

## “INDEBTED TO ALL”

Text: **Romans 1:16-18**

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INTRO: The apostle Paul closes his introduction to the Roman epistle with **vv14-15**; and although **v16** really is the beginning of a very long, logical, doctrinal discourse, we’ve included **v16** with our text because it truly lends great insights into these precious verses (**vv14-15**) while at the same time, begins Paul’s very logical train of thought, as we will see in future studies in our examination of **v16** on. In fact, we will begin from an insight taken from **v16** as I hope to open to you these **seven** points: (1) A Debtor; (2) To Everyone; (3) To Anyone; (4) At Anytime; (5) By Any Means; (6) Yet, Always IN and BY the Spirit; (7) Conclusion with our application of these truths.

I. PAUL AS A DEBTOR. The word debtor in 17<sup>th</sup> century King James English meant “under obligation.” Paul was obligated, or under obligation. Why? because it was that by which he was not ashamed (**v16**), “the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Certainly, there were people who were ashamed of the gospel, so Paul does write as much with that particular terminology (and Lord willing, we’ll look more closely at that next time); however, “not ashamed” is also his way of saying that he glories in or boasts in the gospel of Jesus Christ. To use this kind of negative expression, “*not* ashamed,” was common among speakers of Paul’s day; one way it was used was by expressing the overwhelming magnificence of a thing without sounding arrogant or haughty. This way of expressing things was quite common in the New Testament: “no mean city” (**Acts 21:39**); “not a few” (**Acts 17:4, 21**); “no small stir” (**Acts 19:23**) &etc.

Paul was a debtor, under obligation, because of the magnificent glories of the gospel of Jesus Christ, by which he was recipient of that good news, and elected as one who abode with, lived by, breathed in, and received nourishment from all its heavenly benefits and promises. Paul knew the priceless value and infinite worth of Christ’s substitutionary

Sacrifice, as he wrote to the Corinthians, “Know ye not that... ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s (1 Cor 6:19-20).

II. [v14] Paul was debtor TO EVERYONE: to the civilized (Greeks) and to the uncivilized (Barbarians). That sums up everyone of every culture. And just so there’s no chance of anyone making any mistake, he also says, that he is obligated to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel that saved a sinner like him by God’s amazing grace, that he was obligated to those who were educated (wise) as well as those who were uneducated (unwise). Paul figured that if God, by His grace, made the gospel available to him, then he was under obligation to also make the gospel available to all. He implies this same thing in preaching to the Athenians at Mars Hill, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30). “Of a truth... God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34) when it comes to the gospel, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

III. [v15] Paul was a debtor TO ANYONE. When Paul says that he is “ready to preach the gospel to [those] that are at Rome also,” he’s not singling them out as a uniquely different category as those mentioned in v14. No, they had those within their number in that capital city of the Roman Empire who were wise and unwise, both Greeks and Barbarians. The specific mention of the Christians at Rome presents us with that particular insight that Paul was a debtor to, not only everyone, but also to anyone God brought his way, or brought him to. We understand this to be true by the expression often used by our Lord, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matt 11:15).

IV. Paul was obligated to all to preach the gospel AT ANY TIME (v15). Because Paul had not yet been with them at Rome; because he desired to go but was hindered (v13), he states here that he is ready to preach the gospel to them at anytime that the Spirit brings it to pass. Paul says basically the same thing to Timothy with regard to preaching the gospel, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season” (2 Tim 4:2); that is, Paul says to the young pastor, “Preach the Word always. Be ready when you have the opportunity; be ready when there is no opportunity; but be ready.”

V. Paul was a debtor to all for the gospel's sake BY ANY MEANS (v15). He says, "So, as much as in me is..." or as the NASB puts it, "Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome." What was Paul's part? Although his boast, his glory, is in the gospel on the one hand (v16), he knew that because he was bought with the price of the precious blood of Christ, he had nothing to boast about in and of himself; and so he wrote thus to the Corinthian believers, "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16). Paul's part then, as much as was in him, was to be a servant to all because of his obligation to all [1 Cor 9:19]. Here, in v19, he nearly says the same thing in Rom 1:14, that he is "a debtor" to all, "Greeks and Barbarians." Yet, let's read further [vv20-22]. We need to understand that when he says these things, he's certainly not speaking of an outward appearance. Preaching the gospel, being debtor to everyone and a servant to all doesn't mean we've got to become a cowboy church to reach the cowboys, or punk rockers to reach the punks. I saw someone some years back, who was about my age, with a Mohawk, tattoos, and face and body piercings, quoting this passage as if to justify his dress in order to preach the gospel. He said, "Whatever it takes to reach the lost; Amen?" Well, if we follow his logic out, by reaching those rockers by dressing as rockers, or dressing as cowboys to only reach cowboys, or bikers for the bikers, or whatever, we actually limit ourselves to only those folks we are trying to reach; and then our preaching becomes contrary to the last part of v22 because we do not become all things to **all** men since we are only becoming one thing to **some** men; and because our preaching and testimony in such a case is contrary to Scripture, the Word preached will not go forth in the power of the Spirit; why? because we have submitted to whimsical notions of the flesh rather than being utterly surrendered to the Word of God through His Spirit.

Then what does it mean when Paul says that he became a Jew to the Jews, as under the law, as without the law, and as weak? Let me explain this. Just because someone's a Jew doesn't mean that he thinks like a Jew. There are many nominal Jews today, just as there are nominal Christians today; and there were nominal Jews back in Paul's day. Today, just as in Paul's day, there are many legalists, attempting to keep the Ten Commandments, &etc., yet, they may know nothing of true religion or spiritual matters.

The word “weak” (**v22**) is the Greet root **αστηενες**, meaning “sick, feeble, or infirmed.” The word is also used in the Bible to denote a gentler physical stature, i.e., a woman being a “weaker vessel” (**1 Pet 3:7**); or also as in spiritual weakness, immaturity, or a failure of faith during a time of temptation, i.e., “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (**Matt 26:41**). But from all three Biblical definitions, common sense and simple logic should prevail to indicate that Paul didn’t try to make himself sick to preach to the sick; he didn’t become a woman so as to present the gospel to weaker vessels; he did not preach in the flesh to win those who were weak in faith. So what did Paul mean by this? He meant that his proclamation of the gospel was such that it came forth from the Spirit of God through Paul’s continual communion with the Father and Christ through the Spirit, in order that appropriate words would be given no matter where a person was spiritually; and that the means by which the Lord would effectually bless the soul by grace, may be by the preaching to a multitude; it may be one on one; it may be by the reading of Scripture; it may be by a written letter or a book; or it may be by the witness of our actions; or through God’s presence in worship; &etc.; which brings us to the next point...

VI. Paul was a debtor to all for the gospel’s sake, **BUT ALWAYS IN AND BY THE SPIRIT**. [**1 Cor 2:1-5**] Paul, here goes out of his way to ensure that the Corinthians recall that he used no flashy gimmicks, no “enticing words of man’s wisdom, but [came to them preaching the simple gospel] in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (**v4**). How did he know what to do, what to speak, what to preach, and when to preach? He made every effort to keep himself in communion with God. That’s what it means when we are commanded in the New Testament to “Pray without ceasing” (**1 Thess 5:17**). Since praying is not merely our speaking to God, but more importantly Him speaking to us by bringing to our minds His Word in the power and anointing of the Spirit, then Paul could do and say what was appropriate, when it was appropriate, for the work the Spirit had already been effectually performing in those whom the Word was going forth to bless. The work of salvation is God’s work through His Holy Spirit, as we’re told by the Lord Jesus, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (**Jn 3:8**). When we are not at the source of Living Water, desiring God, desiring to stay in continual fellowship with Him through the intimate communion of

prayer, the evidence will be there that this very essential kind of prayer life is truly lacking in our lives as individuals, as well as in our corporate gathering in the local, visible church. Here are just three ways in which this error is manifested (and there are others, to be sure):

**1.** We use enticing words of man's wisdom (**1 Cor 2:4**). A June 11<sup>th</sup> article from the NY Times, entitled "Door to Door Missionaries, Then as Salesman" reports on a home security company using former Mormon missionaries to sell their product door-to-door. Now, certainly the Mormon doctrine is not Historical, Biblical Christianity (Mormons are not Christian...); yet, many unbelievers may make a connection with that article and born-again, Bible-believing Christians because they are unsaved, unregenerate and don't know any better. Still, in the attitude the home security company has, the salesmen have, and the unbelieving world may have concerning the persuasive methods of Mormon salesman, and those methods being the same "persuasive techniques" used for preaching their doctrine, there are Christians thinking that we preach the gospel of Jesus Christ with the same persuasive techniques, the same enticing words of man's wisdom in order to try to "sell" Jesus. "Here, try Jesus on. Look in the mirror and see how He looks on you." Absolutely shameful; yet, apostate Christendom today employ those methods.

**2.** We appeal to the lusts of the flesh (**2 Tim 4:3-4**), "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." On the flight to Dallas from Atlanta recently, they had a montage of scenes from Jay Leno's Tonight Show (and though I didn't plug head phones in to listen) I could see all the "quality entertainment" piped in to America's homes: men shot out of canons, motorcycle leaps in the studio, lions and tigers and bears on stage.... Yet as I saw all that, I remembered a Baptist pastor coming up to Alaska and talking about lighting off chain saws in the sanctuary; why? to illustrate his points. I've seen on the Internet churches where ministers ride motorcycles, even jump motorcycles, in the sanctuary; they dress up in costumes; they smash and break props up on the platform in front of their audience... because that's what they are: an audience. The people were entertained into the gathering and

therefore, they must be increasingly entertained to stay in the gathering. It's not the gospel that got them there, nor is it the gospel that's keeping them there.

**3.** Finally, we give no reverence to the Word we preach [**1 Cor 2:3**]. Although, to do justice to this one, I'd really need to expound verse-by-verse **Matt 7:1-12**, yet, I will say this: sometimes, whether it be out of duty, or even out of sincere obedience to God's command, because we are not in constant communion with the Father, the Gospel is not handled as holy, and the Word is not scattered as seed by the power of the Spirit, but heaped as manure by the whims of the flesh. What I mean by that is that there are certainly times when a quiet Christian witness is better than soiling the gospel by speaking it forth in spiritual untimeliness or uncleanness. The Bible tells us to be "swift to hear [and] slow to speak" (**Jas 1:19**); the Lord tells us, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you" (**Matt 7:6**). Someone asked me, "How do you know that they are dogs or swine?" I told him, "You don't. We can't see a man's heart. That's why a few verses earlier in **Mt 7:1** it says, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.'" This is why continual abiding in Christ by the Spirit is needed. This is what it means to pray without ceasing: to be ever sensitive to the Spirit's leadings and promptings. The gospel of Jesus Christ is truth. The gospel of Jesus Christ is powerful and effective to the saving of souls. Yet, the gospel of Jesus Christ is also most holy. The gospel sanctifies [make one holy] (**Jn 17:17**), because the gospel is holy. We need to remember that.

VII. Now, let us CONCLUDE with our application of these truths. Paul, again, is not unique for we dare not say, "That was for him and not for us because he was an apostle." Nor do we say, "It's for someone with a special calling like pastor or teacher." The work of the Spirit is such that when we consider the precious price, the eternal value, and infinite worth of Christ's substitutionary Sacrifice, as we meditate upon the Scriptures, as pray without ceasing in intimate fellowship with the Father, as we often gather and get together to stir up one another to behave as holy and pleasing to God in good works by encouraging one another by the truth of the doctrine of justification by grace, we will have daily, even moment-by-moment revelations that we are indebted to all, because we are indebted to the gospel, because we are indebted to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for His everlasting love manifested thru His sovereign grace.