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Sermon Notes

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Paul's Debt and How He Discharged It

Romans 1:8-15

I. The Nature of Paul's Debt

A. The Debt Stated: vs. 14-15

1. "Obligated" = debtor
2. To whom? Greeks and Barbarians, Wise & Foolish
 - a. whole Gentile world
 - b. social & economic classes
 - c. "barbarians" = those whose language sounds like "bar-bar-bar" to Greeks
3. Paul's life mission: Romans 1:5

Paul: "I exist by the grace of God to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles of the world for the sake of the glory of the name of Christ."

- a. Paul lived every moment for that purpose
- b. THEREFORE: Romans itself was written for that purpose
- c. He was constrained to that purpose

1 Corinthians 9:16-17 "Yet when I preach the gospel I cannot boast for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me."

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 "So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."

4. Obligation to Gentiles came with his commission as an apostle

B. God's Grace to Paul

1. First, for salvation
2. Second, for apostleship (1:5)

Romans 1:5 "Through him and for his name's sake we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith."

C. Paul's Incredible Energy

1. Eager to Preach in Rome

vs. 15 "That is why I am eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome."

- a. deep sense of responsibility
- b. obligation... led to COMPULSION... THE COMPULSION OF GRACE

2. Relentless in Pursuit of God's Purposes... the RELENTLESSNESS OF GRACE

1 Corinthians 15:9-10 "For I am the least of all the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them; yet, not I, but the grace of God that was with me."

Colossians 1:28-29 "We proclaim him [Christ], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy which so powerfully works in me."

D. The Nature of Paul's Debt: The Gospel of Grace

1. The Gospel Ministry Itself is Paul's Debt
2. The Debt of Good News to the Suffering

If you are in a city which is suffering from a terrible drought, and you stumble upon a flowing mountain spring which had never been seen before, you are obligated to tell the whole community about it... or else you are acting as though God loves you alone, or that you alone are worthy of this gift of grace!!

NO ONE QUALIFIES FOR GRACE!!!

II. A Dangerous Misunderstanding: Salvation Is NOT A Mortgage!!

“O to grace how great a debtor daily I’m constrained to be...”

A. Paul’s Debt Here Is **NOT TO GOD**

1. Easy mistake to make
2. Gift of Christ is infinite...
3. Slave on His knees:

Matthew 18:26-27 “Be patient with me and I will pay back everything.” Instead his master had mercy on him, canceled the debt, and let him go.

B. Grace doesn’t CREATE DEBTS; Grace PAYS DEBTS!!!

Matthew 6:12 “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

C. Paul: Try to Pay God Back, Grace Is No Longer Grace!!

God gave His best for me, so I owe it to God to give my best for Him...

Problem: paying God back for grace is after the fact earning of salvation

Illus: “The Debtor’s Ethic”

Romans 4:4 “Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited to him as righteousness.”

We don’t buy salvation on credit and then pay it back in installments!!!

III. Discharging the Debt: Preaching the Gospel of Grace

- A. Ultimate Goal: Glory of Christ in the Obedience of Faith Among the Gentiles
- B. Method: Preaching the Gospel of Grace
- C. Audience #1: Unbelievers

1. No great surprise here
2. Soon makes open declaration

1:16 *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”*

3. Wants a harvest

vs. 13 *“I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you, but have been prevented from doing so until now, in order that I might have a harvest among you just as I have had among the other Gentiles.”*

4. Just like Jesus... a feast of joy

John 4:34-37 *“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me. Do you not say, ‘Four months more, and then the harvest.’ I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest! Even now the reaper draws his wages. Even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying, ‘One sows, and another reaps.’”*

D. Audience #2: Believers

vs. 15 *“That is why I am eager to preach the gospel also to YOU who are at Rome...”*

1. Goal: obedience that comes from faith... in EVERY AREA OF LIFE... a different kind of harvest

Romans 6:22 *“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of righteousness, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.”*

The harvest is the OBEDIENCE OF FAITH... in everyday life

Matthew 28:19 *“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”*

2. Salvation is not simply JUSTIFICATION
3. The Romans are believers... but they are not done being saved
4. SANCTIFICATION also occurs through the preaching of the Gospel...

Romans 10:9 *“Faith comes by hearing the word...”*

Therefore the obedience of faith in every area of life also comes through the hearing of the word preached

Romans 15:15-16 “I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of preaching the gospel of God so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”

Reminders of the scope of this gospel... how it operates by grace through faith... are constantly needed... “as if to remind you of them again”

“Remind” = to put something back in the mind which was once there but has not slipped out

5. The Grace of God

- enters you irresistibly by the calling of the Spirit
- produces faith as a gift
- then works out the obedience of faith in every area of life

All of this from hearing the gospel properly explained... and you will never be done with it!... Paul wasn't: He also needed to be encouraged by the Romans' faith

Final outcome: God gets all the glory for the Romans continued growth in grace

IV. Paul: Our Role Model

Why does it matter how Paul carried out his ministry? Because of his unique position not only as preacher/teacher, but as EXAMPLE

A. The Need for Role Models

1. Christ our ultimate role model

1 Peter 2:21 “To this you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.”

2. Paul frequently presented himself that way

1 Corinthians 11:1 “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.”

Philippians 4:9 “Whatever you have learned or received or heard in me or seen in me, put it into practice; and the God of peace will be with you.”

B. Ministry First to God

1. Thankfulness to God (vs. 8)

vs. 8 “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you...”

- a. thankfulness only acceptable to God if through JESUS CHRIST... He is our only MEDIATOR
- b. NOTE: thankfulness to God FOR THE PEOPLE... “for all of you”

People have faith... Paul is intensely concerned with the Romans as people

- c. NOTE: thankfulness to God for work done by others

Paul not just concerned about his own ministry... the whole body of Christ is what matters to him

- d. NOTE: thankfulness to God for their FAITH

We tend to think of faith as the one thing we bring to God for our own salvation... “Of course, God doesn’t want our works... they are like filthy rags in His sight,” we say... but the biggest difference between me and the other guy is that I believed and he didn’t...

IF THAT WERE TRUE... we would have reason for boasting: two choices: 1) boastfulness; 2) thankfulness

NO!!! Paul thanks God for the faith of the Roman Christians because God deserves to be thanked for their faith... it came from HIM

- d. Spectacular faith!!!

vs. 8 “... your faith is being reported all over the world”

- i) not exaggeration
- ii) entire world = Roman empire
- iii) incredible progress of the gospel

iv) strategic significance of the Roman Christians

270 years after Paul wrote this letter, a Roman Emperor declared himself to be a Christian... Struggle between Christ and Caesar would end with a total victory for Christ!!!

Small but energetically growing network of little house churches had all heard of an enclave of believers in the heart of the greatest city in the world... a powerful encouragement to them of the truth of their faith

2. Wholehearted Service to God

vs. 9 *“God whom I serve with my whole heart in [preaching] the gospel of his Son is my witness...”*

a. Greek = “God whom I serve in my spirit...”

i) could be prayer life... prayer in the gospel ministry

ii) more probably refers to the zeal and wholehearted nature of his service

Romans 12:11 *“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord.”*

iii) “half-heartedness” characterizes our lives apart from God

NOTHING HAS CAPTURED US... NOTHING HAS CONQUERED US AND GIVEN US A COMPELLING REASON TO LIVE EVERY MOMENT ... Paul was absolutely ravished by Christ and his salvation... then ravished again by the grace for apostleship

Are you like Paul? Or would half-heartedness characterize your service to God

b. Service = worship

i) Greek word translated “service” = worship... ritual duties of a priest

ii) everyday life in ministry of Gospel a priestly service

3. Constant Prayer to God

vs. 9-10 *“[God is my witness] how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times*

a. word does not mean endlessly without ever doing anything else

b. rather: means regular, persistent pattern of prayer

c. relies on God for their welfare

C. Ministry Second to/from the Romans

1. Deep Longing for the Romans

Prayer is clear: that somehow, by the will of God, he might at last be able to come to see them

- a. not just looking for “faith” the way gold-diggers look for gold
- b. faith is not a commodity we store up
- c. faith is the way PERSONS respond to God & to His Word
- d. INTENSELY INTERESTED IN THE PEOPLE
- e. Prays constantly for them
- f. deeply yearns to see them

vs.13 *“I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to see you, but have been prevented from doing so until now, in order that I may have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.”*

Paul’s reputation as “apostle to the Gentiles” is on the line... it could be said that Paul didn’t really care about the Romans because he’d never come to see them... nothing could have been further from the truth.

GOD’S WILL prevented him... not his own lack of desire

2. Mutual Encouragement of Faith with the Romans: Spiritual Gifts

vs. 11-12 *“I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.”*

- a. spiritual leaders still need to grow too
- b. Paul knew he needed the Romans as much as they needed him
- c. WHY? The wisdom of God in the giving of spiritual gifts

Romans 12:4-6 *“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and*

each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.”

Paul is not just coming to bless the Romans and help them grow in their faith... a godly spiritual leader knows that he himself also needs to grow and will be blessed by the Romans as well

3. Harvest from the Romans

vs. 13 “... in order that I may have a harvest among you...”

Romans 1:5 “grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.”

That is the harvest... faith for conversion, faith also for spiritual obedience in every area of life

V. Summary and Application

A. What we have seen

1. Paul had a life call that focused all of his efforts on one thing
2. The call of grace made him a debtor to all the Gentiles to pour himself out for their salvation... the debt he was paying was NOT to God for his salvation
3. The Romans were deeply and passionately on Paul’s heart, and he had prayed time & time again to be able to see them, but God had always said NO
4. He deeply desires the Romans to know his heart for God and for their obedience
5. Paul is a role model: wholehearted service to God; deep, loving commitment to the Romans

B. Applications

1. No “debtor’s ethic”... salvation is not a mortgage!
 2. A profound debt to lost people
 3. Life purpose: passionate service to God & God’s people
- OUTCOME: “a harvest of righteousness for God’s glory”