

In Debt to Everybody

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No, this has no reference to the feeling that momentarily seizes us when the first of the month rolls round and the bills pour in! As a matter of fact our creditors only seem numerous; they are actually few.

But there once lived and labored a fiery-spirited Christian who announced that every man was his creditor. In the Phillips rendering of Romans 1:14 we read: "I feel myself under a sort of universal obligation. I owe something to all men, from cultured Greek to ignorant savage." Is there a spirit in us akin to that of the man Paul? Are we disturbed and driven by it?

When once it really dawns on us what kind of world it is that God has created for us and what kind of Saviour He has provided for us in Jesus Christ, we shall understand what Detroit's princely preacher, Dr. M. S. Rice, meant when once he cried in my presence: "We (Christians) are not here to collect our dues; we are here to pay our bills!"

Let's take a closer look at this sense of universal obligation by which Paul was motivated and mastered.

First of all, we see in him an unlimited recognition of debt. "I am debtor," he freely acknowledges, "both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish." By "Greeks" is meant the whole Greek-speaking civilization of Paul's day, and by "barbarians" is meant all other peoples and tribes.

Here is a facing up to debt that climbs over racial barriers and burrows under cultural differences. The old Paul of pre-conversion days, the patriotic Hebrew and proud Pharisee would have said to Gentiles, "You are in debt to me!" But the new Paul, the "man in Christ," says, "I am in debt to you!"

Observe, in the next place, that Paul gives us an unrivalled reason for debt. The curious and the casual will want to toss Paul the query: Why should you feel obligated to a man on the other side of the planet who doesn't even know that you exist? What has he done to put you in debt to him?

And Paul the Christian replies in effect. It isn't what he has done at all. It is what God has done in Jesus Christ our Lord! It has all come about, argues the Apostle, because three absolutely tremendous and unprecedented things have taken place in our world.

For one thing, the supreme Person has been revealed, and He is the Son of God, named Jesus the Christ. Thus in this first chapter of Romans Paul starts right off by saying that he is going to write about "the gospel of God" (v. 1), which is the good news "concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (vv. 3,4).

God has come in Christ. The Supreme Person of the ages has acted. His action was a birth, a life, a death, a resurrection, all of which, because of its redemptive purpose, has put a new chord into the music of life.

Second, the supreme Power has been released, and that is the "power of God unto salvation" (v. 16). The power of man, look where we will, turns out to be power unto destruction. But the power of God, demonstrated and offered in the death and resurrection of Jesus, saves men:

saves the conscience from the despair of unforgiven guilt, saves the will from the ruin of false loyalties, saves the emotions from being wasted and warped by worry and fear, saves them into wholeness and purposefulness.

And third, the supreme Principle has been recorded. It is the principle of faith, on which sinful beings like ourselves come to God through Christ and, confessing spiritual bankruptcy, admitting inability to save ourselves, receive God's grace, God's forgiveness, God's newness of life, as His undeserved gift to us. Hence Paul's unashamed proclamation everywhere: "the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

Now it is this triple fact—the supreme Person revealed, the supreme Power released, the supreme Principle recorded—that creates for the Christian an unpayably great debt. Others must be told. Others must know.

III

Consider one further feature of the debt Paul feels: besides an unlimited recognition of it and an unrivalled reason for it, he testifies to his unhesitant response to this debt. "So I am eager," he cries, "eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome" (v. 15).

Think of the totality that characterizes this response: "as much as in me is." So the Authorized Version reads. "I have one passion," declared Count Zinzendorf. "It is He, He alone. The world is the field and the field is the world; and henceforth that country shall be my home where I can be most used in winning souls by Christ." Another man, you see, feeling his universal indebtedness!

Think too of the testing that will come to our response: "I want you to know, brethren, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far I have been prevented)" (v. 13). Any man who sets out to pay his Christian debt to others, his debt to the Cross on which the Prince of Givers once hung, is going to meet with obstacles. The devil will see to that. Such a man will be tested.

But Paul was no slacker. He got to Rome.

It is only the slacker who is doomed. The debtor who pays, and pays, and pays, is crowned with everlasting honor

—World Vision

THE ANSWER

I pressed the button at my neighbor's door,

But when I heard no sound, I turned and stood

Irresolute. If I had moved a bell

I must have heard it. Should I rap, or go?

But in a moment more my neighbor came.

"The bell is far, and very small," he said.

"You may not catch it for the walls between;

But rest assured, each time you push the knob,

We cannot choose but hear the bell inside."

And what they told me of my neighbor's bell

Has cheered me when I knocked at some hard heart

And caught no answer. Now and then

I poured my soul out in a hot appeal,

And had no sign from lip, or hand, or eye,

That he I would have saved had even heard.

And I have sighed and turned away; and then

My neighbor's words came back:

"We cannot choose but hear inside."

And after many days

I have had answer to a word I spoke

In ears that seemed as deaf as dead man's ears.

—The British Weekly.