***Paul's Appeal for Prayer Support - No. 1
Romans 15:30-33
RO190-02***

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**Paul's Need For Prayer Support**

Romans 15. We begin a new section at the very end of this chapter, Romans 15:30-33. Our subject is Paul's Appeal for Prayer Support - Segment Number 1.

**Historical Background of Romans 15:30-33**

As you know, the historical background of this particular area of the Book of Romans is that Paul is on his way to Jerusalem with the Jerusalem relief fund to help the Jewish believers who are suffering famine in the city of Jerusalem. The Gentile churches have now completed their donations to this fund. A committee from the various churches has been appointed, and they are accompanying Paul to Jerusalem with the relief money. God's good Christian stewards have given generously of their treasures, and they've done it on the principles that we have just studied of grace giving appropriate to Church Age believers.

Paul now looks forward to handing the funds over to the Christian leaders in Jerusalem. Then he plans to travel on to Rome to meet these believers whom he has never met, but to whom he has written this magnificent letter. He looks forward to bringing the blessings of Christ to the Roman Christians. He is going to do this, of course, through teaching them Church Age doctrines, the doctrines of grace, which he is uniquely qualified to teach. After visiting, administering the Word of God in Rome, Paul plans to open up a new mission field in Spain.

**Paul's Appeal**

So, Paul now comes to the end of this chapter. Before he closes, having given all the background concerning his plans and itinerary, he requests their prayers and he makes an appeal to them. In Romans 15:30 he says, "Now I urge you, brethren." The word "urge" is the word "parakaleo," p a r a k a l e o. This Greek word means "I make a strong appeal." It is a very strong word. It is the word from which we get the English word "paraclete," which is used to describe God the Holy Spirit, who is our helper. And the word connotes somebody who comes alongside of you and he puts his arms under you and he lifts you up. The apostle Paul says, "I have an urgency and I need you to come and undergird me in a very specific way.

He addresses this to people that he calls "brethren." He indicates by this word that he is speaking to people who are born-again Christians who are in the royal family of God, the Church. There is no point for you to ask non-Christians to pray for you. There is no point in you ever joining non-Christians in a prayer exercise. They have no access to God and they have no ears that God has opened to them. There is, of course, little profit in asking some carnal Christian to pray for you. Some Christian who is out of temporal fellowship is no better off than an unbeliever; God doesn't listen to him either. But, a spirit filled brother or sister praying for you is an invaluable asset in life. The apostle Paul knows this.

**The Efficacy of Prayer**

This is not the first time that he has asked people to pray for him. This is characteristic of the apostle to ask people to be praying for him. He knows that this is his lifeline. That was true both spiritually and in fact physically for him. Please note in 2 Corinthians 1:11, Paul says, "You also joining in helping us through your prayers, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed upon us through the prayers of many." Here Paul commends them and asks them to join him in prayer so that as a result of their prayers his ministry would result in blessings for many who in turn would extend Thanksgiving to God for what they have received, all as a result of the prayers of believers.

Is praying one way of performing divine good works? You but it is! One of the most dramatic ways of storing treasures of Heaven is every time you open your mouth in prayer under the Spirit of God's leadership on behalf of another believer. Apart from how that prayer is disposed of by God in His sovereign decision, your praying for people is one of the easiest ways to store treasures in Heaven, and you should be aware of that. Notice Philippians 1:19; Paul says, "For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Paul expects deliverance. Remember, he is writing this letter from Rome as a prisoner in chains and he is telling these people, I know that you have not forgotten that I'm sitting here in this jail. I am chained to this soldier 24 hours a day and I know you're praying for me. I expect results to come to me, results from your prayers, that will result in my freedom.

Colossians 4:3. Paul says, "Praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned." In Colossians 4:2, he tells them to devote themselves to prayer, be alert in it, and have an attitude of thanksgiving. Did you notice that? Christians devote yourselves to prayer. Then he says, 'And while you do that, don't forget me. Put me pretty near the top of that list of the people you are praying for. For what? That God will give me openings to teach the Word of God.' It's very difficult to find openings to explain God's viewpoint to people. You probably have relatives who have minds that are steel traps closed against any instruction in the Word of God. But that's what the Bible tells us. The Bible tells us that the unsaved people have such dull minds, they are totally blinded, they couldn't care less about being instructed in the Word of God.

And the same thing is true of the carnal Christian, he has become callous toward the Word of God. He couldn't care less. You see him tearing up his life. You see him on self-destructive courses. I watch husbands, I watch wives, I think they're crazy in what they do. I wonder how the Word of God never gets to them. It is because they have closed their minds against the Word of God. They're like horses and mules. They have to be jerked and pushed around. They will not be taught.

So, this is no small thing. When Paul says, 'I have found that it is very hard to stand up and teach people the Word of God and have them give you a hearing and take seriously what God has said. I have found that people will laugh even when you have read to them a Scripture that lays down a principle of life that they don't believe in, that they don't like, that they don't approve. They sit there and they make fun of it.' And this is what Paul says, 'These folks will never be helped until God comes in and suddenly shatters them and opens their mind.'

Every time I perform a marriage ceremony where I read all those Scriptures that tell about the role of a wife, the role of a woman in a marriage relationship, the role of a man, the role of a husband, there's always somebody that's got remarks. I had a wedding recently and one lady said she sat behind 2 girls, and every time the Scriptures were read, they looked at each other and giggled and spoke and made snide remarks to each other, and poked each other and laughed, and they had a good time.

My marriage ceremonies are very entertaining for some people, but they're going to laugh on the other side of their face someday when they're in God's presence. You would think that when somebody gets up and reads the Scripture and it gives a reference, you'd say, 'Boy, that's God talking. Maybe I ought to think about that,' instead to be so blinded as to make fun of it, to laugh, to scoff.

Why are they doing that? Well, because Betty Friedan has taught them better, because the women of the feminist movement have told them what the "real truth" is. Be sure you read your hand out today. It will be revealing to you. It will give you a perspective on the problem that exists and why the United States is not in prophecy. It is a nation on its own self-destructive course. And the way it teaches its girls to grow up to be a certain kind of woman is one of the major keys of that self-destruction.

The apostle Paul says, 'I'm in the business of teaching Divine viewpoint, but it's an uphill fight. Please pray for open minds.'

1 Thessalonians 5:25, Paul says, "Brethren, pray for us." That's the simplest thing in the world you could ever say to any Christian, "Brethren, pray for us." And the spirit filled Christian will respond like Samuel of old did, which said 'I would not sin against God by failing to pray for you after you ask me.' It is a sin for you to be asked to pray and then to ignore it.

One more: 2 Thessalonians 3:1, Paul says, "Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you."

So, those of you who are in our various teaching ministries and schools and clubs and our other activities here who are teaching the Word of God, just remember that any time you stand up to proclaim Scripture, you need an awful lot of prayer to get the mind open, to listen. People are dull, people are jaded, people are indifferent. People are determined to destroy themselves. Yet our job is to grab as many of those burning branches out of the fire before they are consumed as we can. Here and there, God is going to open a mind. If your mind is open to the Word of God, if you're a young person who's been reared with the understanding and appreciation to have your mind open to the Word of God, you should thank God that your parents have dealt you so well.

**The Authority of Paul's Appeal**

The apostle Paul then says, "Now I urge you, brethren," I appeal to you to do something for me. Then he strengthens that appeal by telling them the basis upon which he makes it to them. He says, "I appeal to you, by our Lord Jesus Christ." What he means is that he's appealing for their prayers on the basis of the authority of Jesus Christ who promised to meet the believers' prayer requests.

Don't forget that when we speak about prayer, the reason we know it's not blowing bubbles in the air that are going to pop into nothing is because, our Savior Himself has said, 'You ask Me, I'll pay attention, if it's acceptable to our Heavenly Father, I'll do it, whatever it is you ask Me.' John 14:13-14, for example, "And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it." Here's a blank check. Here's a blank spiritual check already signed and all you have to do is fill it out, but you have to have it in His name, which means it has to be according to everything He stands for. His name is what He is so that He asks for that which is in the will of God.

There are people no doubt, sitting in this little group of believers right now who haven't asked God for a single thing this week, who probably haven't even thought of Him and who when we hit the early third of this century are going to be jerked out of this world suddenly in the Rapture and find themselves in the Lord's presence and wonder what they did with the last few years that was before them. If you're getting tired of hearing that warning, I would take it seriously, because it is for real. And at least you will never be able to look back and say, 'Why in the world did I squander my life in trivial things on the last few years I had left to store my treasures in Heaven?'

Look at John 16:24, Jesus says, "Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full." God delights in doing the impossible. It is a great thrill when we come to him with the impossible, and indeed, he performs for us.

The apostle Paul here asks for prayer. He said, 'I'm asking you to pray for me out of your regard for the Lord Jesus Christ in whose work I am engaged, and which work you want to see done as well.' What Paul is doing is asking them to run interference for him while he carries the ball in the Lord's work.

**Paul Also Appeals Out of Love**

'Now I urgently plead with you, my brothers in Christ, on the basis of our Lord Jesus Christ' and also by something else. He says, "by the love of the spirit," and he uses this word for love, one you're familiar with, "agape," a g a p e. This is the word that refers not to emotional love, there's no emotion in this word, this is a totally mental word. This is a mental attitude word, this mental attitude of goodwill.

Galatians 5:22 says this is a product that arises as part of the fruit of the spirit in the life of a Christian who is walking in temporal fellowship. The Christian whose known sins are all confessed and who is walking with the sincerity of pursuing the will of God is the Christian who the Spirit of God is leading. And when He leads, He causes this kind of goodwill mental attitude toward human beings to develop in your mind. So, instead of running around with resentments and bitterness and contempt and indifference toward people, you suddenly find that you have the mind of Christ, of compassion and consideration for them. It is not something you can turn on for yourself.

He [Paul] appeals to these believers in Rome for prayer on the basis of the love of the Holy Spirit, which is in them. That love extends to Paul. That love extends to the Lord's work in which Paul is engaged in. Paul is very dear to God the Holy Spirit, so the Christians should esteem him as well. It is the love of the Holy Spirit that binds us together as Christians in God's work. There are many things that would very quickly separate us from one another in God's work: temperament differences, preference differences, desire differences, financial differences, social status differences, educational differences. But all that means nothing. The binding cement is the love of God the Holy Spirit places in our hearts, so that no matter who you are or where you are in life, you are my brother in Christ, you are my sister in the Lord, and therefore you are essentially the most important family I have this side of eternity.

So, Paul's appeal for support is made in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom all spiritual Christians love and by the love of the Holy Spirit, which is engendered in a believer for God's servant and for God's work.

**The Need for Paul's Appeal**

Then he says, 'I'm asking you to pray for me because this will enable you to do something that I need you to do for me.' He uses this word, "strive together." It is a long Greek word, but a significant one. It's the word "sunagonizomai." It is made up of several words actually. To give you the impact, let me show them to you. The first preposition here "sun," means "with." The second word, "agonizomai," is a verb; it means "to meet with as in a contest during a struggle." So, the word "to meet and the idea is meeting as in a struggle." So what he is saying is 'I want you to meet with me to struggle together in a contest as partners. This is not an easy thing that I'm asking you; I'm asking you to join me in a fight. I'm asking you to join me in a battle to struggle together as partners.'

This is in the Greek aorist tense, which means "at any point in time when Paul is in need of prayer, he needs people who will fight with him by prayer." Interestingly enough, it's the middle voice which indicates "for Paul's own benefit." 'I'm asking you to struggle with me in prayer for my benefit.' The infinitive mood tells us that "this is Paul's purpose for the Roman Christians." He wants them to join him in the battle.

So that, no matter where God's work is being done anywhere in the world, when you enter a prayer in behalf of the people engaged in that work, you become part of that work. Can you imagine the enormous amount of eternal rewards that some people have piled up just because they pray regularly for our missionaries? Those who never walk by..., and I sit up front and I see some of you, you walk in, and the first thing you do is you turn to the right and you reach out, you grab that summary sheet from last week's prayer meeting. Some of you never even look at it. You couldn't care less. But there are people who grab that, and they sit down at home, and they go through that list of requests that have been brought to us last Wednesday night. Can you imagine the enormous amount of eternal rewards those people are piling up because they have engaged with those people in meeting the will of God in their lives and in executing the ministries for which they've asked prayer?

This word, "sunagonizomai," actually portrays in the ancient world a wrestling match, two guys who are out there with each other, straining and struggling and sweating and shoving and trying to achieve a position. This is what praying is: fight hard, don't give up, and certainly expect results. You must be aware of the fact that the world that surrounds us, of all of Satan's institutions, that the Sin Nature within us, and that our arch enemy, Satan, consistently oppose. They belittle, they distract and they hinder Christians from persevering prayer. You must be aware of the fact that if you're not a praying person, if your life moves along from day to day with little or no prayer, that's because of the world around you. They have captivated your attention. They have absorbed your concerns. You are preoccupied with moving about with whatever you're doing out there in Satan's world, whatever objectives you're pursuing. It is because your Sin Nature has turned you to evils rather than to the Lord's prayer service, and because there is Satan himself who is telling you 'that it's really not all that important. You have more important things to do with your time; after all, with your job and the ambitions you're pursuing, you don't really have all that much time.' Many spiritual battles are lost because we default in prayer.

**Prayer**

Paul says in Romans 15:30, 'I urgently ask you, my brothers, on the basis of our Lord Jesus Christ who promised to respond to prayer and on the basis of your affection for me, created by God the Holy Spirit, for you to join me in the wrestling match with me in prayer.' This is the word for prayer that is used (There are several in the Bible.), this one is "proseuche," p r o s e u c h e. "Proseuche" is the most common word for prayer. It's the general word. It covers every kind of conceivable need and specifically says, "prayers to God for me."

Too many of you as Christians are preoccupied with talking to other people. You have not yet learned that it is more important to talk to God about your problem than it is to talk to people about your problems. We live in a society where religious leaders love the word counseling and boy, do they ever love to be counselors. Do they ever love to see you walk in their office so they can sit down and let you pour your heart out? They just love that. But the Word of God says, 'Forget those dudes.' If you have been taught the principles of the Word of God and you paid attention and you've learned doctrines and you have been positive to them, you know what to do. You know exactly what to do. And God the Holy Spirit will take His illuminating lamp, and He'll shine it upon that particular piece of doctrine stored in your human spirit so you will know what to do. But prayer is what draws that out.

Paul says, 'your prayers with mine to God.' Prayer is the product of faith in the Bible's way of getting God's work done on this earth. God says, 'I accomplish my will through your prayers.' That's amazing. Prayer is the means for moving the hand of God in behalf of Paul's ministry.

Actually, Isaiah put this very well in Isaiah 64:7. Isaiah said that prayer is the believer's way of taking hold of God. Isaiah 64:7, "And there is no one who calls on Thy name, Who arouses himself to take hold of Thee; for Thou hast hidden Thy face from us, And hast delivered us into the power of our iniquities." Isaiah is bemoaning the fact that he lives in a day when the people of God don't pray and he says, 'They have not aroused themselves to take hold of you.' That's an interesting comparison, that's an interesting analogy, walking up and grabbing hold of almighty God because you need His attention and you need His help. How do I get hold of God? I do it through prayer.

You remember the passage in Genesis 32:24-30 with Jacob at the brook Jabbok, all night long you had this picture of him wrestling with the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ and he won't let him go. Dawn is coming, and the pre-incarnate Jesus says, 'You have to let me go. I must leave now.' And he says, 'No I'm not going to let you go until you bless me.' You had this picture of Jacob hanging on for dear life. Finally the Lord places a great blessing upon him. Then Jacob relaxes.

Colossians 4:12 is pertinent to this also. Colossians 4:12, "Epaphras," Paul says, "who is one of your number." And don't forget, this letter was written while he's in prison in Rome. "Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondslave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God." Now, isn't this something? He is working for you. How? Well, he came out and he moved those cabinets that have been under our feet, you came out and you ran that club meeting. You did this. You did that. No, he says, 'All that was the result first of prayer. It was prayer that got the cabinet smooth. It was prayer that has achieved all the ministry that you engaged in.' Epaphras knew his doctrine. He wanted something accomplished for his people back in Colossi, that they would be mature Christians, not these wimps that run around in churches today, rolling their eyes heavenward, holding their hands overhead, jumping and jiving', and sweating and swaying in the charismatic movement and call that praising God. He says, 'You who are mature, fully assured Christians, you know what you're talking about. You know where you stand. You know the will of God. How have you come to that? Because somebody prayed for you.'

Paul knew what it was to face peril and I mean deadly peril in his ministry. And I suppose that encouraged him to be more concerned about prayer than it is for some of us. You know how it is when you have found yourself in a desperate situation. Maybe sometimes some of you find yourself in the life and death situation. Boy, do you ever get serious about prayer then? Suddenly, you're not thinking about that next event you're going to go on. You're suddenly not thinking about how much more money you can earn or what you can buy. Suddenly nothing is important except that desperate cry to God to give you the immediate help you need in that situation.

In Acts 20:3 Paul says, "And there he spent three months, [here when he came to Greece] and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to sail for Syria, he determined to return through Macedonia." Paul had his plans made in how he was going to go back home, and they discovered a plot to kill him. And his friends came to him and said, 'Paul, you're going to have to go a different way,' and he had to chuck everything. But prayer brought him the information and prayer brought him the protection.

In 2 Corinthians 1, Paul refers again to his personal experience of awareness of how desperately his very life needs the protection of the prayer of God's people and of himself. 2 Corinthians 1:10-11, Paul says, "who delivered us from so great peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us, you also joining in helping us through your prayers, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed upon us through the prayers of many." You couldn't say it any better than that! 'You who have delivered us from the peril of death because of the prayers of so many. He on who we have set our hope, He is going to deliver us.' I love that phrase: 'He on whom we have set our hope, He will yet deliver us.'

There's a great confusion and we'll be relating this to the last couple of verses of this chapter in the very near future. There was a book published called "The Gospel According to Jesus," by a very famous and very sound pastor, John MacArthur, in California. But he is proposing a salvation called Lordship's Salvation that is very defective, and it is tearing up the hearts of Christians. Have you ever asked yourself, am I really going to Heaven? Do I really know I'm going to Heaven and am I at ease about this? How do I know that my card, my ticket is for Heaven? And Mr. MacArthur is proposing a way of confidence that puts the eyes upon the individual and his conduct and performance instead of his eyes on the Lord. I'm going to take you through some detailed steps on that in the very near future. Be sure that you are here. It is a critical, unfortunate theological misconception that is putting a lot of people ill at ease, wondering where in the world they are going once they close their eyes in death.

But I want you to notice what Paul says here! There's no question in his mind, [2 Corinthians 1:10c] "He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us." Paul said in another place, "and I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I committed unto Him against that day." 'I've committed to Him my soul, and against the day when I face God, He's going to take care of me. The Lord Jesus Christ is the assurance of my eternal life, not whether I behave myself or act the way I should as a Christian.' So, the apostle Paul knew what it was to face deadly fear. He knew what it was to come out victoriously.

**The First of Paul's Two Specific Prayer Requests**

In Romans 15:31, he now presents request for two specific prayers. First, he says, "that [which introduces these two requests, that] I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Jerusalem." The word delivered looks like this in the Greek Bible, it's the Greek word "rhuomai," r h u o m a i, and this word simply means "to be rescued." Paul says, 'I'm in a situation where I need to be preserved from something.' It is at a point in danger. It is in the passive voice which indicates that he can't preserve himself. Someone has to do this for him. And it's in the subjunctive mood, he says, 'this is my hope, this is my purpose.'

What's his concern? He said, 'I'm going to Jerusalem now with this Jerusalem relief fund and I need prayers that I am going to be preserved. I'm going to be rescued from something I fear there in Jerusalem.' He describes what he fears as those who are "apeitheo," a p e i t h e o. This word means "disobedient," "people who have a constant quality about them of disobedience." What he is referring to is to Jews, both Christian and non-Christian, both classes who are disobedient to the Word of God, who are disobedient to Church Age doctrine. These disobedient Jews were not subject themselves to the grace of God. They were legalists. They hated anybody who talked about being free from all the ritual of the Law of Moses, and I'm talking about Christian Jews. They didn't like what Paul was telling these Gentile converts, that they didn't have to come under the Mosaic Law rituals, all that was past.

In Romans 10:21, the apostle Paul says in describing the Jewish people, "But as for Israel He says, 'ALL THE DAY LONG, I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE.'" Paul himself knew that the Jews would not listen. In the Romans 11:30, he says, "For just as you once were disobedient to God, [speaking to believers now] but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience." He says, 'You gentiles were also out of the family of God, but because the Jews are so disobedient toward my revelation that Jesus Christ is their Savior and without Him they cannot go to Heaven, I have set them aside and I turn to you Gentiles and I'm opening the door to Heaven wide for you Gentiles. Just come on in. And I'm freeing you of all the Mosaic Laws, of all the Mosaic requirements. Man, there were 613 of them. Go home this afternoon and count them, 613 laborious things that were required under the Mosaic Law. And Paul says, 'Forget it, every bit of that is gone. Anything of value of the righteousness of God in those regulations have been restated for us in New Testament doctrines.'

So, the apostle Paul knew he was facing Jews who were disobedient. He himself had known that in the past from his own experience when he had to flee for his very life when these disobedient Jews wanted to kill him for what he was teaching. One example of that is in Acts 9:28-30. Acts 9:28, "And he was with them moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. [29] "And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews [The Jews who were in the dispersion, who had the Greek lifestyle now.]; but they were attempting to put him to death. [30] "But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus." These Jews, in Paul's past experience, he knew would take his life at the drop of a hat. They thought they were serving God as Jesus told them they would; 'they're going to think they're going to serve God by killing you and thus silencing you.'

Well, did Paul really have all that much to be concerned about? Was there any reason for him to be this uneasy about going to Jerusalem and facing these rebellious, recalcitrant Jews? Well, when he got there, he found that there was good reason for concern. Here's where the beautiful historical background of the Book of Acts comes in. And I'm going to bring this in a little bit for you, portions that you have read before that you should now appreciate in the new perspective of what Paul is talking about.

In Acts 21, for example, beginning at Acts 21:27, Paul gets to Jerusalem, he delivers the Jerusalem relief fund, and what happens? Acts 21:27-36 describe what takes place. Paul himself had understood the differences between grace and law. But when he got to Jerusalem, he met with James (the leading pastor) and the other pastor-teachers of the city (the elders). And they said to him, 'You know Paul, you've got a bad reputation among the Jews. A lot of false rumors have come here about you. They're telling that you tell Jews no longer to follow the traditions of the Jewish people. [Paul never did that.] They're saying that you're telling Jews not to circumcise their children.' Paul never said that. He told the Gentiles; you don't have to do it. Actually, the Jews didn't either anymore. But Paul never told them not to follow their traditions. So, these were lies.

Then the preachers gave him some bad advice. They said, 'We have four men here. They're poor. They want to take a Nazarite vow. At the end of a seven-day period, they must perform some very expensive sacrifices according to the Law of Moses. Why don't you sponsor them? Why don't you let us publicly declare that you are sponsoring this ritual from the Mosaic Law so all these Jews will see that you're not really antagonistic to our lifestyle, that you're still a man who is a Jew, and who respects and appreciates your Jewish background?' Bad advice. It's going to cost him 4 years in prison for taking this advice. But he proceeded to do it.

Acts 21:27, [Did he ever need prayer against these opposers in Jerusalem? His request was well placed. Here's what happened!] "And when the 7 days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the multitude and laid hands on him, [28] "crying out, 'Men of Israel, come to our aid. This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people, and the Law, and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.' [They accuse Paul of bringing a Gentile in the court that was only reserved for the Jewish men, beyond the Court of the Gentiles. It was a lie; he never did that.] [29] "For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. [30] "And all the city was aroused, and the people rushed together; and taking hold of Paul, they dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut." Now, Paul is in there as part of this ritual, this Mosaic ritual of the Nazarite vow. They're coming to the climax after the seven days. He's there, engaged in making these animal sacrifices, and these unbelieving Jews start spreading the rumors about him and they get a riot going. A mob comes. And boy, this is discouraging to any preacher. Once the mob starts dragging you around, it's hard to keep your mind on your preaching.

Acts 21:31, "And while they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion." The Roman authorities hear about this riot going on in Jerusalem near the temple. [Acts 21:32] "And at once he [the officer] took along some soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul." This saved his life. When the Roman authorities showed up, the Jews backed off and stopped beating Paul because they could have killed him and they did not have authority to execute anybody.

Acts 21:33 "Then the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he began asking who he was and what he had done. [34] "But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts on account of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. [35] "And when he got to the stairs, it so happened that he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob." This thing became so bad that the Roman soldiers actually had to pick Paul up and carry him along into the barracks to get them in there safely.

[Acts 21:36] "for the multitude of the people kept following behind, crying out, 'Away with him!'" When is the last time you heard that expression? 'Away with him, away with him,' precisely what they had done to Jesus, now they do to His all-time great representative, the apostle Paul, 'Kill him, and silence him in that way!' While the apostle Paul had good reason to say, 'Please pray for me, I'm going to face, I feel, some disobedient Jews disobedient to God who think they know what God wants them to do. They're totally wrong and they will do what they can even to the taking of my life.'

Now, the apostle Paul had made it very clear that he was ready to suffer for the sake of the gospel testimony and for his loyalty to Jesus Christ. But he did not crave martyrdom. He was ready to take whatever gaff he had to take, but he wasn't eager to become a martyr. Acts 20:24 says, "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God." What kind of a gospel did he preach? The gospel of the grace of God, and you can add the word "free" in there, the gospel of the free grace of God. I want you to get acquainted with that term [free grace]. It's the opposite of the gospel of Lordship Salvation, the gospel of the free grace of God.

Paul said 'I don't consider myself, my life, to be so dear that I would let it stand, in any way, in the way of my integrity of ministry and my proclaiming of the truth of the Word of God. But Paul was in fact ready to die if necessary. Acts 21:13 said, "Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing?'" These people, his friends, had just said to him, 'Paul, God the Holy Spirit has been talking to us. You send this Jerusalem relief fund by the committee. Don't go to Jerusalem. They're laying for you. This is very serious. Stay out of Jerusalem. [Acts 21:13] "Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.'" Paul himself felt that he had to go with this fund. He couldn't let them go without him. He had to see that he had a maximal opportunity to solidify the unity between Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians. Paul himself would not compromise, but a martyr is a silent voice. Paul himself, on several occasions, was warned about what is coming. God the Holy Spirit, made it very clear to him what was in store.

Now, of course, there is a great debate. Should he have listened? Was he wrong in going? Was it alright for him to go in spite of the danger that he had been alerted to? Was he out of line when he took the Jewish ritual? We're going to deal with all of those questions next time. At this point, we're going to leave the story and pick it up with the warnings that were given to this man and the process by which he made the decision to go for it. And indeed, while it resulted in great loss of freedom, suffering, turmoil, hazards to him, it again worked out for good, as God always promises, in spite of all our meddling and muddling. He said, I'm never going to let it happen, that you will not come through successfully. Whatever muddling you do, I'm going to bring it together for great good today. You can go home this afternoon and you can read four great epistles that have maximum content of divine viewpoint Grace Age truth, just because Paul was in prison and had the time and the surroundings to do it. You can go home and read Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, Colossians, those great prison epistles, all because he had the freedom. God always brings good, even when we sincerely, as I take it Paul did here, was sincerely wrong. He missed the boat, but God yet brought victory. We must take great comfort indeed from that.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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