responses are supposed to mirror God's. So the nature of the problem is internal- it has to do with my inmost being rather than something peripheral. Because of the fall, there is something wrong with me at my core and therefore my emotions/affections need renewing.

B. The nature of the problem is spiritual. Satan is war with us right now. Part of his war with us is to deceive us. Satan has many of us deceived regarding the sovereignty of God and His emotions. We know that we are supposed to be like God. But my default mindset is to believe that God is not emotionally invested in people and that, like a machine, he is unemotionally bringing his plan to pass. This is a lie about the very heart of God. God, and specifically Christ, is in anguish over the lost.

Deuteronomy 5:29 "Oh that they had such a mind as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments, that it might go well with them and with their descendants forever!"

Ezekiel 33:11 "Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?"

Matthew 23: 37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!"

Satan tries to fool us into thinking God does not have a heart for the lost and thereby makes us blind to our own sin of not caring about those around us. Satan is trying to make us into his own image. If that happens we will be God's enemy. Thus, the problem is spiritual and it is very dangerous.

Step three is to identify the cause:

Although I have already said that in some sense the cause is the deceitfulness of sin and Satan as I explained the nature of the problem, I think there is a more immediate cause. I think it is pride. It is true that Satan whispered lies into my ear, but I wanted to hear these things. I wanted to believe that I was not responsible for my feelings. I wanted to believe that God's heart was more like mine and therefore I'm OK. It all makes me look good and leaves me in a position of not having to face my sin and change. Finally, if we look at the specific sin we are talking about- not having a real love for those who are lost, it should be

obvious that this means we are self-absorbed. We are more concerned with our own success, comfort, schedule, etc. I just recently reread Mark 10 and the account of James and John arguing about who is the greatest. I was struck by something this time through. Let's read it:

35 And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." 36 And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." 38 Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" 39 And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." 41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. 42 And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

What I was absolutely shocked by was what wasn't in this passage. Here are the disciples of Jesus approaching the savior of the world. They are not concerned about the safety of their own souls. There is no talk from them or their indignant friends (whose sin was perhaps even worse) about the salvation of the rest of the world. There is simply this bickering about who is the greatest. Pride is not just wrong in and of itself, it totally blinds us from and banishes all concern for others.

Pride is subtle and can take a variety of forms. I would like to briefly look at 3 forms.

1. "religious humility." This says, "I am not sanctified enough to focus on the lost. I just need to deal with me right now and someday I will think about them." The sum of that is, "I matter more than those other people right now. That is like being rescued from the titanic and rather than beginning to help others into the lifeboat you are in, you choose to concentrate on buckling your life-jacket, tying your shoes, and making sure your hair is combed.

-But we are supposed to care about BOTH our neighbor and ourselves SIMULTANEOUSLY and with equal passion.

2. "religious realism." This form of pride judges his potential based on the size of the problem/ enormity of the task and one's track record and decides on how realistic it is to pray for the people or situation. So he looks at the enormity of the task- the conversion of a country like China with a billion people or the conversion of a relative with a notoriously

hard heart towards God and sees his own smallness or his own lack of evangelistic success and gets discouraged from praying or doing anything.

-But this form of pride lead me to trust in myself (or become hopeless because I am not trustworthy) when I should be looking to God who is strong enough and certainly willing to seek and save the lost and His track record is impressive.

3. “Distraction.” This form of pride is very subtle. We can be distracted by our success. We can be distracted by our effort to be successful. We can be distracted by our pain (physical or psychological). We can be distracted by our efforts to anesthetize the pain. The tools we use to get there are our jobs, our kids (we want successful, healthy, or at least comfortable kids), our televisions (to relax), our friends, etc. But this is a form of pride because our focus is our comfort our quest for being and feeling OK.

-But this form of pride makes God a footnote in my life. It is all about my Kingdom, my comfort, my life and God’s kingdom agenda becomes barely a footnote. But that is OK because at least I am “saved.”

Step four cannot be “get humble” or “get a heart for the lost.” You see, God wants you to be in a spot where you see you are caught. Not just caught, but helpless and guilty. Step four has to be to repent and trust in the gospel for Christ to get the glory. He has to be the one who changes us. Live in the gospel and you will be changed. If you are like me and you have not been on your knees in heart anguish for the lost of the world or some nation or even your own family, then confess your sin to God. Confess your pride to God. Weep mourn and wail over your sin. Know that you cannot change but believe that there is one who wants to forgive you and change you. Trust in Christ who truly loved the lost and who was truly humble...to the point of death on a cross. You need to be broken right here at the foot of the cross...at the knowledge that one loved you so much and was in anguish over you. He lived with a perfect love for the lost and you were one of them. He prayed for you with loud cries and tears. He didn’t just have a soft heart for the lost, He was misunderstood for the lost, tortured for the lost, mocked for the lost, and killed for them. He was cursed for the lost. He was cursed for you. You see, if you read about Paul’s anguish for lost people and you simply say, I need to be like that you will either become self-righteous or you will break yourself on that and go away in despair. But if you realize that Christ loved you with that anguish, if you live in that love, you will be broken and you will slowly change and be filled with an anguished love others- That is what John says in 1 John 4: “We love because he first loved us.” That is why Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3 is that we might have strength to grasp the dimensions of God’s love for us in Christ. Grasping that you have a God and Savior who wept for, was misunderstood for you, bled for you, was rejected for you, died for you, and prays for you even now—in spite of your sin and callousness...paradoxically, wonderfully, unbelievably...changes you and makes you like Paul—it makes you into a love filled weeper.