

TBC – 3/9/03 p.m.

## PAUL, A DEBTOR

Romans 1:16

**Intro:** (Read Rom. 1:1-16 in order to get the whole setting in which our text rests.)

When the Apostle Paul wrote this epistle, he had never been to Rome. The sixteenth chapter of this epistle, with its names of many believers who lived in Rome, is evidence that Paul had gotten acquainted with some of the Roman Christians in other places. Perhaps there were some that he knew by name only, but whom he had never seen. However, for a long time he had wanted to go to Rome, not just to visit the capital city of the Empire, but, as we have read, to preach the Gospel. Verse 13 tells us that he had made his plans to go to Rome often, but that he had been providentially hindered each time. But it was still one of the requests that he was placing before the Lord.

He actually gives several reasons for wanting to come. We know from that he had been appointed especially to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles, and he mentions this in Rom. 11:13. He mentioned it in 1 Cor. 9:2, in 1 Tim. 2:7, in 2 Tim. 1:11, and in Gal. 2:8 he mentioned that Peter had been particularly appointed to carry the Gospel to the Jews, or the circumcision, as he had been appointed to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles.

But in addition to the fact that he was an apostle to the Gentiles, and needed to go to the largest Gentile population in the world at that time, he wanted to be a blessing to them (Rom. 1:11) which he went on to explain that he sought comfort, or encouragement, for them and for himself. And, in addition, and as surprising as this may sound since he was writing to the saints in Rome, he wanted to preach the Gospel to them. See v. 15. We will come back to that in a moment. In fact, he mentioned the Gospel to them four times in the first sixteen verses. See vv. 1, 9, 15, and 16.

The church in Rome was evidently a thriving church. See verse 8. How large it was, we do not know. That is not the important thing. What is important is that it was well-known throughout the Empire for its faith.

But as we move on down in chapter 1 to verse 13 we find some other reasons why Paul wanted to go to Rome. In verse 13 he wanted to have some fruit among them as he had had fruit in other places. Then in verse 14 he spoke of himself as “a debtor.” In verse 15 he said that he was

“ready,” which means that he was willing to go, and prepared to go, and eager to go. At the moment there was nothing else that he hoped to do more than to go to Rome to preach the Gospel there.

And then he told them in verses 16 and 17 why the Gospel was so important to him. (Read vv. 16 and 17 again.)

I suppose that practically everyone who has read Paul’s epistle to the Romans, has noticed the three times in verses 14, 15, and 16 where Paul said, “I am . . .” The first two are positive, and the third one is negative. But they all fit together perfectly. Verse 16 actually helps us to understand why he felt that he had an obligation to meet, a debt to God and to the people of Rome, to preach the Gospel there. And it also expresses his eagerness to come. I want to consider all three of these verses with you tonight, although in doing so we will continue to look at the other verses in this first part of chapter 1.

In expressing his desire, his eager desire, his total willingness to go to Rome, he said:

### **I. “I AM DEBTOR . . . (Rom. 1:14).**

Paul felt in his heart that he had an obligation to God and to Rome to preach the Gospel there.

If we could have asked Paul why he felt that this was like a debt to God and to Rome which had to be paid, I think that the first reason he would have given was that it was because he was a Christian, and that it was a God-given responsibility which rested upon every child of God to spread the Gospel. Consider Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15. Add to those verses Matt. 5:14-16:

14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

But he would also have given us another answer. He would have told us that when he was saved and called to be an apostle, he had been “separated unto the Gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1). He had been set apart in a very

special way to preach the Gospel. To preach it to the Greeks and to the Barbarians. And then, lest we not understand what he meant by those two terms, he added, “both to the wise, and to the unwise.” This was one way both the Romans and the Greeks divided the whole human race, those who were educated, and those who were not, with all degrees in between. Paul’s mission field was the whole world. And in verse 9 Paul took God as his witness not only that he had been praying regularly for the believers at Rome, but that he was serving God “with my spirit,” he said, meaning that he had devoted his life to this one thing. There was nothing he loved to do more than to serve the Lord in the preaching of the Gospel.

So he felt this as a debt that needed to be paid, in gratitude for his own salvation, and because it specifically was God’s will for him. Paul’s words in 1 Cor. 9:16 fit right in here. You probably remember what he said in that verse:

16 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!

But let us go on to the second “I am.”

## II. “I AM READY . . . (Rom. 1:15).

Paul recognized that what he intended to do might not be easy. He was hoping to reach people in Rome who were not yet saved, and he knew that the natural man not only does not want the Gospel, is not interested in the Gospel, but he is just as opposed to the Gospel as Paul was eager to preach it to him. Little did Paul know at the time how he would go to Rome, and where he would be preaching the Gospel. But if he had known, that wouldn’t have stopped him.

But notice here in verse 15 that Paul said, “I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also.” Now we can readily understand preaching the Gospel to the lost, to people who do not know the Lord (and Paul certainly wanted to do that), but why would he want to preach the Gospel to believers, to those who were already saved? And what is the Gospel?

Well, one question at a time. What is the Gospel? To answer that question let us look back to the first four verses of our chapter, Romans 1. The Gospel has its roots in the OT. It runs through the OT like a golden

thread. And the subject of the Gospel is God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord Who came into this world as a descendant of David but Whose life on earth showed that He was "the Son of God with power," His birth not affecting in any way His Deity. Paul mentioned His resurrection in verse 4, but not His death. However, how could He have been resurrected if He had not died? The prophets predicted that He would come, that He would die, and that He would be raised again from the dead. As we go on in this book of Romans Paul left no doubt that the Gospel had to do with the death, burial, and resurrection all for the salvation of sinners. And this is the Gospel. The Gospel covers the whole doctrine of salvation. Greeks and Barbarians, and also Jews, are sinners in need of a Savior.

We speak of Matthew as the Gospel according to Matthew. We speak of the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John in the same way. We could easily and truthfully speak of the book of Romans as "The Gospel According to Paul." We don't have different Gospels here. It is the same Gospel, each approached in a slightly different way. And Paul was so eager to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Rome.

Now our third "I am" tells us why he wanted to preach the Gospel in Rome.

### **III. "FOR I AM NOT ASHAMED . . ." (Rom. 1:16-17).**

All teachers of any other way of salvation have every reason to be ashamed. Those who follow them will not reach heaven however sincere they might be, but they will find themselves in hell. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only power of God unto salvation" – the only one! There is no other way of salvation. And it is not a message of what man needs to do in order to be saved, but it is "the power of God unto salvation," not for everyone, but for "every one that believeth." Believing includes believing Who Jesus Christ is, that He came to die as a Substitute for sinners, and that through the power of Christ alone based upon His work on the Cross, guilty sinners can be and will be saved.

Paul is going to get into more details as we go on reading through this epistle, but the basic facts are here. Paul knew that in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ he would never have to be ashamed to face any who trusted in Christ. It is not only "the power of God unto salvation," but it is the only way of salvation. Here he gave another way in which the human race is divided: "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." It makes

no difference how we divide the human family, Jesus Christ is the only Savior for sinners. It takes divine power to save sinners, and that power is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But before I close I want to point out what Paul said in verse 17.

One thing that people fail to look for when they are thinking about God and their relationship to God, is what does it take to please God. On what basis does He agree to save sinners. Some religious person comes along and he tells us all that we have to do to get right with God. Ask that person, “Can you guarantee that what you are telling me is really what God requires?” After all, sin is an offence to God. What does He require is sinners are to be saved, saved in the fullest meaning of the word, which as Paul goes on to tell us in this epistle includes justification and sanctification and glorification? “The wages of sin is death, but the gift,” the free gift, “of God, is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

Paul said here in Rom. 1:17 that in the Gospel the righteousness of God has been revealed. We are under the penalty of death, eternal death, because we are sinners. Jesus Christ took that penalty upon Himself for every person who ever had, or who ever will, put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Paul expressed the Gospel in these words in 2 Cor. 5:17-21:

2 Cor 5:17-21

17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

18 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

**Concl:** Can't you sense Paul's excitement about the Gospel in the opening words of this epistle? If you had never read Romans before, and if the Holy Spirit was giving you a hunger to know God, it would be hard to put this epistle down before you had read it to the very end – and

then you would probably want to start reading it again.

And so why would Paul want to preach the Gospel to the believers at Rome, those who already believed it and who had been saved? It was because we need to know the Gospel as thoroughly as we can. This is where we find assurance. This is where we find the strength to overcome sin, and to face the trials of life. There is no message comparable to the Gospel message. It is the greatest that has ever been heard. It is the truth of God – not telling us what we need to do for our salvation, but telling us what Christ has already done and through that message imparting to us the faith that saved. “The just shall live by faith.”

Let us recognize that since God has saved us, we owe Him a debt, and the world also, to tell people wherever we are and whenever we can that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” and that “there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.”