

Praying for the Religious Lost

Romans 10:1-2

1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. (NKJV)

In Paul's day as in ours there were two worlds. The world of the saved and the world of the lost.

Among the world of the lost there were two worlds, the world of the religious and the non-religious or the pagan.

So it is today. The lost world is divided into the pagan and the religious.

That is why Jesus had to tell Nicodemus that unless he would be born again he would never see the kingdom of God.

That is what Paul understands personally in this passage.

It is what gave Paul a drive, a heart's desire for Israel.

For Paul was once as they still were, religious but lost.

Oh that we were of the same mind and heart.

I. My Heart's Desire and Prayer to God for Israel Is That They May Be Saved

A. This was a very strong emotion for Paul

1. This is one of the things that motivated him as a missionary.
2. A missionary without a burning desire for those to whom he preaches is a falsehood.
3. Romans 9:1-3 (NKJV) 1 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,
4. 2 Timothy 2:10 (NKJV) 10 Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

B. He devoted much time in prayer for them.

1. Why pray for those that he knew God had set aside.
2. People get all confused when it comes to God's sovereignty and human responsibility.
3. Our duty is to watch and pray, to occupy till He comes, to work the fields, to witness. God will take care of the results.

4. But if we stop thinking that God will do it without human hands then we become that unprofitable servant that will cast into outer darkness.
5. “The promise that Israel would surely be saved did not move Paul to forsake prayer. Rather, the promise that Israel would be saved was the foundation and bulwark for his prayers. Similarly, Daniel prayed fervently for release from exile (Dan. 9) precisely because God had promised to liberate Israel after seventy years (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10). The idea that one could abjure prayer since God had already predicted what would occur was foreign to Paul and Daniel. God’s promises provided the encouragement and stimulus for prayer (cf. also Schlatter 1995: 212). Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are correlative rather than antithetical. *Thomas R. Schreiner, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament – Romans, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 542.*

C. That they might be saved.

1. They thought that they were saved.
2. But as we saw they did not seek it by faith and were still lost.
3. They were lost like Paul had been lost, religious but lost.
4. He wants the to come to the same place he did when God stopped hi on the road to Damascus.
5. Jesus said that He had come to seek and to save those that were lost.

II. For I Bear Them Witness That They Have a Zeal for God

A. Israel was in a unique position.

1. They had a historical relation with God though their ancestors.
2. They were following the same laws handed down by Moses from God.
3. They were fulfilling the sacrificial system in the temple.
4. God been dealing with the nation for almost 2000 years.
5. No other people or nation had the privileges and position as they did with God.

B. They had not abandoned what they considered core principles of their faith even in the face of relentless persecution.

C. Of all the people of the world they alone had to oracles, the very words of God.

1. They had preserved these things at least in physical form.
2. They committed them to memory themselves and gave them to their

children.

3. Israel was not an illiterate people for every Jewish child was taught to read the holy scriptures.

D. Paul understood first had what Israel thought they had according to the flesh.

1. Philippians 3:4-7 (NKJV) 4 though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.

III. But Not According to Knowledge

A. John MacArthur spends almost the whole section covering this point.

B. Here Paul does not mean religious knowledge.

1. But he means saving knowledge.

2. The knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. “What grieved Paul most was his realization of the fact that their present religious position was the result of a hardness of heart that came from the rejection of truth. *Donald Grey Barnhouse, Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans As a Point of Departure – Volume 8: God’s Covenants, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 62.*

C. But they did not have knowledge because they had rejected God.

1. “In other words, ignorance of God does not bring rejection of Him, but rather rejection of God brings spiritual ignorance of Him. *John MacArthur, MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Romans 9-16, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 57.*

D. There are so many in the Christian church today who have not the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

1. 2 Timothy 2:25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,

If anyone could ever have achieved salvation by his own efforts, it was Martin Luther. In 1505, when he was twenty-one years old, Luther abandoned a promising career in law and entered the monastery of the Augustine hermits at Erfurt. As he later said, this was not to study academic theology but to save his soul.

In those days the monastic orders prescribed ways by which the seeking soul could find God, and

Luther, with the determination and strength that characterized his entire life, gave himself rigorously to these tasks. He fasted and prayed. He devoted himself to menial work. Above all, he practiced penance, confessing his sins, even the most trivial, for hours on end until his superiors wearied of his exercise and ordered him to stop until he had committed some sin worth confessing. Luther's piety gained him a reputation for being the most exemplary of monks.

Later he wrote to the Duke of Saxony, "I was indeed a pious monk and followed the rules of my order more strictly than I can express. If ever a monk could obtain heaven by his monkish works, I should certainly have been entitled to it. Of this all the friars who have known me can testify. If it had continued much longer, I should have carried my mortification even to death, by means of my watchings, prayers, reading and other labors."

Yet Luther found no peace through these exercises.

The monkish wisdom of the day instructed him to satisfy God's demand for righteousness by doing good works. "But what works?" thought Luther. "What works can come from a heart like mine? How can I stand before the holiness of my Judge with works polluted in their very source?"

It was not until John Staupitz, the Vicar-General of the Congregation and Luther's wise spiritual father, set him to studying the Bible that Luther realized what the difficulty was. He was trying to earn salvation by works of human righteousness, when the righteousness we need is not human righteousness at all. It is divine righteousness, and this can become ours only if God gives it to us, which he does in the gospel.

Luther had been seeking righteousness by means of human works, when what he needed was to accept God's righteousness by simple faith and therefore stop trying to work for it.

James Montgomery Boice, Romans: God and History, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991-), 1132-1134.

Psalm 50:16-21 (NKJV)

16 But to the wicked God says: "What right have you to declare My statutes, Or take My covenant in your mouth, 17 Seeing you hate instruction And cast My words behind you? 18 When you saw a thief, you consented with him, And have been a partaker with adulterers. 19 You give your mouth to evil, And your tongue frames deceit. 20 You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son. 21 These things you have done, and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you; But I will rebuke you, And set them in order before your eyes.

“Israel's rejection by God was not due to arbitrary divine election, as though He had withheld His grace from His chosen people. The entire Jewish Scriptures are a testimony to God's calling Israel to Himself. He called her over and over again—through the law, the prophets, and the other sacred writings. Of all people on earth, Israel was entrusted with the very oracles of God (Rom. 3:2). She was therefore uniquely responsible for her rejection by God, who made every effort to bring her to Himself.

“As with the rest of the world (cf. Rom. 1:18-21), Israel rejected God before God rejected Israel. The tragedy in the history of Israel was squandering the immeasurable privilege of having directly received the very Word of God—first His written Word in the Scriptures, and even more tragically the living Word, God's only Son, Jesus Christ.

John MacArthur, MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Romans 9-16, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 60.

“Personally, I would roll all three of these into one definition and say, with the next verse, that the righteousness of God is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans As a Point of Departure – Volume 8: God's Covenants, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 63.

“If we read our verse this way, it can be paraphrased: "They, being ignorant of the Lord Jesus Christ and going about to establish some other method of acceptance and approach to God, have not submitted themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ."

Donald Grey Barnhouse, Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans As a Point of Departure – Volume 8: God's Covenants, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 63.

“Nothing but the natural alienation of their minds from God prevents those who possess the Scriptures from understanding the way of salvation.

Robert Haldane, Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans, WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "CHAPTER X" ROMANS 10:1-21".

Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NKJV)

23 Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; 24 But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD.