

# The Gospel Brings A Debt

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now, you might be wondering, what? I hear the gospel dead. What does that mean? Where does that come from?

! And that's what I really want to address this morning. What the gospel dead is. The title of the sermon is that the gospel does bring a debt.

Romans 1, 11 through 15 is the text this morning. If you would stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together. Romans chapter 1, beginning in verse 11 and going through verse 15.

For I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you. That is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you, but thus far have been prevented, in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

[ 1 : 11 ] I am under obligation, both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated? Debt is a dirty word to many of us, because many of us have debt or have been in debt.

Mortgage payments, car payments, credit card payments, student loans. In fact, when I think of debt, I usually have a vision of Dave Ramsey in my head with a large pair of scissors, cutting up credit cards and exclaiming, the borrower is a slave to the lender, the borrower is a slave to the lender.

That is one form of debt, but there are other kinds of debt that a person can incur. For example, fathers, today is Mother's Day.

Hopefully, you are aware of that, and you've planned accordingly for that, because if you have it, and you go the rest of this day without honoring your wife, the mother of your children in some way, you are going to incur a debt with her.

[ 2 : 41 ] And you'll have to pay for it through either her cold shoulder, or you're spending a few nights on the couch.

You will have a debt to pay. There are still other kinds of debts. There are debts of the moral and ethical kind. An off-duty firefighter or a paramedic or a lifeguard would be expected to save a drowning child at a lake or a pool, even though they weren't technically on the clock.

I know in my church growing up, we had a doctor in our congregation, and anytime anyone was ill or fainted in the service, he would leave the sanctuary to go be with that person, because there was sort of an expectation.

But he gladly did it free of charge, because he knew that he had the ability to help. He was in debt in that way. In our text today, Paul speaks of still another kind of debt.

That word debt, or translated as obligation in the ESV, is a Greek word, and it's used seven times in the New Testament, three of which occur here in the book of Romans.

[ 4 : 20 ] It's defined as a debtor, one who owes, one who is in any way bound or under obligation to perform any duty.

And so in verse 14, Paul tells us that he owes a debt, and he tells us who he owes it to. He says that he is under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

And then in verse 15, he tells us what it is that he owes to them, by saying, so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

So the debt seems to be preaching the gospel. That's his obligation, which makes us then wonder, well, how did he come to receive this obligation?

How did he come into this debt? Well, he's told the Roman church this already. Look back at verse 1 of chapter 1.

[ 5 : 27 ] Paul there introduces himself, saying, Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.

So we understand that Paul understood that Christ had called him and commissioned him to perform a duty.

But this wasn't a duty that Paul did with drudgery. And we can't miss that this morning. Look at verse 5 of chapter 1 and how he understood this calling that he had received.

He says, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.

See, Paul views his calling, his duty, his indebtedness, not as a burden, not even so much as a command, but as a grace from God.

[ 6 : 32 ] And that is what we can't miss here this morning. That's what we have to see today as we focus on missions.

Now I know, though, what you might be thinking at this point. Oh, Pastor Mike, he's about to take us on a guilt trip.

He's going to tug on our heart strings to loosen our purse strings so that we'll contribute to the gospel debt. But that's not what I want to do.

God does not want us, God does not want you, to participate in missions from a motivation of guilt, but a motivation of grace.

And so my hope is that like Paul, we will see our indebtedness and that we will be willing to pay.

That we will be willing to pay not just with our time, not just with our talents or our treasures, but with our entire lives.

[ 7 : 49 ] That we would pay with our everything. And so my hope is that the Holy Spirit will open your eyes and hearts to see this morning how by God's grace you have been given the privilege of being gospel debtors and the joy that comes in our being debtors together.

So this morning's, the main idea for this sermon is this. Recipients of God's grace are under obligation to share the gospel with those who haven't and continually share it with those who have. Recipients of God's grace are under obligation to share the gospel with those who haven't and continually share it with those who have.

And so in these verses, Paul provides us with two truths about the gospel of grace that we as Christians have received from God and what God expects us to do with it.

The first truth that he presents us with is in verse 14 that Christians are under obligation to share the gospel with unbelievers.

[ 9 : 15 ] Christians are under obligation to share the gospel with unbelievers. Look at verse 14 again. Paul says very clearly, I am under obligation or in your translation it might say, it might say I'm a debtor, both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

As has already been noted in verse 14, Paul says that he is a debtor but not to God.

He is a debtor to other people and he separates those other people into two groups. First group is the Greeks. The second group is the barbarians.

And when he does that, really, he's talking about all Gentiles to those who are civilized and those who are uncivilized, to those who are cultured and those who are uncultured.

The Greeks, as a result of Alexander the Great's conquest, had spread their language and their learning throughout most of the known world. In fact, the Greeks believed that their language was the language of the gods and they believed that their philosophy was just a little less than divine.

[ 10 : 32 ] They were the higher-ups. They were the educated. They were the sophisticated in their minds. The barbarians, on the other hand, were the exact opposite of them.

In fact, barbarian was a term derived by the Greeks to describe all those who were not steeped in their learning and in their culture.

In fact, the word is onomatopoeic. To a cultured Greek, other languages sounded like gibberish and so they mimicked their sound derogatorily by saying bar, bar, bar, bar, bar.

They're barbarians. They're beneath us. So, in the narrowest sense, barbarians refer to the uneducated and the uncultured masses.

But in its widest sense, it means any Gentile who is not a Greek person. And so, what Paul is saying here is that he is, and he doesn't want them to misunderstand this, that he is indebted to all,

both to those who are considered the higher classes of society and those who are considered to be of the lower classes of society.

[11:50] But the Greeks and the barbarians, as far as we know, haven't loaned Paul anything. So, we ask, how did Paul incur a debt with them?

Well, again, as we've gone through, he's told us through the grace that he has received from God in salvation and the grace that he has received by his calling to share the gospel.

But again, this wasn't a debt that Paul owed to God because grace cannot be paid back. Grace cannot be paid back.

and we could never pay God back for the grace that we have received from him.

In fact, grace cannot and must not be paid back as a debt, otherwise it would cease to be grace.

[12:58] We often have a wrong view, though, of how grace works as evidenced by the thought that we often have that we can earn someone's grace, that we can be in someone's good graces.

I remember as a teenager when my dad was at work before he got home spring, summertime, I would mow the grass without his having asked me.

He'd come home and he'd see the grass mowed and straight lines and mostly straight lines and I had this vision, he's going to get out of his car and think, oh, you know, what a great son I have, didn't have to ask him to do mow the lawn and yet he did it, he took his own time and he did the effort himself.

I'm blessed to have such a great kid. But I had a motivation behind how I wanted to put myself in my father's good graces.

This is money. I wanted, I needed some money. And so what I hoped to do was to put myself in my father's good graces so that I could eventually cash in on it.

[14:35] And we do that. But that isn't how God's grace works. His grace isn't based on merit.

He doesn't give us his grace based upon who we are or what we've done. His grace is true grace because it's truly free. It's truly undeserved and it's totally impossible to pay back.

In fact, God's grace does not create debts, it pays them and forgives them.

In salvation, God pays and forgives the debt that we owed to him and he pays it himself. Paul knew that he once owed God a debt, a debt that God was gracious to pay and to forgive.

What was that debt? Sin. The essence of sin is pride, which seeks to steal God's glory for yourself.

[15:50] It's what Satan did in heaven before he was cast out, and then what he tempted Adam and Eve to do in the garden when they sought to become like God themselves, sought to steal his glory.

And still, fallen mankind does the same, tempted and willing to exchange the glory of God for things that they like better.

Paul will go on to explain this, and again, Romans 1, 21-23, saying that, for although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

You see, when you steal from someone, you owe them a debt, and no one has been stolen from more than God, our creator.

[17:10] As a result of the fall in Genesis 3, we are all born with a sin nature, a disposition that does not seek God, that does not want God, because we truly want to be our own God.

We want to determine our own truth and be our own authority of what is right and what is wrong. like Adam and Eve, we seek to overthrow God's rulership over us.

We're rebels, usurpers, ones who commit regicide in our hearts. We sin against our creator who designed us for fellowship with him, and sin against an infinite being carries an infinite consequence, that no one but God can overcome.

Paul knew that God had overcome his sins through the death and resurrection of his own son, Jesus Christ, who appeared to him on his way to seeking the annihilation of his church in Damascus.

Scripture refers to the church as the bride of Christ. And so I ask you men, you husbands, how many of you would be willing to forgive someone who sought the desecration, humiliation, imprisonment, and murder of your bride?

[ 18 : 48 ] That was Paul. He sought Christ's destruction, the destruction of Christ's bride, and yet our Lord chose to forgive him and use him anyways.

When God's grace comes to a sinner through the proclamation of the gospel, it comes to pay their debt to God. And that grace, while it does not make you a debtor to God anymore, does make you a debtor to others.

And that's the debt that Paul speaks of here in verse 14 to the Greeks and to the barbarians. He has been forgiven a great debt, and he is eager to pay it forward.

He owes it to them, he says. Why? Well, when you hear the good news of how to escape from a common misery, you become a debtor to share that good news with others that they may escape as well.

Harriet Tubman was born into slavery in 1822 to a ruthless master who whipped and beat her viciously.

[ 20 : 09 ] for much of her life, she suffered from dizzy spells and headaches. She had problems going to sleep at night because when she was younger, her master lost his temper and threw a heavy weight and it struck her in her head.

She suffered with that throughout her life. at the age of 27, she escaped to Philadelphia and was finally free from her oppression.

And she was 27 years old. She was young. She had a lot of life left to live to enjoy her new found freedom. But she chose to use that freedom to help secure the freedom of others.

she ventured back into enemy territory time and time again, risking her life, risking her freedom to free those who had yet to experience it.

Harriet Tubman did not take her freedom for granted. She desired that others would experience it too. She felt as if she owed it to them.

[ 21 : 38 ] For Christians to withhold the good news of freedom from sin's enslavement through Jesus Christ is to act, I believe, as if they were somehow qualified to receive it.

to value your comfort over sharing the good news with unbelievers is to make the determination in your heart that your feelings matter more than their eternity to you.

To be of the mind that you are more qualified and others less deserving is to default on your debt to the world.

And it may reveal that you've never truly known God's grace in the first place. Don't be deceived into defaulting on your debt.

Don't miss out on this God-given responsibility and opportunity that you have. In verse 14, Paul stresses that he understands that the grace he has received has made him a debtor to all people.

[ 23 : 00 ] And he will not be caught into the trap of thinking some people are more qualified to hear the gospel than others. Paul doesn't have a specific target audience that he is going to market the gospel to.

He wouldn't advise a church to do the same, to target the rich and the cultured over the poor. And the uneducated, or vice versa. He wouldn't advise a church to do that.

Because all are under the curse of sin. No one should be excluded from our gospel proclamation. All are in equal need of hearing the gospel.

Being refined and intelligent do not qualify a person for God's grace. Likewise, being unrefined and illiterate are not grounds to disqualify them from hearing it.

Paul views himself as a debtor to everyone, to all people, because he understood that he didn't qualify either. grace came to him anyways.

[ 24 : 15 ] And he understood that there was no one any less deserving of it than him. And that made him willing to be a debtor to all. And whatever God was pleased to do through him, he understood that it wasn't him that was doing it.

It was God doing it by his grace. Look at what he says to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 9 through 11. Paul says, For I'm the least of the apostles, unworthy 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 toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Whether then it was I or they, so we preach, and you believed. Paul understood his conversion from persecutor to apostle to be a free and holy, undeserving gift that he had received from God.

A gift which he would not be passive with, but which prompted him to gladly undertake the Lord's mission to seek and to save the lost, whoever and wherever it is that they might be.

[ 25 : 44 ] Is this not, when you read the gospel, is this not what you see Jesus doing? Is this not what he did for you?

Did he seek comfort? over crucifixion? For us? For you? Matthew 9, 35-36.

It says, Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

when Jesus surveys the crowds, he doesn't look down on them with contempt or disdain.

[ 26 : 50 ] And you know what? If ever there was someone who had the right to do that, it was Jesus. Because he was infinitely holy. The second person of the Trinity completely and totally without sin and eternally pleasing to the Father in whatever it was that he said or did.

He could justifiably look down on others. But instead, we see that he had compassion for them. Why?

Because they were harassed and helpless. They were lost sheep without a shepherd. He sees their sinful condition. He sees the suppression of truth amongst them.

He sees the corruption of their religious system. the emptiness, the hopelessness that they feel, and the guilt that they carry. And he knows that he is their only hope.

So he goes to them. He goes personally to where they are, where they live, where they congregate, to proclaim the gospel to them that the kingdom of God has come, that it is at hand.

[ 28 : 07 ] And after he did this, after he went to them, he gave of his time, he gave completely of himself on the cross, where he was crucified for their sins, for our sins.

And on the third day he arose from the death, from the grave, from death. death. And just prior to his ascension, before he went back to the Father, he told them, and he tells you and me to do the same.

Matthew 28, 19-21, Jesus says, it's not stay therefore, stay and be comfortable, they'll come to you. Go!

Get going! Go therefore! Make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I command you, and behold, I am with you.

I am with you as you do this always, and will be, to the end of the age. If we are going to be faithful witnesses to Christ, then we must remember that the gospel has not only changed our status with God, but it also changes our status with the unbelieving world around us.

[ 29 : 39 ] The gospel removes a debt with God and brings a debt to our neighbors and to the nations that we should be more than willing to pay.

We've gone from being their partners in bondage to sin to those who have a message of liberation from it. over ten years ago, Penn Gillette of Penn and Teller, maybe you know that magic comedy group, Gillette is the tall one who talks.

He recorded a video and this was a video soon after he had an encounter with a Christian after one of his shows in Las Vegas. Gillette is an atheist and he's not ashamed to share that, tell people about that.

He says in that video that this man about his age introduced himself and complimented the show and then held out to him a small book. It was a New Testament with the Psalms, probably a Gideon's Bible.

The man said to Gillette, I wanted you to have this. And in the video you can see Penn Gillette getting emotional as he retells the story.

[ 31 : 10 ] He's moved by this experience. He said of that man, he was kind and nice and sane and looked me in the eyes and talked to me and gave me this Bible.

Then he went on to say, I've always said, and this is an atheist speaking, I've always said I don't respect people who don't proselytize, who don't evangelize.

I don't respect that at all. If you believe there is a heaven and a hell and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever and you think it's not really worth telling them because it would make it socially awkward, how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize?

How much do you have to hate someone to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? He concludes, can't we at least do what this brother did?

I talk to our Gideon representative, we can get you a box full of those Bibles if you would like, but gosh how simple.

[ 32 : 32 ] Just go up afterwards, hey I enjoyed your show, I want you to have this. And they had a conversation where the gospel was shared. and though he did not believe, he heard the good news and was moved by it.

Can't we at least do that? We begin to love like Jesus when we realize how lost we once were, but that it was Jesus who found us.

When we love like Jesus, we will gladly share in this debt to share the gospel with unbelievers.

But in order for us to be reminded of Christ's love and his mission, we need something that Paul mentions in the surrounding verses of verse 14, which brings us to the second truth, that Christians are under obligation to share the gospel with other Christians.

We're under obligation to share the gospel with unbelievers. I think we understand that, but here we see that we're also obligated to share the gospel with each other, with other Christians.

[ 33 : 48 ] Look at these verses that precede and proceed verse 14. Listen as we read them to how Paul expresses his desire to be with his brothers and sisters in Christ who are in Roman and what he hopes to accomplish when he sees them there.

Look at verses 11 through 13. Paul says, for I long to see you. How many of us wake up on Sunday morning with that thought? I long to see the people in my church today.

He longs to see them that I might impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you. That is that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you, but thus far have been prevented in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

Paul longed to be with the church, and he wanted to be there not because of primarily what he had to get from them, but what he wanted to give to them.

[ 34 : 55 ] Encouragement and strengthening that he says as he did so, he would in turn be encouraged and strengthened by them. And together they will bear fruit that advances the kingdom of God.

How is this going to be achieved? What is Paul going to do so that this strengthening and encouraging and fruit bearing comes about? Well, he says so in verse 15. I am eager to preach the gospel to you also.

You Christians, you believers, I'm eager to preach the gospel to you too. who are in Rome. They've already been saved. So why do they need to hear the gospel again, we might ask.

I don't know about you, but once I've read a book or seen a movie, I don't read the book again or watch the movie again. Unless it's really good.

Unless it was really good, but even still it's like I've got to let some time pass before I read this book or watch this movie again. But the gospel should never be treated by us in that way.

[ 36 : 06 ] Our faith feeds continually off of the good news of God's grace that we've received.

And our obedience to God feeds off of our faith faith that grows when we hear and dwell upon and think about the gospel that has saved us.

In other words, the gospel saves us initially and then sanctifies us perpetually. It saved us. It's making us more like Jesus.

Sanctifying us. Making us more like Christ. Christ. It keeps us. It guides us. It guards us from wasting our lives in the little time that we have here to live.

It propels us forward into mission. It reminds us that without Christ, without God's grace, we'd be eternally doomed.

[ 37 : 15 ] It reveals to us continually the love that we have received from God to send His Son to pay our debt on the cross, to be forsaken, so that we by faith in Him are saved, so that we will never hear God say to us, depart from me, for I never knew you.

He found you. He saved you. Not because you qualified over somebody else, but because He has chosen to be gracious to you.

And so, are we seriously going to act and live as if we somehow were qualified for the salvation that we've received?

God need each other to preach the good news to each other. And it takes more than one person in a church to do that.

That's why we have the small groups that we have. That's why we have the Sunday school classes and the community groups. That's why we have the Bible studies and the book clubs and the women's ministries and the men's ministries and the youth group and on and on.

[ 38 : 34 ] Because we need to preach the gospel to each other continually. And you need to be here. Because you need to hear the gospel continually preached to you.

Yet still, I know in all these things that you and I could be tempted to say, well, you know what? That was Paul. And Paul was called to be an apostle.

And that's just not me. I can't do the same. I'm not him. And it's almost as if we act like there was something in some way that Paul had more of God than any of the rest of us.

I know I've sometimes heard someone say to me, they think that as a pastor, somehow you have a direct line to God in heaven. If you remember the old Batman TV shows with Adam West, like Commissioner Gordon picks up that red phone and Batman's on the other line.

It doesn't work that way. We all have the same access to the Father. It wasn't, it wasn't that Paul had more of God, but that he was willing to give more of himself to God.

[ 39 : 49 ] God had more of him. Does God have all of you? He wants to use your life, and he wants to use this church to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

And why wouldn't we, who have received such grace, want to be a part of that? Three questions of application, they'll be discussed at our community groups tonight.

If you're not a part of our community group, I hope that you, it's still not too late, we can plug you in, or jump in next time we do it, but still, look over these questions later today or later this week.

Question number one, how should the grace of God, which has paid your debt to sin, shape your understanding of the gospel debt? The gospel debt.

How should it motivate you to share the gospel with unbelievers? Question number two, read Matthew 28, 18 through 21.

[ 40 : 59 ] What command does Jesus give us in this text? And then, what promises does he give to us to encourage us in this mission?

And then finally, why is it essential that we continually preach and hear the gospel, and hear the gospel preached to us? How does keeping the gospel at the forefront of our minds make us better evangelists?

before I close in prayer, I do want to say if you have heard this word this morning and you realize that you do owe God a debt, that you owe God the debt of sin, the sin that you have committed against him, that you can't be a part of the gospel debt because you still have this debt.

And I encourage you, I'll be up here if you want to pray or talk, but don't leave without understanding that through Jesus Christ that debt has been paid forever.

If you put your faith in him, God's grace again does not create debts, it pays them and forgives them eternally. Put your faith in Christ.

[ 42 : 17 ] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the grace that we have received from you, the undeserved, unmerited, amazing grace that we have received from you.

God, we ask that you would forgive us that we have not often enough taken our gospel debt seriously.

Lord, I pray for each of us you would cause us to stop and reflect today and this week and as time goes by as we live our earthly lives to reflect upon your amazing grace that we would daily preach the gospel to ourselves and one another's, that the gospel would always be forefront in our mind, propelling our feet forward and our mouths to open and our voices to speak and to declare the good news of Jesus Christ.

God, we pray that by your spirit's empowering and moving through us, that the gospel will go, that the disciples will be made, and the name of Jesus Christ will advance, and our hope would be that you use us to do that.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.