

Eternity Daily Bible Study

Romans 9-16 The Implications of Salvation

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE MINISTRY OF THE AIBI

Number: 625

Verses: Romans 15:20-24

Topic: When Is The Job Done?

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Romans 15:20-24 HCSB *So my aim is to evangelize where Christ has not been named, in order that I will not be building on someone else's foundation, (21) but, as it is written: "Those who had no report of Him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." (22) That is why I have been prevented many times from coming to you. (23) But now I no longer have any work to do in these provinces, and I have strongly desired for many years to come to you (24) whenever I travel to Spain. For I do hope to see you when I pass through, and to be sent on my way there by you, once I have first enjoyed your company for a while.*

For Paul the unreached took priority over the reached – even if the “reached” were high profile and important Romans. As politically central as Rome was it had been well evangelized (by the apostle Peter among others) and Paul preferred to go where the gospel had not yet been preached. *So my aim is to evangelize where Christ has not been named, in order that I will not be building on someone else's foundation, (21) but, as it is written: "Those who had no report of Him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."*

In order to do this Paul put these other less evangelized regions AHEAD of “important” Rome in his ministry priorities saying: *That is why I have been prevented many times from coming to you.*

It was only when the less reached provinces such as Galatia had been adequately evangelized that Paul could feel free to visit Rome. *But now I no longer have any work to do in these provinces, and I have strongly desired for many years to come to you (24) whenever I travel to Spain.*

Now one of the thorniest problems in missionary work is the question of “When is the job done so the missionary can go home or move elsewhere?” Does it take five years, fifty years or five hundred years?

In verse 23 Paul writes the astonishing phrase: ***“But now I **no longer have any work to do** in these provinces..”*** In other words “the job was done” for Paul in the vast area (about one thousand miles) *“from Jerusalem, and all around to Illyricum”* (see v. 19). Illyricum was a Roman province in the far north of Macedonia and corresponding to modern Albania, Croatia, Bosnia and Slovenia (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illyricum>) With the job done in these areas Paul could visit Rome on his way to Spain.

Romans was written about 58 AD, Paul's first missionary journey was 46-48 AD. So we are looking at a ten to twelve year period, and that without the aid of modern media. Were there no sinners left to convert, no pastors to train, no church problems to solve,

no doctrinal controversies to sort out? For some reason Paul thought that the gospel had been "fully proclaimed" in these areas!

By 58 AD the gospel had been proclaimed to many, leaders like Timothy and Titus had been trained up and the main problems of local contextualization such as circumcision, meat offered to idols, the role of the Jewish law, and speaking in tongues had been solved, resolved and pronounced on. Now the local churches could take over the job and evangelize their local communities by being obedient to the gospel.

The local leadership understood the gospel and the Christian lifestyle and the power of the Holy Spirit and could be trusted to operate under God's guidance. Therefore Paul could leave them alone to do the job even though "savage wolves" would come in and cause problems (see Acts 20:17-38).

For Paul the missionary task was completed when the gospel had been clearly and unambiguously proclaimed in the area and trustworthy local leadership had been raised up who were capable of getting God's guidance for themselves.

Paul did not wait until the local churches were perfect, or were financially sound, or were wonderful bible scholars. Once "faithful men (and women) who could teach others also" were raised up Paul moved on!

2 Timothy 2:2 HCSB *And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*

Paul was not interested in maintaining his own position or importance, or being the great guru and solver of all problems, or in maintaining control. Control belonged to God alone!

Paul allowed the local Christians to run their churches with a high degree of autonomy and local flavor. The gospel was the same but the food, dress and certain aspects of the leadership styles may be very, very different.

The whole idea for Paul was to produce churches that were run by Jesus Christ and filled with love and the Holy Spirit. Jesus was to run the church, not man, and certainly not a corporation.

Paul did not produce a denominational handbook, or a Paulistic logo, or a centralized government with a multi-story head office and fierce executive assistants that kept people away from their "very important" bosses. Paul produced living, holy disciples who in turn produced other living, holy disciples.

So when should a missionary leave, and what does that say about what a missionary should be doing? A missionary should leave as soon as the gospel has been clearly proclaimed and the local leadership can stand on their own. This should not take "too long". If Paul could do it in twelve years, perhaps we can say twenty to fifty years of missionary presence should be all that it takes. After that the missionary society should move to new areas where the gospel has not been as well proclaimed: *So my aim is to evangelize where Christ has not been named, in order that I will not be building on someone else's foundation, (21) but, as it is written: "Those who had no report of Him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."*

Missionaries are there to bring the gospel to those who have not heard and should prioritize the unreached over the reached. This priority should cause them to avoid places where the gospel has been well proclaimed (such as most of South America) and focus on areas where it has hardly been heard at all – such as the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist blocs. And the goal of the missions agency should be to proclaim the gospel and to make faithful Spirit-filled disciples who can teach others also.

Blessings,

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