

~Other Speakers S-Z: Classic Christian Writings:**It's Our Solemn Obligation!**

Before our Lord departed to be with the Father, He made a promise to His disciples that they should receive a gift of power: "Ye shall receive power, the Holy Ghost coming upon you" (Acts 1:8). The purpose of that spiritual endowment was to enable those who knew Him to be witnesses unto Him, and that, in a word, is the business of every individual believer, and of the Church collectively!

We are not here to devise new schemes for human betterment. We are here to bear a simple personal witness to the power of Jesus Christ to make men new creatures in Him. That is the task of the Church--to be witnesses to tell what we know about Him. That is our business every day we live.

An Outstanding Witness

In all the history of the Christian Church, there has never been a more fruitful preacher than the Apostle Paul. He labored more abundantly than all his contemporaries. From the beginning of his Christian life to the end, he did nothing but bear witness to the power of divine grace. "Straightway"--after his conversion--he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God."

And he kept on preaching Christ until, as Paul the aged, he was able to say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day" (2 Tim. 4:7,8). What were the motives which lay behind this lifelong testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ?

"I Am Debtor"

Paul describes himself as a "debtor": "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also" (Romans 1:14,15).

Consider how this man got into debt. Saul of Tarsus was as truly a missionary as Paul the Apostle. From what we know of the life of Saul of Tarsus, it is clear that he was dominated by one purpose, mastered by one idea, carried forward day after day by a great zeal for the accomplishment of that purpose: "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9).

This man Saul, the proud Pharisee, who boasted that he owed the law nothing at all, was consumed with a great passion. That is a striking phrase which describes the intensity of his zeal: "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus" (Acts 9:1-2). Like the hot breath of some beast of prey determined to possess that which it was pursuing, Saul breathed out "threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." His passion for the law, for the honor of the religion of his fathers, consumed him. It was the one thing for which he lived.

Then a voice from heaven spoke, and this proud man who believed that he was free before God and men, that he owed nothing--suddenly discovered that he was hopelessly insolvent, utterly bankrupt, in debt--hopelessly in debt to the law of God. And when he expected the doors of the eternal prison to swing open to receive him, and the hand of the divine jailer to make him a prisoner forever, behold, he discovered that his debt was paid, that his obligations were cancelled, that Another had stood in his stead. He learned what he later wrote, that in Him "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Eph. 1:7).

It was revealed to him that God's books were balanced and that he, who had richly deserved to be in chains, had been delivered "into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21), and was no longer in debt to the law. He discovered, however, that by that deliverance he had been placed under an overwhelming obligation to his great Redeemer, and that he was more deeply in debt than ever.

Paul discovered that Jesus had become the bridegroom of his soul. There was no possibility of his ever getting out of debt to redeeming love. But it was a blessed obligation, a happy bondage, a glorious bankruptcy, for his chief Creditor was none other than the Lover of his soul. When he began to inquire how this debt was to be liquidated, when he asked, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Jesus said, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9:6).

Then the Lord said to Ananias, "He is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:15-16). Paul discovered that his whole future was mortgaged, that he had become the bondsman of Jesus Christ, that he was not his own--he was bought with a price, and that he must spend the rest of his life and all eternity in trying to make some return to Him who had redeemed him at such tremendous cost. He learned that the only way by which it could be done was to render service to those whom the Lord loved.

The Lord said to him in effect, "Saul, if you would pay Me, if you would show how much you love Me, if you would endeavor to discharge your obligation, then from this time forward be My witness. Tell other people who are in debt to the law as you are; tell other people who are bound with the chains of sin as you were, of One who is able to set them free."

We Are All Debtors!

That is true of every one of us: we are bankrupt before God. There is no possibility of our paying what we owe, but "Jesus paid it all." Therefore we are debtors. There rests upon every one of us a solemn obligation to make Jesus Christ known, even to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Paul recognized that what Jesus had done for him had made him a debtor to all men. He said, "I owe it to the Greek--to the man of culture, to the man who seeks after wisdom, to the man who is proud of his intellectual attainments, to the man who thinks that by his own reason he can fathom the mysteries of life--I owe it to the Greek to tell him that the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God: I owe it to him to preach the everlasting gospel."

We, too, must preach to the learned, but it is our obligation also to preach Jesus to the barbarian--to the unlettered, to the simple, to the savage, to the man who dwells in the regions beyond. It is our obligation to make Jesus known to the unwise as well as to the wise.

Let us dedicate ourselves to this service. Let every blood-bought soul accept the simple teaching of that text: I am in debt to every man who does not know my Lord Jesus; I am under bond to make Jesus known. If we would dedicate ourselves to that service, and resolve that we will go forward preaching the Word, set on fire by the Holy Ghost, in the power of the divine Spirit, bearing witness for Jesus, we should have a revival at once!

It is well that we should pray, and we cannot pray too much. It is well that we should invoke Heaven's blessing upon those whom we love, but we must ourselves recognize that God uses human instrumentalities for the accomplishment of His work. We are bound before God "to tell to all around, what a dear Saviour we have found."

We shall never do this unless we recognize that we are under a personal obligation to Jesus Christ. It is a debt of honor, as far as we are concerned. We are in honor bound to do for our Lord Jesus in obedience to His commands what He requires.

But by no resolution to do our duty shall we ever become effective witnesses for the Lord Jesus. Effective witnessing depends upon what we know about Jesus. If His work is so real to us and of such great value that He never fades from our vision, that He is always the altogether lovely One, that He is the One with whom we live and with whom we converse, the One of whose grace we are daily receiving, the One with whom we walk, the One who is more real to us than any of our friends, the One whose redeeming work is so precious to us that it is the most natural thing in the world to tell other people about it--then from a sense of obligation to Him, we shall be able to tell others what Jesus has done.

I will tell you why we do not do it more often. It is because we have lost the bloom of our first experience, the first joy of redemption. There are multitudes who have no vital relationship to Christ, who are not living in daily fellowship with Him, who are not spurred on by a present experience of His grace to tell other people what Jesus has done for their souls. It is only as we abide in Him, and as He abides in us, as we live in the joy of His presence, that we shall be able to bear witness to His abounding grace.

How Are We To Do Our Share?

What is our share of the obligation? How much do I owe? How much do you owe? You cannot estimate that but how much can you pay? What can you do? What return can you possibly make for the infinite sacrifice of

the cross?

The Apostle Paul said, "As much as in me is, I am ready..." It means the dedication of all natural powers. You say you cannot speak. We all have thought that is true, but He makes the dumb to speak. Not only give your heart wholly to the Lord Jesus, but give your tongue to Him.

If our mouths were continually filled with His praise, it would save us a lot of trouble. Keep your tongue busy speaking about Jesus, praising Him.

The silence of Jesus before Pilate was designed to teach us sometimes to be silent, but His speech before Pilate, when He said, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth" (John 18:37), should teach us that these tongues belong to Him, to be used wholly for His glory.

It also means the development of our latent powers. Nobody knows how much there is within. We do not become perfect all at once, in any profession, in any art. We have to learn how to do things, and we have to learn to do well. We have to learn to speak for Jesus. We have to learn what to speak.

You say, "I have been doing the best I can; and I do not know that any souls have been saved. I have come to the conclusion that my talents are so small, my ability is so insignificant that the Lord could well dispense with me."

This text means, all there is of you -- of body, of mind and of spirit: heart opened to the Spirit of God, the mind given up to the Spirit of God, that it may be flooded with His light, that all its powers may be brought in subjection to the Holy Ghost. Some modest soul says, "Even with all that, it does not amount to very much, because I am just a little man. As much as in me is: that is not very much." I hope you feel like that. I wish we could all feel like that and keep feeling like that. There is no danger of our ever becoming too small for God to use us, but there is great danger of our becoming too big. "As much as in me is"--your little powers, whatever they may be, plus Deity, plus Omnipotence: that is what it means.

"I cannot go with these," said David to Saul, son of Kish; and he put off the splendid armor, and the great sword and helmet--all the military equipment, and he took his sling and went to the brook and gathered five smooth stones.

You say, "David, are you going to battle like that, without a sword?" because there was no sword in David's hand.

"Yes, I am going to do the best I can today."

"Well, how are you going to do it?"

"As much as in me is, I have dedicated it to the service of the Lord. I am going out against that giant in the name of the Lord of hosts--the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied."

"As much as in me is,"--his little ability, and you know the result. Just one smooth stone in David's sling, in the sling in the hand of this trained man of the wilderness! O no, one smooth stone in the sling in the hand of Omnipotence, and the giant licked the dust, and there was a great victory in Israel.

"As much as in me is." Will you let Him have it--little or much, whatever it may be? Are you ready to preach the gospel to anybody, everybody, to whom God shall send you? "But Paul, aren't you a little extravagant?"

"No, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God, to me: it saved me." That is what made Paul unashamed of the gospel: it was what the gospel had done for him, and he was ready. Let us ask God to make us ready!

Abridged from The Gospel Witness.