

PRAYING FOR OUR COUNTRYMEN

Romans 10:1

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

Paul was 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" (verse 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" (verse 3).

3. Self-righteousness.

"Going about to establish their own righteousness" (verse 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" (verse 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 of 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.
3. It was evangelical.
"That they might be saved." This was Christ-like. 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.

Multiplied thousands of Southern Baptists are observing a week of prayer for Home Missions and are making special offerings for this great cause. At the close of the 1960, the Home Mission Board reported 2,035 missionaries, 525 student summer workers and 200 tentmakers, all busily engaged in spiritual efforts in every state in the United States, Cuba, Panama and the Canal Zone. These chosen servants of God reported a total of 51,463 professions of faith, with 41,388 additions to churches. May we here exclaim, "What a harvest!

Twenty-three of our state conventions have an established co-operative working agreement with the Home Mission Board, this is an increase of seven over the previous year.

There are six divisions of the ministries of the Home Mission Board, namely:

1. Division of Chaplaincy, George W. Cummins, Director. This division has four departments of work; the military chaplaincy, with 431 active, 676 reserve, and 92 Civil Air Patrol chaplains; hospital chaplains, with 51 Veterans' Hospital chaplains and 99 serving in chaplain capacity in other hospitals; 73 as institutional chaplains; and 10 industrial chaplains.
2. Division of Evangelism, C. E. Autrey, director. This division of the Home Mission Board is now represented in every state, Cuba, Panama and Jamaica.
3. Division of Missions, Arthur Rutledge, director. Six major departments comprise this large division of the work, Associational, Pioneer, City, Survey and Special Studies, Language Groups Ministry, and Work with National Baptists.

During 1960 the missionary personnel related to this division increased from 1,543 to 1,930. There were many new appointees, but the sizable increase is due in large part to the co-operative mission agreements with sixteen state conventions.

4. Division of Church Loans--Program of Church Loan Funds, G. Frank Garrison, director. During the past seven years the Board's loan resources have been more than doubled, and notwithstanding that fact they are still inadequate to serve the needs of all of our churches. In recognition of that fact the convention is making available to the Board's Church Extension Loan Fund a total of \$400,000,000 over the five-year period 1959-1963 (\$1,400,000 of this amount has already been received). There are two types of church loan funds used by the Board:

- (1) The Church Building Loan Fund;
- (2) The Church Extension Loan Fund.

5. Division of Related Ministries, which provides field workers serving in schools of Missions and giving special help to the Woman's Missionary Union. William E. Burke, field worker in this division, labors in an effort to inform Southern Baptists of the belief of Roman Catholics, and at the same time seeks to lead Roman Catholics into the true teachings of the New Testament. The Tentmaker program is carried on in this division. The Tentmakers with 66 Regulars and 122 Reserves last year reported 237 professions of faith in Christ. Student summer missionaries work through this division and during the summer of 1960, 525 students were used in this great effort for the Lord.

6. Division of Education and Promotion, L.O. Griffith, director. This division of the Home Mission Board's ministry tells the story of home missions in a various ways to the public. Promoted by this division are: Schools of Missions, Speakers Bureau, Home Mission Magazine, Graded Series books for mission study, tracts, Baptist Press Service, Circulation Service, Picture Service, visuals and exhibits.

In the United States there are over 500,000 Indians, and we have 163 Home missionaries working amongg them in 13 states. San Francisco has more Chinese than any city outside China--80,000 -- amongg whom we have 16 workers. There are 45 workers among the 800,000 French-speaking citizens of Louisiana. We have 6 workers among the many Italians in Tampa. We have 5 workers among the 125,000 Japanese on the West Coast. One couple is working with the 4500 Koreans in Los Angeles. There are 580 workers in 15 states among the 8,000,000 Spanish-speaking people. There are 15,000 Mexican harvest workers coming to the States annually. We have 105 workers in Panama. There are 168 workers in Cuba, where there are 90 churches and 150 missions. Another immigrant comes to the United States every 1½ minutes.

All of these groups challenge us to give our best in praying, giving and witnessing in order that all of them may hear the gospel of Christ.