

# Romans (15:30-33)

## *Errors of Prayers*

Part 97 - March 4, 2007

### URGENT REQUEST

Last week, we saw that Paul was putting Spain on hold, and taking a 2000 mile detour, in order to deliver an offering from the Gentiles to the poverty-stricken Jews in Jerusalem. Paul felt compelled to go, even though he was well-warned that he would be persecuted and imprisoned.

Today, he asks the believers in Rome to pray for this trip.

I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen. - *Romans 15:30-33 NIV*

Q: Can you hear the urgency in Paul's request?

He knows the danger he'll be facing. He knows what he's up against. And yet, he knows the amazing influence of prayer. There are three aspects to Paul's request that draw attention to three errors in our prayers.

The first is: Failing to pray intentionally.

I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit (15:30a)

Paul isn't referring to a casual approach to the throne, here. He "urges" them two separate ways: "by our Lord Jesus Christ" referring to Paul's authority as an Apostle, and: "by the love of the Spirit" reminding them of their relationship.

In other words, he's serious. He wants them to definitely and deliberately add him to their prayer lists. Paul is well aware that prayer *has* to be intentional.

The enemy's top priority is to block your attempts at a consistent prayer life; because, if he can cut off the power source and the supply line, the whole army is disabled.

- It has to be intentional 'cause there's gonna be a battle!

Look at what Paul is urging them to do:

To join me in my struggle by praying to God for me (15:30b)

Wow! He doesn't say, "Pray for my struggle to end"!

Q: How often do you pray for the easiest way out, instead of guidance, direction, and empowerment to face the fight?



We can get this idea that if we're struggling we must be out of God's will. Paul not only seems to assume that struggling is just part of the deal; he invites them to join him! As Christians we are called to a life of victory. And let's face it: Victory by nature involves a battle.

Q: Have you heard the adage that God answers prayer three ways: yes, no, and wait?

Well actually, I think He has *four* responses:



1. No (No pretty much means: no)
2. Slow (Wait; *circumstances* aren't yet right)
3. Grow (Wait; *You* aren't yet ready)
4. Go (Timing's right, and it's in His will)

- I suppose if He grants a miracle, there's: WHOA!
- I hate three out of four of those possibilities!

But, if we want a clear answer, we have to pray unambiguously. The second error in prayer: Failing to pray specifically. Paul doesn't ask for *generalized* prayers. He tells them *exactly* what he wants them to pray for. There are two things here:

1. Protection from unbelievers.

That I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea (15:31a)

And we see in Acts that this is exactly what happened.

The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple ... While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops ... He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. - *Acts 17:30-32 NIV*



Q: Want to see something really cool?!

When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered [a letter from Felix] to the governor and handed Paul over to him. ... Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace. - *Acts 23:33;35 NIV*



This is ancient Caesarea, on Israel's coast.

- These are the remains of Herod's palace.
- This is where Paul was kept under guard.

So, he asks for "protection from unbelievers," and secondly:

2. Acceptance from believers.

That my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there (15:31b)

Q: How does God answer that prayer when people have free will?

A: Paul isn't asking God to change the will of the believers in Jerusalem; the emphasis is on his own "service" (his words and actions), that they'd be appealing and "acceptable".

And it was; Luke writes in Acts:

When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. ... Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they praised God. - Acts 21:17-20 NIV

Q: What does God do when we ask Him to "soften someone's heart"?

Q: Is it legitimate to ask God to influence someone's will?

A: Control, no. Influence, Yes.

It's not appropriate to pray for God to *make* someone accept Him. But we can pray that He fill their minds with His truth, and flood their hearts with His love.

The third error in prayer: Failing to pray submissively. Paul had a desire that superseded his safety and success. His *utmost* desire was to remain in God's will.

So that by God's will (15:32)

I heard a great quote the other day:

Lord, protect me from the things that I desire. - *Anonymous*

There's an incredibly touching moment at the end of "Bruce Almighty" after Bruce has ruined his relationship with Grace (his girlfriend), and pretty much destroyed the world. And in this moment, Bruce has painfully realized that *thy will* is infinitely superior to *my will*. And when God returns a prayer bracelet given to Bruce by Grace, Bruce must quickly learn to pray specifically and selflessly.

Prayer is not about power, it's about humility.



And prayer isn't magic. Magic is an attempt to *control* supernatural powers so that God might become an instrument for *my* self-centered desires. Prayer is a process of *surrender*, so that I might become an instrument that God can use for *His* perfectly righteous desires.

So many people have turned prayer into a self-centered, mystical, conjuring that it's easy to be confused about what it really is. God longs for us to be earnest and honest in our communication with Him, but He will not enable the notion that He's a genie. We are short-sighted, ill-mannered, and dim-witted if we assume that we know best, and God is waiting to jump at our command. Treating prayer like magic will turn it into incantational labor, and strip it of its intimate, passionate, miraculous joy.

So that by God's will I may come to you with joy (15:32)

It is only by aligning ourselves to *His* will that we can ever hope to experience true satisfaction and fulfillment and joy. And then Paul adds something very interesting to this passage:

And together with you be refreshed



God intends for the invigorated faith of some to refresh the dehydrated souls of others. And then the next week the roles may be reversed. God uses His people to refresh His people. Do you have friends around you who do that for you?

I like that in the same breath Paul says: we'll all struggle together, and together we'll be refreshed. He wants them to join him in wrestling, and he wants to join them in resting; two halves of a whole Christian life.

Fight the good fight of the faith. - 1 Timothy 6:12 NIV

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I [Jesus] will give you rest. - Matthew 11:28 NIV

So, it is both fighting and resting. And the biggest struggle we face daily is the temptation and the inclination to rest in anything other than Jesus. Money beckons us to rest in what it can purchase. Sex beckons us to rest in the pleasure it offers. Success beckons us to rest in the power it gives. Food, family, hobbies, sports, recognition, education, looks, accomplishments, all beckon us to rest in what they offer. They all promise us rest, they all pledge to refresh, and it's all an illusion. In the end, they enslave and destroy. We must struggle to rest in Christ alone. Only God, through Jesus, can give us the rest, and grant us the peace that we struggle for.

The God of peace be with you all. Amen (15:33)