



St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Minot, ND
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The Epistle of Romans

The Justification of the Ungodly

Chapter 9 Verses 1-5

In chapter 9, we enter into a new section. Paul begins to express how the Gospel fulfill's God's Old Testament Word about 'Israel.'

To prepare for the later argument of chapter 9, the Apostle Paul lays down three very big themes in these five short verses: the ministry, how we read the Bible, and Christ.

The Ministry

In 1973, an African-American Preacher from Philadelphia gave the commencement address at Yale Divinity School. His text was 1 Peter 5:6, "*Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time.*" The preacher looked up from his Bible and said to the graduates, "*This is your last proud day. Because if you aren't humble now, when you go out into the churches, they will make you humble.*" You see, the nature of the ministry is one where a Pastor is made humble. Arrogance and ministry do not mix. Ministry demands humility. But why? The answer, the nature of the ministry follows the same ethos and pattern of Jesus: ministers are to spend and be spent for the sake of their flock.

But we must be very careful to understand 'how' a pastor in

the ministry spends himself for the sake of the flock. Considering Paul's words in verses 1-3, he was willing to be damned to hell for the sake of his people. These are not pious thoughts that are meant to flatter. They communicate the nature of the 'call.' But again, we must define how and why a pastor spends himself for the flock. The pastor's concern is for the Gospel 'for' his flock. The pastor's concern is for the salvation of his flock.

What this means is that the pastor should be *dying* in ways that deliver the Gospel to his people. A late phone call at night to go and preach the Gospel to a dying parishioner in the hospital – yes! A text conversation while on vacation to a person struggling in their marriage to remind them of the gospel – yes! Staying up past midnight to prepare a sermon for his flock to hear Jesus – yes! These are small ways that a pastor is to spend and be spent for his flock. This is the humility of the call.

But we must be careful, for there are times where churches will abuse the humility of the pastoral call. Demanding a pastor to mow a large church lawn, be a CEO of church structure, be a social organizer of church activities, be the church's janitor, be the IT guy, etc. is not

what Paul had in mind when it came to being spent and spending on one's flock.

It has been said before that the majority of the pastor's time should be working with the tools that he has been given – the Word and Sacraments. Does this mean that a pastor shouldn't roll up his sleeves to help in the kitchen or that a pastor can't play a game with children? Not at all. It means, though, that a pastor should spend and be spent (the majority of his time) over delivering the Word and Sacraments to his flock. Woe to the pastor who gets burnt out on things that are not the Word and Sacraments!

How to Read the Bible

In verses 4-5a, Paul lays forth the gifts of grace given to Israel. Does possession of these gifts put the Israelites in a more advantageous position than the Gentiles? No! The gifts given to Israel are only good only in so far as they are connected to their fulfillment in Christ. Possessing the Torah, being a Jew, having the Covenant, etc. are of no value unless they are understood as 'means' that give Jesus/grace and are received by faith! Christ is the goal of the Old Testament Torah! Christ is the goal and end of the Promises! If it does not lead us to Christ, it is futile!

This can be applied to our Liturgy! Does the historic liturgy make us at St. Paul's more advantageous than other people? No! The Liturgy does not save. So, is the liturgy bad? Is the Torah bad? Is being a Jew bad? Absolutely not! We love the Liturgy not because it is historical and not because it is the way we have always done things but because it gives us Jesus. We love the liturgy because we believe that all the other liturgies in the church (yes, that includes contemporary worship) do not clearly give us Jesus as well as the historic liturgy does.

And so, what Paul is showing us in these short verses is that Christ is the goal. Thus, if you have regal historic chanting, but omit Jesus – your liturgy is a clanging gong. Likewise, if you have mighty emotive worship songs, and miss Jesus – you are nothing more than an empty tin cowbell. Furthermore, if you have great rhetorical sermons that create goosebumps, but fail to mention Jesus – you are spouting nothing more than hot useless air. And if you pack a stadium full of people and do not deliver Jesus – you are as irrelevant as a cat herder. Remember that Christ is at the apex of the gifts in the church.

Christ

At the end of verse 5, Paul confesses the central message of Christ as true God and true Man. Without both – no Gospel.

