

ROMANS SERIES #4

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,
on Sunday, October 8, 1995, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

ROMANS 1:14-16

“I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the Gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...”

A GREAT MAN’S SECRET OF SUCCESS

Find out what motivates a person, and you find out what makes him tick. Some people seem to get more done than others. They achieve more and seem to be more enthusiastic than the common herd.

Here, in a very personal statement, the Apostle Paul tells us the secret of *his* success as a Christian. He makes three “I am” statements:

1. “I am a debtor” — He knew he owed a debt that he would never be able fully to repay.
2. “I am ready” — Ready to proclaim the good news of Christ.
3. “I am not ashamed” — Of the Gospel of Christ.

I am a debtor; I am ready; I am not ashamed. Let us think about these three magnificent and thought-provoking statements and apply them to our own lives.

1. “**I am a DEBTOR.**” he says, “both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise.” What did Paul mean when he said he was a “debtor”?
 - (a) I’m sure he meant that he was a debtor to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the first verse of this chapter you will remember that Paul calls himself “a slave of Christ Jesus.” Jesus had purchased him at the cost of His own blood, which reminds us again that as Christians “we are not our own; we have been bought at a price” (1 Cor. 6:20). As the old hymn says:

Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.

We can’t *pay* for our salvation, and for that reason we shall be eternally in Christ’s debt.

(b) But primarily Paul is saying that he is a debtor to those who have not yet heard the good news about Jesus. He is a debtor, he says, “both to the Greeks and to the barbarians.” The

Greeks were the sophisticated intellectuals of that day. The barbarians were the uncultured, savage peoples of the Earth. So, Paul was saying in effect: "I owe the Gospel to everybody, and I've got to take it to everybody everywhere. It is so relevant that it is for the intellectual and the non-intellectual. This amazing grace is for every race; it is for the up and out as well as for the down and out."

My friend, if our compassion for lost souls leaves out anybody, then we don't really love people as Jesus loves them. We can't be selective in our love. Many Christians have sinned because of prejudice that has kept them from sharing the Gospel with every race on earth. I am a debtor to get the Gospel to everyone. Sometimes we're not interested in doing that because we're too interested in ourselves and our own immediate circle of family and friends.

Many years ago, a missionary was speaking at a country church out west. He was being entertained for the weekend at the home of a wealthy rancher who was a member of that congregation, and in the course of conversation the rancher made it quite clear that he was less than enthusiastic about overseas missions. "Let's get the heathen here at home converted!" was his attitude.

"Let me tell you a story," said the missionary. "In the early days of our country some immigrants to the U.S.A. were travelling from New York to California in a wagon train. As they crossed the great American desert, they lost their way, and they began to run low on food and water. And the children began to cry, and the women began to complain. The cattle began to die, and the situation was rapidly becoming critical. So, the leader of the expedition realized that he must take decisive action. He selected some of the strongest men and horses, gave them food and water, and sent them off in different directions to try to find the way and to try to find some water. One man rode off to the northwest where, after a hard ride, he discovered what proved to be an oasis on the edge of the westward trail, with lush green trees and a beautiful pool of fresh water. As he dismounted, he gave a shout of joy, rushed to the water's edge where he splashed the water on his face and arms, and drank until his thirst was quenched. After watering his horse, resting a while, and replenishing his water canteen, he wheeled his horse around and started back to the caravan. Then he thought, 'Why should I go back? I'm single, and those people mean nothing to me. I have what I need, and I can make it from here on.' And so, he turned and headed on to California by himself."

And the missionary said to the rancher, "What would you do with a man like that?" He said, "If I could get my hands on him I'd tie him to a wagon wheel and take a whip and thrash him to within an inch of his life." To which the missionary replied, "What would you think of a man who had the water of life and refused to share it with people who have never heard of Jesus?"

Friends, let me ask you a question: What ought to happen to *us* if we don't share the Gospel with others — those around us, as well as those in India and Indonesia and Africa and Korea and Japan? The greatest sin a Christian can commit is the sin of silence, the refusal to witness on behalf of our Lord. In Mark 1:17 our Lord said to Simon Peter and Andrew his brother, "Come, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." Dr. James Kennedy puts an interesting spin on that verse. He says, "Try running it through the wringer backwards and see

what you get.” Here it is: “If you are not fishers of men, you are not following Me.” And the logic of that is surely irrefutable.

Paul said, “I am a debtor; I owe the Gospel!” You have heard it said that “those who hold the torch must pass on the light.” But on another occasion Paul could say to the elders of the church at Ephesus, “I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God” (Acts 20:26-27).

Tell me — is the blood of your unconverted neighbor on your hands . . . the blood of your unsaved business associate . . . the blood of your lost brother or sister or uncle or aunt? You remember the awesome words in Ezekiel 3:17-19 where God speaks to Ezekiel and says:

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from Me. When I say to a wicked man, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself.

Do you realize now that you are a debtor — that you *owe* it to Christ and to your unsaved friends to be an effective witness? If you do, then you will train yourself to become the soul winner you ought to be.

I don’t care what else you do in this church. I don’t care how much money you give, or how faithfully you attend, or how much you study the Bible and pray and teach your Sunday School class, or even how circumspectly you walk with God. If you are not endeavoring to share Jesus Christ with the lost, you’re not following Him as He calls you to do. No one is excused. A Christian who refuses to witness is like a surgeon who refuses to operate. We are debtors — to Jesus and to the lost world around us.

2. **“I am READY,”** says Paul — or as the NIV translates it, “I am eager to preach the Gospel... “Many of us would like to win people for Christ, but we never do it. You may agree that you are a debtor, but then you will leave church and you will not be ready and eager to do the job!

Someone has said that the best ability is *dependability*, and another ability that is closely aligned to dependability is *availability*. Give me a church full of people who have dependability and availability, people who are ready, people who do not need to be coaxed, people who are willing to *live* the Christian life as witnesses for Christ. We can’t share the Gospel until we’re prepared to *live* it. You remember the embarrassing one-liner: “If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”

Paul was ready to live the Gospel. And he was ready to *go* wherever the Lord sent him on mission. I heard of a sales executive who had his sales staff in a conference room, and in the center of a poster board he marked in a black dot. And he said to them, “What do you see?” And

without exception they said, “I see a black dot.” And finally, he said, “Isn’t that strange? All of you saw a black dot. No one seemed to see the white all around it!” All we see so often is the black dot of concern for ourselves and *our* family. Jesus said, “Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are white already for harvest” (John 4:35).

Some of you may think that you don’t have any opportunity to witness. Not so. *Every day* you have opportunities to witness. Jesus, in the Great Commission, said, “Go into all the world... “But literally in the Greek it says, “*As* you go...” (Matthew 28:19). Jesus presumed that you would go. So, it means that as you go to work tomorrow, as you go to school, as you go to the service station, as you stand in line at the checkout at the supermarket, as you sit beside someone on an airplane, you are to look and pray for opportunities to make a genuine, unselfconscious witness for the Lord. Every day in every way we are to be ready to embrace every God — given opportunity to say a word for Jesus. That is our challenge, our task, and our unspeakable privilege.

You are to be ready. Are you ready? You are a debtor, and you ought to be ready — ready to live, ready to go, and ready to *die*. When a person is totally committed to Christ, he is not afraid to die; and when he is ready to die, for the first time in his life he is ready to *live*. Paul said in Acts 20:24, “I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”

I heard a story once about a little girl who was critically ill and in need of a blood transfusion. Her younger brother had her type of blood, and the little fellow was told that his sister was very sick and needed blood in order to survive. The doctor wanted to know if he would give his sister some of his own blood. He told him how it would be done, but at first the little boy didn’t want to do it. The doctor said, “Sister needs it and you mustn’t be afraid.” Looking at his mother he said, “Does the doctor say she will die if she doesn’t get it?” “She might,” said his mother. “Well, all right,” he said. So, they put him down on the table, prepared his little arm, and inserted the needle. As the blood started to flow into the plastic bag, he looked so frightened. And after a while he looked up into the face of the doctor and said very quietly, “Doctor, how long will it be before I die?” In his mind, the blood transfusion meant that he would die so that his sister might live. No one had explained to him that that was not so.

When you and I have something of that same spirit, we might see our unsaved friends come to know Christ. I know I don’t love people the way I ought. Later on, we will discover in chapter 9 how Paul, in a burst of concern, exclaimed, “I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel” (Romans 9:3). His fellow Jews were dying without Christ, and he would have been willing to die if that could have led to their salvation. “That,” said the Apostle, “is why I am so ready and eager to preach the Gospel.”

Why did God use Paul to turn the world upside down? Because Paul realized he had a debt to pay, and he said, “I am ready!”

3. “**I am NOT ASHAMED** of the Gospel,” said Paul, “because it is the power of God for

the salvation of everyone who believes.”

What did Paul mean when he said “I am not ashamed”?

(a) He meant that he was not ashamed of the Person of the Gospel — the Lord Jesus Christ. “I’m not ashamed of Jesus!” he exclaims. Now, in Paul’s day, to be a follower of the lowly Galilean was a mark of shame. To many, Jesus was a madman at His best and a criminal at His worst. Our Lord was despised, and especially so in power-hungry Rome. But Paul was not ashamed of the Person of the Gospel, because Jesus had saved him and transformed his life. I like the old hymn that says —

Am I a soldier of the Cross,
A follower of the Lamb?
And shall I fear to own His cause,
Or blush to speak His Name?

You know, you can ask some church members, “When were you converted?” and they will say, “Oh, I joined the church 20 years ago!” It’s hard for them even to say, “I received Jesus as my Savior 20 years ago!” They’re ashamed of the very name of Jesus. Of course, maybe they never entered into a personal relationship with Him. Joining a church doesn’t make you a Christian, and our Lord Himself said, “If anyone is ashamed of Me . . . in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His Father’s glory with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38). If you are in a public gathering and someone mentions the name of Jesus, do you duck your head? Are you ashamed to speak of Jesus where you work?

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If so, you’re in deadly peril, believe me. Paul said, “I’m not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.”

Perhaps you say, “But I haven’t always lived as a Christian ought.” Well, I haven’t either. But we can still be proud of Jesus. We have failed Him, but He has never failed us. Paul was not ashamed of the Person of the Gospel — Jesus Christ his Lord.

(b) Paul was not ashamed of the Purpose of the Gospel. He said, “The Gospel is the power of God for salvation . . . You see, the purpose of the Gospel is salvation. Paul was going to Rome; and in Rome there was slavery; there was organized prostitution; there was drunkenness; there was militarism; there was unspeakable and unbridled vice; there were all kinds of social injustices. But Paul was not going to Rome to wage a war on the Caesars or to campaign against the Roman government or to organize political action committees or even to organize a slave rebellion. Paul wanted to go to Rome to get people saved. He knew that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Paul refused to get sidetracked into “the social gospel.”

There used to be good preachers who spent half their time fighting Communism. Now I believe we ought to speak out against evil in every shape or form. But when a preacher spends his time denouncing every social ill, he reminds me of a man who is busy re-painting a sinking ship. Our job is to preach Jesus Christ. You can make a man an anti-Communist without making him a Christian, but you can’t make him a real Christian without making him an anti-

Communist.

Paul refused to get sidetracked. He knew that what people needed first of all and most of all was salvation through Christ. The Gospel is an idea, and the only thing that can shoot down an idea is a *better* idea. You can't kill an idea with a bullet. Communism and secular humanism are ideas, and you can kill them with the Gospel of Christ.

Paul was not ashamed of the *Person* or the *Purpose* of the Gospel.

(c) And Paul was not ashamed of The Power of the Gospel. The Gospel is “the *power* of God unto salvation.” And the Greek word for “power” is “*dunamis*,” from which we get our English word “dynamite.” The Gospel is “the dynamite of God” for the salvation of everyone who believes. And I have seen that dynamite explode and blow sin and hatred out of human lives. I've seen it blow prejudice and bitterness out of hearts. The only power that can do that is the power of our risen Christ!

Did you ever realize that God is powerless apart from the Gospel? If a person will not accept the Gospel there is no other way for him to be saved. If there had been any other way apart from Jesus dying on the Cross, God would have taken it. But just because God allowed His Son to die on Calvary to atone for my sin, I know that this is bound to be the only way.

“There is power, power, wonder-working power” in the Gospel of Christ. One of the pure joys of returning to Raven-hill Church, Belfast, where I was ordained 51 years ago, is to meet friends whom I had the joy of leading to Christ all those years ago. Those of them who are still living are standing tall for Christ as living testimony to the power of Christ to save, transform and keep those who have committed themselves to Him.

There is power in the Gospel, power to “rescue the perishing,” power to “snatch them in pity from sin and the grave”; and that's why I'm not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.

(d) And finally, Paul was not ashamed of the Plan of the Gospel, for, as he says, “It is the power of God for the salvation of *everyone* who *believes*.” Can you think of anything more wonderful than that? Suppose God said, “Let everyone who wants to be saved run around the block.” That sounds easy, doesn't it? But some little crippled children couldn't run. Or suppose God said, “Let everyone who wants to be saved read the Bible from cover to cover.” But millions of people can't read.

You see, when God bestows salvation, the plan of salvation is “to everyone who *believes*.” That is gloriously simple, and simply glorious, isn't it? “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). That's *so* plain that sometimes a college professor will stumble over it when a little child will grasp it.

There are those people who would tell us that we must join this church or that to be saved. Some claim that you are saved through being baptized. You have to do this, or you have to do that. But any time a person tells me that there is anything he must do, other than believe, in order to be saved, I know he's wrong, because whenever you add any condition, you are taking

the “whosoever” out of the Bible — “Whosoever is thirsty, let him come; and whosoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life” (Rev. 22:17). We would then have to read the Bible like this: “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord or is fortunate enough to be near water so that he can be baptized and is also fortunate enough to have an ordained minister present to perform the baptism, shall be saved.” That would eliminate a lot of people, wouldn’t it? When you take the “whosoever” out, you are mutilating God’s plan of salvation. Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel.”

So why was Paul the soul — winner he was? Because of his three mighty “I am’s”:

“I am a debtor.”

“I am ready.”

“I am not ashamed.”

Would to God that could be said about my life this morning, and about yours.

AMEN.