

EVERY BAPTIST A DEBTOR

"I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Romans 1:14-16.

Across the centuries Paul towers majestically as one of the most positive and dynamic persons the world has ever known. He was fortunate in having a distinguished ancestry, a remarkable ability, a trained mind, a polished education and a courageous spirit.

At one time, Paul was a fanatical hater of Christ, a bitter opponent of His gospel and a zealous persecutor of His followers. He was so bitterly opposed to the early Christians that he knew no limits in his persecution of them. In spite of this, Christ loved him, sought him, grasped him, saved him, transformed him, called him into the ministry and commissioned him for world-wide service. Nothing but the power of Christ could have wrought such a change in him. He became the most remarkable Christian of all the ages. He also became a fearless, faithful and flaming evangelist, the most effective preacher of the gospel Christ has ever had. As God's man, Paul was concerned primarily with discovering and doing the will of the Master. When he inquired, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?", he immediately received the information which he requested, and he quickly placed his life at the disposal of the Master.

Having yielded his personality, possessions and plans to Christ, and having proclaimed His glorious gospel in various places with marked success, Paul, for a long time had desired to visit Rome, but thus far had not been able to realize his noble purpose. In view of the fact that he might never visit the great metropolis, and being desirous of doing so only if it were in accordance with God's will, Paul wrote this letter to the Christians there, expressing his love for them and his longing to preach to them.

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This wonderful text breathes the very spirit of the matchless Apostle, out of which grew all of the missionary activity and the magnificent service of his remarkable career. In these three forceful statements he lifts us to the heights of Christian faith and devotion. And the declarations which he makes concerning himself should be just as true of every Baptist. Therefore, as we center our thoughts around this text, and apply it to our lives, let us consider three things:

I. THE REALIZATION.

"I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise." Romans 1:14.

Paul was a debtor to Christ. That we can readily understand on the basis of creation, preservation, redemption and salvation. From Christ he had received love, light, life and liberty. Because of his spiritual emancipation he was deeply indebted to the Saviour. Paul thought of his debt to Christ as having arisen out of the grace of which he had been the recipient on his way to Damascus and out of his call to the apostolate. He said, "By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for His name." Romans 1:5. To the obligation thus laid upon him Paul referred again and again, notably in I Corinthians 9:16, where he wrote, "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel."

Paul was a debtor to men also. On what grounds was he indebted to them? His debtorship was not due to any benefits they had conferred on him, because at their hands he had suffered personal injury in almost every city where he had proclaimed the glorious gospel of Christ. But, the fact that they had maltreated him did not alter his position or cancel his debt. He was a debtor to men because of what Christ had done for him. After Paul's experience of grace, Christ said to him, in effect, "You cannot do anything for Me personally in return for what I have done for you. Instead of attempting to do so, I want you to go and preach my gospel to the Gentiles, regardless of the personal sacrifice that may be involved."

Even though Paul was a member of the most patriotic sect of the most exclusive race on earth, he was brought to the complete realization that he was a debtor to other races also. Recognizing that there were different ways of classifying the members of the human race, the Apostle publicly confessed that he was debtor to the Greeks and to the Barbarians. Drawing a line of demarcation on the basis of religion, the Hebrews classified them as Jews or Greeks. The Greeks and the Romans divided mankind into two categories, namely, the Greeks and the Barbarians. The latter term was applied to all non-Greeks. Believing that they were the only ones who had achieved any cultural attainments, the Greeks referred to others as Barbarians. In keeping with the Greek classification, Paul called them the wise and the unwise, using the two words to distinguish between the philosophers or those who were skilled in letters, and the non-philosophers or those who were the uncomprehending masses.

Cognizant that he was a debtor, Paul did not hesitate to acknowledge it. Even though that was not the easy or the popular thing to do, he made this bold assertion, "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise." This affirmation was indicative of Paul's greatness. He manfully acknowledged his indebtedness to all types of men--the Greeks and the Barbarians, the wise and the unwise, the intelligent and the ignorant, the learned and the unlearned, the cultured and the uncultured. He freely admitted that he was debtor to every nation under heaven, and to all classes in each, without respect to color, to character or to condition of life.

Possessing that which others did not have, but which they desperately needed, and which he could provide, Paul confessed with unerring dispatch that he was debtor. If we are to render genuine and acceptable service for our Lord, we must have a similar sense of obligation and debtorship. The best work for Christ will be done always by those who possess the absolute realization that they are debtors in reality.

II. THE RESPONSE.

"So much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also."
Romans 1:15.

One may respond to the realization that he is a debtor either by a determination to repudiate it or by a willingness to retire it. The latter is the only honorable response for a Christian. It is one thing to recognize and acknowledge a debt, but quite another to be ready and willing to pay it. The Apostle Paul did both, which causes us to admire and appreciate him the more. He declared, "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also." Paul was a very sensitive and conscientious debtor. Ever mindful of his debt, he refused merely to sing, "Jesus paid it all," and do nothing more about it. Rather, he announced his readiness to meet his obligation to the utmost of his ability. His determination to retire his debt corresponded with his sense of obligation.

Paul was anxious to pay his debt in the proper coin, namely, the gospel of Christ. He firmly believed that his debt could be retired or liquidated only by his faithful and

fearless preaching of the gospel. For this important and glorious task he was thoroughly prepared and eminently qualified. He possessed an experience of grace, an assurance of salvation, an ability to preach, a call from God, a dedication of life, a recognition of need, a heart of compassion, an eagerness to serve, a willingness to sacrifice and a dependence on the Holy Spirit. He was eager to use his talents, time, influence and money in the service of his Master.

It is commendable indeed when one is actually ready to do a worthwhile work. Others will recognize and appreciate a person who sees a need and makes the proper response thereto, and who possesses the necessary judgment and skill for efficiency and effectiveness in the execution of the endeavor. Paul was known as a man who was ready to go anywhere and to do anything for the furtherance of the gospel and for the glory of Christ. To this end he was ready to serve, to suffer and to sacrifice.

Because of his ambition to proclaim the gospel in high places, Paul was ready and eager to go to Rome; provided such a course met the approval of his Lord. He knew that the Imperial City was not an easy place in which to preach Christ, but he was not concerned primarily about the opposition and difficulties to be encountered there. He never yielded to the temptation to turn aside and fail to do the will of the Lord because difficulties and hardships were involved. Possible pain, privation and peril did not diminish his eagerness to enter Rome. He wanted the Christians there to understand that his delayed arrival in their midst was due to his circumstances and not to his choice. His only limitation in accomplishing his undaunted purpose was personal inability.

As an outgrowth of Paul's realization of the enormity of his debt to Christ and humanity, he declared his deliberate intention of striving diligently toward its liquidation until the time of his death. He did this with the knowledge that the gospel of Christ was the only means with which his debt could be paid.

III. THE RESOURCES.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Romans 1:16.

Concerning the only available resources for meeting his spiritual obligation, Paul wrote, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Thus he introduced his readers to the theme of the Epistle to the Romans, which is the gospel of Christ.

There is music in the very sound of the word, "gospel." It is a word of deep significance and wide import. The gospel is not the Bible. Notwithstanding the fact that the Bible is the Word of God, yet, there is much in it that is not the gospel. Neither is it simply a call to repentance, or to the amendment of one's ways or to a higher and nobler kind of life. These things are excellent, but they do not constitute the gospel. Nor is the gospel merely a statement of what God desires and rightfully expects of us. It is not concerned with what man should do, but rather with what God has done already.

Instead of the gospel being good advice to be heeded, it is good news to be believed. The gospel of Christ is the best news that has ever been announced. Paul gives an abbreviated, and yet a complete, statement of it in I Corinthians 15:1, 3-4 which reads as follows: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you . . . For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He arose again the third day according to the scriptures." Thus, it is very obvious

that the gospel of Christ is not concerned with theories, but rather with established facts. The facts which constitute the gospel of Christ are three in number.

1. Christ died for our sins.

Regardless of how many nice things a person may say about Christ, he has not proclaimed the gospel if he has omitted His vicarious death on Calvary's cross. There is no other way whereby a sinner can be saved than through the shed blood of the Son of God.

2. Christ was buried.

Christ's body was removed from the cross and placed in the tomb.

3. Christ arose.

Early on Sunday morning Christ arose from the dead, laid aside His grave clothes and walked out of the tomb triumphant over death. The resurrection of Christ is an indispensable part of the glorious gospel.

Any message that does not flow from these three historical facts, namely, that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, and that He rose from the grave, is not the gospel. In these three facts there is nothing except that which should increase our faith in Christ, our love for Christ and our devotion to Him. Without any hesitation whatsoever I gladly avow my firm belief in Christ's supernatural birth, His absolute deity, His vicarious atonement, His bodily resurrection and His personal return.

There were people in Rome who were very suspicious and critical of the Apostle, and who sought to discredit his message in no uncertain terms. Quite likely some of them remarked that he would be ashamed to appear in Rome, where there was so much learning, with the kind of message he was proclaiming with such confidence elsewhere. Knowing that the Romans regarded those who believed and preached the gospel as being contemptible did not cause Paul the least concern. Their wealthy and wicked city, which was the very embodiment of pride in human achievement, held no fear for him. He asserted that he was not ashamed to preach the gospel in Rome. Isn't it noteworthy that Paul was not going to Rome as a psychologist, a psychiatrist, a philosopher, a lecturer, an entertainer, a reformer, a director of recreation or a distributor of prizes, but as a preacher of the gospel of Christ? Preaching His gospel is the highest privilege our Lord ever gave to Paul or any other man. Therefore, let us never neglect this in order to spend our time on things of secondary importance or trivial value.

Having been entrusted with the Gospel, Paul rejoiced to proclaim it. He said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." Such an expression is what is called a litotes, meaning the use of an understatement for the purpose of increasing the effect. A negative statement is sometimes the most emphatic way of expressing an implied opposite. Paul's assertion, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," meant that he was justly proud of the gospel and truly gloried in it. Instead of being ashamed of it, he considered it a high honor to be able to preach it anywhere, and especially in Rome.

Ashamed of the gospel? A thousand times no! Certain things about the gospel forbid our being ashamed of it.

1. Its Power.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God." The Greek New Testament contains two words which are translated "power." They are *exousia* and *dunamis*. The former means authority and the latter means ability. *Dunamis* is used in this verse, and it means ability or strength. It is the word from which we get the term "dynamite." It implies power expressed in action. The gospel of Christ is to the spiritual realm what atomic power is to the physical realm.

It is almost unthinkable that anyone would be ashamed of power, and especially God's power. The gospel of Christ is just that, the power of the living God. It is the most potent force the world has ever known. It has power to bring sinners to the feet of Christ, laying aside their self-sufficiency, contritely confessing their utter sinfulness, and through simple faith humbly receiving the righteousness of Christ. It shatters the prison walls of sin and liberates the souls incarcerated therein. It has ample power to level mountains of pride and to conquer the carnal habits which are contrary to the will of God.

If the gospel of Christ is the power of the living God unto salvation, and it is, then the lack of power in our churches must be due to the withholding of this gospel or the substitution of something else for it. Are we ashamed to preach the gospel of Christ and to depend on it alone for the desired results? The substitution of anything for the gospel is similar to the replacement of an atomic bomb with a cap pistol.

In what spirit should this glorious gospel be proclaimed? Prayerfully, dependently, faithfully, purposefully, pleadingly, persistently, persuasively, lovingly, earnestly and expectantly.

2. Its Purpose.

"It is the power of God unto salvation." This expression implies that it is God's power instead of man's strength which extricates a sinner from the state of condemnation. Salvation was purposed in the mind of God, prompted by the love of God and provided by the Son of God. It means the rescue of the soul from sin, unrighteousness, the wrath of God and eternal punishment unto grace, righteousness, forgiveness, eternal life and fellowship with God. Salvation has three aspects--deliverance from the penalty of sin, from the power of sin, and eventually from the presence of sin. Deliverance from the penalty of sin is granted to those who are justified, deliverance from the power of sin is experienced by those who are being sanctified, and deliverance from the presence of sin is enjoyed by those who are glorified. This salvation is the greatest blessing that God can bestow or man can receive. It is great in its conception, in its cost and in its content.

Salvation is the ultimate purpose of the gospel. This statement, "the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation," excludes all other means of salvation. The gospel is the power in the hand of God to effect our deliverance from sin, as opposed to our natural impotence and utter inability to obtain salvation by anything we can do.

With the exception of Christianity all religions teach salvation by character or by conduct. They hold out the hope of earning salvation by merit of one kind or another. But, salvation by conduct or by works is the doctrine of Satan, no matter by whom nor where it is preached. What a pity that so many are trying to achieve salvation through personal efforts and meritorious works in spite of the fact that God's Word repeatedly states that it is an utter impossibility to do so! Salvation is never the result of merit on the part of the receiver, but it is always and entirely a matter of grace on the part of the Giver. It is not partly of grace and partly of works, but it is all of grace and none of works. According to God's Word, salvation is always by grace through faith plus nothing.

3. Its Product.

Essentially pragmatic and utilitarian in their outlook, the Romans were not interested in anything unless it worked and had power. Knowing that they would test the gospel of Christ by its results, Paul was ready to challenge them with it on the basis of its product. He said, "It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

Christ's gospel is the powerful and effectual instrument for bringing to salvation every one who believes it. While this gospel is limitless in its offer to every one, it is limited in its application to only those who believe. This mightiest power on earth will not become effective in a life until one believes on Christ. Doing that results in one becoming a child of God. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

Like Paul, we know that the gospel has had a tremendous and transforming effect on us. Moreover, with him, we can point to the marvelous results it has produced in the lives of numerous and various sorts of characters. Because of what the power of God has wrought in the saved souls, transformed lives and Christian activities of believers, we can never be ashamed of it.

God has been so gracious to us in making the gospel of Christ effectual to the salvation of our souls. We shall never be able to express adequately the appreciation of our hearts for what He has done for us as individuals and as a Baptist people. We are indeed grateful for the high honor which He has bestowed upon us in making us stewards of His glorious gospel and of our Baptist distinctives. In this capacity we occupy a position of trust, of honor, of influence and of responsibility. It is required of us that we shall be faithful to our trust.

It is the desire of our blessed Lord that every person shall hear His gospel. Therefore, we owe it to Him to take His message to every creature. Our possession of the gospel and the positive command of the Master place us under this obligation, from which there is no evasion or exemption. The gospel has not been given to us merely for selfish consumption or selfish distribution. It is our inestimable privilege and imperative duty to share it with all who have never received it. To this end we need to recapture the vision of a lost world, the missionary passion and the spirit of sacrifice. The open doors and broad highways of opportunity call for our very best efforts to proclaim the gospel to all men, and we shall do far more for our Lord and others, to whom we are debtors, when we regard missions as a debt rather than an object of charity.

THE CALL

The great world's heart is aching, aching fiercely in the night,
And God alone can heal it, and God alone give light;
And the men to bear that message, and to speak the living Word,
Are you and I, my brothers, and the millions that have heard.
Can we close our eyes to duty? Can we fold our hands at ease,
While the gates of night stand open to the pathway of the seas?
Till the lands which sin has blasted have been quickened from
the dead?
Can we shut up our compassions? Can we leave our prayer unsaid?

We grovel among trifles, and our spirits fret and toss,
While above us burns the vision of the Christ upon the cross;
And the blood of God is streaming from His broken hands and side,
And the lips of God are saying, "Tell my brothers I have died."
O voice of God, we hear thee above the shocks of time,
Thine echoes roll around us, and the message is sublime;
No power of man shall thwart us, no stronghold shall dismay,
When God commands obedience, and love has led the way.

--Frederick George Scott.