

Service or Servant?

It would seem, from a cursory reading of the book of Acts, that the Apostle Paul began, shortly after his conversion, something of a whirlwind missionary enterprise that swept throughout the Mediterranean area, to the very gates of Rome. And this, of course, has been the great model and standard for the missionary movement in the church to the present hour. While this has provided countless challenges to the evangelistic fervor of the believers, it has also, unfortunately, produced an equal amount of discouragement among those who seen not to be able to emulate his outstanding record.

Such a perception of Paul's ministry is really quite misleading. The truth of the matter is that Paul's ministry was as fraught with difficulty, disappointment and delays as any of his successors in the missionary effort to the present day. His ministry was interrupted on a number of occasions, by his conflict with the Jews, and his concomitant imprisonments. Again, there were long gaps in the record of his ministry, during which time he is merely said to have worked at his trade of tent making. No doubt he carried on a ministry, but it was not included in the record. It was at least fourteen years after his conversion, before he went to Jerusalem, to confer with the Apostles.

None of the foregoing discussion has been intended as a questioning of Paul's ministry. Rather it is intended to show another side of Paul's service—delays, frustrations, and hindrances that were an equally important part of Paul's life. God is not interested in simply getting people to work for Him. He is not a "spiritual slaver." We are all members of His family, and as such, offer our gifts to Him, voluntarily, in the expression of the gift He has given to us. We are free to offer ourselves and our service to Him, as God gives us the inner compunction to do so. Remember, if our service is an obligation, it is no longer a gift, and salvation is no longer free. We are saved to be members of God's family We are His children, and not His charges, or merely His servants. We serve Him out of a heart of love for Him. Satan, of course, attempts to silence our service. God allows him to afflict us, because it is good for our spiritual growth, because it is a testimony to the quality of our recovery, and the keeping power of God. His "new creatures" will not fail as did His "old creatures"—Adam and Eve. The reason we will not fail is because we have His Spirit within. Meanwhile, He is more concerned about *efficacy*, than about *efficiency*. That is to say, the demonstrating of the efficacy of His atonement is more important than the volume of services performed.

In conclusion, may we encourage the Christians to patience, and perseverance, and peace. God certainly knows what Satan is up to. Satan may heckle, and harass, and hinder, but he will never frustrate the purposes of God. Every stroke he makes against the believer serves only to strengthen the believer, and, ultimately, bring about Satan's own destruction.

"Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect, in every good work, to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight" (Hebrews 13:20,21).

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