

Application

A. What is the most important thing the Apostle Paul did, in your opinion? He started many churches, but they are all gone. He won many people to Christ, but they are all dead. No one I know painted his picture or bronzed him in a statue. What endures today are his letters, and their influence is almost beyond measure.

B. Think of this: Paul started this letter to explain why he hadn't come west to Rome. He wrote it because God kept saying "no" to his desire to go to Rome. But in doing this, in saying "no" with God and in writing this letter, Paul composed what today, 2000 years later, is considered to be the most outstanding theological document of all time – the book of Romans.

Time and again, in every generation, the book of Romans has moved people to courageous acts of faith. It has repeatedly corrected the foolish ideas of man without Christ. It has spawned renewals, revivals, and even reformations across continents. At the time Paul didn't realize it, but this letter was far more important than his trip to Rome – and he wrote it because he was willing to say "no" to his plans and "yes" to God's. Are you willing to do that?

C. Some of you are facing great difficulty in your life right now. You have felt God's "no" and it isn't particularly fun. How is it with you and God? Is your faith big enough to say:

"I know that he that is in me is greater than he that is in the world!" (I John 4:4)

"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth." (Job 19:25).

"I know that God is always at work in my life?" (John 5:17)

D. Knowing what you know, and believing in God's greatness, love, power, and unwavering character, will you say a big "YES" to God today?

Yes, Lord, I believe in you!

Yes, Lord, I put my whole trust in you!

Yes, Lord, I will follow you!

Yes, Lord, when you say "no" I will not turn away from you.

Yes, Lord, you are my Lord!

Prayer

Song: 1st Service – "Yes Lord, Yes Lord"

2nd Service -- "I'll Say Yes, Lord, Yes"

"Know When to Say No"

Romans 15:23-33

4/18/10

RMBC
Pastor Dennis

Introduction

A. Not all of you are parents, but those who are know it can be hard to say "no" to our children. Children, you need to know that parents say "no" to you for a lot of reasons, most of them good – good for you. Sometimes it is for your safety, for your health, or it may be the best thing for your understanding of God and how he works. Learn to trust your parents!

B. A father put his young son to bed and 5 minutes later heard, "Daaad! I'm thirsty. Can you bring me a drink?" The dad told him sternly "No!" He had his chance and it was time for lights out. Five minutes later the same thing, "Daad, I'm thirsty . . ." After the third time the dad said, "I told you "no" and if you ask again you're getting a spanking." It was quiet for a few minutes and then the dad heard, "Dad, when you come to give me a spanking will you bring me a drink?"

C. In our text today, Romans 15:23ff, Paul reviews what happened when God said "no" to one of his great desires. Like every Roman citizen in his day, Paul wanted to see Rome. It was like wanting to see New York or Washington D.C. today. It was fascinating, dangerous, historic, and adventurous. Back in Romans 1:10 Paul prayed that God would open the way for his visit. In 1:13 he planned many times to come to them. And in 15:22 he had often been prevented from going to Rome.

D. Here's one thing that sets God apart from us as parents: He knows precisely when to say "no" and when to say "yes." The key is finding the kind of faith that trusts him in those times. One of the great things about the Apostle Paul is that when things didn't go as he planned he didn't whine and complain; he didn't feel sorry for himself, but saw it as God's way of getting him where he was supposed to be.

From this text I see three times when we need to be able to say no (or accept God's "no" for us).

When God Changes Your Plans vs. 23-24

A. We don't actually have a biblical record of whether Paul ever made it to Spain, but that certainly didn't keep him from planning. As believers, and in our ministries, I believe in setting goals and making plans. We ought to plan as if we are going to be here for the next 100 years and live as if we could be gone tomorrow. We can plan like crazy and trust God completely in everything we do – including our church plans, building plans, ministry plans, and our life plans.

B. Some people are so unsure of the future they won't even buy green bananas. Others live as if this world is their home. Both extremes miss that dynamic of faith that God calls out in us. Paul's desire was to see the good news of the gospel spread world-wide. If he had known in his day that there was a North America he would have wanted to go there too. He just wanted to go everywhere with the gospel, but God directed his path.

C. Like Paul, we need to know how to say "no" in keeping with our calling and our gifts. Paul's calling was to be an apostle/missionary; his gift was proclaiming the gospel. And he was able to say "no" to anything outside of that circle.

I recall one of the most difficult times when Connie and I said "no" to the call of a church. We were on staff in Fresno when a church plant across the city asked us to candidate to be the first pastor to follow the church planter. We went, we talked and visited and prayed and the church voted unanimously for us to come. But something, like Paul writes, "prevented us" and with heavy hearts we said "no" to those people and their dream.

I look back today and believe that it would have taken me out of my gifting to lead a church plant. I believe God spared that church from me and me from a failure. God can change our plans – and when he does we must be willing to join in his "no" for that time.

When Unity of the Church is Threatened vs. 25-29

A. Paul had an undying desire to see the Gentiles and Jews united in their common faith. One of the ways God answered that prayer was to "arrange a famine" in Judea. The Christian Jews in Judea were suffering while the Christian Gentiles in Asia were thriving. So Paul traveled along gathering offerings from Gentiles for the Jews. It was a giant reversal in needs and gifts.

B. I believe that one purpose in this offering was to bring a sense of unity to the churches – to help them see they were not isolated pods of people floating on their own. They were spiritually connected. The Gentiles would not have come to faith without the spiritual heritage of the Jews, and the Jews now needed their new Gentile cousins. Paul reminds them, in vs. 27, that gratitude is a great unifier.

C. The principle is that any new work that is built independent of its foundations is on shaky ground – that's true of buildings and ministries. How many of you remember when we started our second service here? I was not here but something quite unusual and wise happened: It is that the new ministry (contemporary service) honored the foundational ministry (traditional service) by saying, "We will take the more difficult time for meeting – we will meet early and not unsettle the traditional time of worship."

In case you didn't know it, in terms of church-growth that is backwards – the very people they were seeking to reach back in 1996, young people who had left the church, are not too excited about getting up early on Sunday. Most churches, when they started a contemporary service, moved the traditional service to 8:00 a.m. and killed it. We have a healthy traditional service, in part, because some people said "no" for the sake of unity.

(Just so you know, sometime it would be good to visit the question of changing the order of our services. It should not be a question of convenience but of effectiveness; not for personal preference but for purpose. We need to know what will help us reach the most people for Jesus Christ)

D. Don't forget this important lesson in God's way of working: When unity is threatened, those with the most grace say "no" to their personal preferences. Now remember that God's "no" is not always a "never". Often it is a "not now" so remain open, flexible, listening, and attentive to his voice. Think about this principle and prayerfully come together this evening for our congregational meeting. Be asking God throughout the day, "Is this a time to say "no" or is it now a time to say "yes"? What are you saying to us, Lord?" The call to prayer this past week was not so you could talk to God, not only that, but so that we could also hear from God.

When Waiting For God's Leading Through Prayer vs. 30-33

A. Like Paul, there are times when God asks us to go through a struggle and the most powerful thing we can do is pray. Did you notice Paul's three prayer requests?

1. That he would be rescued from the unbelievers
2. That his service in Judea would be accepted
3. That he could come to Rome with joy and be refreshed.

B. If you know the book of Acts you know that all three requests were answered, but in surprising ways. Paul had to say "no" to one thing so that he could say "yes" to God's way.

1. He was rescued, but first he was beaten-up by a mob in Jerusalem.
2. His gift was acceptable, but it was accompanied by lies that led to the riot that led to his beating.
3. And he did come to Rome and was met with a joyful welcome as the believers came out to a place called "The Three Taverns". But he didn't come as a missionary – he came as a prisoner (At least the government paid his way so he traveled free of charge).

C. This is a powerful reminder that we are in a battle. Do you forget that sometimes? I do. I need to be refreshed and re-focused on the task at hand. Reliance on the Holy Spirit is essential and often that comes when I struggle and am moved to pray more.

Introduction

Paul had a strong desire to visit _____
Romans 1:10 – He had _____ for the way to be opened
Romans 1:13 – He had _____ to go on many occasions
Romans 15:22 – He had been _____ from going

One of the things that sets God apart from human parents:
He knows _____ when to say “no” and when to say “yes”

Paul saw God’s “no” as a way to get him _____ he should be

Three Times to say “No”

When God changes your _____ vs. 23-24
Paul’s life encourages us to set _____ and make _____
Plan to be here _____ years;
Live like you’ll be _____ tomorrow
Paul wanted to go everywhere with the gospel
But always God _____ his path

When _____ of the Church is Threatened vs. 25-29
Paul’s strong desire: To see Jews and Gentiles _____
God arranged this through a _____ in Judea
In a new way Christian Jews and Gentiles _____ each other

Principle: Any new work built apart from its _____ is on
shaky ground (true for buildings and ministries)
We need God’s guidance to know when to say:
_____ for the sake of unity
_____ for the sake of the reaching lives for Jesus

When Waiting for God’s Leading Through _____ vs. 30-33
Sometimes in our _____ our most powerful tool is _____
Three prayer _____ Three _____ answers
Reminder: We are in a spiritual _____

Application

Paul’s most important work in his career: His _____
Romans, the greatest theological work, was written because
_____ said “no” and _____ accepted it.

When God says, “no” I will say “yes” to Him!