

2 Timothy 4:9-22

June 17, 2020

In the earlier verses of this chapter we read Paul's farewell as an apostle: his final charge to Timothy, his review of his own walk of faith. In these verses we see Paul's human side. He is cold in his dank prison cell and lonesome for companionship. He feels abandoned by those who had been the object of his care and prayer. But in verses 14 and 15, we see an important lesson on a Christian's attitude toward his opponents.

An imprecation is a curse upon an enemy, desiring that judgment or misfortune would happen to him. Many Psalms are called "imprecatory Psalms." An example is Psalm 69:27, "Add to them punishment upon punishment; may they have no acquittal from you." There are many others like this in the Old Testament.

In the KJV, verse 14 of this chapter reads as an imprecation upon the wicked Alexander: "The Lord reward him according to his works." Paul is apparently asking the Lord to inflict some judgment on Alexander for his opposition to Paul's truthful teaching.

But most other translations, including Darby's, change this to "the Lord *will* repay him according to his deeds." Big difference. Paul is not calling for Alexander to be punished but rather, recognizing the inevitable consequence of Alexander's actions. The curse in Galatians 1:8-9 upon those distorting the gospel is similar. Paul prophetically foresees the curse but does not personally invoke it. This is, of course, in keeping with clear Christian doctrine. "Bless those

who persecute you; bless and do not curse them" and "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God" (Romans 12:14,19).

Verse 16 again reinforces this principle when Paul requests mercy for those who have deserted and disappointed him. Like the Lord, he shows greater tolerance for human weakness than deliberate sin.

We can conclude that Christians may discern the justice of God in punishing evildoers but they should not be the ones asking for it, at least when they are the victims. In Revelation 6:10, the imprecatory cries of the martyred souls for vengeance is seen as evidence that Christians, in the current sense, are not present during the tribulation.

Notes

4:11 For anyone who sees a lack of harmony between the gospels and Paul's epistles, note that two writers of the gospel are Paul's close companions.

4:12,20 Tychicus first appears in Acts 20 as a companion of Trophimus, one of the Gentiles Paul is accused to taking into the temple in Acts 21, the beginning of his legal troubles.

4:14 This may be the Alexander of shipwrecked faith in 1 Tim. 1:20

4:19 Prisca and Aquila, the faithful married couple and mentors of Apollos, appear often in Paul's greetings.

4:19 Onesiphorus was noted for helping Paul in Chapter 1.

4:20 Erastus previously appears as Timothy's help in Acts 19:22 and as the city treasurer of Corinth in Romans 16:23. We know nothing of the other Christians in this verse. That Claudia, a woman, is included indicates we can read the end of the verse "... all the brothers *and sisters*."

4:22 In "Grace be with you," *you* is plural.

Questions for study and discussion:

1. What does it mean to be in love with the present world?
2. Why is it particularly heartwarming that Paul invites Mark to come with Timothy as useful to his ministry?

3. A few verses ago, Paul told Timothy to endure suffering. Why then does he ask for his cloak instead of enduring the cold?
4. Why do you suppose Paul asks for his books and parchments, when he is already being “poured out” and nearing his end?
5. This letter would have been written during Paul’s second and final imprisonment. It is thought he had appeared before the emperor Nero and argued his case without success. What can we tell from verses 16-17 about that trial? What lessons does it have for us?
6. What does verse 18 mean?
7. In the book of Acts, we read of the apostles healing many ill or infirm people. But Paul did not heal Trophimus at Miletus. What can we learn from this?