

Romans 1:8-15 by Wayne Barber

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Romans 1:8-15: The Debtor of God's Good News by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

I want us to talk about the Debtor of God's Good News. We have already seen that the Apostle Paul is the deliverer of that good news. Look at verse 1: "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God." The word "gospel" comes from two Greek words, good and news, the good news of God, the good news of what He did for you and me in Christ Jesus. Paul is not only the deliverer of the good news, which we saw in Ro 1:2-7, he is also the debtor of that good news.

What do I mean, a debtor of the good news? We used to sing a song, "He paid a debt He did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay, I needed someone to take my sins away. And now I sing a brand new song, Amazing Grace all day long. Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay." That is the good news. That is the debt we could never pay. God did it through His Son Jesus Christ coming to this earth to take our sins upon Himself. That is a debt we could not pay. He paid it for us. However, once we have received the good news of Jesus Christ, we become debtors and we now owe a debt that we not only can pay in the energizing of the Holy Spirit, but we must pay.

Ro 1:8-15 are the verses we are looking at this time. Don't disassociate verse 14 from the flow of what Paul is saying: "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish." That little term, "I am under obligation," is the Greek word that means "I am a debtor." Paul says, "I owe a debt that I must pay." By the way, it is in the present tense. Paul says, "I am always, at all times, by my conduct and by what I do, repaying a debt that I owe."

Who do we owe? Obviously, we owe God. We will never repay that one. But Paul is not referring to that. If you will look again at the

verse, he says, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish." Now who are these people? He is talking about the Gentile world. The Greeks were those who had the Greek language and culture of the Gentile world. The barbarians were anyone who not have the Greek language and did not have the Greek culture—which covers the rest of the Gentile world.

The Greeks considered all these people uncultured. That is what it meant to be a barbarian. You did not have the Greek language or the Greek culture. Remember, Paul is assigned to the Gentile world and he is covering all of the bases in this verse. He says, "both to the wise and to the foolish," which covers every ground that you could possibly want.

Why in the world would he be a debtor to these people? You see, once we have received the good news of God, we are under a moral obligation to share that good news with others. A lot of people can't see this. Yes, I am a debtor to God, but I am a debtor to my fellow man, not just to speak it to him, but to live it before him, the message of God's grace.

If you and I were on a ship and the ship was about to sink and for some reason I knew the way out, I knew where the life boats were, I knew where the life jackets were, I knew where the escape hatch was and I did not tell you about it, then I would not only be immoral, I would be amoral. I am under responsibility to tell you if I know something that is good. When a person receives the good news of God, he is under a moral obligation to his fellow man.

We are under obligation to our fellow man. If you don't sense that obligation, for some reason you sense that the world owes you rather than you owing them, it is obvious one of two things has happened. Number one, you don't understand the grace of God and you don't understand your salvation and you have a low view of salvation; or number two, you have never known the good news of Jesus Christ. Because once you have received it and been transformed by it, you are now morally obligated to share it with your fellow man. Paul's way of doing that and your way will be different. Paul's way is in Ro 1:15 (note): "Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome."

What is a debtor? A debtor is a person who understands the good news, has been transformed by it and now feels a responsibility to somehow get that news to someone else. It is something that is deep down inside your heart. You can't make yourself a debtor. God has to make you a debtor. When you see what the good news is, you can't help but tell it to other people in some way. It might not be in the pulpit. It may be by the way you give. But we become a part of God seeking a lost world with His good news. We feel an obligation and a responsibility to our fellow man.

There are three things I want you to see about a true debtor of the gospel of Jesus Christ. What is he like? In Ro 1:8-15 I think we find out. True debtors are few and far between. There are a lot of people who come to church and sit on church pews and that is it for the week. They are not debtors. As a matter of fact, they still feel like somebody else owes them. They are not debtors.

What is the first key? First of all, a debtor, a true debtor is very thankful for other debtors, when he comes across one, when he sees their faithfulness. When you find a person living and controlled by the Spirit of God, a person who is faithful, a true bond-servant of Christ, you have found a genuine debtor of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a debtor in the sense that he is a part now of what God wants to do through him to reach his fellow man.

Paul was thankful for other debtors. Look at Ro 1:8(note): "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world." The word for "faith" can be translated "faith" or "faithfulness." The word "faith" always means faithfulness. In other words, it is not just what you say you believe, it is how you live. Your faithful living is known around the world.

The Apostle Paul had never been to Rome, but he had heard about these people. As a result, he had become thankful. It is almost like saying, "I've got some friends over there in Rome. They see it like I see it. We are bond-servants. We are sold out to Jesus Christ." How can you become grateful for other debtors? He wasn't grateful for the sinners in Rome. He wasn't grateful for the people in the Roman church who were beginning to be side-tracked into antinomianism and legalism, which was one of the reasons he wrote the book. What he is grateful for is the faithful believers there, the ones who love God, the ones who weren't playing church, the ones who were sold out to Him. It somehow struck a cord in the Apostle Paul's heart.

I think there is something implicit in the word "thankful." It comes from the word *eucharisteo*. *Eu* or *ef* means good, and *charis*, means grace. That is what it means to be thankful. There seems to be an underlying meaning here. What is the grace of God? His transforming power, yes. But it is also His unmerited favor in my life. It is something I don't deserve. When God wooed me to Himself, when I received the Lord Jesus in my heart, when God saved me from myself and from my sin and all of a sudden I experienced the grace of God that I could never in my whole entire life repay God for, I am overwhelmed by that and I become a person who is grateful. Nobody is grateful until they have been a recipient of the grace of God. But when you have been overwhelmed by the good news, you understand it. If you understand how tremendous it is and if your view of salvation is what it should be, then you should be so overwhelmed you become grateful for others.

The opposite side of that are people who think the world owes them something. They are always looking for a free ride, jumping from church to church. As soon as they walk in, they don't like things. "Well, what can this church do for me?" I remember years ago I heard Stuart Briscoe speak. He said, "You know these church bulletins that say 'A friendlier place you will never find'? Where do you find that in Scripture? Jesus Christ, the Son of God did not come to be ministered unto, He came to minister. Why do we proclaim to the world, "Come to us and we will do something for you," rather than saying, "Come to us and we will equip you so you can do something for somebody else"?"

Well, Paul says why he is thankful. "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world." Paul had never been there, but he knew some folks there. He gives a list of them in chapter 16. He says, "Send my greetings to them." Priscilla and Aquila were two of them. Evidently they had told him about the faith and faithfulness of these believers in the midst of one of the most perverse cultures the world has ever known. As a matter of fact, if you read any books on the culture of Rome at that time it very much like what we are living in right now. Abortion was happening in Rome at that time. The feminist movement didn't come about in the 20th century. That came about a long time ago. In fact, that came about with Eve. It has been from Adam all the way down. It was going on in Rome. A drug culture was going on at that time. Homosexuality was an approved lifestyle. As a matter of fact, it had even gotten into the Roman government. That is why Paul nails it in chapter 1 as being the result of a reprobate mind. That is why he attacks it.

They were living in this kind of culture just like we are. But when you find a debtor, he is someone who loves God and surrenders to Him and feels the debt that he owes to his fellow man. No matter what it costs him in money and time or whatever else, he is going to be used of God. He is going to be a bond-servant to Christ. That is a debtor. When you find him your heart just leaps up because you are thankful for other debtors wherever you find them. The Apostle Paul was "thankful for the faithfulness that I hear of you."

When you find people who finally understand what salvation is and understand what God has done to deliver them out of the miry clay and to put their feet on the rock and put a new song in their heart, they become grateful and gracious. They become people who are committed to doing one thing, being a part of what God is doing in this world to touch others with that same message. You become thankful for other debtors. You look for them.

Well, not only was he thankful for them, but secondly he was prayerful for them. I want to show you something here. Do you know how we pray for most people? After the fact. We hear of a preacher who is fallen and we start praying for him. We hear of a situation that is bad and we start praying for it. Certainly, we should. But the Apostle Paul shows us that is not when you start praying. When you hear there is a debtor, when you hear that God's hand is on somebody, that is the time to lift that person before God.

Look with me in Romans 8. I want to show you something. The moment a person chooses to go back and live after his flesh, he is no longer a debtor and God cannot use him until he comes back to that place of surrender. Ro 8:12-note reads, "So then, brethren, we are under obligation [the same word, debtors] not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." What is a debtor? He doesn't live after the flesh. He lives according to the Spirit of God. He is motivated, energized and moved by the Spirit of God. The moment you hear that somebody is being used that way, immediately it ought to move us, not only to be thankful, but to be prayerful because they can lose that anointing and go back living after the flesh.

Ro 1:9 says, "For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you." It is not as if Paul didn't have anything else to do. But the Apostle Paul says, "I can't quit praying for you. Every time I hear about your faith, the evidence of your faith, I am motivated to pray for you."

Look over in 2Corinthians 11:22. Paul is a busy man. He just doesn't have Rome on his mind. If you go down through those verses in 2Corinthians 11 you find all the different things he has had to pay as a price for being a debtor to his fellow man. In verse 22 some people had begun to question his authority as an apostle, so he says, "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane.) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my country-men, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren. I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches."

Do you mean to tell me he had to bear that pressure on him? Yes. In 1Corinthians 7:17 he said he was appointed to lead all the churches, on top of everything else! But he says here, "I never ceased praying for you over there in Rome." You see, there was something about the Roman believers that prompted him to pray. It was their faith. Paul knew how quickly that could be lost. So

when he heard it, he immediately prayed about it.

When you find a debtor, you are thankful for them, but when you find a debtor, God in you motivates you to pray for them that they will continue to be the debtors that God can use to get the Good News of Jesus Christ to other people. Pray for them when you hear of the fact that they are being used.

In Romans 1:9 Paul says, "For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness." He is saying, "I don't have to prove anything to you. God knows me."

By the way, he says, "I serve in my spirit." Do you see the difference? That is the message of grace. You don't serve Him in your flesh anymore; you serve Him in your spirit. Paul spent his life trying to impress God. Now he knows, you don't impress God on the surface. You worship in Spirit and Truth. He says, "God... is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you."

What does it mean to pray without ceasing? Have you ever thought about that? Paul is saying, "Every time I hear of your faithfulness, I am motivated without interruption to bring you before the Lord. It is a habit of my life. It is a pattern of my life. It is unceasing in my life." What a gracious habit, to pray that way for one another. Ephesians 6 says there are two things that are going to maintain our victory. One is our willingness to stand firm, basically meaning to be filled with the Spirit of God. But the other is to pray at all times in the Spirit for one another. Until we learn to pray for the body, and especially those who are debtors so God can continue to have His hand on them, we are missing the mark of what God has to say.

Over in 1 Thessalonians 1:2-note and following, he says almost the same thing. He says to the Thessalonians, "constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope." He mentions three different things there and he says as a result of that, he is always "making mention of you in our prayers." If you follow Paul's prayer life, who is he praying for? He is praying for the ones God has got His hands on. He is praying for debtors. He is praying for the bond-servants. That becomes something that we need to understand. When you are blessed by somebody, you have to immediately be thankful for his life, but secondly be prayerful that God would not take His hand off of him. Thankful and prayerful.

Well, the third thing is hopeful. He is hopeful. Paul can't wait to get there. The way he says some of these things, it is almost like a kid who just can't wait to get there! He has heard of the faithful believers. You or I will get on a plane and go and find a room full of people who just love God. I can't wait to get to those kinds of places. When I am there I can't believe that I am there and I never want to leave. You see, when you are with a room full of debtors, you've got people of a common mind and a common commitment. Paul can't wait to get to Rome. Look at what he said in Ro 1: 11-note: "For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine."

There are two things Paul knows are going to happen. When you put some debtors together, good things are going to happen. Number one, you can't be a debtor without understanding the good news of God's grace. Paul is insinuating here that the good news, the gospel, is not just for the lost, it is also for the saved. You see, in Rome they were fighting this antinomianism and this legalism and there were people in the church who said, "You are saved by grace but you are kept by the Law."

Paul knows the good news. What is the good news? Jesus died for me. Yes. But He rose. It is not just His death that is good news to me; it is His life, the saving life of Christ. I can't love my wife. I can't love my children. But the good news is, because Jesus lives in me, He loves my wife. He loves my children. The good news is not just for the lost. The good news is for the saved. How many people do you know in churches everywhere in this country, who are saved by grace and trying to be kept by the Law? "If I can just do it right tomorrow God will love me. I have to go witnessing because if I don't, God will kill me. I am saved by grace. Man, this is work being a church member!" Thank God all that bondage has been taken off of us.

You see, it is not just for the lost, it is for the saved. Two things are going to happen. He says that you may be established, in verse 11. He says that I may impart some spiritual gift to you. Now what gift would he impart? Well, his gift. What is his gift? Teaching the Word of God. Do you know how they loved Paul? He went to Ephesus and spent three years and then came back down on his way to Jerusalem, stopped in Miletus and called the elders over. He began to teach them and when he finally walked away from them they loved him so much they cried over him and said, "Oh, Paul, don't leave us." He said, "You will probably never see me again, but I want to leave some things with you." They loved his teaching. He was a gifted man. And whenever he came around God turned on his gift. As he repaid his debt through the gift God gave to him, people were established.

What does it mean to be established? These Romans are concreted into the ground. Their roots are firmly established. They are debtors. But you know sometimes even false doctrine can get you thinking about something and knock you over. But when you get around another debtor who knows the grace of God, he will come alongside you and prop you back up. Your feet are already in concrete. You are not moving anywhere. He is just propping you back up and you become more and more established in what the good news of grace is all about.

Not only will he establish them, secondly, they would encourage him. Do you know that the Apostle Paul was just like you and me. He had feet of clay. He had needs. In the book of 2 Timothy, right before he died, he said, "Timothy, you come to see me. I am lonely. And will you send me my coat? I am freezing to death. And Timothy, will you send me my books?" He was a man, just like you and me. You know what, he needed the encouragement. The word means to come alongside. What he is saying is, "I will come alongside you. You will be either propped up or established and I tell you what you will do for me. As a debtor to another debtor, you will encourage my heart. I need it desperately in my walk."

I think that is what it ought to be in church every Sunday. Wouldn't it be great if everybody were debtors? People just couldn't wait to celebrate what God had done all week long. People would be so hungry to be more and more firmly established in the good news. All of us would be encouraged just by being around one another. That is what the church is supposed to be—debtors, debtors to the good news of Jesus Christ.

Well, he was hopeful as well as thankful and prayerful. That is what a debtor is all about. You might be a debtor and be wondering why things aren't happening in your life like you thought they would. You may be thinking, "Boy, if I get to be a debtor, life is going to be a piece of cake." Please understand, it may be exactly the opposite. This is entitled, "*Our High Calling*." The author is unknown. Here is what a debtor is really like.

If God has called you to be really found in Jesus in all your spirit, soul and mind, He will draw you into a life of crucifixion and humility. He will put on you such demands of obedience that will not allow you to follow other Christians. And in many ways, He will seem to let other people do things which He will not let you do.

Others, who seem to be very religious and useful, may push themselves, pull wires and work schemes to carry out their plans, but you cannot. If you attempt it, you will meet with such failures and rebuke from the Lord as to make you sorely penitent.

Others can brag on themselves, on their work for Him, on their success and on their writings. The Holy Spirit will not allow you to do any such thing. If you begin it, He will lead you into some deep mortification that will make you despise yourself and all of your good works.

Others will be allowed to succeed in making great sums of money or having a legacy left to them or having luxuries. But God may supply you daily because He wants you to have something far better than gold and being in a helpless dependence upon Him so that He may have the privilege of providing your needs day by day out of the unseen treasury.

The Lord may let others be honored and put forward and keep you hidden away in obscurity because He wants to produce some choice, fragrant fruit for His coming glory which can only be produced in the shade.

God will let others be great, but keep you small. He will let others do a work for Him and get the credit for it, but He will make you work and toil on without knowing how much you are doing. Then to make your work still more precious, He will let others get the credit for the work which you have done. This will make your reward ten times greater when Jesus comes.

The Holy Spirit will put a strict watch on you with a jealous love and will rebuke you for little words and feelings and for wasting your time which other Christians never seem distressed over. So make up your mind that God is an infinite sovereign and has the right to do as He pleases with His own. He will not explain to you a thousand things which may puzzle your reasoning in His dealings with you.

God will take you at your word and let other people say and do things that you cannot say or do. Settle it forever that you are to deal directly with the Holy Spirit and that He is have the privilege of tying your tongue, chaining your hand or closing your eyes in the ways that others are not dealt with.

Now when you are so possessed with the Living God that you are in your secret heart pleased and delighted over this peculiar, personal, private, jealous guardianship and management of the Holy Spirit over your life, then you will have found the vestibule of heaven, the High Calling of God."

You see, a debtor is not everybody you meet. You will know the debtors. They are the ones who don't complain. They are the ones who don't gripe and grumble. They are the ones who only want to be useable until the Lord comes back in getting the good news of His grace to others. It is in the present tense. You are always, at all times, paying a debt. We need to be either speaking it or living it out by letting that grace affect our lives so that others might see and hear the good news of Jesus Christ.