

“Our Debt to the World”  
Romans 1:14-15  
(Preached at Trinity, January 21, 2007)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. We’ve been looking at **Verses 8-15**. After the salutation Paul pauses for a moment to for a few words of a personal tone.
2. **Verse 8** begins with Paul expressing his gratitude to God for their reputation, their consistent testimony to the world. They were living their faith.
3. Paul also expressed his heart for the church –
  - A. He prayed for them continually.  
**Romans 1:9** – “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;”
  - B. He had a great desire to come to them that he might strengthen them in the faith.  
**Verse 11** – “I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established.”
4. In **Verses 14-15** Paul expresses another reason he felt such a strong burden to come to them.  
“I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. <sup>15</sup> So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.”
5. Paul saw himself as a debtor. When someone refers to himself as a debtor several questions immediately come to mind. What was his debt? How did he get into debt? How would he go about paying off his debt?
  - A. With regards to the first question, “What was his debt,” Paul seems to give us the answer in **Verse 15**.  
“So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.”
  - B. Paul seems to be implying that his debt was the Gospel.
6. But this doesn’t satisfy all of our curiosity and it doesn’t answer the other two questions. How did he get into debt and how would he go about satisfying the debt?
  - I. First, How did Paul get into this debt?
    - A. You might be tempted to answer that it was his calling as an Apostle – that God had called him and ordered him to this business
      1. In one sense you would be right. In **Verse 1** Paul clearly states his calling  
**Romans 1:1** – “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,”
      2. He was obligated to preach the gospel. It was his divine calling.
      3. He even mentions in another letter that it was his obligation.  
**1 Corinthians 9:16** – “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!”

4. But Paul also saw his calling as a grace granted to him.  
**Romans 1:5** – “By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name:”  
**1 Timothy 1:12** – “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;”
  5. For Paul his “debt” was far more than a divine obligation based upon the command of Christ.
- B. Note that Paul is saying that his debt is to men, not to God  
 “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.”
1. In **Verse 5** we read that Paul had received grace from God but grace does not make us a debtor to God.
    - a. Grace is something that God gives us that cannot be paid back as a debt, else it would cease to be grace but something purchased – something gained through our actions.
    - b. In Christ all of our debts have been paid
    - c. If you are not a Christian you have an infinite debt to God—a debt you can never settle. You are a debtor because you have stolen His glory. You are a robber and a thief who has robbed God of that which belongs to Him alone.
    - d. Instead of seeing the glory of God as a treasure to be received and enjoyed you have exchanged it for things your wicked hearts has preferred.  
**Romans 1:21** – “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”  
**Romans 1:23** – “And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.”
    - e. The nature of the Gospel is that it has come to pay our debts  
 This is what the Lord’s Prayer points to:  
**Matthew 6:12** – “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”
  2. If grace hasn’t made us debtors to God how is it that we have been made debtors to men?  
 Usually a debt is acquired when we borrow something or acquire something from someone that must be paid back. But the Greeks and Barbarians had not loaned anything to Paul. Paul hadn’t taken anything from them.
  3. We are debtors because of the nature of grace. Grace does not make you a debtor to God but it does make you a debtor to other men who are in the need of grace.  
 We owe them the Gospel
  4. Paul’s debt was not a debt that he had just because he was an apostle. It was a debt he had because he was a Christian.

- C. To whom did Paul owe the debt?
1. Paul mentions Greeks and Barbarians
    - a. The term Greeks was used to describe non-Jews  
**Romans 1:16** – “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.”
    - b. The term Barbarian was used to describe all who were not Greeks  
This would include the Jews.
    - c. In other words, by the words Greeks and Barbarians Paul was speaking of every human being.
  2. Paul also uses the words “wise and unwise.”
    - a. This would include the educationally wise – those who though much learning have had their hearts turned from God.
    - b. It would also include the religiously wise who in their self-righteousness have excluded themselves from the Gospel
    - c. It also includes the spiritually ignorant who because of the blindness of their hearts see not value in the Gospel of Christ
    - d. The terms “wise and unwise” also include all men.  
**1 Corinthians 1:20-21** – “Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? <sup>21</sup> For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”
- D. Why do we owe this debt to men?
1. We heard and received the good news of the Gospel by God’s grace. We were unworthy of this grace. The means by which we received this grace was others who shared it with us. Others shared it with us—we must share it with others.
  2. If we withhold the Gospel from others we are implying that we were worthy to receive it – which we were not. We owe it to others who are unworthy because we were unworthy.
    - a. We must recognize that we are as unworthy as all men and all men are as worthy as us.
    - b. This is why racism is so wicked. This is why self-righteousness is so wicked.
    - c. The Gospel must humble us.
  3. The Gospel is to be freely shared with others.  
**Matthew 10:7-8** – “And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. <sup>8</sup> Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.”
  4. In that sense it is a debt. The Gospel is not yours to keep, it is yours to give away. When you withhold the Gospel from the lost you are in essence robbing them of what you owe to them.
  5. This is what must drive us to share the Gospel with all men.  
Do you believe that you are indebted to them?

- E. We need to understand that this debt is the responsibility of every Christian
1. Paul's debt was not unique to him.  
As we've seen, he had a high duty to faithfully discharge his office before God.
  2. But Paul isn't talking about his duty to God, he is talking about his debt to men. It was a debt he acquired when he received the grace of God. This is a grace that must be shared.
  3. Paul's debt is consistent with every Christian. You too have a debt that you owe to all men. You owe them the Gospel.

II. How do we go about settling this debt?

- A. We must seek to make sure every person in our generation hears the Gospel – we must seize every opportunity
1. We must do this personally as we meet people on our way
  2. We must do this as a church as we discover opportunities to advance the Gospel.
  3. We must sacrificially give of our resources to the work of the Gospel  
Why have we been given such riches in our country?  
The consumerism in our nation continues to expand. There seems to be no end to peoples seeking to satisfy their appetites. We need to learn to say no to our lusts.
  4. We must pray
    - a. Paul understood his great need for help in his Gospel work  
**Ephesians 6:18-19** – “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; <sup>19</sup> And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,”  
**Colossians 4:2-4** – “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; <sup>3</sup> Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: <sup>4</sup> That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.”
    - b. Paul also understood the nature of our opposition  
**2 Thessalonians 3:1-2** – “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have *free* course, and be glorified, even as *it is* with you: <sup>2</sup> And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all *men* have not faith.”
- B. Our debt also includes strengthening believers
1. Our debt isn't necessarily settled when they believe – we must go on to teach them – to teach one another
  2. This is clear in the great commission  
**Matthew 28:19-20** – “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: <sup>20</sup> Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

3. It is also clear in this passage  
**Romans 1:14-15** – “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. <sup>15</sup> So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.”
4. Paul is declaring his desire to preach to the Church of Rome.  
**Romans 15:15-16** – “Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God, <sup>16</sup> That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.”
  - a. Paul isn’t interested in just getting professions by the preaching of the Gospel. He wants to see believers sanctified to present them to God as holy vessels.
  - b. We saw this in **2 Corinthians**  
**2 Corinthians 11:2** – “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present *you* as a chaste virgin to Christ.”
  - c. In other words we must tell all men about God’s claims upon them in the Gospel and then continue to remind them after they have received the Gospel.
5. Paul expressed this in **Verse 5**  
**Romans 1:5** – “By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name:”
  - a. The “Obedience of faith” refers to God’s command for all men to believe – the obedience of faith or the faith that God commands
  - b. The “Obedience of faith” also refers to the obedience that results form genuine faith.
  - c. The work of the Gospel demands both – commanding all men to repent and believe and teaching believers to lives of obedience.

#### Conclusion:

1. Do you understand the nature of God’s grace? Grace received must be grace given. Freely received, freely given.
2. Pray that God will press this debt upon your heart. It is a debt that we must be diligent in satisfying.
3. Pray that God might give you a heart of love for the lost and for the brethren.  
**Romans 13:8** – “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.”

**1 Corinthians 9:11** If we have sown unto you spiritual things, *is it* a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?