

## 2. Learning Why Paul Said He Was a Debtor

In our last topic, we saw that God has called us to be saints. We saw that we are to show our physical and spiritual children by our example that each Christian has been chosen to proclaim the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. In our topic today, we see that Paul points out that because of what Christ had done in his life, he was a debtor to Christ to share the message of the Gospel with others. In the same way, because we have also been called out of darkness into His marvelous light, we are also debtors to Christ to share the message of the Gospel with others. This is an important lesson that we want to share with our children by our example.

In Romans 1:8-10, we see that Paul prayed regularly for the Christians in Rome even though he had never been to Rome. Those verses say, “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. 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, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.” As Paul prayed for the Christians in Rome, the first thing that he did was give thanks for them. In particular, Paul gave thanks for the fact that the faith of the Christians in the city of Rome was being talked about throughout the Roman Empire.

One key lesson that we want to teach and model for our children is the importance of praying for Christians in other places. That is one of the things that will help them to begin to realize that the body of Christ is scattered throughout the world. Paul said that he prayed for the Christians in the city of Rome without ceasing. The word that is translated “without ceasing” means *to do something continually* and is used four times in the New Testament. The other three times are all in the book of 1 Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 says, “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.” Paul continually thanked God for the way that the Thessalonians had received the Word of God. Then, 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Pray without ceasing.” Here, we see that Paul urged the Thessalonians as new Christians to pray continually. We want to help our children learn to pray continually for Christians in other places.

As Paul prayed for the Christians in Rome, he also prayed continually that the Lord would give him the opportunity to visit the Christians in Rome. His prayer to God was to ask that if it was the will of God, God would open the way for him to go and visit the Christians in Rome. Paul explained why he wanted to come to Rome in Romans 1:11-12 where we read, “For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established--that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.” Here, we see that Paul had two reasons why he wanted to visit the Christians in Rome. First, he wanted to share with them to help them be established. The word that is translated “established” means *to be strengthened*. Paul enjoyed the privilege of strengthening other Christians in whatever city they lived. Second, Paul looked forward to the fact that he and the Christians in Rome could be a mutual encouragement to each other. Here, we see that Paul also recognized that they would

minister to him in his spiritual life.

Paul went on to explain why the Lord had not allowed him to visit the church in the city of Rome already. Romans 1:13-15 says, “Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, *I am* ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.” We see that Paul had actually planned to visit the city of Rome many times. However, he had been hindered or forbidden by the Lord. The same word is used in Acts 16:6 where we read, “Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.” Here, we see that God had hindered him from going to Asia at that time even though he later spent three years in Asia. In the same way, he had been prevented from going to Roman although he later spent two years there.

Paul explained the reason why he wanted to visit the city of Rome. Paul wanted to share the Gospel and see the Lord produce fruit there just as the Lord had done in each of the other cities where Paul had taken the Gospel. “Fruit” can talk about the fruit of the Spirit as in Galatians 5:22-23; it can talk about godly actions as it does in Romans 6:22. However, in this verse, it is talking about a third kind of fruit. Here, we see that Paul wanted to have the privilege of sharing the Gospel in the city of Rome and seeing others become Christians. That is the way that this word is used in Romans 16:5 where we read, “Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.” Here, we see that Epaenetus was among the first to become a Christian when Paul preached the Gospel in Corinth and the surrounding area.

This is clearly explained in the next two verses. Paul said he was a debtor. He was a debtor to the Greeks and those who had accepted the Greek culture and its emphasis on worldly wisdom and education. He was also a debtor to those who knew nothing of the Greek language or culture. The Greeks called those who did not speak their language and learn their knowledge barbarians. Today, we would be saying a similar thing if we said that we were a debtor to those who had a great worldly education from well-known universities and to those who had never had any formal education. As a result, Paul said that he was a debtor both to those who followed Greek learning and to those who had never heard of Greek wisdom. Since Rome was the largest city in the Roman Empire, Paul was eager to go to that city to share the Gospel because he knew that there were many there who had not yet heard the Gospel.

Paul had a reason why he said that he was a debtor. When the Lord first sent Ananias to speak to Paul after the Lord had blinded him on the road to Damascus, Acts 9:15-16 says, “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.’” Here, we see that God had called Paul to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, to kings and also to the Jews. We also want to show our children by our example that we also all have the same debt as Paul. Matthew 28:19-20 says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things

that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.’ Amen.” We want to show our children that we also have a debt to share the Gospel with people of every nation and ethnic group.

Paul went on to say in Romans 1:16-17, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” Here, we see that Paul was not ashamed to share the Gospel of Christ wherever he went. He realized that Christ had not been ashamed of him even though he had persecuted the Christians. Hebrews 2:11 says, “For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” Here, we are reminded that Christ is not ashamed of any Christian. Instead, Christ is eager to call all Christians his brethren.

Paul realized that the Gospel of Christ shows the power of God because it gives spiritual life to every person who believes. Ephesians 2:1-2 says, “And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.” Each one of us that have become Christians was at one time spiritually dead. As a result, we all followed the actions of the world and participated in those actions. It was at that time that God showed the power of the Gospel by giving us spiritual life at the moment that we placed our faith in Christ. We see that the Gospel has the power to save both Jews and Gentiles.

The Gospel also reveals the righteousness of God. God is a holy God and cannot look at sin with approval. At the same time, He is a loving God that does not want any person to perish. 1 Peter 2:24 says, “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed.” Because the Gospel is the message of the death and resurrection of Christ, it shows that Christ had our sins placed on Himself as He hung on the cross. That is what makes it possible for God to be righteous when He forgives our sin because the penalty was paid in full by Christ. As 1 John 2:2 says, “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” The word “propitiation” means *that which satisfies*. When Satan accuses a Christian of sin, Christ as our Advocate says that He paid for our sin by shedding His blood on the cross. He says that we accepted His payment by repenting of our sin of unbelief and placing our faith in the payment made by Christ for our sin. God says, “I’m satisfied with the payment. Case dismissed!”

The fact that Christ paid our penalty made us just or righteous in the sight of the Father. Because we are saved by faith, we also live by faith. That is why we are told that “The just shall live by faith.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that we are now free to serve the Lord by faith. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to live by faith as you show others the love of Christ.