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The Servant of the Gospel, Part 5

Evangelism

Years ago I spoke with a minister who related the following to me:

As a leadership board, they had committed to becoming a church which actively shared the gospel with the lost. And thus, each elder with their corresponding evening service committed to participating in an outreach effort once quarterly. After a couple of quarters of very limited outreach activity, they had a meeting where one-by-one each of the elders confessed to being “frightened” when it came to the sharing of their faith.

Interesting, I have no doubt that each of these men could have taught a Sunday School class about...

- The Great Commission.
- The importance of bringing Christ to the nations.
- Engaging culture.

Yet nothing happened because they were afraid. And you know what family of God? I think if you and I were honest we might say the same thing. We are quick to speak of the importance of engaging the

culture in which we live but when it comes down to it: We Lack Eagerness!

And yet would you notice, Paul didn't struggle with eagerness when it came to sharing the gospel. Look at Romans 1:15.

Romans 1:15, "thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome."

To be eager is not only to be willing, but zealous. From this, and the rest of Scripture, we see that unlike us Paul was consumed with an eager desire to preach Christ. Paul's supreme passion was the proclamation of the gospel; he cared little for...

- Personal comfort.
- Popularity.
- Reputation.
- Ease of life.

Paul had a ZEAL for the service of God! And this raises some very important questions:

- How is it that Paul was so eager to preach the Gospel?
- How is it that Paul was zealous to preach the Gospel in a place which no doubt would bring the same rejection, opposition, and animosity that he had received on other occasions?

Consider what Paul is saying here:

Romans 1:15, "Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome"

If you think about it, this really is amazing. Paul was eager to preach the gospel in the capital of the pagan empire that ruled virtually all the known world. As such, all that was good and bad about the Roman Empire could be expected to be found in Rome. If Paul was persecuted on account of the Gospel outside of Rome, he could count on persecution in the capital as well. If Paul was severely rejected on account of the Gospel outside of Rome, he could count on rejection in the capital as well. If Paul was ridiculed on account of the Gospel outside of Rome, he could count on ridicule in the capital as well.

So what was it that made Paul "eager to preach the gospel;" even though that most likely would mean persecution? What was the cause for Paul's ZEAL?

Paul's Obligation

Our text gives us the two-fold reason for Paul's Zeal. First his zeal was on account of his obligation.

Romans 1:14, "I am under obligation."

The word used here for "obligation" literally means "to be indebted." It refers to one who owes anything to another, and therefore was used to refer to an obligation which needed to be met or discharged. For example, it is used to describe believers and their obligation to mortify the deeds of the body.

Romans 8:11-12, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you. So then, brethren, we are under obligation..."

On account of the working of the Spirit of God in our lives we have been placed under an obligation out of which we cannot escape. That's the idea behind this term. We see it of those who would seek to be justified by circumcision, of their obligation to live a perfect life without sin,

Galatians 5:3, "And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law."

If as a Christian we believe that our acceptance before God is predicated upon our work, then whether we realize it or not, we have placed ourselves under an obligation out of which we cannot escape- we must live a perfect life or God will get us! Of course this is false, but this gives us the idea behind "obligation."

When the Bible speaks of an "obligation" it is referencing a commitment from which there is no escape. I hope you see from this that this is a strong term. Accordingly, when we read here that Paul roots and grounds his passion to preach the gospel to an "obligation," we understand that as a child of God; as a priest whose life revolved around the offering of acceptable worship (v. 9), preaching Christ was his lasting obligation. And thus we are not surprised to read this:

1 Corinthians 9:16, "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel."

Recall in Acts after the disciples were charged to stop sharing their faith what do we read?

Acts 4:19-20, "'But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard.'"

Paul lived ever mindful of this obligation. Yet to whom or to what was he obligated?

Romans 1:15, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish."

The idea behind this is that Paul was obligated to all men! Yet notice the people groups. First we have the Greeks and barbarians. The term "Greeks" can have other meanings than "those of the Greek nation." For example, when we read of "Jews and Greek" (Romans 1:16) the term is used in reference to a non-Jew or a "Gentile." It can also refer to Greek speaking Jews or Jewish proselytes.¹

In other words, the term is rather broad. See, by Paul's day Greek language and culture were widespread and people in many places had adopted both. Now that which was used to reference this culture is the word in our passage, "Greeks." Accordingly, the term is best understood in this passage in

¹ Compare John 12:20 and Acts 17:4

reference to “people of culture.”

Secondly, the term “barbarians” is an onomatopoeic term, meaning someone whose language was unintelligible. Very early it was used to refer to any who did not speak the local language. And thus, by Paul’s day it was generally used to refer to someone who lacked culture. We see that Paul is here making a contrast between the “cultured and the uncultured.” Such were the groups to which Paul viewed himself a DEBTOR.

Thirdly, the term “wise” is used to refer to mental excellence in its highest and fullest sense.

Fourthly, the term “foolish” refers to ones without understanding, ones not schooled in philosophical debate. Here Paul is drawing a contrast between the “educated and uneducated.”

Now I want you to see once again that these two categories represent ALL OF MANKIND. Yet there is a twist here. In this passage Paul does not mention nationalities or people groups which are the designations we usually use in the context of mission.

- I’ve got a passion for China.
- I’ve got a passion for African.

Rather, he thought in terms of socio, economic, cultural, and educational designations- which really is the more difficult field of ministry. See I have no problem ministering to middle class Africans or Chinese. You know, decent, hard working, responsible individuals. But send me to the extreme poor, the addict, and I’m out of my comfort zone.

Brothers and sisters, don’t miss it! Paul understood himself to be a debtor to all men: rich, poor, educated, uneducated, responsible, irresponsible. His obligation knew no distinction!

What was the basis for Paul’s obligation? The calling of God which accompanies salvation.

Galatians 1:15-16: “But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother’s womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood.”

Paul’s call into the kingdom of God was accompanied by a call into active service! See just as the MASTER’S servant becomes the GUEST’S servant, Paul’s service to God INDEBTED him to ALL of God’s people- Cultured or Uncultured, Educated or Uneducated, Dependent or Independent.

1 Corinthians 9:19ff, “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more...”

On this passage Paul Minear wrote this:

“Obligation to him who died produces obligation to those for whom he died... To the extent Paul was indebted to God for his call, to that very extent he was indebted to those Gentiles for whose

sake God had called him.”²

So Paul was ZEALOUS to preach the gospel even in an atmosphere of certain persecution, Rome, because he understood that his relationship with God made him a DEBTOR both to God and man. Do you have such an understanding when it comes to your relationship with God?

You say, “*You mean this just wasn’t Paul?*”

No! Conversion brings with it obligation! Let me ask you: How many of you ever buy something that...

- You have no intention of using?
- You intend on throwing away?
- The object might not be discarded, but instead be happy?

The idea is ludicrous. And yet in our relationship with God, we make the same assumption when it comes to God’s Kingdom: God saved me...

- But He has no intention of using me.
- For no purpose.
- So that I would be happy.

The idea is equally ludicrous. Salvation brings with it an obligation unto service in God’s name- to...

- Live holy lives, 1 Corinthians 6:20.
- Neglect not the assembly of the body, Hebrews 10:19-21, 24-25.
- Be moved and motivated only by God, 1 Corinthians 7:23.
- Forgive others, Matthew 18:33.

Our Obligation to Proclaim Christ to the Nations!

As believers we have an obligation to proclaim Christ to the nations. The genesis for this calling began when God gathered His people together into a covenant community now almost 4,000 years ago. To our father in the faith, Abraham, God gave an important command; this is not a prediction, but an obligation!

Genesis 12:2, ““And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing.”

Yet do you know what God’s people did for the next 1,800 years? By and large, they buried their head in the sand looking for the time when God would come and establish his earthly throne. And amazingly, by the time of Christ God’s people could be quoted as saying: “...God delights over the downfall of the godless.”³ “There is joy before God when those who provoke Him perish from the world.”⁴

² Cited in Morris’ *The Epistle to the Romans*, page 63

³ t. Sanh. 14:10; SB II, 209

⁴ LT2, p. 256

It is little wonder therefore that one of the charges that Christ gave to His people prior to His exaltation was “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18-20).

You must see that this “commission” wasn’t new to the people of God. Rather it was a restating of Genesis 12! Well praise God this time the body of Christ listened! Each and every child of God took it upon himself to fulfill the obligation placed on him from the days of Abraham. Hardly! The first six chapters of the book of Acts finds God’s people gathered in a holy huddle in Jerusalem like frightened rabbits!

So what did God do? In Acts 7 He ordained a persecution which dispersed God’s people throughout the Roman Empire. If there was to be a “holy huddle,” the Christian would have to labor for it by preaching Christ and planting churches! And though it took 2,000 years, nevertheless the mandate which rested upon God’s people from Abraham’s time began to be addressed. And thus THE question that rests upon our generation is: What will we do with our Covenant Obligation to be a blessing to the world... to make disciples of all nations? Will we bury our head in the sand? Or will we endeavor actively to engage our culture for Christ?

Why was Paul eager to preach the gospel?

Why ought we to be eager to preach the gospel?

Because salvation brings with it an obligation to bless the nations! Yet there is a second reason Paul was zealous to preach the gospel because of the beauty of the gospel.

The Beauty of the Gospel

Romans 1:16, “for [explaining further the reason for his zeal, Paul continued...] I am not ashamed of the gospel.”

To be ashamed is to be disgraced or embarrassed, and so refers to an internal attitude rather than an external action. It is the feeling of intense shame or fear arising from something that has been done. This type of shame is illustrated in the Skimmerhorn Massacre.

James Michener’s *Centennial* is a historical novel detailing the founding and growth of Greeley, Colorado. In his description of the founding of Greeley, he relates the story of Colonel Frank Skimmerhorn. The year was 1861 and the Indian wars were winding down in Northern Colorado. However there were still occasional problems with the Indians. Well, Frank Skimmerhorn arrived in Centennial just in time to “save the city” from these savage and evil Indians.

To make a long story short, Colonel Skimmerhorn and his troop attacked an Indian village of unarmed women and children, and slaughtered them. Upon his return, the town heralded him as a hero until two soldiers who refused to fight were tried for treason and the truth came out. One of the young soldiers who fought in the campaign described the atrocities:

- Weak elderly women and babies were cut in two.
- Defenseless mothers were run down with sabers.

When this testimony came out the festive court room turned silent. All eyes began to glare at Colonel Skimmerhorn.

Where did the glee, celebration and exhilaration of victory go? It was swallowed up in shame as the town now realized what had happened!

This is the idea behind the “shame” referenced in our passage. It is an intense feeling of disgrace on account of something that has been done. From this perspective, I hope you see that when it comes to the gospel, we have absolutely no reason for shame. Think of what God has done. Is there anything for which you and I should be ashamed?

- Christ’s love for sinners?
- Christ’s atoning death on the cross?
- Our salvation from sin and misery?

What is there in the Gospel that ought to...

- Embarrass us?
- Cause us to shrink back in shame?

There is absolutely nothing! Paul knew this, and it produced in him a holy zeal to proclaim Christ. And if you and I will meditate upon this, we likewise will begin to know this zeal! But sadly, we don’t.

It is said that if a circle of white chalk is traced on the floor around a goose, the animal will not leave the circle for fear of crossing the white mark. In a similar way, the chalk-marks of...

- Criticism.
- Ridicule.
- Tradition.
- Fear of rejection.
- Fear of offending others.

Prevent many believers from leaving the security of Christian fellowship to engage the culture in which we live! Thus, when we have the opportunity to speak for Christ, because of our fear of man, we demonstrate our shame over the gospel by remaining silent!

And so I ask you, who have been

- Saved from a life of sin, misery, pain, and heart-ache.
- Saved by God’s grace.
- Given an inheritance... the promised Spirit.
- Plucked from a life which was deserving of the flames and miseries of hell, and given the righteousness, peace and joy of the kingdom of God.
- Received...
 - The peace of God which surpasses all understanding.

- A future and a hope.
- Grace instead of judgment.
- Heaven instead of hell.
- Life instead of death.
- The Father's good pleasure instead of His wrath.
- Comfort in times of trial.
- Become the people of God, and therefore heirs of God's glory and grace.

Is there anything about the gospel for which you ought to be ashamed? Then why aren't we eager/zealous to share the gospel? Honestly, I think it is because we GIVE TOO MUCH WEIGHT to man and his opinions.

Proverbs 29:25: "The fear of man brings a snare..."

When we give weight to man and his opinions, we quickly shrink back from sharing the glorious message of Christ. There is just too much at stake...

John 12:42-44: "Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God."

The quickest way to lose a passion for sharing the glorious news of Christ is to live for the approval of man and live in the present, forgetting eternity. When we forget eternity, we don't evangelize the lost, we envy them.

Psalm 73:2-3, "But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling; my steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, as I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

Indeed! It will be difficult to engage a culture which we find appealing. However, if we keep eternity in view, we will see life as it really is. Asaph continued in his envy, until he was confronted with eternity:

Psalm 73:17, "Until I came into the sanctuary of God; *then* I perceived their end."

It behooves us ever and always to keep the eternal before us. That is why Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4 are so important.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18: "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Imagine had Paul's focus been the temporal, passing things of this life. To suffer severe persecution would be to side track him greatly. So too when it comes to the sharing of Christ. To focus on the present passing world; our happiness, well-being, pleasure, wants, desires, and goals, is to ignore eternity and so...

- God's claim on us.

- Man's need for a Savior.
- DO NOT FEAR GOD.

When Jehoshaphat commissioned servants of God to minister in His kingdom, notice the charge:

2 Chronicles 19:7, "Now then let the fear of the Lord be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the Lord our God will have no part in unrighteousness, or partiality, or the taking of a bribe."

The Fear of the Lord; living in light of the weightiness of His being, is life-changing. It not only will keep the child of God from sin (Ex. 20:20), but it also will compel him unto ministry! Listen to Isaiah's call to the people of God.

Isaiah 40:9, "Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; lift *it* up, do not fear. [And so] say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!'"

Isaiah's call to the people of God in this passage is twofold- fear the Lord and then proclaim His word! We see the same calling in Amos.

Amos 3:8, "A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?"

2 Corinthians 5:11, "Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men..."

We shrink back from sharing the gospel when our God is small and His Kingdom irrelevant. No! If we learn the "fear of the Lord," we will not care what man might think or do. As in the days of Joshua when he was taken to task by an entire nation, we will proclaim the truth knowing that "if God is for us, then who can be against us" (Romans 8:31).

If you don't know how to engage the culture for Christ this can be a big reason you don't do it. However, let us realize that while we may feel inadequate to engage the culture, nevertheless our adequacy is bound up in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:4-5). Therefore, relying upon the Lord, let us bring the face and affections of Christ to a lost and dying world. FORGET the beauty of the gospel and so minimize it and represent it as a fire insurance policy against God's anger due to us on account of our sin. Quite frankly, if that is all that the gospel is, I'm not too excited to share it.

Family of God, focusing on this last point which is the focus of Romans 1:16, don't forget that the sweetness of the gospel is NOT forgiven sin BUT a wounded Savior! The beauty of the gospel is NOT what we get BUT what God gave to save us! The riches of the gospel is NOT happiness or fulfillment, BUT fellowshiping with the Great I AM! The gospel speaks of a spotless Lamb, taking our sin on Himself, dying in our place, that the relationship which Adam and Even enjoyed with God at the beginning might be restored to man!

When you and I understand it in these terms, preaching Christ becomes one of the highest privileges a man could boast- a greater honor than introducing someone to...

- A famous person.

- A statesman.
- A president.

I cannot tell you how many times I have heard this phrase in my house. See when I am out with some of our children, and we see or hear of something spectacular, it always is an argument as to who gets to share the news with mom. Paul was passionate about engaging the culture in which he lived because he was convinced that the gospel was the most spectacular news any man, woman, or child could ever hear.

- Do you agree?
- Then let us no longer shrink back in our faith. Rather, let us boldly proclaim the glories of His name to the nations!

Behold the words of a man overwhelmed with the beauty of Christ.

Psalm 108:3-5, "I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord, among the peoples; and I will sing praises to Thee among the nations. For Thy lovingkindness is great above the heavens; and Thy truth *reaches* to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens, and Thy glory above all the earth."

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on November 8, 2009. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.