

Romans - Commentaries by Edward Denny

Miscellaneous Papers, Israel's Twofold Failure, and God's Twofold Mercy. (9:1-13)

ROMANS 9:1-13.ROM 9:1-13

"Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?"—Isa. 49:21.

THE APOSTLE'S SORROW, BLESSING PERTAINING TO ISRAEL.

"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart (for I did, or used to, wish that myself were accursed, or separated, from Christ) for, or on account of, my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen."

(Ver. 1-5.)

(Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect.)

THE TWOFOOLD CAUSE OF THE APOSTLE'S SORROW.

A { For they are not all ISRAEL, which are OF ISRAEL:

B { Neither, because they are the ' SEED OF ABRAHAM, are they all CHILDREN."

(Ver. 6, 7.)

THE TWO CASES IN WHICH THE WORD OF GOD TAKES EFFECT

B- " But, IN ISAAC SHALL THY SEED BE CALLED. That is, They which are the children of the FLESH, these are not the children of GOD: but the children of the PROMISE are counted for the seed. For this is the word of the promise, At this time will I come and SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON.

(Ver. 7-9.)

And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to ELECTION might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The ELDER shall serve the YOUNGER. As it is written, JACOB HAVE I LOVED, BUT ESAU HAVE I HATED."

(Ver. 10-13.)

BEFORE entering upon any attempt to explain the above passage, with a view to arrive at the apostle's meaning therein, we will for a moment divest it of all that which we believe to be parenthetical, or merely accessory to the sense; and read it as follows:—

" I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my" heart, for, or because of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children."

Here, observe, we have two distinct points:

1. THE APOSTLE'S SORROW BECAUSE OF HIS BRETHREN.

2. THE TWOFOOLD CAUSE OF HIS SORROW.

With regard to the former, we here find how heavy his heart was, how continual his sorrow, at the thought of the lost condition of Israel, his kinsmen according to the flesh; and that for two reasons, as we shall presently see. In the meantime, however, we turn to notice one point in connection therewith, namely, the import of that sentence which, on referring to the whole passage quoted from Rom. 9 at the head of this paper, it will be seen that we have ventured to treat as a parenthesis, and also to give a new rendering thereof, viz., FOR I DID, OR USED TO WISH THAT MYSELF WERE ACCURSED FROM CHRIST."To this, it is likely, objection will be offered by many: in order therefore to clear the way before we enter upon our proposed. explanation, we beg to remind the reader that *ηύχομην* being the imperfect tense, the true rendering is, not" I could wish," according to the authorized version, but "I did, or I used to, wish." This, be it observed, is unquestionably right, as all are agreed who are competent to form a judgment thereon. And now, having settled this point, let us consider the passage, and see whether our thought as to its parenthetical character is as open to objection as may by some be supposed. Our explanation is as follows: The apostle, as we have seen, is here mourning over the sad state of his people, his brethren and kinsmen; and in doing so his thoughts naturally revert to himself and his former condition. Ignorant of his need as a sinner, he had willingly lived without Christ, and therefore without God, in the

world. This touches his heart; this deepens his compassion for them; and so he breaks off, and in a parenthesis gives vent to his feelings, and says, "FOR I DID, OR I USED TO, WISH THAT MYSELF WERE ACCURSED, OR SEPARATED, FROM CHRIST." He did not of course know that to be separated from Christ was to be accursed; but he has made the discovery, and hence this strong exclamation, this expressive parenthesis. This is quite natural, often indeed the way with ourselves in similar circumstances: when we think of poor perishing sinners, the next thing that we do is, to remember that such we formerly were; and this serves to heighten, to give greater emphasis and point to, our compassion for them.

Such then is the interpretation we offer; and we ask, Is not this simple and natural? More consistent, surely, than that which is commonly held; which represents the apostle as wishing that he might be accursed from Christ for his people: a thing which we venture to say never entered his thoughts, however deep his affection for them; and which, supposing it could possibly happen, would never avail for the deliverance and blessing of those over whom he was mourning. Even Moses, with whom Paul is often compared in this passage, never surely meant to say that he was willing to lose his soul, to be accursed for his people. It was, we believe, in his official character that he spoke of himself as he did, even as the lawgiver and leader of Israel; and in this sense he asked, sooner than that God should not forgive them, that he should be blotted out of His book. (See Ex. 32:32.) And now as to the second point; namely, the twofold cause of his sorrow.

1. THEY ARE NOT ALL ISRAEL, WHICH ARE OF ISRAEL:

2. NEITHER, BECAUSE THEY ARE THE SEED OF ABRAHAM, ARE THEY ALL CHILDREN.

As to the former, Israelites born they were; but not Israelites either in spirit or in heart. Instead of prevailing with God and with men, as their father Jacob had done, and consequently received the new name-of ISRAEL, Satan had prevailed over them, and caused them to fall.

As to the latter, they were the seed of Abraham, it is true, according to the flesh; but still they were not Abraham's children. To be this, in the divine sense, they must have Abraham's faith: and this they had not; the evidence of which was their rejection of Christ, the promised Seed, the Deliverer of Israel.

There is however comfort in the midst of this ruin, a ray of light in the darkness. God, he well knew, had. AN ELECTION, a people, among them: so eager therefore is he to find relief in this thought, that before he proceeds to speak of the twofold cause of his grief, of which we have spoken above, we find him breaking off for a moment, and in a PARENTHESIS anticipatively touching on what he speaks of at large when he comes to tell of God's dealings in grace with His people. "NOT AS THOUGH THE WORD OF GOD HAD TAKEN NONE EFFECT," he says, comforting his heart as he approaches the sorrowful thought of Israel's failure. This is surely according to Him who, as His eye looks down on the thousands who are living without God in the world, singles out from among them those blessed and chosen ones on whom His own name is called.

And now we pass on to the cheering part of our passage; that which, as I have just said, the apostle briefly and parenthetically anticipates; a twofold exhibition of grace; an exception, as we shall see, to the twofold cause of his sorrow.

It is as follows: First, "BUT, IN ISAAC SHALL THY SEED BE CALLED; that is, they which are the children of "the FLESH, these are not the children of God: but the" children of the promise are counted for the seed. For "this is the word of promise, At this time will I come," and SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON."This, observe, is at once connected, and at the same time contrasted, with that which stands just before it; namely, the second statement of Israel's failure, viz., "Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children." Here the meaning is, that as in the case of Abraham's two sons Ishmael and Isaac, the one who was born according to nature, or the will of the flesh, was not owned of God; while he who was born according to promise was the elect seed: so Israel hereafter, regenerate Israel, the nation under the new covenant, will be accepted and owned as the people of God. And so also we find in chapter 11., there are individuals now at this present time out of the nation; the unregenerate ones, those still lying in the deadness and darkness of nature, are rejected; while those who are looking to Christ, the true Child of promise, are children of promise themselves, the people of God. That there were such even then, a believing remnant among them, with whom the word took effect; this was the thing that gave relief to the heart of the apostle, that filled him with joy. Israel as a nation may have stumbled; but notwithstanding this, how many beloved ones are among them whom he will yet meet in heaven!

Secondly:

"And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to ELECTION might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The ELDER shall serve the YOUNGER. As it is written, JACOB HAVE I LOVED, BUT ESAU HAVE I HATED."

This, observe, like the former, is connected by contrast with something noticed before; namely, with the first view of Israel's failure; viz., "For they are not all ISRAEL which are OF ISRAEL;" meaning, that as of Isaac's two sons Esau and Jacob, one, namely the younger, was chosen; while the other, the firstborn, he to whom according to nature the birthright, and at the same time the blessing, belonged, was rejected: so is it now as to individual Jews: "They are not all Israel which are of Israel;" it is the elect, and the elect only, those who are trusting, not to works, but to God's grace in Christ, to whom the blessing pertains. Here again there is comfort: there will be a remnant hereafter, and there is a remnant even now according to the election of grace, over whom his large and loving heart can rejoice. Thus then, on reviewing what has been said, we find that the two passages in question teach us two truths, distinct from each other and yet closely connected; that in which Abraham and Isaac are named having relation to sonship; while the other, wherein Isaac and his two sons Jacob and Esau appear, bears on election.

"O groundless deeps! O love beyond degree! Th' offended dies to set th' offender free."

Quarles' Emblems.

AT the time of the late war, a young man, a husband, and at the same time a father, was called to serve in the ranks, upon which a fellow countryman of his who was unmarried, presented himself, saying, that he having no wife or children dependent on him, his life was of less importance than that of the other, and that he was willing to serve in his stead. Such an offer, under the circumstances, was not likely to be rejected; he accordingly took the place of substitute for his friend, went forth into the field, and fell in battle.

After this, there was another conscription, and the survivor, through an oversight on the part of the Government, was again required to serve. Now however he had a plea in his favor which at first he had not. How do you suppose he answered the summons? He answered it thus—"I AM DEAD—I HAVE LOST MY LIFE IN SERVING MY COUNTRY, AND SHE HAS NO FURTHER CLAIM UPON ME:" and so it actually was, he had died in the person of his substitute, and hence, a living man as he was, he could reckon himself to be dead, and therefore exempted from exposing his life in the field.

So is it with us whose hope is in Christ. We reckon ourselves to be dead. And why? Because He, the Son of God, has died in our stead, because the penalty due to us, has been borne by our Surety. (See Rom. 6:11.) On the cross He was made sin, forsaken of God: all, all to satisfy the justice of Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, who required that sin should meet its due punishment. This, and this alone, is our plea. By faith we identify ourselves with Him who first identified Himself with us, so that we realize ourselves to be dead—dead to sin, in two ways, dead to it both judicially and morally, simply because, in the person of our Substitute, we have suffered, and can therefore say with the apostle, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20.)

And now how is this? Has every one a right to speak thus of himself? No, in no way, we answer. No one can do so, but the TRUE BELIEVER, HE WHO WITH THE HEART BELIEVES UNTO RIGHTEOUSNESS. He who by the Spirit is united to Christ, who lives, because He lives, who is alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord, he alone can speak of himself as dead, as having the old man crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth he should not serve sin. (See Rom. 6:6.)

Such is the position of the believer, though often, unhappily, through weakness of faith, he cannot speak of his state with the full confidence that he is entitled to do. But let him only look away from himself, and cast his eye upon Christ, and it will be otherwise with him. Let him, in the case of the young man, who gave that remarkable answer, when called to risk his life in the field, simply realize the fact that another has died in his stead, and that consequently he is dead, and he will be perfectly fearless; no judgment, no wrath, he will feel, can reach him. Identified, as he is in resurrection, with Him in whom the Father is well pleased, the sufferings of that infinitely worthy One are imputed to him, as well as His worthiness. This is the ground of his confidence, hence he knows himself to be, not only delivered from death, but also entitled to perfect, infinite happiness, in "THE DAY" when Christ shall reap the reward of His work; of that devotedness which brought Him down from His true home above, into the midst of the darkness and desolation of this sorrowful world; which caused Him, in the likeness of sinful flesh, to give His life a ransom 'for the lost and unworthy. (See Rom. 8:1-4.)

Bible Treasury: Volume N13, Romans 1:1-23, Address on (1:1-23)

It is not my intention to take up the opening verses so much of the chapter, nor indeed the doctrine of the Epistle with which we are familiar, in setting forth the righteousness of God and the means of justification by faith, although one may find it convenient to say a word on these latter, but my mind is centered on verse 16—the stability of the gospel and its power.

The opening verses show us the gospel as "concerning His Son" (verse 3) and giving the Savior's descent from David, so fulfilling the promise of God to David. Very beautiful it is to see that the key note of the gospel is the fulfillment of promise. There is no give and take in the gospel, no exchange, as commonly thought that in return for faith God gives salvation. No, it is the fulfillment of God's promise not only to David's Son to sit on His throne, but the Seed of Abraham in whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed. But the apostle says, "I am not ashamed." Was there anything in his day to produce a feeling of shame? When the apostle was deserted by all, he might have thought he was linked with a very poor cause. John the Baptist had felt so. All the multitude had gone out to hear him preach, but when cast into prison, his heart failed him, and he sent his disciples to say, "Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another." What a contrast to the bold stand he had taken at the Jordan when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," and then, to his disciples, "Behold the Lamb of God"! Presenting His great work, he then draws attention to the Person who should accomplish it!

The apostle had a very varied experience, and he too found himself in a Roman prison but not at this time. He had purposed going to Rome, and I think we may gather how God overrules all for our good and His own glory. We should never have had a treatise such as this if he had not been hindered in his journey to Rome. And it brings out his interest in a people he had never seen, we know how our interest increases with those we come in contact with, but here is the love of God shed abroad in the heart of His servant, toward those he had never seen. This is very beautiful. It was his special commission to go to the Gentiles, but there is something more here—the deep yearning of the evangelist in the apostle—for He sums up all the gifts in this vessel, a very rare thing. The evangelist's gift causes him to stir about and go to the unconverted; and the more fish he catches, the more he wants to catch. So when the Lord called Peter from his fishing to become a fisher of men, he also became an evangelist as well as an apostle. But as far as we may gather Peter came behind the apostle Paul in his mission. "I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I but the grace of God that was with me." Gift is capable of development. The talent must be used if the one talent is to become five, and the more we use the gift the more it increases. Now the apostle shows a true pastoral character as well. This epistle was addressed to saints, those "set apart" and "called saints" by God's grace, just as he was called on the road to Damascus as an apostle and a saint too and it was as saints he wished to establish them. It is altogether fictitious to suppose that there are any successors of the apostles. A man who goes to an unexplored part may be called so, in a sense, but not in the strictly scriptural sense, "some apostles," Eph. 4.

But the apostle's object was that those who came under his ministry should be established. Because I have peace with God it does not follow I am well grounded in the faith; so whether it is Peter or Paul, both endeavor to establish and encourage souls, 2 Pet. 1:12. Rom. 1:11.

The Lord Jesus had spoken of shame. He knew the tendency of our hearts when He said, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and My words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed," etc. Luke 9:26. No doubt it was addressed to Jews at that time, but the principle always holds good; so He puts the danger of shame as well as of fear. John the Baptist thought he might have made a mistake: his thought was fear, not shame.

The word "gospel" is the Saxon for glad tidings, but the gospel of the kingdom means the glad tidings of a coming kingdom, though this would remain in abeyance for a long time while the King is in heaven; but the sowing and the reaping would follow, and those He was addressing would shine forth in the kingdom of their Father, Matt. 13:43, but the Lord did not say then that those who believe are now translated into the kingdom of His Son, Col. 1:13. Yet that gospel of the kingdom was nothing to be ashamed of. But the disciples thought it, the kingdom in glory, was near at hand and were always asking when it was to be set up, Acts. 1:6. The Lord knew all that and what tribulation and trial they would go through to enter into it, Acts 14:22, and that it would produce shame and fear. The apostle spoke of the gospel of the glory (2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Tim. 1:2). To be an apostle he must have seen the Lord, and he says "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" 1 Cor. 9:1.

In Acts 9, 22, and 26, we get a three-fold account of Saul's conversion, and in each instance there is the sense of the Lord's personal presence. He has seen a vision and the center of it is the Lord; no doubt he was also caught up into Paradise, but he would not boast of it, He received the thorn in the flesh and three times besought the Lord to remove it (2 Cor. 12). If he must boast it should be in the cross etc. (Gal. vi. 14). It was necessary to sustain the revelation he had had. There was that which it was not lawful for a man to utter. The apostle John had his revelation, and he was enabled to tell it out with one exception (Rev. 10:4).

There is something between the Lord and the servant that is only given to the servant. It is very blessed to serve the Lord. Well may the apostle say, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel!"

"The gospel of glory" and "My gospel!" Now he goes on to show its power, power unto salvation. Each writer of the New Testament has got his special line of things, and we must not shake up all the epistles together, because there was never meant to be a harmony of these any more than of the Gospels. No harmony is wanted. It is contrast rather than comparison that is needed. But there is no discord. The Gospels give us One Person in four views, and each Epistle gives us its own line of things, looking at these from a different standpoint. The apostle John in the main looks at eternal life in his Epistle and as a present possession, taking up the instructions he had received. How we need to treasure the teaching of the apostle John now, and based upon his Gospel, when the Person of the Lord is assailed in His divinity and humanity! So the apostle shows us the truth about both. He deals with eternal life as a present fact. His teaching is abstract and positive. He records, "I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish." There is absolute security denoted in these words, and how much blessing and comfort they have been to the saints for many years! yet the enemy has not been slack in seeking to rob us of these.

Paul, in speaking of eternal life in this epistle, looks at it as something to be gained and striven after, and gained at the end. So he directs our attention to two classes of people. Chap. 1 is devoted to bringing out the gross immorality of heathendom which has given us all the corrupt religions in the world even to making a religion of sin deifying their very lusts. Then he takes up that which was not exactly religious. There was a class of people who had seen the folly of making a religion of their sin, and yet they did similar things themselves—this he brings out in chap. 2:6. "God will render to every man according to his works." That is the subject of judgment, whether of the nations in Matt. 25; or at the great white throne, in Rev. 20; or of the judgment seat of Christ in 2 Corinthians 5. Every one shall receive the things done in the body. So it says here, "to these who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, and honor and immortality, eternal life; but unto these that are contentious and do not obey the truth... indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish" You see he is looking at eternal life here as a goal; so in chap. 6 where he traces the issue of things in verse 21, "the end of those things is death." We must not forget that God said, "Dying thou shalt die," to Adam, and in his sinning, death was wrought, and he would have died eternally had not God announced the Seed of the woman. Adam was a believer, for otherwise the end of these things would have been eternal death for him He now was mortal, and had to die. I know in the Old Testament eternal verities are not gone into, but I am showing the logical conclusion. But because of verse 22 it does not follow you have to wait to the end to receive, anything. You must begin with life. The new birth includes the thought of eternal life, and you cannot disengage these two truths. There is a necessity for the new birth, and with it the gift of eternal life.

But to come back to our verse 16. What a thought, "the power of God unto salvation!" Just think what is included. In the Epistle to the Hebrews it is called "So great salvation." There we are on the ground of contrast. There were numerous temporal salvations and deliverances in times past, but none to compare with what we get in Hebrews. In Ex. 15, on the shores of the Red Sea, it was a great salvation, but here was a greater. Everything connected with Christ glorified is greater than anything before. Everything is greater, and heavenly, in contrast with what is earthly. But salvation is a continuing thing, not only a present deliverance from God's wrath, and future too, as promised to the Romans, (Romans 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:10); but all along the pilgrim pathway we experience God's delivering mercy, until the salvation of the body, when He gives us one like Christ's, Philippians 3. The apostle in this epistle not only speaks of what is doctrinal, but of what is very practical; and if it is not, the truth has not got hold of us at all. When we are finally established, then the apostle may give us exhorting, for he wants a practical people to be expositors of his doctrine. So he says (Romans 12:1, 2), "I beseech," etc. Oh, what true missionaries of the gospel we everyone would be if these verses were fulfilled in us! The apostle was a living witness of this, so he says "I am not ashamed." What a mighty change had been made in him! One who had sought to exterminate, now builds up (Galatians 1:23), and none built so firmly and strongly as he. Oh, the mighty power of faith! It is the ground of justification, here, and even to all. Faith is just as essential for our daily life as for forgiveness of sins. How often we get a rude awakening instead of simply reposing in God! "The just shall live by faith" is applied not only to my eternal safety but to my walk. The emphasis in Habakkuk 2:4 being upon live, as in Rom. 1:17 it is upon the word just, and Gal. 3:11 on faith.

E.B.D.