

# NOTES OF ADDRESSES

BY THE LATE

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#### IV.

#### I AM DEBTOR.

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“I AM DEBTOR BOTH TO THE GREEKS, AND TO THE BARBARIANS; BOTH TO THE WISE, AND TO THE UNWISE.”—*Romans I. 14.*

PAUL had a strong desire, as it appears from—the context of these words, to convince the Church of Rome of two things;—first, of his own commission to preach the Gospel; and second, that he had a very warm heart towards themselves—not only that he had a call to preach to them, but a very fervent desire to do this work. “Oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto), that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.” One reason he had already given,—he longed to impart to the believers there some spiritual gift, to the end they might be established. But although he expresses this desire, and although the work of establishing believers in the faith is one of the chief obligations laid on every minister of Christ, yet there was no man less willing than Paul to build on another man’s foundation; and, therefore, he greatly desired to have some fruit among the Romans as well as among the other Gentiles. He had got many a bright gem among the heathen, but he earnestly desired some jewels for his crown of glory from among this people. This desire was very natural to one who had such a warm heart towards the cause and kingdom of the Lord Jesus as had the Apostle: his heart had learned to stretch itself forth to embrace, in the bowels of Jesus Christ, the whole lost world.

We behold in Paul, a notable example of zeal for the Master’s cause,—a very different thing from the zeal of corrupt nature. There *is* such a thing as zeal in the natural heart, and it can sometimes exist in a human cause for a long life, without apparent abatement or declension; but true zeal is quite different from this, and is only to be found in a child of God. It cannot stand, or breathe, or act, or move, far less *endure*, except in so far as Christ Himself breathes, and acts, and moves in the soul. To believers now, it is indeed, a wonderful sight to look back to the grace that Paul got in this respect, and to see how zealous, active, and persevering he was in the Lord’s service. Yet, while looking back to Paul, let us be careful to remember that it is not in ministers alone that this zeal should be found. It is just as much the part and the character of *private* Christians to be very jealous for the honour of the Lord of Hosts. There is much zeal in the world, and there is nothing so easy or so pleasing to the natural man as to be zealous in a cause, the glory of which is to revert to himself; so much so, that Christ tells us of the Phari-

sees, that they would compass sea and land to make one proselyte, who, when gained over, they made twofold more the child of hell than themselves. We have had many a proof of this, in the exertions made since the days of the Pharisees, by men who have had the Pharisees' spirit. How much will they do—how much will they give—how much sea and land will they compass to make a few proselytes! Even to the Jews, Paul bore witness that they had a zeal of God, though not according to knowledge. Therefore, my dear friends, you must search out your hearts well, and bring your motives to the light; for we know that zeal for the spread of any merely human opinion—or even for the spread of any spiritual truth, which is not of a primary kind—is no evidence that we are of the number of God's people. A zeal to gain over men to argue on doctrines,—so dark and incomprehensible, perhaps, that God has seemed to place them on a secondary scale, and to the belief of which He has evidently not called all men,—a great and mistaken zeal for the spread of particular doctrines or tenets, or of peculiar views, or of sects,—does exist, without having grace for the spring of it. But there can be no true zeal, having the glory of God and the salvation of sinners for its only aim, without the grace of God in the soul. Oh! how much would be done for God, if His true servants had as much zeal in His holy cause, as professors often have in the propagation of some peculiar opinion.

We come now to the *mainspring* and reason of all Paul's zeal for the Romans and all other Gentiles. "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to 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." I AM DEBTOR. What is his meaning here? Does Paul mean by this, that the Gentiles had done anything for him? some services that merited return? No; for though he might have laid claim to much as the due reward of his services, he determined to be chargeable to no man; and he says, "Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more." How was he, then, their debtor? He was so on two grounds. The first of these was, *the state in which the Gentiles were*. The second, *Christ's dealings with himself*. He was debtor to the Gentiles, because he saw the whole Gentile world lying in sin,—condemned, depraved, enslaved, carried away captive by the devil at his will, disobedient, and so under the curse of God. This was one thing that brought Paul under a debt, a vast debt of obligation to them, so that he could say, "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians." How so? Because he was not like Cain, saying, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The Gospel taught him, on the contrary, to love his neighbour as himself. He deeply realised that since the Lord had freely saved *him*, he was bound to be as tender and compassionate for others as of his own soul. How strongly he felt it towards the Jews, these wonderful words bear witness, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Isra-

el is, that they might be saved.” “I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”

We learn from this, that all Christians are debtors to those who are without Christ; that they should be moved by compassion for a perishing world, to go forward with this as their prevailing motive, that through grace they have become debtors *to all men*. And if this be binding on every follower of Christ, how much more on ministers of the everlasting Gospel? Oh! that they felt it more. If we had but more of the grace of God, we should. When ministers have little grace, they cannot feel this, just because they do not see the danger of others. They see men more in the light of being inhabitants of the world, than as going on with speed to death, to judgment, and to hell. But ah! where a true minister of Christ *does* get a view of the lost condition of mankind, *he cannot get over it*. A heavy weight lies on his bosom, which nothing can remove. He has great desires after the salvation of the soul, and cannot rest without *pulling* sinners out of the fire, while hating the garment spotted with the flesh. Thus he becomes debtor to the whole world.

But the thought of what Christ had done for him, as well as the peculiar way in which He had called him, made Paul feel this. Even at the time of his conversion, the Lord had told him that he was a chosen vessel for this end; making him to know that he was converted for the very purpose of bringing souls to Immanuel. He got his commission as an ambassador of Christ at the very time he received a pardon. His charge to declare the Gospel of Jesus was written, as it were, on the same parchment with his own pardon—written on the very charter of his salvation. Every way he was bound and obliged to preach the gospel. Not as a condition of his pardon. God forbid! Ah, no, it was all from love!—love to God and man. He had nothing left to glory in, the utmost he could ever *do* could not acquit the debt of love. It was laid on him as a solemn duty by the God of salvation, so that he was not only constrained to preach, but to say—“Woe is me if I preach not the gospel.” This feeling of imperative obligation to declare the truth, did not belong to Paul alone; every man that has the grace of God within him feels it. There is no such thing as a monopoly of grace; her language and her charge to all is, “Freely ye have received, freely give.” “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let *him that heareth* say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Like the woman of Samaria, who left her water-pot and returned into the city, and told them that were in it to come and see a man who had told her all that ever she did; so we see that when one hears of Christ, he tells another, and brings another, too. A man *is bound* to do it—he cannot *help* it—he cannot

contain it within him; a necessity is laid on his spirit, and woe is him if he preach not the gospel.

The apostle says something more than this,—“I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and the unwise.” The meaning of this seems to be,—if I were free to make a *choice*, I might choose the barbarian or I might choose the Greek, I might choose the wise or the unwise; but Paul says, *I am debtor*, and you know a debtor has no such thing as a choice to make to whom he will pay his debts. The debtor knows this, and the believers feels it just in the same way. “Whatever my calculations may be, or whatever I might myself desire, the question is not, *what would I like*, but *what is my commission*,—what are the objects of my embassy? It is not *my choice* that I have to do with, but *God’s commission*,—what instructions does it contain?”

We would fain impress this important, solemn truth upon God’s children. Believer, do you feel this? Do you know what it is to feel yourself a *debtor to a lost world*? Have you ever thought of what *object* Christ had in view when He brought you to Himself? what design He had in calling you? It was certainly, in the first instance, to save you from perdition, but that was not the only end. It is possible to think too much, or, at least, too exclusively, about your own case. In one sense you cannot do that; woe be to him who seeks to pull the mote out of a brother’s eye, when a beam is in his own. But yet a believer must remember that he is called to know Christ, not only *to be safe himself*; but also that he may be a witness for Christ in the world. Ah! think of this; don’t be selfish in the matter of salvation, and remember above all, that this is not a thing which you may or may not do, just as you like. Some people do much in this way, just because they have a liking to it, and because the employment suits their taste—and it is a happy thing to feel that; but there is a far more unchangeable foundation for a believer’s labour in the Lord’s vineyard than that. The man is no longer free to like, or not to like; *he is a debtor now*—a debtor to do it *fully*, and *constantly*, and *unceasingly*, and *devotedly*, whether he likes it or not. Think of it in this light, and then you will be going and hasting to tell your friends, and all whom you know, of these precious things of God. Oh, if this were fully felt, *and felt universally*, how many would be preaching whose mouths are dumb through sloth and idleness! There would be fewer preaching as a trade, and more preaching as *debtors*, for every believer would then have a voice with which to sound the praises of the most high God.

There is often a very great mistake made in this way among believers when speaking of each other. They say—How much such and such a one does for God and for souls, seeming to think that it is a great grace in that man; whereas the truth is, that when once a man becomes a Christian, his

ceasing to declare Christ is a very fearful shortcoming in simple duty. The *command* is to preach the gospel, and to cease from it is disobedience. The *obligation* is to preach the gospel, and how dare he be silent? A minister is just as guilty if he cease from this, as if he left an earthly debt unpaid. For instance, such an obligation is laid on me as one of Christ's ministers. Now, it is not in the least left to my choice whether or not I am to preach continually the gospel of Christ. The world can claim it—believers can claim it—woe, woe is me if I preach not the gospel. As to my liking it, that is another thing; if my heart is with the work, then I shall have my reward. See the fulfilment of this when God gives the commandment for it,—

“The Lord Himself did give the word,  
The word abroad did spread;  
Great was the company of them,  
The same who published.”

If we are to be useful in God's vineyard, we must not take it into our own hands to direct how or where we are to do His work. We must not go upon our own conjectures, but walk by God's rule. Oh! that we all felt that we had no liberty in this matter. When once a man has given himself to God, he has given away all right to this. It is left to a man's own choice whether he will give his heart to Christ or not; but when he *has* given his heart to Christ, it is *not* left to his own choice whether he will shine as a light in the world or not.

If the believer be a debtor, he is bound continually to seek opportunity to speak to those around him, that he may win them to the Lord. We are very apt to make a choice in this, but, ah! guard against it, if you would get the blessing. Did you never feel, in giving away a tract, or in speaking to anyone, as if you had a choice in the matter? You felt as if in one case you were likely to succeed, and not in the other. This is a great error, and may keep you from doing much good. If such be the duty of all Christians, how careful should elders and teachers be to be instant in the work committed to them.

Believer, have *you* no ungodly companion, whom you might try to bring to the knowledge of God? Remember, you are a debtor, and bound to do it. How many there are who, even if they instruct their children, yet neglect their servants. In how many houses, where godliness is professed, have the servants never had a question directly put to their consciences, that might awaken them?

There is fearful guilt lying on the heads of many in this matter; and why is there so great an unwillingness to anything of the kind? Just because if masters were to do this, it would have two effects. They would themselves require to live very consistently—to watch their own actions, and guard

their own words and looks in the presence of their servants; and a second effect would be, that there would be many more of the inmates of such households brought to Christ, attracted by holy conversation, and their likeness to Christ. Ah! if parents lived thus holily before their children, there would be another effect; it would be this, that they would not so often go down to the grave leaving unconverted children behind them in the world; or, what is as bad, if they do live, seeing the ruin of sons and daughters given over to vanity and folly. If parents took this more to heart, it would save them many a pang, and many a dark hour.

And neighbours have also a duty belonging to them, too often, alas! forgotten. How few think it necessary to speak a word to an unconverted neighbour, although they know they are guilty in being silent. What excuse do they give? "Oh, that it would be meddling, and interfering with other people's matters." And *so it would* be meddling, unless you did it from love to Christ. But, my dear friends, if you were to do it, and to do it in a kind, humble, and gentle way, your neighbours, however bad they might be, would thank you for taking a kind interest in them. Oh, be jealous of your motives for silence, for there seems to be about some Christians so much restraint and coldness, that if a neighbour or acquaintance were willing to receive instruction from them, he could hardly get it.

Were you never ashamed, in some companies, to recognise Christ as your Master? You love to wear the white robe in the closet, or even, perhaps, in the family; but ah! it is far too white to walk with in the world: it would give you too much singularity of appearance there. Sad it is, when a believer is ashamed, in any point, of the Gospel of Christ. Were you never tempted, when giving tracts away, to distribute them among the poor; yet to be disinclined to give them to the rich, thinking them less likely to get good; and did you never, when you had overcome the false shame, find that the *unlikely* person was the only one who got good? Did you never feel as if the devil were tempting you back from those very acts which God has been afterwards pleased most graciously to bless? Oh, we speak from self-experience; for often have we been left, especially in the preaching of the Gospel, to regret having chosen for ourselves. The place to which we may have gone with the greatest repugnance, thinking that, from some circumstance, the probabilities of success were small, has been the very one where God has helped us. It may not be gratifying to our fallen nature to believe it, but what we have to learn is, to do the work of *servants*, and not, as we might choose, the work of *masters*. Let every Christian remember, in conclusion, that *he is a debtor*;—a debtor to the Lord Jesus Christ; a debtor to a fallen world.

And now, unconverted fellow-sinners, do not these considerations, which we have sought to impress on the minds and bind on the consciences of believers, apply very forcibly, if indirectly, to you? Oh, is it no proof of the

love of God towards you, that He has made all his true people feel that they are *debtors* to *you*, that they may bring you to the knowledge of Christ Jesus? Many a debt you owe to God, though you never dreamed of trying to pay one of them. And yet He has not only counselled, and besought, and commanded his quickened people to take every means in their power to turn you; but He has laid on them *a woe*, if each one of them do not, in his different sphere and way, preach the Gospel to you. Is it not wonderful that, as soon as they believe the Gospel themselves, they cry out under the weight of a fearful responsibility lying on their souls, “I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians; both to the wise and to the unwise”?

Every converted soul, from the hour of its conversion, is commissioned to seek and to save that which was lost. Try, then, to praise the Lord for this. Try to wonder at his goodness, that, instead of taking his dear children home, when first they come to Him, He leaves them in a world of enemies, that they may seek for you. He might transplant them at once to their eternal, blessed home with himself in glory, as soon as they had tasted of his love; but He leaves them amid sorrow and trial, in a vale of tears, that they may be ensamples to you, as Christ is to them; nay, more, He lays woe upon them if they preach not the Gospel. Ah! how much easier for them if, as soon as they could call Him FATHER, they were to reach their Father’s house, and get the smile of his reconciled countenance—if, as soon as their souls were lighted at the Spirit’s fire, they were allowed to burst forth into the flame of glory, with which redeemed souls shine in the kingdom above, instead of having to shine so dimly, as at best they do, while only lights in a world that knows them not ? Yes, but *what would the world be without them?*