

Cut Off From Christ

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[0 : 00] All right.

The bird's eye view shows us that though it may appear that God's promises have failed,! In fact, they have not because God has always had and will always have a remnant within! Israel. And now we are coming to wrestle with and grapple with this morning the first five verses that show us why it is such a tragedy for it to appear on the surface level at least that God's promises have failed.

And so we need to consider both the magnitude and the greatness of God's promises to Israel and their great privileged status before Him as His people throughout history.

And then we need to come to understand Paul's great sorrow at the fact that it appears that those promises are not being fulfilled. And so as you turn there to Romans chapter 9, we're going to read the first five verses together this morning.

[1 : 06] And I would like you guys to stand as we read from God's Word together. The Apostle Paul writes, I am speaking the truth in Christ. I am not lying.

My conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

They are Israelites and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs.

And from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. Help us, Father, now to see the glory of Jesus and the greatness of the gospel in this passage this morning.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. We have lately been introduced in the last few years. We have been introduced via the media and other means to what is, at least for me, I think for most people, a somewhat new term that has come into our consciousness.

[2 : 22] And that is the concept of white privilege. Are you guys familiar with that term? You hear it in the news occasionally. You'll read about it in various articles. It's the idea that if in America you are born and you are white, you have certain advantages automatically just because of the way that the culture receives you.

The reality is that all of us have various privileges and advantages. The fact that we are all living in America means that we have an advantage over the vast majority of the people living in other nations around the world.

There are privileges that accrue to everyone, not on the basis necessarily of anything that we've done, but just simply because of where we're born or what we happen to look like or who our parents are or what our socioeconomic condition might happen to be.

And so there are all sorts of privileges that we do have. Advantages that you might have over your neighbor. Advantages that you might have over someone in your own family. Simply because of who you are and where you are and when you are.

It makes a difference that we live in the 21st century. It's much easier for you and I to have access to food and clean water than if we had lived 500 years ago.

[3 : 39] And yet you did not choose to be born at the time that you were born. You didn't choose to live in this era. It just happened to you. And so you are privileged over in that, at least in that aspect of life, you are privileged over people who lived five centuries ago.

Of course, you might be able to find ways in which they were privileged over us. And so there are a number of advantages and privileges that we have that we didn't earn, that we didn't choose.

It's just by virtue of being where we are, when we are, and who we are. Now, in our passage this morning, the Apostle Paul is going to zero in on some specific privileges that belong to the Jewish people, some advantages that they have had historically over all other nations, over all other ethnic groups throughout history.

I want you to look at verse 4 of our passage this morning, where Paul spells out the privileges that he has in mind. He begins with sort of an overarching term.

He simply says, they are Israelites. That's who they are. That term really encompasses everything else that he's going to say in the rest of this verse and in verse 5. That sums it all up.

[4 : 51] They are Israelites. And now he's going to list a number of privileges that belong to them because they are, in fact, Israelites. Israelites. To them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.

Now, Paul's right there. There are two more advantages listed in verse 5. But Paul's right there because I want you to see clearly and to understand what things Paul has in mind as he lists these six things.

The adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. One of the things that you may not see very clearly in your English translation, though, is that these are paired up.

If you were to write these out on a sheet of paper and you were to write the first three privileges that he lists on a line, if you were to write those out and then underneath them you list the next three privileges, then you would have three columns, right, of two words each or two privileges each because the first privilege matches up with the fourth privilege, the second with the fifth privilege, and the third with the sixth privilege.

So that he really says in these two lines, he mentions each privilege looking at it from a different angle or using different language to describe it in different ways. So there are really three major privileges or advantages that he is considering in this list of six things that he says that the people of God, the Jewish people of God have because they are, in fact, Israelites.

[6 : 24] Now, let me show you. It's easy to see in Greek because the endings of them match up and you can see how they're couplets, but we can even see, without seeing that, we can see sort of conceptually how these things are linked together.

So let me just briefly show you, and this will help us to understand what these privileges are by seeing how they're connected in these couplets. So consider the first two that are linked together.

The adoption and the giving of the law are a couple. They go together. The adoption and the giving of the law. Paul is saying here that the Israelites, the people of Israel, are in some way uniquely God's children.

In fact, God refers to Israel as his son in the Old Testament. But what's interesting is that the first time that God ever refers to Israel as his son is found in the book of Exodus in chapter 4, just before God is going to deliver the people out of the land of Egypt.

And he's going to give them the law in the Sinai wilderness. So that when Paul lists the adoption here, he's talking about Israel's status as God's son. Not a status that they have naturally, but one that has been granted to them because God chose them.

[7 : 41] Because God chose Abraham and Abraham's descendants. And that reality of Israel being God's son comes to sort of a realization for the people as God comes to them in the land of Egypt and says, you are my son.

I'm going to rescue you. I'm going to bring you out of this nation. And I'm going to constitute you as a unique new nation. In fact, when he gives them the commandments, the law at Mount Sinai, that is in a real way, that is the official sort of inauguration of these 12 tribes as a real people, a nation together, not just slaves living in the land of Egypt, not just descendants of Jacob, but now a nation with a kind of constitution in the Mosaic law that forms them together as a nation because we have seen as we've gone through Romans, we have had opportunity to look more closely at the law.

And we have seen that the law of Moses is not just morality. It's not just rules for how they are to live, but there are laws in there that tell them how they're supposed to function as a nation, how they are supposed to punish certain criminals and all of those sorts of things.

That's contained within the law. But the law itself binds them together and reminds them that in the Exodus, they were brought together as God's son.

In fact, the prophet Hosea looks back upon the Exodus and God speaking through him says, out of Egypt, I called my son in Hosea 11 verse 1.

[9 : 20] In other words, God bringing the people out of Egypt is connected with Israel as God's son. So when Paul says that to them belongs the adoption, Paul is saying they have the unique privilege status of having been rescued out of Egypt, made like a son to God and then given this law that governs them as a unique nation upon the face of the earth.

God did not treat the Egyptians as if they were his children. He treated them as his enemies. He did not treat the nations in the land of Canaan as if they were his children. He treated them as his enemies. Israel and Israel alone as a nation was viewed by God as his very own son. And that was a privileged status that only those who could say that they were Israelites could claim throughout that period of time. So you have the adoption and you have the giving of the law coupled together there.

But then he mentions a couple of other terms because it's not only the adoption. He mentions the glory. And then in the second list he mentions the worship. The glory and the worship. I think that what Paul has in mind here is not a general concept of glory, but I think he has in mind the glory of God made manifest in the tabernacle and later on after they built the temple in the temple.

[10 : 39] The word used here for worship is a word that typically throughout the Old Testament in the Greek translation of the Old Testament refers to the worship that took place in the temple.

The sacrificial system and the entire priestly system as it functioned was the worship that Paul has in mind here. And it was in the temple that God's glory came into the midst of his people. And that glory was not revealed to the nations at large. The nations at large did not have the sacrificial system that Israel had so that their sins could be atoned for before the coming of Christ. They didn't have those things. That was unique to Israel. So not only is Israel regarded as in some sense God's son constituted as a nation with laws given directly from God, but they have a sacrificial system in which God reveals himself through the priest and at the temple and shows his glory to the nation.

So that is a unique privilege that they have that none of the other nations have. All the nations that surrounded Israel, they all had sacrificial systems. They all had some sort of temple or some sort of meeting place where they would offer those sacrifices.

[11 : 53] They all had altars that they would construct and they would offer sacrifices to their gods. But Israel and Israel alone was chosen by the true God and Israel and Israel alone had a temple or a tabernacle where God actually revealed his own glory is unique to the Israelites.

They are God's children. They uniquely receive God's glory in their tabernacle or temple. And not only that, but there's a third one listed.

He says to them belong the adoption, the glory. And then finally, he mentions the covenants, which is coupled up with the promises, the covenants coupled together with the promises.

Now, scholars have sort of debated and banded about back and forth which which covenants might be in mind here, because there are a number of covenants that God makes with people throughout the Old Testament.

So which covenants exactly does God have in mind? I think probably, and we'll see why in a few moments, but I think what's at the forefront of Paul's mind is probably the covenant that he made with Abraham and that he that he re-initiated with Abraham's children.

[13 : 07] First, Isaac and then Abraham's grandson, Jacob. That there are these covenant ceremonies that take place in the book of Genesis, first with Abraham, then with his son and then with his grandson, in which the covenant that God made with Abraham is reinforced or passed on to his children.

So that I think primarily the covenants that are in mind here is the Abrahamic covenants in its various expressions in the book of Genesis. And even throughout Israel's history, they're constantly reminded that it's because of Abraham and the covenant that God made with Abraham that they have any hope whatsoever.

That's that's the covenant that begins this. The covenant that he makes through Moses, the giving of the law, he has already mentioned and that's something unique. But the covenant that God makes with Abraham repeatedly and with his descendants is also unique among the nations. It was Abraham who was chosen out of Ur of the Chaldeans. There were plenty of other Chaldeans. There were plenty of other moon worshipers out there. There were plenty of other people that God could have called out.

And yet he calls out Abraham, not Abraham's father, not any of Abraham's siblings, but Abraham and Abraham's descendants. To Abraham is given the promise.

[14:24] To Abraham is given the covenant. And to his descendants, the covenants and the promises are passed on. That was a unique privilege that Israel had.

So Israel has this privileged status as God's son. Israel has this privileged status as the only nation that has the glory of God revealed in their worship, in their place of worship.

And they have this privileged status of having received the covenants and the promises that God made through their founder, Abraham. Those are vast. Those are massive, unique promises.

Those are privileges far beyond anything that you or I might imagine. Whatever privileges we have in this world, they do not compare to these privileges that Israel had.

And it's because of the greatness of these privileges that Paul is filled with such anguish at the realization that these privileges, these promises, these great gifts that God gave to the Israelites, they do not seem to be in possession of at his time.

[15:33] They do not seem to be coming to fruition in Paul's lifetime. In fact, the very opposite seems to be happening. As Paul looks upon his, he calls them his kinsmen according to the flesh, he is filled with great sorrow, he says, unceasing anguish.

Because though they have been granted these privileges, they are not enjoying these privileges.

Though they have been given these covenants, these promises, though the glory of God in the past has been revealed to them, they are not now currently experiencing those things.

That's what causes great sorrow in Paul's heart. But the question that we need to ask this morning, and that Paul answers for us here and at the end of Romans chapter 9, is the question of why is it the case?

Why is it that Israel is not currently, presently receiving those privileges? Why is it if those things have historically belonged to Israel, how can Paul look upon Israel now and view them as being accursed?

How can he look upon them now and see them as those who are no longer at the present privileged in these ways? How can that be?

[16:51] How is that the case? The answer is not difficult to find. In fact, he tells us very, very clearly. He says that he has great sorrow and unceasing anguish in his heart.

Verse 3, I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ. That's the key. The people of God descended from Abraham, the Israelites, are cut off from Christ.

In fact, if we consider the last two privileges here in verse 5, then we can understand why it is so devastating for them to be cut off from Christ.

Verse 5 says, To them, to the Israelites, to them belong the patriarchs. The fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

To them belong the patriarchs. In other words, they're a part of this chosen family. And what is so special about the chosen family? What's so special is what he says next.

[17:58] That from their race, that is from the people descended from the fathers, from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. The Christ has come through these people who can claim Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as their fathers.

It's from their race that the Christ has come. Now, I think far too often, we don't pause to reflect upon all the meaning that is packed into this simple term, the Christ.

Because we have grown accustomed to thinking of Christ almost as the last name of Jesus. But in fact, it is not his last name. It is his title. He is the Christ.

He is the Messiah. In other words, he is the promised one. He is the long-awaited one. And his coming was foretold long before the term Messiah or Christ was even thought up in Hebrew.

He was promised as the seed in Genesis chapter 3. And then you track through the Old Testament and you see this hope of a coming seed, a coming descendant. One born according to the flesh from the line that God had singled out.

[19:07] Paul says, the Christ is from them according to the flesh. And yet, they are cut off from Him. And being cut off from Him means being cut off from all of the promises.

All of the privileges that once were theirs because they were Israelites are no longer presently enjoyed by them because they're cut off from the Christ.

That happens because as we approach the New Testament, what we begin to see, even in the opening chapters of the first gospel in the New Testament, very, very early on, we begin to see that

Jesus has not come merely to be a political figure for the people of Israel. The Messiah has not come merely to deliver the people of Israel from their external oppressors. In fact, He has come to do more than simply deliver them.

He has come to take their place. He has come to be the Israelite. The true spiritual Israel.

[20 : 21] How do we know that? Because, for instance, in Matthew chapter 2, Matthew quotes that passage from Hosea chapter 11 in which God says, Out of Egypt I called My Son.

Now Hosea is looking back upon the event of the Exodus. And yet, when Matthew quotes Hosea 11.1, He's referring it to Jesus who went down to Egypt as a baby and then came up out of Egypt after the dangers in Israel were over.

And Matthew says that Out of Egypt I called My Son is fulfilled in reference to Jesus. How can that be? How can a passage in the prophets that's clearly about Israel, how can it be fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ coming up out of Egypt?

How can that be? Because Matthew thinks of Jesus as the true Israel, as the representative of Israel. That's who Jesus is.

It's Jesus who is called God's only begotten Son. He is the true Son of God. No longer now the full nation of Israel because they have by and large rejected God and rejected His promises and His Word that have come true through the Messiah.

[21 : 32] But now Jesus is the fulfillment of those things. He is the true Son. He is the Israel come out of Egypt. That's who He is. In fact, the law itself given to Israel at Mount Sinai, the entire law was pointing us to Christ.

That's what the law was about. We fail to see that many times. In fact, if you turn back a couple of pages in Romans, in Romans chapter 3, Paul talks about the work of Christ in terms of the righteousness that Jesus came to make available for us.

And he says in verse 21, in reference to this righteousness, he says that the righteousness of God has been manifested, that is made known or revealed, apart from the law.

What righteousness are we talking about here? We're talking about the righteousness that Jesus Himself performed. It is the very righteousness of God. So that righteousness now is not something that you perform.

It's not something that you achieve. It is something that you receive by faith in Christ. But he says this righteousness comes apart from the law. But, he says, the law and the prophets bear witness to it.

[22 : 51] The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. So the law all along was bearing witness to a righteousness that would come through the Messiah, through Jesus Christ.

The law was pointing to that all along. So not only is Jesus the true Israel and the true Son of God, but He is also the fulfillment of the law that was given to Israel.

Jesus, in fact, is the temple. He refers to His own body as the temple in the Gospel of John. He refers to Himself as the manifestation of God's glory.

The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians refers to the glory of God in the face of Christ. So that the entire temple system and the glory of God that once was revealed in the Holy of Holies in the temple is now manifested in and through Jesus.

All of these things mentioned by Paul find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus. That is why the Apostle Paul is able to say in 2 Corinthians that all of the promises of God find their yes in Christ.

[24 : 01] All of them. The adoption. The glory. The covenants. The giving of the law. The temple services. The temple worship. And, indeed, the promises.

All of it fulfilled in Christ. So that the way that you become now a recipient of all of these great privileges of Israel is through faith in Jesus.

And yet, they are cut off from Him. They are cut off from all of these great privileges. And Paul has to ask the question, has the Word of God failed for the simple reason that the only means to receiving all of these great privileges is through faith in the Messiah.

And the vast majority of Paul's Jewish kinsmen, his kinsmen according to the flesh, have rejected Christ. They have rejected Him.

I think probably in two primary ways. Two primary ways. I think, first of all, they reject who He is. They were expecting a Messiah.

[25 : 11] In fact, there were, in Jesus' earthly ministry, there were literally thousands of Jewish people who at one point in time in His ministry flocked to Him because they thought that He might be this Messiah.

So there was a time when many, many Jews had an inkling of a beginning of believing that Christ might be the Messiah. But then Jesus began to say things that turned them away.

Jesus began to make claims that they could not accept. He would do things like forgive someone's sins. And the religious leaders were just horrified at that idea and they came to Jesus.

You can read about it in Mark chapter 2 and they come to Jesus and they say, only God can forgive sins. To which Jesus does not respond by saying, you're right, I'm mistaken.

I didn't mean to say, I'm forgiving your sins. I just meant to say that God is going to forgive your sins. That's not what Jesus says to them. He doesn't back off these kinds of claims. What Jesus says is, okay, you want to know that I have authority to forgive sins?

[26 : 18] Fine. You, paralyzed man, get up, walk, show them that I have power. That's Jesus' response. When Jesus says that He is the Son of God and begins to take that upon Himself as an acceptable title for Him, the religious leaders say, you can't do that.

You're making yourself equal with God when you say that. To which Jesus responds by saying, that's not what I mean at all. I don't mean that I'm equal with God. No, it's not what He says. He says, before Abraham was, I am.

That's how He responds to them. They cannot accept who He Himself claims to be. How do we know that's in the mind of the Apostle Paul here though? Because there is a contrast in verse 5. Christ, according to the flesh, He comes from the people of Israel according to the flesh. But who is this Christ?

The end of verse 5. The Christ who is God over all. That's who He is.

[27 : 27] Paul says, He comes from you according to the flesh, Israelites. But I tell you who He is. He is God over all.

And they could not fathom that. A great king from the line of David, they're ready for that. They're expecting that. A miracle worker, they're okay with a miracle worker.

They will celebrate a miracle worker, a troublemaker. They would love to have, they would love to mix it up with the Romans if they just had a powerful enough leader. But one who would make these kind of claims, one whose apostles would say these kinds of things about Him, for the most part the Jewish people will have none of that.

Look down at the end of chapter 9 where Paul gives us a very clear summary of why the Jewish people are cut off.

Verse 32, he says, Why? Because they did not pursue righteousness by faith, but as if it were based on works.

[28 : 38] They have stumbled over the stumbling stone as it is written, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.

They stumbled over the stumbling stone, Jesus Himself. They have stumbled over Him because of who He is, because He is not the Messiah that they are expecting, because He is more than the Christ according to the flesh, because He is in fact God over all, because He says, I am, because He forgives forgives sins, because He calls Himself the Son of God in a unique way, because of all these things, they cannot accept it.

They have rejected the Messiah Himself because of who He claims to be. But, did you notice the other aspect of their rejection?

What else they have rejected? the other reason that they are cut off? Because it's not merely the identity of Jesus that they have trouble with. It's what Christ has actually accomplished that they have trouble with.

Did you hear what we read in verse 32 at the very beginning? He says that, they did not pursue righteousness by faith, but as if it were based upon works.

[30 : 01] You see, it's not only that they reject His identity, they reject His accomplishment. What has Jesus come to do? Jesus has come to fulfill the law.

Jesus has come to obey the law. He has come to represent His people to stand in their place, to earn a righteousness for them, and to take a penalty in their place.

He has done that, and yet they insist upon earning their own righteousness. They insist upon achieving their own standing before God, and that is not going to work for them.

That is not how God will save His people. Not only is it not possible for them to do enough righteousness, not only is it not possible for them to keep the law of God perfectly as God requires, but even if it were possible, that is not God's plan.

God will not save people in such a way so that at the end of the day they can boast and say, I have done all that is necessary. He will not save people like that. He does not save people like that.

[31 : 04] Instead, He sends His own Son who does all that is necessary for us so that we might say, I have done none of what was necessary. I have trusted in the One who has done it all in my place.

Israel is cut off because they cannot believe in who He is and they cannot receive what He has done by faith. So there's great sorrow in Paul's heart.

Though they are Israelites, though they can claim Abraham as their father, though they can claim the Christ as physically descended from them, all the great privileges that ought to accrue to them, they've lost.

They've lost. Which contains an important lesson for us. If the descendants of Abraham, if the Israelites themselves could not depend upon their own physical lineage, if they could not depend upon their own background, if they could not depend upon their own performance of God's law given uniquely to them, if they could depend upon none of those things, then why would any of us ever think that we can?

Why would we ever be tempted to think that we come from a good Christian home and we were taught good Christian morals? My dad was a Christian, my grandfather was a Christian, my great grandfather, I have a long heritage of people we sometimes say, and so because of that I feel safe and secure, we may not voice that out loud, but that lies at the heart of so many people's security before God.

[32 : 48] It is not the righteousness of Jesus that encourages them, it is what they feel they've inherited by being in a Christian home. It's a powerful message for our children.

It's something kids that you really need to hear. You need to understand that it is a great, great blessing that your mom and dad brought you here this morning. It is a great, great blessing that you get to go to Sunday school and learn those Bible stories.

It is so great that you get to hear the Bible and be taught the Bible and be raised in a place where you learn the Bible, but kids, that is not going to cut it before God.

Only one thing counts before Him. It is not memorizing your catechism, it is not memorizing your Bible, it is believing in Jesus. But that's not something that just kids need to hear.

We must be reminded that no matter our background, it's not going to count before Him. Only faith in Jesus counts. And no matter what we have done, no matter what we might present to Him as our lives of so-called faithfulness, of our lives of obedience, it does not count before them.

[34 : 06] If the Jewish people themselves couldn't say, here it is, we've done all these things in obedience to your law, if even they cannot do that, why would we ever be tempted to think that we can earn a right standing before Him?

We cannot. One thing matters. One thing matters. We need to remember this as we approach the Christmas season. The only thing that matters is to receive Christ for who He is and trust Him for what He's done.

That's all that matters. Because the only other option is to be a curse and cut off. Let's pray. pray for voy!