

## DUTY DEMANDS IT

"For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel." I Corinthians 9:16.

Paul regarded his ministry as both a privilege and a duty. From his writings we learn that evangelism is the duty of every Christian, and not merely of a select few like ministers and missionaries. No doubt Paul had, in a special sense, a "necessity laid upon" him. Although he differs from us in his direct, supernatural commission, in the splendor of his gifts and in the width of his sphere, he does not differ from us in the reality of the obligation. The work of evangelizing is an obligation that God has placed on every one of His children whether they acknowledge and accept it or not. Christ's marching orders to His church were expressed in the words, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Our only choice is to deny Christ's authority or to obey His orders. Every Christian is obligated to proclaim the good news of salvation through Christ to the lost. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:19-20). This commandment is contemporaneous with the duration of the promise which is appended to it. In fact, the promise is made conditional upon the discharge of the duty. Because this commission was given to the church it is binding on every individual member thereof. A church is the sum total of its members, and nothing is incumbent upon it which is not incumbent on every member. Everybody who has come to know Christ can tell what the Lord has done for him.

### I. Evangelism Is A Duty Which We Must Discharge.

Paul regarded preaching the gospel of Christ as a duty, and he told us why. He said, "For necessity is laid upon me." A charge of the most solemn character had been laid upon him. When? At his conversion when Christ commissioned him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, "to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." This commission has come to us also. The very fact that we have the gospel puts us under obligation to share it with others. We must convey this good news to our neighbors. The difference between one Christian and another is the fact that God chooses different neighbors for different people. Wherever our appointed sphere, we are all chosen vessels to bear His name.

Although Paul's commissioning had taken place years ago, he continued to witness until his death. So must we. Neither age nor infirmity can excuse us from preaching the grace of God. So long as we are on this earth, we are our Lord's commissioned ambassadors -- in weakness as well as in strength, in sickness and in health, in the zest of youth and in the serenity of old age.

"For necessity is laid upon me." "Necessity" is a word which the pagans used. The Greeks used it of Fate, of that which had to be and could not be evaded by any means. During the war years, you remember, some used to say that if their name was on a bomb, nothing in the world could stop it from hitting them. Fate, they said, could not be dodged. Christians do not believe in Fate; rather, we trust to the Providence of our loving Heavenly Father. But Paul borrowed the pagan idea of Fate to convey the inescapableness of our duty to preach the gospel. We cannot shuffle out of our responsibility to witness without incurring a heavy penalty.

In the next verse Paul amplifies this necessity, as he talks about the stewardship of the gospel which has been committed to him. He pictures himself as a slave placed in a position of trust. A slave in the ancient world was the total possession of his master. He could not argue with his master, but he had to give blind obedience to him. "Their's not to reason why; their's but to do and die" might well have been written about slaves. Christians are Christ's slaves. We are not free men at liberty to pick and choose. Our Master has commissioned us to proclaim His gospel and that is the end of the matter. We have no option but to obey.

However, we are no ordinary slaves. Paul called himself a steward, a slave put in a position of trust. Potiphar committed the distribution of all his goods to Joseph, his chief steward. Paul knew that his Lord had appointed him a steward of the mysteries of His gospel, and he was thus under the most sacred obligation to share these precious, saving truths with the unsaved. You and I are our Master's stewards or trustees and executors. An executor must carry out the wish of the testator to the last detail, and we are the executors of our Lord's last will and testament. It is then our plain and inescapable duty to distribute His Bounty to every man, woman and child. Evangelism is a duty which every Christian must discharge.

This necessity which is laid upon us to evangelize the lost is a force working from within, not a pressure from without. It is the inner force of gratitude to Christ. The true Christian heart cannot but give to others the good news about the salvation which Christ has given to it. The spirit of love is a law that constrains with resistless compulsion. If you are a silent Christian, if you are not doing anything personally to try to win others to Christ, you are certainly a stranger to the heart of Christ.

### III. Evangelism Is A Duty Which We Must Discharge Without Thinking Of Reward.

This is the burden of the opening words of this text -- "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of." In other words, Paul says, "I cannot take any credit for preaching the gospel. I cannot send in my bill to God for services rendered, because I have only done my duty." Reward comes when work exceeds duty.

Evangelism is a duty of the most imperative character. Is there anywhere a more moving illustration of our obligation to share the good news than the story of the starving Samaritan lepers who suddenly hit upon a miraculous plenty? The four lepers only "existed" at the best of times in their little huts at the city gates, but when the Syrians besieged Samaria their plight became intolerable. Famine raged within: the children lying awake at night with the pangs of hunger, their mothers weeping, their fathers distressed, the king pacing the walls of the city distracted and almost out of his mind. What hope was there for lepers? They resolved on a last desperate throw. They would cast themselves on the mercy of the enemy. They stole up to the Syrian camp. They were amazed. They reached the outer tents of the enemy encampment without a sentry to halt them, without even a soldier in sight. It was uncanny. They lifted the flap of the first tent, saw food and fell upon it in a delirium of gratitude. They moved on to the next tent, and the next, until the truth dawned on them. The enemy had fled, leaving all their stores behind. As they felt the glow of a good meal within them and remembered these starving little children back in the besieged city of Samaria, they suddenly felt ashamed. "This is the day of good tidings!" they exclaimed to one another. "We do not well to hold our peace." Back they ran with their good news.

Sheer humanity demanded that the lepers should share the news that they had found bread. They did not expect to be decorated for doing what any decent man would have done under the circumstances. Those of us who are Christians claim to have found bread in a starving world. Therefore, we have a humanitarian obligation to go and tell it. But we have a still more imperious obligation. After all, the lepers took their lives in their hands when they approached the enemy camp, and they were the first to make the discovery. Not so with our discovery of the grace of God. We heard the gospel story, the Holy Spirit wooed and won us and Christ called us unto Himself. Now He commands us to tell others where bread is to be found. It is our duty to tell others that there is bread enough and to spare in our Father's House.

### III. Evangelism Is A Duty Which We Must Discharge For Fear Of The Consequences If We Do Not.

"Yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" What did Paul mean? "Woe" speaks of calamity. The idea of divine judgment is always present in the exclamation. Think of Isaiah's cry in the temple: "Woe is me, for I am undone!" Think again of the way in which our Lord spoke to those who had repeatedly rejected His ministry. "Woe unto you, Chorazin!" "Woe unto you, Bethsaida!" "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" In every case the woe is an announcement of a threatened judgment. Paul believed that some unnamed punishment would befall him if he did not preach the gospel. If he failed to evangelize when he had been commissioned to do so, it would be so much worse for him. Paul quailed before the woe of unfaithfulness to his Saviour, to the gospel which had been committed to him and to others. He was afraid of not doing the right thing.

You might ask, "Do you believe that God chastises Christians when they do not preach, when they do not witness, when they do not give and pray for the work of evangelism at home and abroad?" The answer is "Yes." It is a scriptural teaching that God chastises His disobedient children.

Jonah's duty was to preach to the Ninevites, but when he ran away from it God put him into the sea and into the fish, and made His renegade missionary so miserable that he was glad to obey Him. Haggai confronted a people who refused to build the temple on the plea that they could not afford it; yet they had built palatial homes for themselves. They had definitely robbed God. But with what result? They had not prospered. On the contrary, they had put their money into "a bag with holes." Money never stays in a bottomless bag. God had chastised them further with drought, blight and famine. Poverty was the net result of their disobedience.

God's Word clearly speaks of God's judgment resting upon His disobedient people. Experience also confirms this. Christians who evade their Master's commission to evangelize the lost never enjoy a full and powerful life. We need to be afraid not to witness and make known the love of God in Christ. Calamity will befall us if we don't make it known -- perhaps outwardly, and certainly inwardly.

Not for duty's sake only should we tell about our Saviour, but because our hearts are so full of Christ that we cannot but declare the things which we have seen, heard and experienced. Let us do our best to make Christ known to men. Upon their acceptance of Him, He will deliver them from the power of Satan and translate them into His glorious kingdom.

"Rescue the perishing, Duty demands it;  
Strength for thy labor the Lord will provide;  
Back to the narrow way, patiently win them;  
Tell the poor wanderer a Saviour has died.

"Rescue the perishing, Care for the dying;  
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save."