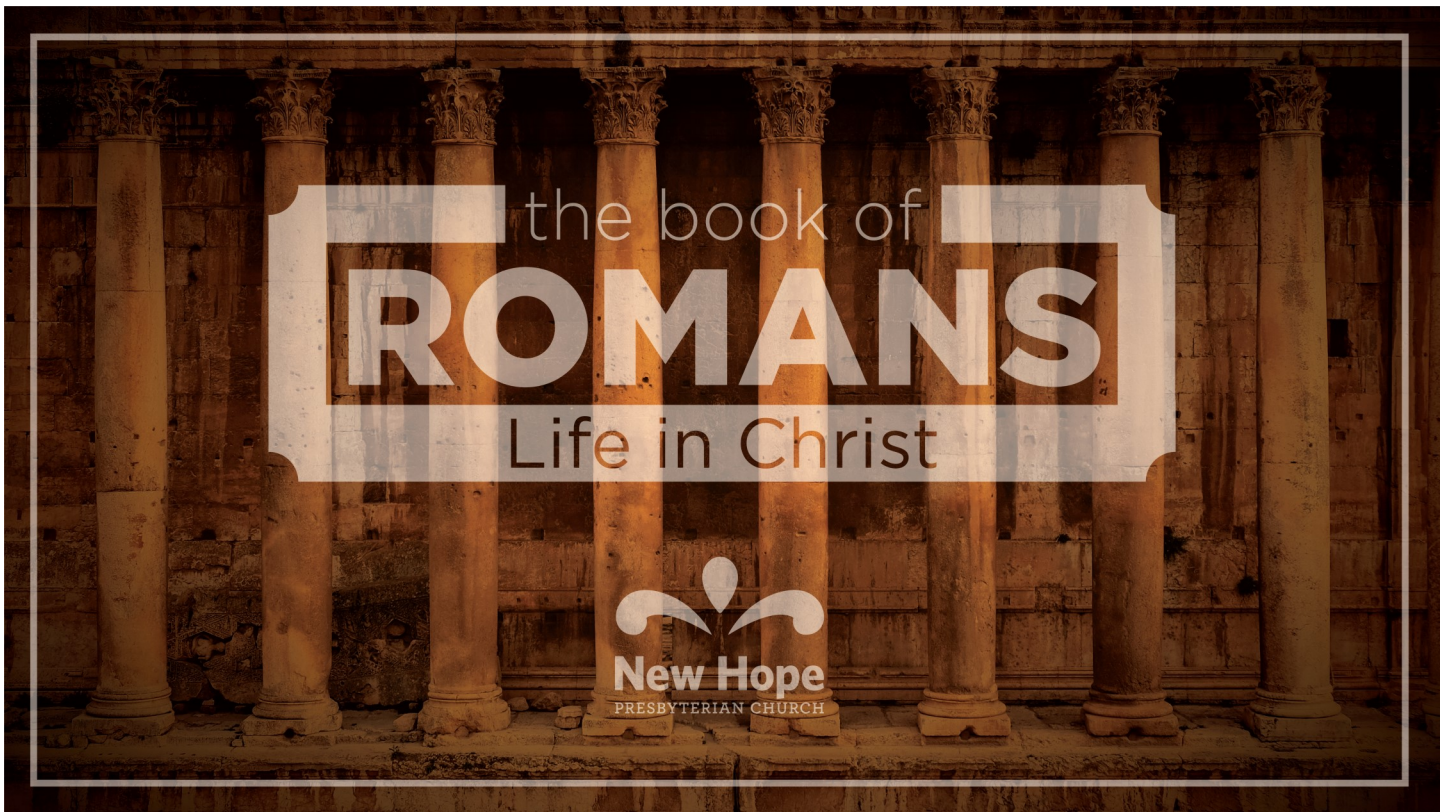




Romans: Life in Christ Study Guide

Paul's Unceasing Anguish

November 14, 2021

Romans 9:1-5

9I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit— 2I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. 4They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; 5to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (NRSV)

¹⁻⁵ At the same time, you need to know that I carry with me at all times a huge sorrow. It's an enormous pain deep within me, and I'm never free of it. I'm not exaggerating—Christ and the Holy Spirit are my witnesses. It's the Israelites . . . If there were any way I could be cursed by the Messiah so they could be blessed by him, I'd do it in a minute. They're my family. I grew up with them. They had everything going for them—family, glory, covenants, revelation, worship, promises, to say nothing of being the race that produced the Messiah, the Christ, who is God over everything, always. Oh, yes! (*The Message*)

1. There is an abrupt shift as we move from chapter 8 into 9. We ended the eighth chapter with a flourish of God's faithfulness—*nothing* can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord—one of the most famous lines in all of Scripture. But then in nine, Paul introduces a new theme that the previous eight chapters have led him to. This theme will continue through chapter 11. It is important to read these chapters as a unit, chapters 9-11.

2. I have included two translations this week of the passage. Read them both at least once if not twice. Perhaps once silently and then once aloud. What do you notice?

3. What is Paul's "unceasing anguish," his "huge sorrow"?

4. These three chapters likely contain the main reason that Paul wrote Romans. Some scholars look at Paul's letter to the church in Rome as his great theological treatise. Indeed, as we've seen, it contains a *lot* of rich theology—our faith vocabulary has expanded these many weeks we've been in Romans. But other scholars, while acknowledging the great theology, also see there was a practical purpose in writing this letter. That purpose is highlighted in chs.9-11.

In short, the Roman Emperor Claudius, in the late '40s of the first century, issued an edict expelling all Jews from Rome. There were undoubtedly Jewish Christians who were part of the house churches in Rome—most of them left Rome under this edict, or if they stayed, they lived in peril. See Acts 18:2 for a Biblical reference to the edict.

When Claudius died in '54, Nero became emperor, and the edict was revoked. Jews, though not necessarily welcome by all, could now return to Rome. By the time Paul wrote Romans (likely in '57) Jewish Christians were coming back into church life—a *Gentile* church. It is safe to assume this welcome back into church life, after so many years of expulsion, was not smooth. Gentile Christians had for years been accustomed to having no Jewish brothers and sisters in the faith alongside. Indeed, it was likely difficult for many Gentiles to welcome them back and perhaps they assumed that God was now fulfilling his plan through Gentiles alone.

Given this historical backdrop, it explains why Paul spends three chapters of his most famous letter wrestling with the future of the Jews in God's family.

5. Before we get deeper into Paul's understanding of the future of the Jews in God's family these next couple of weeks, what is *your* understanding of their place in God's family?

Reflections on Romans

"According to the Old Testament, the nation of Israel had a special place within God's purpose ... At this point [in the letter] the need for ... a discussion [of Israel] has become urgent, since the very reliability of God's purpose as the ground of Christian hope is called in question by the exclusion of the majority of the Jews. If the truth is that God's purpose with Israel has been frustrated, then what sort of a basis for *Christian* hope is God's purpose? And, if God's love for Israel has ceased, what reliance can be placed on Paul's conviction that nothing can separate *us* [in the church] from God's love in Christ (Rom. 8:38)?"

Charles E.B. Cranfield as quoted by Dale Bruner in *The Letter to the Romans: A Short Commentary*, p.124