

Romans 9:3 (R. Beacon) 70075

Bible Treasury: Volume N1, I Could Wish Myself Accursed From Christ (9:3)

I do not suppose these words are often taken as a text. If Paul had not given utterance to them, it is hardly too much to say that nobody else would have imputed such sentiments to him. It is true that the English Versions, Authorized and Revised, alike give it a little more strongly than the original warrants. At any rate the Greek simply says, "I was wishing, or praying."¹ It was doubtless but an impossible wish of love, such as Moses had felt and expressed before. For Paul was the last man deliberately to wish himself "accursed from Christ." As he more than any man knew and appreciated what it is to be "in Christ," so he must necessarily have had the keenest sense of the infinite misery consequent upon losing Christ—if that were possible. Indeed it could not be. None of all that the Father had given Him can be plucked out of the Savior's gracious hand. But still the apostle meant it at the time, meant it so much indeed that he was led of the Holy Spirit to record his wish on the imperishable page of scripture, where he solemnly affirms that the same Holy Spirit was a witness of his pain. And, I doubt not, there is more than one lesson to be learned from it.

And, first, it is most refreshing to find that Paul speaks out, as always, plainly and fearlessly, as well as most sincerely. We know of course that these qualities must characterize the divine word. Such seems but its low-water mark, if we may so term it. Still there is nothing stilted in the Bible. We no doubt are sometimes in danger of using high-flown language, of speaking or wishing it may be more as we fancy our brethren will approve, than as we soberly realize. We may be too careful at times to keep to the beaten track. Undoubtedly we should guard our words as well as our ways, and seek to speak only as the Holy Spirit would direct. But while, on the one hand, we must ever have this before us, and remember (I refer now to ministry of the word) that if we cannot "speak as oracles of God," or as His mouth-piece, we had better hold our tongues, and restrain our lips and pens, yet we do well, while judging ourselves, not to refrain from speaking out just what we believe in our hearts to be His mind. And this quite apart from the wish to say anything startling or novel, which is of course the opposite fault of mere sanity.

"There are those," an eminent writer² has said, "who are fond of digging up a meaning from beneath a verse, which they would be amiably sorry to think any other human being had been so fortunate as to discover before them." Of course I would commend nothing so unworthy. But the fact is that, leaving inspiration out of sight for a moment, Paul could afford to be, as I have said above, plain, fearless, and entirely sincere. He touched a harp of many strings. How many tones were in his voice! At, one time full of burning indignation, then subdued in pathos, anon quivering with delicate irony, but always earnest, elevated, and fearless before God. And such should our voices be in our measure, always bearing in mind that he was inspired, which we in any true sense are certainly not. For the word of God is both perfect and complete, and our words are worthless or worse, if they be not an echo of that which was "once for all delivered to the saints." But still we may learn to be large-hearted from the wonderful expansiveness and elasticity, if I may so call it, of the great apostle. It seems to me this is one lesson we may get from the passage.

But the words of Paul become much more striking still when taken with their context. Is it not singular that we should be told of his "great sorrow and unceasing pain" immediately after the grand outburst that closes the eighth chapter? Perhaps, if we except the Ephesians and Colossians, there is no more triumphant language in the whole Bible than this, as there is none loftier in its sphere outside the words of our blessed Lord Himself, whose utterances necessarily have a unique majesty. Paul had just been saying that "nothing could separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Immediately after he speaks of wishing to be not merely "separated" but "accursed from Christ!" Even so, do not our hearts understand it? Do we not recollect in our own history occasions of deep trial following hard upon seasons of special elevation and holy joy in the truth? Surely then it is not written in vain, but for our encouragement, that he who was "not a whit behind the pre-eminent apostles" was momentarily disposed to wish himself "accursed from Christ." No wonder we have our "ups and downs" if Paul felt thus. At the same time it is well to remember that the apostle's anguish was wholly unselfish, which is more than can always be said of ours. It was his consuming zeal for God's ancient people that caused the deep pain he felt at their rejection of his Master. Our sorrows are too often due to our own want of subjection to that Master. Not always indeed. There is such a thing as pure and unselfish sorrow in the contemplating of such a world as this. Those who know it know a little, and only a little, of what the apostle felt for the chosen people of Jehovah. And the record of this sorrow of his is just as much a part of revelation (no doubt a very much less important part) as his preaching of the Cross or his unfolding of the mystery. In this way too, as in those of direct teaching, we are meant through "the comfort of the scriptures" to "have hope." We are encouraged after temporary grief or depression to rise on more buoyant wing. And One suffered even more than Paul (I speak not of the atonement, where He was alone), as His is and will be the greatest joy (Heb. 1:9). R. B., Jun.

[The writer is alone responsible for mod s of expression and his thoughts.

Ed. B. T.]

clickbible.org