

Debtors

By Paris Reidhead*

Now this morning will you turn, please, to Romans, Chapter 1. It was Paul who said, He preached not himself, “but Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). But you’ll notice this important Epistle, perhaps one of the most important in the New Testament, if we can rank them, for it deals more fully with certain great truths than any other. Condemnation, justification, sanctification are all presented in order and developed fully. This epistle begins with a personal testimony: “Paul, a bond slave of Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:1a). And the word that is used carries you back to the year of the release of slaves in Israel, when one who had been purchased and held in bondage was free to go if he wished. But not all slaves chose to be released from their bondage. And so it was the right and privilege of the slave to go to the master and say, I choose to be your servant. Then the master of the house would call witnesses; receive the second affirmation of the voluntary choice of the one that chose to be a bond slave. When this was certified by competent witnesses, then the slave would go to the main door of the house, take a hold of the lobe of his ear, and stretch it out against the pillar, and the master would take an awl and bore a hole in the ear. And this would mark the slave forever thereafter as a voluntary servant, a bond slave, who out of love, and affection and appreciation chose bondage rather than freedom. And so Paul declares here and now that he is by his own choice, by the deep longing of his heart, without any resentment, or rebellion, a servant, a slave, a bond slave of Jesus Christ.

“Called an apostle...” Called it says, “to be an apostle,” but literally by deleting the two words that are in italics, called an apostle. Called, a sent one. *Ierapóstolos* in the Greek is the same word as missionary in the Latin. Mitto means to send. An apostle is a sent one. He was not one of the twelve. But he was nonetheless an apostle, an apostle in the sense that you can be. He was an apostle in a sense in which, with inward revelation to your own heart, you see the Lord Jesus Christ, risen, glorified, and hear Him say, “Arise, stand upon thy feet, I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness,... to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God” (Act. 26:16a; 18a). Now could you change this and put your name into this first verse, whether it be Frank, or Mary, or whatever it might be. A bond slave of Jesus Christ? You have deliberately, without coercion, but drawn and moved by His love, brought the ear of your heart to the door of His love, and there said, Mark me forever as belonging wholly to Jesus Christ. If you can, then you can also say, called an apostle, called to be sent. Called an apostle is just He calls you to Him that He might send you from Him. You understand the same one who said, “Come unto me and rest,” said, “Go ye and preach” (Mat. 11:28; Mat. 10:7a).

For one to say the “come and rest” means me, but the go and preach means another is to my mind the utmost of dishonesty. Nothing can be intellectually more dishonest than to pick and choose throughout the Scripture, and say, This of course is personal, but that is particular. “Come and rest?” Oh, that means me because I had such a burden. “Go and preach?” That refers only to those that have a special call. Well, if you’ve had a general call to “come and rest,” you have had an equally particular call to “go and preach.” Called to be sent is literally what he said. I came to go. I was called to be an apostle.

“Separated unto the Gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1b). Everyone who names the name of Christ is thus to view himself. Frequently I have business men say something like this, Well I am planning on going into full-time service. And the only answer that is appropriate to such a statement is this, Well if you are not in full time service now, you must be backslider, because He has called all of us into full-time service, and there is absolutely no Biblical sense in which we can distinguish between those that are supported by the Gospel and those that are under God’s Providence and direction ministering also in the midst of their work. And so every Christian is “separated unto the Gospel of God.” This does not mean that one was to live by offerings of the people, for it certainly is true that in the life of Paul you can only account for 18 out of 35 years spent in full-time service. Have you ever realized that? If you will mark down every day, month, year that is annotated in the Scripture as being spent in the Lord’s work, Paul only spent 18 out of what we would assume would be 35 or 36 years. The rest of the time, he abode a great while in that place, and he abode many months in that place, and apparently was not engaged in any public ministry, but simply in fellowship with the church on a local level, and we know that on one occasion, or for some extended period of time, he supported himself by following his craft to which he had been apprenticed as a tent maker. So you can in no wise say, “Separated unto the Gospel of God,” has reference to the source of income. It only has reference to the attitude of heart, that

we belong to Jesus Christ wholly and completely, and it is thus applicable to everyone. Everyone has been sent with the message, and everyone has been “separated unto the Gospel of God.” Well then we will move down further.

After this time of personal testimony, we find that he has based his whole statement to the Church of Rome on three phases of truth, three aspects of the same truth. If I begin in the 13th verse, I am sure the 14th will have fuller meaning to you. “Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let...” (Rom. 1:13). And so many times, reading that, we fail to remember that this was the King James Version, and at the time of the translation the word LET had reference to prevent. You may recall from times you have played tennis that when the ball strikes the net, it is properly called a let ball. Many times we say a net ball, but that is not actually the word. It is a let ball, for tennis is an old English game, and this is one use of it that is carried over. And it means, prevented from going across. And so Paul was let. He was prevented from having gone to Rome. He desired that he might have fruit among this people in Rome, even as he had among other Gentiles. Why? Why was he concerned about Rome? Why was he concerned about these people? Because God had given to him a revelation at the very outset of his relationship to Christ. At the time when he became a bond slave of Christ, when he was called an apostle, when he was “separated unto the Gospel of God,” he discovered that he was a *debtor*.

Now it is my firm conviction that this must be the foundation stone in every Biblically effective Christian life, that we must have a sense of moral obligation, a sense of responsibility, a sense in which we are indeed, even as this text ways debtors to the Greeks, who were the civilized people with a culture of such a high standard, and to the barbarian, the pagan, and the heathen, to the wise and the unwise. That it was to recognize by Paul as being a personal obligation that he had received from Christ, that he could not lightly pass off, he could not put away.

Twenty five years ago today, I began my ministry. Oh, I had spoken previously. I had ministered elsewhere, but had found it necessary to leave Bible School at the end of the first semester of the 1936 — the Fall of 1936 and into the semester change of '37. I had financial problems. You may recall that that was contagious back in those days. Some of you at least. And it was necessary to work and pay certain bills that had accumulated in school, and take the semester off. So in May, or early June, I had an appendectomy. And this necessitated some weeks of waiting. And I received from the Practical Work Department of the Bible School in Minneapolis a call, a friend of my fathers'. He was here incidentally a year ago, Mr. Frank Bass. He called and said, I have just had a letter from Brother Mark Ward up in Long Prairie, that there is a church about nine miles from Long Prairie, and about nine miles from Osakis at the head of Lake Osakis and they need a Pastor, and so I am asking you to go.

Well, I had just been 18 for about three weeks, felt myself utterly incompetent and incapable, had had dire predictions made that if I stopped school at the end of that semester I'd never go again, and here was this man saying, God had led him. I brought that request and the letter that I received from his hands in the office home. This was on Monday. And I fought what was to me, perhaps up until that time, the greatest battle of my life. Whether or not a boy of 18 could possibly accept a pastorate, even from a small country church, where there were people who had need of counsel and help and spiritual direction and preaching. And so the matter was a very crucial one, one that just kept me before the Lord, almost day and night during the days of that week. I'll never forget that He spoke to my heart from a portion that has been so frequently used by other young men in no sense personal, and I am confident that every young person that goes into the ministry anywhere has the Lord say the same thing to him. But He said it to me in a very personal way, for I had been arguing that I was such a child, and He said, “Say not that thou art a child, thou canst not speak because thou art a child, for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces, for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. And the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and He said, I have put my words into thy mouth” (Jer. 1:6-9). And so with that word, quickened by the Holy Spirit to my heart, I said, All right, Lord, if this is what you mean, then You are going to have to give a message, You are going to have to give me Your word.

And as I was praying that day, in anticipation of taking the bus on Saturday to go to Long Prairie, this was probably on Thursday of that important week, waiting before the Lord in prayer, this word that is before you this morning leaped to life. And I was charged then, that day, to go before this people out in the country in that Minnesota valley, and tell them that there were three things that God wanted them to hear. Three things which He had emphasized and placed upon my heart. I am debtor. I am debtor. Are you aware this morning that you are a debtor? You have lived in that apartment building for years, thinking

that God simply wanted to provide shelter from heat, and cold, and rain, and snow for you. But have you gone into that door day after day, recognizing your sense of debt to the people that reside on other floors, and in other apartments, that you live in a city that is perhaps one of the world's greatest mission fields? Are you aware that you are not here by accident, that it is not simply to make a living? You could have made a living back in Long Prairie. You did not need to come to New York to do it. Your living is not that much better. That you are here for some other reason than mere convenience, that you are a debtor? Now should it be that the place of your residence changes, your sense of obligation will move with you. Wherever you go you are to understand that as long as you breathe the breath of human life, and as long as God lets you live on the top of His good green earth, you are a debtor, and a lifetime of service will never repay it. Twenty years on the mission field won't pay it. Twenty years in Christian work won't pay it. As long as you breathe the breath of human life you are a debtor to men and women who know not the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now a sense of debt is a strange thing. You understand, of course, that Paul is saying that he is a debtor, not to the church at Rome. He is a debtor, not to the people of Antioch that appointed him to go as an Apostle. His debt is not incurred to the men of the church. His debt is to those that are without Christ, those that are in need, and he has been released by the church of Antioch so that he can pay the debt as the Spirit of God directs him. And you are released by the Spirit of God in your community to pay your debt there. You are released in the school you attend by His ordering you to that school, to pay your debt there. You are released by your place of residence by the fact that you live there and go in and out of those doors day in and day out. You are released by the fact of His appointment to that place to pay your debt in that area. Now obviously, with 8 million people, you are going to have to understand that you have a general debt to all, but a particular debt to some. And you are going to have to get the mind of the Spirit as to the manner in which you pay that debt. There are so many people in this city, that if you were to simply run and touch each of them on the shoulder, you would die long before the last had been touched. It is utterly impossible for you to go to 8 million people with nothing more than the quickest touch, much less an effective witness. But if you are prepared to be a Biblical Christian, then you are prepared to recognize that the debt is to be paid in a particular way by the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit, and you are therefore to gladly embrace your general debt to New York City, but your particular debt to the ones that you can touch and reach. By the same token, you cannot support all the missionaries on the field and you cannot pray for all the 27 thousand Protestant missionaries around the world. And so, whereas you have a general debt to missions, you have a particular debt to certain missionaries, a particular debt to share their needs, to intercede with them, and labor together in prayer for them. You have a particular debt, as well as a general debt. And it requires, therefore, the guidance of the Holy Ghost, for you to understand the means by which that debt is to be paid.

I sometimes think it is far better for you to become an intelligent co-laborer in missionary intercession with a few than to simply have a long list of fifty that you would read over somewhat the way one would read a column in the telephone directory. I realize that this is difficult, that it is costly. But I would ask you today, Have you paid the debt of local witness to the people that you can touch, the people that you do touch? Have you let them know that you care? Have you put into their hands an effective piece of literature? Have you invited them to come to some place for hearing the Gospel? Have you invited them to sit down with you because you have good news to share with them? Have you been paying your debt on the local level? Some of you have a debt to the ministry of the Sunday School. The Spirit of God has given it to you. He has given you both gift, opportunity, and invitation. And this is a debt that you pay by your faithful prayer for your students, by your faithful preparation of the lesson, by your faithful identification with them in their need. Are you prepared to recognize that your Christian life is a life time of payment of debt, debt which can never be paid by you as long as you breathe the breath of human life, because simply breathing increases the responsibility and extends the debt. You not only have a debt to people, but you have a debt to the truth of God, because light always brings with it the moral responsibility to act in that light, and to walk in that light, and obey that light. You cannot possibly afford to allow truth to go unbeyed, to neglect it, and overlook it. Dire consequences are given by the Lord when He allowed the writer of Hebrews to say, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation" (Heb. 2:3). If truth is come to your mind and heart, and it is verified as the truth of God, you have an obligation to act upon that truth, and walk in that truth, because the fact that light has come has brought with it the moral obligation to walk in that light. God at great pain and great effort has brought the revelation of His truth, and with this revelation comes the

moral obligation to walk in it. You not only have a debt to the unsaved, to the barbarians, to the wise and the unwise, the people outside, a debt to truth, but you also have a debt to the church, the body of Christ.

For most Christians, unless they are in extremely isolated areas, are part of some body. They are either joined by the Spirit of God, by conscious direction, or by some family or personal preference or affiliation. But they become by their choice and their identification with the Group, a part of the Group. And they, therefore, have a moral and a spiritual debt to that group by acceptance in it, and being part of it. They have a debt to watch after the church covenant, not adopted by this church, but generally held by Christians to be an expression of responsibility. The Church covenant is a setting forth of that debt, that obligation to seek the best interests of the other members of the local body, to desire their spiritual growth, to comfort them when they are afflicted, and to rebuke them when they are in sin, and in all to recognize that we are to care one for another, we are to bear one another's burdens, and we are also to protect the spiritual wellbeing of the group. Do you accept that debt? Do you accept the responsibility that your conduct influences the whole body of Christ? There has been on the part of all of us a deep desire to see the arm of the Lord unbarred, and the mighty miracle working power of the risen Christ, to whom testimony is continually affirmed by the verse on the wall behind me revealed. But I submit to you that the means whereby this can be done is when each of us recognizes our debt to the other, and the body becomes what the Lord has intended it to be. For we find that when they were of one accord, of one mind, in one place, praying in the midst of persecution, comforting and strengthening the hands one of another, that the place was shaken wherein they prayed, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. And so we have a debt to the lost world around us, we have a debt to the truth of God that is revealed to us, we have a debt to the church, that body of believers to which the Lord has joined us, and which we have been made a part.

But it is not only this. It is also that Paul stated, "I am ready." So, as much as in me is, I am ready to pay that debt. In his case, it was to preach the Gospel to them that were at Rome also. Are you ready to pay your debt? Or do you have to wait for a program to be established with the thermometer put on the wall, and captains of teams, and then each team is going to decide that they will give out so many tracts, and when the one team wins the other will give a banquet in their honor. Must we have programs in order to secure fulfillment of debt, or can this be on the basis of a personal relationship with a living Lord, whom we love, whom we adore, whom we serve, and whose approval we seek. I feel that it is an extremely sad thing when Christian activity, whether it be home visitation, or personal witnessing, or inviting of people to in the church, has to be put on the level of the same way the Fuller Brush Company would secure enthusiastic effort from their salesmen. I believe this should be on an entirely different level, a spiritual level, because truth has been illuminated to our heart and the church has become the place of mutual strengthening and encouragement. Then the readiness to pay the debt is the outflow of a proper and a normal and a wholesome and a healthy spiritual life. Is this the case?

Can you say this morning, I am ready? I am ready to preach. I am ready to serve. I am ready to go if the Lord wants me to go, to stay if the Lord wants me to stay, but I recognize the debt, and that I must be at all times prepared to be available to the Spirit of God to pay that debt. If you are ready, then you are going to recognize that this week is in a sense no longer yours but His. Oh, I realize you have an obligation to your employer, and I think that it is most inimitable to your testimony in your place of employment if you use the time for which your employer has purchased to do your personal witnessing and evangelism. You are going to have to witness by your attitude. Are you ready to do your work cheerfully, without complaining, to do it gladly, to accept your responsibility, to glorify the Lord in the tasks at your hand? This is part of the payment of your debt. Are you ready to do your school work with an eye single to His glory, not simply for the scholarship or the honor, but because you are glorifying the Lord by the manner in which you do that work which is not at your hand, realizing that faithful preparation is faithful service? Are you prepared therefore to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ in the most menial of tasks? For this is part of the payment of debt. The only way that you can fulfill your responsibility and pay your debt is to live every hour, every moment with an eye single to His glory, and every task that comes to hand has to be performed in the light of eternity and the fact that you will reap the reward of that task the day that you stand before Him. Are you ready? Is there a readiness of spirit? Do you find it in your heart this morning? Are you prepared to then recognize that every area of your life has been sanctified by the sovereignty of your loving Lord, and that nothing is unimportant any longer, neither your recreation nor your business, but that you are to do all for His praise and all for His honor? Are you then prepared to realize that perhaps some plans that you have made must be laid by the side in order that you can be available for the Spirit of God, that you may have to spend some time. If

you owe a debt to the people in the building where you live, when you meet them in the elevator or in the hall, and they give you the least little opportunity, and you pursue it, then you find that it is going to be necessary to inconvenience yourself and maybe change some plans in order that you can pay your debt. Is this true? Is your heart responding with Paul saying, "I am ready."

It was a long, dangerous, arduous trip that he had to undergo, 3 months as you know. It was difficult getting to Rome. But he says, I am ready to go. Any personal inconvenience or sacrifice means nothing, because I am determined that I am going to fulfill my responsibility and I am going to pay my debt.

Then I notice the last thing and close with it. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ" (Rom. 1:16). Could it be that one reason you have been reluctant to pay your debt is because you are somewhat ashamed of the Gospel? I must confess to you that there have been years of my life in the past when I tried to avoid talking with people, because my only understanding of salvation was that if they would accept the plan and agree with me that they had accepted it that I could then pronounce them saved. And I had been taught in a school which said, Just get the person to say yes to your proposition, and then you can report that you have a convert. And after doing this for some little time, I saw the futility of it. And so there were years in my life when I rather sought to avoid talking to people about Christ rather than gladly accepting the opportunity, because I knew that Christ has done something wonderfully real in my life, but I had left behind me a train of people to whom I had given the formula and nothing had happened. And it didn't seem to be fair to the Lord to brag on Him, and then to leave the people with so little, and then soon to go back denying all they had. So, I must confess there were years ago, there was a great reluctance after those first years of enthusiastic witnessing to everyone near and far, bus stop and elsewhere, trying my best to get people to accept the Lord. There came into my heart a sense of, Well it worked for me and I don't know why it doesn't work for others, and so... but I'd just rather not talk about it. And this is perfectly candid and honest, for I was ashamed of the Gospel. It did not seem to work. But then I began to realize that what I was presenting was not what He had chosen and given me to present. For I was substituting a formula for a Person, and a scheme for the Lord Jesus Christ, and a system of Scripture verses put in sequence for the Son of God Himself. But I assure you today that for many years now I have had great joy in witnessing because of the fact that I know that if people will meet Him on His terms there will be a revelation of Christ in them and they will be gloriously transformed by the invading presence of the Son of God by the Holy Spirit.

Are you ashamed of the Gospel of Christ? Do you look back and say, Well I have gone through it. I have gotten them to pray. They have reluctantly said a few words after me, and nothing happened. Could it be that you have substituted a scheme for a Person, a system for a Savior, and you have just had the same kind of disappointment that has come to many others, because they have found that their oversimplification actually was a betrayal of the Son of God. Then I assure you that if you will present the message, the Gospel. The Gospel is not only that Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture and was buried, and was raised again the 3rd day, but the Gospel carries with it the demand to repent and believe. And repentance means the renunciation of the right to rule, and an utter abandonment to the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ, and an invitation to Him to come in, both to govern as well as to forgive. And when one presents Christ on His terms and says to the individual, Now when you have done this, He will have come in. And when He has come in, you tell me. You will find how much your heart is released by the simple fact that you have left to the Holy Ghost the sovereign prerogatives that belong to Him, and you have fulfilled the responsibilities that He has given to you. The Gospel does work. It is the power of God unto salvation, to everyone that believeth. The word believe means to commit. The word faith means to commit. And everyone that makes a commitment to Christ as Christ is presented as Prince and Savior, embraces Him as He is lifted up and as He has been presented, I assure you that the Gospel is indeed the power of God unto salvation.

Let me ask you this morning. Are you recognizing your debt to the children of New York, to the people of the apartment, to the family back home where you lived, to the folk that you meet, to the foreign students that invade our shores, to the multitudes that come and go? Are you thinking and praying as to what we will have as our evangelical witness in New York in two years in the World's Fair that is coming to Flushing Meadows? Are you concerned about the fulfillment of responsibility, or have you become so involved in certain little things of personal interest that the grand purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ in using you as a witness for Him has been obscured. Do you see that the fields are white already to harvest? Have you allowed the Spirit of God to place upon your heart afresh and new the debt? If you just walk down the streets of New York and look up at the people

hanging out of the windows on these summer evenings, and seeing the children sitting on the brownstone steps, and let your heart go out and say, How many of them have ever had any one love them to Christ. You will have the same feeling that a missionary has when he goes into a village where no one has ever stopped with the Gospel of the grace of God.

Today I ask you, *Are you a debtor, and are you ready? Are you unashamed*, because you know the Lord Jesus Christ will do everything He has promised to do? I entreat you, I beg you, I implore you to bring yourself with me to a new place of abandonment, a new place of consecration that we can say with Paul, and you put your name, a bond slave of Jesus Christ, called an apostle, “separated unto the Gospel of God.” And whatever days God may afford us in the future might they be lived with an eye single to His glory, accepting freely our debt, prepared by the power of the Holy Ghost to fulfill our responsibility, and confidently boasting of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to save unto the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him. The alternative to this is a slow but insidious hardening of heart, and embittering of spirit until we become utterly useless vines that cumber the ground that He must cut down in order that by Him some new planting may be established that will be to the praise of the glory of His grace. I am debtor, said Paul. I am ready. I am not ashamed. Let us together then recommit ourselves to Him for the unfinished tasks that He has entrusted to us, and as we come to this Declaration of Independence Day, this Independence Day, July 4, let us remember that the true freedom of the child of God comes only when he is a completely willing, and willingly, a bond slave of Jesus Christ. Paul and you. A bond slave, called an apostle, “separated unto the Gospel of God.” Let us pray.

Our Father, we are prepared to accept the responsibilities of our citizenship in this land. We believe, by Thy Grace, we are. But we realize that there are far greater responsibilities of being a citizen of the Kingdom of God. And we realize that there is with this truth that Thou hast caused to burst a light in our hearts, a great sense of moral obligation. Might we willingly accept our debt today? Give to us, we ask Thee, a sense in which all of us realize anew and afresh, because of the work of Thy Spirit in our hearts we have met together this hour, we have an obligation to the place that Thou hast put us, to the apartment building, to the block, to the community, to the tradesmen from which we purchase, to those that serve us and meet us, and we have a debt to family and friends and neighbors and visitors, foreigners that come our way. Grant to us, Lord, hearty acceptance of it. Then we are to be ready by the power of the Holy Ghost, the equipment of the Spirit of God, the enabling that He gives to fulfill this. We remember what our Lord Jesus said, “After that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, ye shall receive power, and ye shall be witnesses” (Act. 1:8). Perhaps the reason that some are unready is because they have never known the fullness of Thy Spirit, and they are seeking to work in the energy of their flesh, and finding wariness result. And then, I am not ashamed. Perhaps the reason that some have not witness is because they’ve not seen the dynamite of the Gospel released in their own life. And so we pray Lord for Thy delivering work in the heart of every professing Christian until the testimony of the Apostle Paul becomes our testimony, and this Word of unchanging and unchangeable truth becomes real and operative in our lives. We come now, Lord, to thank Thee for the Lord Jesus Christ who loved us, who went to the Cross for us, who shed His Blood there in the agony of Calvary that He might redeem us. And as we come to the Table of remembrance, might we do it as did the apostle, with a heart open to hear the Lord Jesus speak to us. The first words he said are the words we ought to say, even in this precious moment, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” (Act. 9:6) We know that Thou dost have a plan for every life, a place for every person, and in Thy glorious will each of us are important. And so we ask Thee, Lord, as we approach the Table that it may be in utter consecration, complete abandonment as well as complete cleansing, and that as we come that we might receive in order that we might distribute, that we might share with others, and so fulfill our debt. We ask it in the Name and for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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