

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR HIS COUNTRYMEN

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." Romans 10:1.

Paul was a Jew, a Hebrew of the Hebrews. His conversion subjected him to the suspicion that he was uncharitable in his judgment of the Jews, and that he was an enemy of his country. This is no uncommon thing, even though it is strange that one cannot begin to love Christ supremely without immediately being suspected of lack of love for others. From the Jews, Paul met with obstacles, opposition, and persecution. Naturally, he could not be blind to their faults and errors. There were at least four characteristic evils of his countrymen: --

1. Corrupt zealotism.

"For I bear them record that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." vs. 2.

2. Ignorance of Christianity.

"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." vs. 3.

3. Self-righteousness.

"Going about to establish their own righteousness." vs. 3. They considered their own righteousness to consist in their patriarchal descent and their conformity to the letter of the law.

4. Gospel rejection.

"Have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." vs. 3. They refused to accept the only Physician who could heal their diseases. This is the crowning sin of all. While Paul was kind by nature, in order for him to be loyal to the truth, he had to rebuke his brethren for their rejection of Christ, and to warn them of the condemnation which their unbelief would certainly bring.

In spite of all their unkindness to Paul, he still loved his nation, and felt the claim of nationality and kindred. He labored, spoke, wrote, and prayed for his Jewish kindred. Above all things, he longed and prayed for their salvation; and in this he imitated the example of the Saviour, who prayed for the forgiveness of His murderers. It is Christ alone who can inspire such sentiments and give such an example to the world.

Paul's patriotism sought the highest good of his country. What was that? Augmented wealth, extended dominion, or a higher state of intellectual culture? No, salvation.

I. The Causes Of His Prayer.

1. The need of his countrymen.

Their physical blessings were great. They lived in a beautiful country. "It was a land flowing with milk and honey." When he looked into the moral heart of his country, he observed that their souls were dead in sin and under condemnation. Consequently, he longed for their salvation. He was anxious for them to avert the danger of perishing, so he interposed his prayers and labors to save them from eternal ruin.

2. The greatness of salvation.

Something of its greatness and value may be seen in the price which Christ paid for it when He died on the cross.

3. The love of Christ.

This was the impelling motive which constrained Paul to seek for the salvation of the souls of his countrymen, and to labor for their welfare. When he considered what humiliation, what sufferings, and what an ignominious death Christ had endured for our sakes, the heart of the apostle was stimulated to exertion for the salvation of their souls.

4. The glory of God.

The glory of God is connected inseparably with the salvation of sinners. Paul, therefore, longed for the salvation of others in order that the Lord might be glorified.

II. The Characteristics Of His Prayer.

1. It was fraternal.

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." The Apostle felt himself to be fully under the power of national feeling and of Christian affection. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and he loved his nation devotedly. In his preaching he always gave to the Jew the first opportunity to receive the blessing of the gospel. But, he was also the apostle to the Gentiles.

2. It was heartfelt.

"Brethren, my heart's desire." His desire came from his heart; it was, therefore, honest, sincere, and earnest. This earnest desire gives us the apostle's motive in so addressing his brethren and in laboring for their salvation. Not all who are interested in the salvation of men are influenced by this high motive.

(1) It may be a professional desire.

In various ways one may be influenced by personal and professional motives.

(2) It may be a duteous desire.

Some desire the salvation of others as a matter of mere duty.

3. It was evangelical.

"That they might be saved." This was Christlike. Nothing short of their redemption from sin here and from death hereafter could satisfy Paul; nothing less than this ought to satisfy us with reference to our fellow men. To this end our heart's desires and prayers should be united always. Whatever is our heart's desire, let us make it our prayer to God. If we were more fervent in prayer, our labors would be more successful.

We must ever remember that there is a widespread need of salvation; also, that there is salvation for all who need it. We have experienced the grace and power of Jesus to pardon, purify, and bless; and what He has done for us He can do for others. As Christians, we must be anxious and prayerful on behalf of sinners that they may be saved, and then we must use the means appointed for their salvation. Sympathy and prayer, unaccompanied by effort, would be a mockery. Genuine sympathy and true prayer will always lead to some form of practical effort.