

Eternity Daily Bible Study

Romans 9-16 The Implications of Salvation

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE MINISTRY OF THE AIBI

Number: 627

Verses: Romans 15:30-33

Topic: An Unanswered Prayer

Date: 6th March 2007

Romans 15:30-33 MKJV *But I exhort you, brothers, for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ and for the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, (31) that I may be delivered from those disbelieving in Judea, and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted by the saints; (32) so that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed with you. (33) Now may the God of peace be with you all. Amen.*

If you go and do something, against the direction of the Holy Spirit, will prayer get you out of the mess that you create?

Paul is heading to Jerusalem, everyone is telling him not to and God even send the prophet Agabus who tells him that the Holy Spirit is telling him not to go and what the consequences would be:

Acts 21:9-14 MKJV *And there were four virgin daughters to this one, who prophesied. (10) And as we stayed more days, a certain prophet from Judea named Agabus came down. (11) And coming to us, and taking Paul's belt, and binding his hands and feet, he said, The Holy Spirit says these things: So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man whose belt this is, and will deliver him into the hands of the nations. (12) And when we heard these things, both we and those of the place begged him not to go up to Jerusalem. (13) Then Paul answered, What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. (14) And he not being persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.*

Paul was clearly aware of these dangers even when he wrote Romans because he asks the Romans:

- a) that I may be delivered from those disbelieving in Judea,*
- b) and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted by the saints;*

Even at this point he was aware the unbelieving Jews might want to kill him and that the Jewish Christians might not accept his "service for the saints". Paul is clearly aware of the tensions that surround this matter – yet he goes ahead and asks people to pray fervently.

Paul was gambling on prayer! He knew the risks and the consequences and the warnings of the Holy Spirit but was hoping the fervent prayers of himself and others would work in his favor. But they did not work in his favor and he was lucky to survive, spent two years in jail and quite possibly (if my reasoning in yesterdays devotional was correct)

split Christendom down the middle!

Now I still hold Paul in high regard as a mighty apostle of God, but this was not his smartest moment. It was a mistake and it was a huge mistake! Scripture is honest enough to record it - and we can still learn from it. Here are some lessons I see in this:

1. God does not answer prayers, even from great saints, when they are being foolish and stubborn.
2. Don't pray to change human nature *en masse*. The answer to Paul's prayer would have required the entire Jewish leadership and Torah-observant Jewish Christians to do a 180 degree cultural about face - and that was a very tall order!
3. Most of the time wisdom is more important than courage and discretion is often the better part of valor. Paul's reply *For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus* was courageous but foolhardy.
4. No one is infallible. Even if you are right 99.5% of the time as Paul may have been there is that 0.5% when you can be plain wrong and you need to be aware of that.
5. Your "one mistake" can have huge consequences especially if you are a leader.
6. It is more important to listen to the Holy Spirit than to our own desires, or our own logic or to the imperatives of even our most strategic plans.

It is very common in missionary work to have a "Grand Plan" that is impractical but which we are "in love with" and desperately try to make work, and as we do so the mess just keeps getting worse and worse.

Why did Paul press on? Perhaps there are a few understandable reasons:

1. Paul had accepted a large amount of money from people all over Asia Minor and would have lost a huge amount of "face" and credibility if he had not delivered it.
2. Paul possibly had a huge personal need for acceptance by the Jewish Christians and the Jewish people whom he loved so much (see Romans 9-11).
3. Paul had once been at the top of Jewish society and could not understand the rejection of him that was now complete.
4. Paul had a type A "driven" personality and was highly committed to achieving his objectives and completing his projects. Failure was not an option.

God is merciful and He did not strike Paul dead and in fact God saved him from the worst of the Jewish conspirators. God understood Paul's mistake and forgave him - yet He did send many warnings beforehand. Prayer while it is a mighty force, is no substitute for listening to God and obeying Him in all wisdom and humility - even if it means abandoning or greatly altering a "pet project". Failure in the pet project is better than stubborn disobedience.

I, and many others in Christian service, can testify to the fact that we have foolishly gone ahead when God was saying "Whoa"! On such occasions the Grand Idea has become our "god" rather than the Lord. I take some comfort that even Paul made such a calamitous mistake. It is the mistake of one who strives and struggles and wrestles things to completion without giving in. Sometimes we should wake up, smell the coffee and acknowledge reality.

Blessings,

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