

# A Burden for Souls

Romans 9:1-3

*I speak the truth in Christ-I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit-I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.* Romans 9:1-3

In the first eight chapters of Romans, Paul articulated the gospel of salvation in terms of justification, sanctification, and glorification. Then he concluded with the declaration that nothing can ever separate a believer from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. All believers are united with Christ; yet most of Paul's Jewish kinsmen were outside of Christ. The reason was that they rejected the Messiah. They were outside the kingdom of God and outside the sphere of salvation. Knowing that the kingdom of God had been taken away from them and was now being given to those who would bring forth the fruit of it gave great grief and pain to Paul, as we read in Romans 9:1-3.

## The Truth of Paul's Pain

The first thing is the truth of Paul's great pain. In fact, in the Greek text, the word "truth" is placed first for emphasis. Paul is speaking the truth as a Christian, as the one who wrote in Ephesians 4:25, "*Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.*"

So, Paul begins, "*I speak the truth in Christ,*" and then he adds, "*I am not lying.*" Some people may have wondered if Paul was lying when he expressed concern for the Jews. After all, how could a man have any love for his fellow Israelites who had treated him as badly as the Jews treated Paul? For example, in 2 Corinthians 11:24 Paul recorded, "*Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.*" Paul suffered these blows on his bare back. How could anyone feel such great pain for those who had so abused him? His statement sounded like a lie.

But Paul reassured his audience, saying, ***“No, I am not lying.”*** Not only that, Paul’s conscience was bearing witness to him. Conscience is an independent agency in us. The Bible speaks about all kinds of consciences. For example, in 1 Timothy 4:1-2 Paul wrote about seared consciences, saying, ***“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.”*** People with seared consciences are those who have lost all sensitivity to truth because they engage continually in the transgression of God’s law. We see this truth manifested in modern people who have no concept of what is right.

The Bible also tells us about defiled consciences. The conscience of an unbeliever is defiled, and it can only be cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ, as we read in Hebrews 9:14 and 10:22. Although this may be somewhat shocking, it is the truth.

The Bible also speaks about weak consciences. Some Christians are not well-educated in the word of God. To such people, eating meat may not be right, so their conscience will tell them to only eat vegetables. While we should never violate our consciences, such people need to be educated in the Word so that they will have informed consciences. Then they can become strong with strong consciences. Then they can eat meat without their consciences condemning them.

The Bible also speaks about good consciences. Paul encouraged Timothy to guard the truth with a good conscience (1 Timothy 3:9).

So in Romans 9:1-3 Paul wrote, in essence, “My conscience witnesses to the truth that I am experiencing great pain in view of the fact that the vast majority of my own people are outside of the kingdom of God and outside of salvation, which the Jewish Messiah Jesus Christ brought about by his death and resurrection.”

Then Paul wrote, ***“My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit.”*** Not only was Paul’s conscience informed by the Scripture, but it was also influenced by the Holy Spirit of God.

So, Paul's own conscience was witness that he was experiencing great pain-continuous, incessant pain-on behalf of his Jewish brethren.

## **Content of Paul's Pain**

In Romans 9:2 Paul wrote, ***“I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.”*** That was the content of his pain. He had great sorrow, increasing, incessant, continuous pain. Why is this pain? Paul was saved and he believed in the truth that he had just proclaimed that nothing could separate him from the love of God which is in Christ. He knew he was in the kingdom of God, which is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. So, on one hand, he was experiencing great joy, but on the other, great sorrow when he thought about those outside the kingdom of God.

## **The Extent of Paul's Pain**

Paul's pain had to do with his kinsmen being outside of the kingdom of God. Who did it include? I am sure he thought of his immediate family-his father and mother and brothers and sisters and grandparents-as well as others in the tribe of Benjamin. Then he thought of the whole Israelite community, including the members of the Sanhedrin, the high priests, and all others who were opposed to the Messiah.

The extent of Paul's pain is seen in verses 3-4, where Paul uses an amazing statement, one rarely seen in the Scripture: ***“For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.”*** The word for “cursed” is anathema. So Paul writes, “I wish that I may be accursed - apo tou Christou - away from Christ.” Paul, of course, knew it would be impossible for him to be away from Christ. He just said that he was speaking in Christ and had just declared that nothing can separate a Christian from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. But his burden and pain were such that, if it were possible, he would offer himself to be accursed, if that would cause his kinsmen to come to trust in their Messiah, Jesus Christ.

If it were possible! It is not possible, and Paul understood that. God planned our salvation from eternity. That is what we believe because that is what the Scripture says. Paul already made that statement in the first line of Romans 9, saying, ***“I am speaking in Christ.”*** He was in Christ.

To be cursed is to be away from Christ. Do you feel pain like Paul did when you see your mother and father and uncle and children outside of Christ? Do you feel that pain? This scripture instructs us about how we should deal with those who are related to us, beginning with our nuclear family. Paul was willing to go to hell, if it were possible, so that his kinsmen may be saved. He clearly understood hell as well as heaven.

### **Concern for the Souls of Men**

Paul was not the first person in the Bible who expressed this type of concern for the Jewish people. In Exodus 32 Moses was meeting with God on the mountain when God told him he wanted him to go down because the people of Israel had turned away from God. In Moses' absence they had made for themselves a golden calf, which they were worshiping. God was angry with his people and told Moses, ***“Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation”*** (v. 10). Moses declined the offer, telling God they were his people, and if he were going to destroy them, it would put God's glory on the line. Then he pleaded with God not to destroy them.

Then Moses came down and saw the terrible behavior of God's people. Through the Levites, God killed about three thousand people for their crime, and beginning in verse 30 we read, ***“The next day Moses said to the people, ‘You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.’ So, Moses went back to the Lord and said, ‘Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin-but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written,’”*** meaning the book of life. In other words, Moses was telling God, “Send me to hell instead of these people. Save your people, the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

Look at Jesus himself. He who was greater than Moses experienced great pain in behalf of the people of the people of Israel. In Luke 19:41 we read, ***“As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it.”*** Do you mourn spiritually for your grandfather, grandmother, uncle, cousin, and mother? You know them; they are not Christians. When you tell them about the singular way of salvation, they don't like it. But here we see Jesus weeping and saying, ***“If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace-but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.”*** Jesus is weeping.

### **God 's Concern for Our Souls**

Jesus came to fulfill the law, positively and negatively. Jesus said, ***“The Son of Man has come, not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life as a ransom for many.”***

In Galatians 3 Paul gives us a profound interpretation of the cross. When we transgress God's law, the law curses us; the wages of sin is death, and eternal damnation. So, Paul writes in verse 13, ***“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’”***

God the Father did not accept the offers of Paul or Moses. What benefit could come out of the death of either of them? They could not save themselves, let alone anyone else, because they, like all people, are sinners. Moses or Paul cannot atone for anyone's sin, let alone his own. But Jesus, the eternal Son of God who knew no sin, became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God. He was accused and became anathema in our place.

### **Are You Concerned for Souls?**

What about you? Do you feel great pain and continuous sorrow as Paul did, as Moses did, and, ultimately, as Jesus did for others??