

Rejecting the Silver Spoon

Chosen...Before Time Began – Part II

Romans 9:4-5

Introduction

Please turn in your Bible to the book of Romans. In our last discussion, I began preaching from Romans, chapter 9, and found in that text, by the way, a wonderful platform for any politician to run on. Maybe those who serve us can build this into their next speech. Look at Romans, chapter 9, verse 1a,

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying . . .

Isn't that a great statement? That is a distinctive to serve with – especially in our country, right?

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit,

In other words, “I tell the truth, I don't lie, and the Spirit of God is my witness!”

Wouldn't that be great to be known for? In fact, this is not only good for any politician, it is good for any preacher as well. This land has its fill of lying, scheming, money-grubbing preachers.

This verse is good for politicians, preachers, and every citizen to live by – especially believers; especially the church. As believers, we should be known as people who not only follow the truth, but tell the truth.

Jeremiah talked about religious corruption in his day, when he spoke, in chapter 8, verse 8b, of

. . . the lying pen of the scribes . . .

Ezekiel also warned about the lying prophets, with their fake visions and deceitful, self-serving prophecy. In chapter 13, verse 3, he warned,

. . . Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing.

Paul was so concerned that he would be lumped in with all the deceitful prophets, fake visionaries, and corrupt scribes before him that he said,

. . . I am not lying . . .

This was not the first time he had declared something similar. He wrote:

- in II Corinthians 11:31,

The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, . . . knows that I am not lying.

- in Galatians 1:20b,

. . . I assure you before God that I am not lying.

- in I Timothy 2:7a, to his young preaching student,

For . . . I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) . . .

When Paul began writing this passage in Romans, chapter 9, he was so convinced that people would think he was lying that he declares his honesty more than at any other time. He calls to his defense:

- the Lord Jesus;
- his own conscience;
- the Holy Spirit.

As we previously discussed, the nation Israel would have a hard time believing Paul as he continues in verses 2 and 3 to share his burden. He says that he would be willing to be accursed from Christ; that is, experience “anathema,” or divine, eternal condemnation, if only his kinsmen, the nation Israel, would follow Jesus Christ, their true Messiah.

What follows next from Paul is an exhortation for the Jewish people to recognize their unique position and blessing from God. The Jews would be wondering if Paul thought they were now abandoned by God; that God would no longer keep His covenant with them regarding the city and the throne and the kingdom.

So, in the next verse, verse 4, Paul sort of unpacks Israel’s identity and history and then, reminds them that God loves them and has a special plan for the nation, still. You could say that the nation Israel had been “born with a silver spoon in its mouth,” so to speak, or with great privileges and advantages.

Paul specifically lists eight things that show how much God blessed the nation Israel. These are eight wonderful privileges that belonged to Israel.

I did not know whether I should cover this in eight sermons, because they are such rich gems full of truth, or to cover all of this in one sermon with eight points. I opted for one sermon with eight points. And all the people said, “Amen!”

Actually, I am going to give two main points. All other points will fall under these. In the main points Paul provides:

1. An irrefutable summary of Israel’s divine blessings.

This cannot be argued against. No one would ever deny the truth of this summary – Jew or Gentile. This is truly an irrefutable summary of Israel’s divine blessings.

2. An irrefutable statement of Christ’s divine being.

Paul writes one of the strongest statements regarding the deity of Christ that you will ever find in the Bible.

An Irrefutable Summary of Israel’s Divine Blessings

Let us begin with Paul’s irrefutable summary of Israel’s divine blessings.

The first blessing – Israel has a special position with God

1. The first blessing is that the nation Israel has a special position with God.

Look at verses 3 through 4a.

For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belong the adoption as sons . . .

This is the only time that Paul ever refers to the adoption of Israel. In fact, this is the only time in the entire New Testament that the Israelites are said to be the adopted sons of God.

In the Old Testament, however, there are many verses that refer to Israel as a nation being the child of God. For example:

In Exodus 4:22b, God commanded Moses to say to Pharaoh,

. . . Israel is My son, My firstborn.

In Hosea 11:1, the Lord said,

When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.

Paul is simply re-stating the fact that the nation of Israel was still God’s chosen nation.

Now, do not misunderstand, salvation has always been on an individual basis; one person cannot be saved by another person’s faith. So, just because you were an Israelite, did not mean you had a personal, saving relationship with God. Paul is not speaking in the sense of personal salvation in verse 4, he is speaking in the sense of national election – that God has sovereignly bestowed His special calling, covenant, blessing, and protection upon this nation, [for His redemptive purposes].ⁱ

The second blessing – Israel has experienced the special presence of God

2. The second blessing is that not only does Israel have a special position with God, it has experienced the special presence of God.

Paul goes on in verse 4, to mention that Israel has also received,

. . . the glory . . .

Paul is referring to the glory of God, or the “doxa”. This word, no doubt in this context, referred to the visible symbol of the presence of God. For instance:

- It first appeared at the time of the exodus from Egypt, when it was a great cloud separating the fleeing nation from the pursuing army.
- The cloud guided them during the years of their wandering, protecting them from the sun by day and turning into a pillar of fire at night, which would serve as light and warmth.
- Later, the glory descended on Mount Sinai, along with thunder and lightning, as the law was given to Moses.
- Then later, it filled the tabernacle and rested over the Ark of the Covenant.
- Still later, the glory settled down as an intense light above the Mercy Seat between the wings of the cherubim.
- Finally, it departed and returned to heaven in response to the escalating sins of the people.ⁱⁱ

Paul says, “You, as a nation, had this incredible blessing of God’s unmistakable, irrefutable presence.”

What a blessing! Can you imagine having a cloud representing God’s presence as you walked through your day? If you do not know which way to turn and the cloud turns left, you know to turn left. If you do not know which college to attend and the cloud leads you to a college; if you do not know whether to go to Duke or NC State and the cloud consistently goes to NC State . . . right?! If you do not know which house to buy and the cloud hovers over the roof of the one God wants you to have, you know which one to buy. If you do not know the answer on that multiple choice test question and a little wisp of cloud hovers over the letter “A” . . .! You never have to wonder where God is – you can just point to the cloud.

What a blessing the nation Israel experienced. In their failure to walk by faith, God graciously allowed them to walk by sight.

The third blessing – Israel has the covenants with God

3. The third blessing is that Israel has the covenants with God.

Paul continues in verse 4 to say that Israel also has,

. . . the covenants . . .

God gave covenants, which can be translated “agreements”. This was what God would expect of His people and what God’s people could expect of Him.

Through Moses, there was the covenant of Law. Through David, there was the covenant of an eternal kingdom and throne. And there were many more.

One author pointed out that, “no aspect in Israel’s history pointed out their uniqueness as the recipients of redemptive revelation any more than these covenants.”ⁱⁱⁱ

This blessing could be worded in this way, *Israel had received the promises of God.*

Paul implies that God has not abandoned His covenant with Israel – though for a season, Israel as a nation, has been set aside as Christ fulfills a new covenant with His universal church. However, these covenants or promises that specifically deal with Israel – the coming kingdom, the coming throne, the promise of a New Jerusalem and a restored throne of David – are promises that God intends to keep.

The fourth blessing – Israel had received the Law

4. The fourth blessing is that Israel had received the Law.

Paul mentions further in verse 4 that Israel received,

. . . the giving of the Law . . .

Paul had already written, in Romans, chapter 3, verse 2b, that the advantage to being Jewish was the simple fact that the nation of Jews had been,

. . . entrusted with the oracles [very words] of God.

So, the nation of Israel,

- has a position with God;
- has experienced the presence of God;
- has received the promises from God;
- was responsible, in receiving the words of God, for propagating the character of God.

Israel failed to propagate the character of God. They hoarded the Law; they hoarded God’s message. They considered it a treasure to keep for themselves. It was theirs and theirs alone. They failed to be a blessing to the nations of the world. The reason for this was primarily because they missed the Savior, who was so clearly identified in the words of God.

However, what a blessing to have been chosen to be the recipient of the very words of God.

The fifth blessing – Israel had received the principles of approaching God

5. The fifth blessing is that Israel had received the principles of approaching God.

Paul adds in verse 4 that the nation had received, . . . *the temple service* . . .

The temple service refers to the entire system of temple worship with its sacrifices, priesthood, ceremony, and principles of atonement that clearly pointed to the final sacrifice of atonement, the Great High priest, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

The sixth blessing – Israel had been given prophetic truth from God

6. The sixth blessing is that the nation Israel had been given prophetic truth from God.

Paul, at the end of verse 4, mentions, . . . *the promises*,

Peter preached about the promised Messiah – the prophecies which had indeed come true. Paul also preached about the promise made to the fathers. These are prophetic statements about the coming Messiah.

Israel had been given these prophecies. And, even while they were occurring and after they had happened, to this day, the nation refuses to see how these prophecies intersect with stunning accuracy in the person of Jesus Christ. These include:

- He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2);
- He would suffer (Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 53);
- His hands and feet would be pierced (Psalm 22:16);
- He would be resurrected (Psalm 16:10);
- He, the Savior, would be a Jew (Genesis 12:1-3);
- He, the Savior, would come from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10);
- He, the Messiah, would be directly descended from the family of David (II Samuel 7:1-17);
- He, the Messiah, would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14);
- When He was crucified, His executioners would cast lots for His clothing (Psalm 22:18).

There are Jewish men and women who have come to faith in Christ. We call them Messianic Jews or completed Jews. Imagine the double blessing of that! We have a number in our church fellowship who have believed in Jesus Christ as their Messiah. Some of them came to faith after attending this fellowship. I remember one gentleman who came to our new members class, the “Greenhouse” class, just to find out for himself what we believed. Through that class, he came to believe in Jesus Christ.

The seventh blessing – Israel had descended from godly patriarchs

7. The seventh blessing is that Israel had descended from godly patriarchs according to the plan of God.

Paul writes of another blessing Israel has experienced in verse 5a of Romans, chapter 9,

whose are the fathers . . .

In other words, “You have the blessing of heritage – men of faith, like Abraham, Moses, and David.”

Have you ever met someone whose grandfather fought in the civil war? If you visit them, you will probably hear about it.

I have been told that General Sherman and his army camped out on our very church property – somewhere on these forty acres – on his way back from burning Atlanta, Georgia. I do not know if it is true, but my wife, Marsha, is from Atlanta and did not like that story. In fact, she thought of moving her membership when we built on the property and I had to talk her out of it!

Some of you have a story of godly heritage; of a lineage of godliness and service; of a grandfather or a great grandmother who walked with God. My father told me some time ago, that my older brother, who is also a pastor, and I are the eighth generation of pastors or missionaries in our family line. Eight generations in a row! And now, our sons are planning on preparing for the ministry as they head to Bible college this fall. They know they will be the ninth generation. If they choose to do something else, by the way, that will be perfectly fine with us – there is no pressure. As far as I am concerned, we are already beyond the number of perfection anyway!

Perhaps you are starting that godly heritage; you are the first generation to follow after Jesus Christ.

Frankly, I think that is more exciting than being in the eighth generation.

Paul says to Israel, “You can talk about your family tree. You are related to people who have demonstrated great faith in God.”

The interesting thing is that it did the current generation little good.

Paul now moves to the climax of Israel’s blessing as a nation.

The eighth blessing – Israel had delivered through them the promised Messiah, the Son of God

8. The eighth blessing is that the nation Israel had delivered through them the promised Messiah, the Son of God.

Notice verse 5b,

... and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh ...

In other words, the very Messiah came from Israel’s family line! The Son of God, the Christ, the anointed One happens to have Jewish blood flowing through His veins.

It was through Israel that the promised Redeemer would come, who happened to be Son of God.

This is the ultimate prize! Jesus, the God-man, is a Jew! The Messiah came from Israel’s family!

You can talk about Moses and Abraham and your grandfather and your great grandmother and the eighth and ninth generation – big deal. The nation Israel had delivered through them the promised Messiah, the Son of God!

Now, do you know what Paul does at this point? He just starts to celebrate! He begins to wax eloquent about the Messiah. In other words, “Forget about the nation for a moment. There is nothing all that exciting about our advantages and our blessings. Let’s talk about Jesus the Christ!”

Paul just stops and begins to worship! It is as if the love of his life was mentioned and he cannot help but stop and start talking about his Savior.

In doing this, Paul actually says something really stunning! This is the second main point that Paul makes in this text.

An Irrefutable Statement of Christ’s Divine Being

Paul delivers an irrefutable statement of Christ’s divine being.

Paul writes in verse 5b of Romans, chapter 9,

... and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

There is quite an argument about this text. One commentator said that the interpretation of Romans 9:5 has probably been discussed at greater length than that of any other verse in the New Testament.^{iv}

Part of the reason for this stems from the fact that the early Greek manuscripts did not have punctuation. As a result, liberal translators placed a period after the word “all” and thus, the remainder of verse 5 is a simple doxology.

It is interesting, however, that without exception in scripture, both in the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament, a doxology always placed the word “blessed” *before* the name of God. But in this verse, Paul [does something found nowhere else in scripture] he uses the reverse form, God blessed, indicating beyond a doubt that the apostle intentionally equated Christ with God.^v

Look at your text and circle a few words. Circle the word “God” and draw a line back to its antecedent, which includes the words “who is”. Then circle these words “who is” and draw a line to their antecedent, which is the word “Christ”. Paul is clearly saying, “Christ who is God.”

Now, usually in the New Testament, the name God, or “theos,” is reserved as a reference to God the Father, Jesus as God the Son, and the Holy Spirit as God’s Spirit. The writers of scripture understood the existence of the Trinity and usually distinguished them in some way under the influence of the Holy Spirit. So, when they did not distinguish them, it was with the intention of shoring up the defense of the deity of any one of them. Thus, Jesus Christ was not just an additional God, but God Himself; God incarnate or God in the flesh. In other words, “Christ who is God blessed forever.”

Does Paul not simply agree with the testimony of scripture – as in John, chapter 1, verse 1,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Does Paul not agree with Thomas, who confessed his faith when he said to the risen Lord, as recorded in John, chapter 20, verse 28b,

... My Lord and my God!

Did not Paul challenge the Ephesian elders, in Acts, chapter 20, verse 28b, to faithfully,

. . . shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Did not Paul write to Titus, in chapter 2, verse 13, and say,

looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus

In Paul's moment of worship and celebration of Christ, in Romans, chapter 9, verse 5b, we find one of the clearest, most irrefutable statements regarding the deity of Christ's being.

Christ who is God, blessed forever. Amen.

Observations

Let me tie up our study with two observations.

It is possible to have privileges from God and not be a child of God

1. First, it is possible to have privileges from God and not be a child of God.

Israel had been born, so to speak, with a silver spoon in its mouth. They were incredibly privileged – graced with God's presence and promise. But realize that . . .

- in spite of their position,
- in spite of the promises,
- in spite of the prophecy,
- in spite of the principles,
- in spite of the patriarchs,
- in spite of the promised Redeemer being from among them,

. . . they rejected the Savior. Israel rejected the silver spoon of advantage from God. For them, it had accomplished nothing.

It is possible to experience the privileges of God and not possess the person of God

2. Secondly, it is possible to experience the privileges of God and yet, not possess the person of God.

Ask yourself, "What has God has given me? What silver spoon has God graced me with?"

Whether Gentile or Jew, we are all the recipient of irrefutable benefits. For example:

- we have food in our pantry and a closet full of clothes;

- we can get a drink of water any time we want;
- we probably did not have to walk to church;
- we have been raised in a nation built on Judeo-Christian formulas and principles;
- we probably have our own copy of the very words of God;
- we have heard the promises of God;
- we have read and heard, even again today, the prophecies of the Redeemer.

We have all, in some measure, been born with a silver spoon in our mouth.

However, have you, like Israel, rejected the silver spoon – ignored the blessings of God and refused the Savior? What have you done with Jesus Christ who is God, blessed forever?

Have you ever seen the bumper sticker that says, "Try Jesus". Maybe you have thought of doing that. Maybe you are doing that right now.

My friend, you do not try Jesus. There is no such thing as "trying Jesus". Jesus is not:

- a sweater you put on when it is cold and then discard when it gets hot;
- a new recipe you try to see if He tastes better than the other spiritual flavors you have sampled;
- some spiritual experiment you are hoping will pan out and make life better;
- someone who will keep your problems from ever getting out of hand;
- someone to check in with now and then as you try to salve your guilty conscience;
- something you add to your bag of religious beliefs – He does not share space; He does not share His glory with Krishna or with Allah.

It is not Jesus and every other god, it is Jesus, who is God, blessed forever, amen! It is not Jesus and every other way, it is Jesus who is the only way, God, blessed forever, amen! You do not try Him, you trust in Him!

J. Sidlow Baxter once wrote,

Our Lord's message was Himself. He did not come merely to preach a Gospel; He Himself is that Gospel. He did not come merely to give bread; He said, "I am the bread." He did not come merely to shed light; He said, "I am the light." He did not come merely to

point the way; He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, except by Me."

Jesus Christ is over all things, God who is blessed forever and ever.

May I ask you a question? Has the silver spoon of advantage and blessing – the goodness of God and common grace of God – drawn you to Jesus Christ as God, blessed forever? Or, do you refuse to believe; refuse to acknowledge Him or thank Him; refuse to give Him your heart?

Maybe you are a Christian – you have even more significant, eternal blessings from God. Perhaps you are taking the blessings for granted. Perhaps you are even beginning to demand that He deliver something more. Maybe you have begun to wander away from

your Lord who does not seem to be delivering what you want.

Will you enter into the praise of Paul that we read in Romans, chapter 9, verse 5, as you re-acknowledge the sovereign, divine being of Jesus who is God – your living God – who is over all things? Even though your heart may be heavy with some burden, will you, by faith in this One who is over all things, God, blessed forever, thank Him for what He has given you and trust Him for what He has not? Will you trust in Him, even when He does not deliver?

That kind of trust will lead you to be able to utter this kind of statement – whether it is through shouts of joy or tears of sorrow,

My Lord Jesus Christ is over all things . . . He is God blessed forever and ever and ever and ever. Amen.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/2/2004 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ John MacArthur, Romans: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 1994), p. 13.

ⁱⁱ James Montgomery Boice, Romans: Volume 3 (Baker Book House, 1993), p. 1027.

ⁱⁱⁱ MacArthur, p. 14.

^{iv} Ralph Earle, Word Meanings in the New Testament (Baker Book House, 1974), p. 188.

^v MacArthur, p. 16.