

GOD'S ANSWER TO MAN'S SIN

by

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CHAPTER TWO

"I AM 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. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:14-16).

THIS is the heart of Paul's theology, the very soul of Paul's religion, the essence of his consecrated devotion.

In three terrific statements, Paul lifts us to the heights of Christian faith and devotion. Understand them and you will have apprehended the motives of the life of this matchless servant of Christ.

Surely this man, Paul, is worth studying, worth knowing, worth following. Without any further introduction, therefore, let us consider the mighty message out of the burning heart of this magnificent minister of Christ. To help you understand and to help me preach, may we think together of these three statements of Paul:

I. I AM NOT ASHAMED

II. I AM DEBTOR

III. I AM READY

I. I AM NOT ASHAMED

"I am not ashamed of the gospel" is a description of Paul's attitude toward the Word of God that he had been commissioned to proclaim to a lost world. The gospel had an entirely different standing in those days from that which it occupies today. The cross was a mark of shame, of obloquy, of criminality.

To most men Jesus was a mad man at best, a malefactor at worst. His message was a mockery, a mediocre statement of ethics that could in no way compare with the philosophy of Aristotle and Socrates. The whole world was against Him, yet Paul could stand facing this same world and cry, **"I am not ashamed of the gospel."** Yea, neither are we!

With Paul, we are not ashamed of its compiler— God.

It is not the work of man, of groups of men, of schools of men. It is the inerrant, unchangeable, unmistakable, eternal, universal Word of God dictated by the Holy Spirit for the guidance of the ages. It is without fault, without flaw, without fear, without favor. It speaks to the heart of the man, the woman, the child, of every clime, of every country, of every continent, of every condition. It is positive, permanent, powerful. It was as true nineteen hundred years ago as it is today, as it will be when Christ comes again. It is as necessary this hour as it has been through the generations that have passed, and it will be for as long as the world stands.

Together with Paul, we are not ashamed of its contents—salvation.

It alone is the bread of life and directs to the fountain of the water of life.

- It alone promises, provides, and proffers eternal life. The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world, is its theme.
- It alone describes the way of the cross that leads home.
- It alone sustains the pilgrim over the steep ascent that leads to God and to glory.
- It alone teaches and offers the redemption of souls, the remission of sins, and the reconciliation of sinners.

The world is consciously and unconsciously hungry for its eternal deliverance.

Together with Paul, we are not ashamed of its consequences—the power of God unto salvation to every one who believeth.

Twelve men, poor, humble, lowly, mediocre, with no organization, with no finances, with no standing; started out to preach. That trickle became a brook; that brook became a river; that river became an ocean of saved souls seeking sinners for a sacrificial, sovereign Savior.

Their message has changed individuals, cities, nations, continents, a whole world. It has

“rescued the perishing, cared for the dying,
snatched them in pity from sin and the grave,
wept o’er the erring one, lifted the fallen,
told them of Jesus, the mighty to save.”

It has built churches, established schools, organized hospitals, orphanages, old folks’ homes. It has emancipated women, ennobled and educated children, and alleviated old age. Wherever its cross has been lifted, its message proclaimed, barbarism has been changed to civilization and culture, and the brutality of man to man has been ameliorated by the sacrificial constraint of the lowly, loving Nazarene. Most of all, best of all, loftiest of all, it has redeemed and released souls from the slavery of sin, from the storminess of self. It has made saints out of sinners and angels out of demons.

I know a man now in glory, a reprobate, a thief, a forger, an outcast, an outlaw. Christ found him, saved him, sanctified him, and stirred him. I stood by his side in a gospel mission in a western city and, having finished my sermon, heard him in a passionate, tear-strained plea, appeal to sinners to come to Christ. His name is Jimmy Goodheart; the place, the Sunshine Mission; the city, Denver, Colorado. That's what the gospel did.

I know another man intimately. He was alien-born, a lawyer, crooked, careless, indifferent to the claims of society, with the passion for money-making running riot in his veins, as far from religion and God as a man can be. Christ sought him, saved him, and sent him. He is before you now, preaching Christ to you. That is what the gospel has done.

II. I AM DEBTOR

Paul goes on with the burning enthusiasm of his soul for the message of salvation. With every nerve in his body a-stretch with gratitude to the Savior of his soul, with tear-dimmed eyes, looking out upon a lost, dying, judgment-bound world, he cries, "**I am debtor.**"

That was a declaration. It drummed in his heart! It throbbed in his mind! It burned in his soul! It was his meat by day and his travail by night! By that he lived! By that he was sustained! For that he preached! For that he toiled! For that he suffered! For that, when in God's wisdom, the time came, he died! He was debtor! So are we!

Together with Paul, we are debtors to Christ.

We are debtors to Him for creation.

- It was He who fashioned our members in the wombs of our mothers.
- It was He who called us into being.
- It was He who gave us our sound minds and our sound bodies.

We are debtors to Him for preservation, for every bite of food, for every drop of water, for every breath of air that has entered into our bodies from the first breath that we drew to this good hour.

Think, beloved, of all the mighty, munificent, magnificent blessings Christ has showered down upon us throughout the days of our lives. It will take this day and tomorrow and the next, beloved, the lifetime of every one of us, to tell the sum of all the benedictions that have been poured out upon us in all the days of our being.

But most of all, above all, beyond all, are we debtors for our redemption.

In agony, in loneliness, in shame, in travail, in blood, in death on the cruel cross of Calvary, Christ provided our salvation. He built a bridge across hell, paved a way into heaven, provided a mansion in glory. Surely our blood must run faster, our hearts beat harder, our eyes fill with tears of gratitude at the measure of His love and sacrifice for us. Surely we can cry with the poet:

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

But that is not all. Together with Paul, we are debtors to the conquerors of the past.

Think of the mighty-hearted martyrs, men, women, children that cemented together with their hearts' blood the walls of Zion, the church that you and I so thoroughly enjoy today.

We are debtors to Peter for dying crucified, head down, in the Roman arena.

We are debtors to Paul for his emaciated, striped back, his bleeding body, for his days of imprisonment in the dark, dank, dismal Asiatic and European jails, for the blood that he spilt when he was beheaded for a testimony. There are others, many others. Time is too short for me to enumerate them.

Think of the arenas of the Roman world, saturated, inundated, baptized, with the heroic blood of the early Christians, who went to the stake, to the fagots, to the beasts, who saw their men, women, their little children, bruised, beaten, burned, torn asunder, and who counted it all a matter of deep and unselfish joy to pay, to seal, to witness with their lives their adoration, their consecration to Christ.

O brethren and sisters in Christ, compare that with the kind of Christianity we have today, that has to be begged, cajoled, implored, even so much as to attend worship regularly.

Surely Christianity is a religion for heroes and heroines, and we, God help us, are not of heroic mold.

But even that is not all. Together with Paul, we are debtors to our contemporaries, to those who even now live all about us.

We are debtors to our fellow-Christians. There never has been a time in the history of Christianity when the forces of evil have more and more definitely aligned themselves so forcefully against the armies of God. In every city and country, Christianity and Christians are battling for their existence. This is a time when the armies of Christ, convicted, consecrated, concentrated, soul to soul, heart to heart, mind to mind, life to life, blood to blood, and by the grace of God, are to beat and batter down the gates of hell.

We are debtors to a lost world all around us, on every hand, in every place. In every block, in multiplied multitudes of homes, there are souls without God, without Christ, without hope, souls steeped in sin, sold to Satan, straying into hell, consciously and unconsciously. They need our help. We and we alone have the keys of heaven.

Some years ago while this humble preacher was in the Seminary, the good Dr. O. L. Hailey, President of the American Baptist Seminary, Nashville, Tenn., told the evangelism class this matchless story:

It seems that in the inception of the seminary, when it was just a few months old, the school and he came into financial straits. He traveled to Texas to visit the home of a rich rancher with the purpose in mind of asking for a contribution or a loan. The rancher was a friend and kinsman.

When Dr. Hailey approached him and asked for one thousand dollars the rancher at once drew out his check-book, filled out a check for that sum, signed it, tore it out of his book, and started to hand it to the preacher. Before the preacher took it, the rancher asked him what it was for. Dr. Hailey said, "It's for the work of my Negro seminary."

The rancher angrily withdrew the check, tore it into a hundred pieces, scattered it all over the floor, jumped up and cried, "What has a Southern gentleman to do with a bunch of cursed Negroes anyhow? If God wants to save those blasted Negroes, He will do it without you. I wouldn't give you two cents for the whole rotten lot of them!"

In spite of the appeal and protest of the seminary president, the rancher was adamant. Day after day the discussion went on. The cowman absolutely refused to take any interest in the matter. Sunday came. The rancher and Dr. Hailey sat on the front seat of a carriage, while the rancher's wife and father occupied the rear seat as they drove to church. Dr. Hailey had been praying with all of his soul that God might move the heart of this rich man to help in this desperate matter. As they drove along, the seminary president turned to his friend and said, "Jim, slow up. We've got plenty of time. I want to tell you a story.

"Some years ago a party of American emigrants traveled from New York to California. They got lost on the great American desert and ran out of water. The stock began to die, the children to cry, the women to whimper and moan, the men to grumble. The captain of the caravan was concerned about conditions, and early one morning, before sunup, sent scouts in every direction to search for water. One of them set out to the northwest. For hours he rode his horse without sighting water. Toward noon, as he topped a small sand dune, he saw what looked like trees in the distance, a little to the right of his course. Whipping up his horse, he sped towards it.

It was an oasis around a spring that gushed out of a small rocky formation, forming a pool about the size of an average house. The man jumped off his horse and carefully watered it. He undressed, plunged into the pool, and soaked up the water with every pore in his skin. He swam to the spring and drank his fill. Coming out of the water, he dried himself, dressed again, filled his water bags, and canteens, took another long, thankful gaze, gave his horse a drink, got up into the saddle, and turned the animal back toward the party. The sandy expanse stretched out before him. There was no sign of any road. The shifting sand had covered his tracks, but he was plainsman enough to have easily found his way back. The sun was blazing now. He reined in his horse and said to himself, "It's a long way back and hard. There's nobody in that party who belongs to me. I know my way now. I will just go on and let the rest root for themselves."

The rancher placed his heavy hand clutchingly on Dr. Hailey's arm, "O. L.," he cried, "you know what I'd do with a man like that?"

"What would you do?"

"Why, I'd tie him to my buggy wheel and take a blacksnake whip and cut him to hell."

Dr. Hailey put his arm around the speaker. "Jim," he said, "What would you do to a man who had the water of life and refused to pass it on to sin-cursed, dying, hell-bound souls?"

Beloved, he got his check and many, many more liberal ones. So the seminary was saved, and the work went on. That is what I mean. In every direction from us, in every city, in every countryside, in every State are precious souls lost in the desert of sin. We know the oasis; we know the rock that was stricken for our salvation, from Whose side, from Whose hands, from Whose feet and head, poured the life-giving flow, even our Rock of Ages. Tell me, shall we stand idly by and drink of the fountain and ever hesitate to pass it on to others?

III. I AM READY

Now, because we are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, because we are debtors to Christ, to God, the conquerors of the past, our contemporaries, to every soul out of Christ. What is the very essence, the very heart, the very blood, the very soul of Paul's cry, we are ready to live, to live as Jesus lived, to live as Jesus would live were He in our shoes, in our homes, in our circumstances, in our activity. Regardless of what others may do, regardless of what others may ask us to do, regardless of any pleasure, regardless of any problems, regardless of any proposals, we are ready to live the Christ life.

It may cost us wealth, ease, pleasure, health, our very lives, but as Christ was ready to die for us on the cross, we are ready to live the crucified life for Him. Beloved, that is the greatest need today—this readiness to live the New Testament life. It will do more, it will help more, it will serve more, it will win more, it will last longer, it will glorify Christ more, it will win more souls, bring more pressure, advance the kingdom farther, help the world more than anything and all things else we may be able to do. It cost Paul everything he was and had to say, "**I am ready,**" and live up to it.

Beloved, apostolic succession demands that we are also to pay the same price. Christianity is a heroic religion, calling out, challenging, constraining with an imperial compulsion, the very best that is in us, the loftiest, the holiest, the honorable, the courageous, to live devout, undefiled, sacrificial Christian lives day by day, day after day. "I am ready to live" ought to be written in letters of fire across our hearts, our minds, our souls, our lives. It ought to be our prayer by day and our dream by night. We are ready to live because we are not our own, because we are bought with a price, the price of the blood of Christ. We are living on borrowed time, on gifted time, on time that belongs to someone else.

We are ready to give—to give our talents, our toils, our tears, our tithe, and all that we are and possess or ever hope to possess. Permit me to make an humble and yet burning suggestion. The next time you are called upon to make a contribution, whether in time or in money, before you make up your mind what it will be, how much it shall be, close your eyes, think upon Calvary's cross, see the pierced hands, the torn feet, the streaming, wounded side, the crown of thorns, take everything you are and have, stretch it out on the altar in the agony of abandonment. Even then, after you have done all that, if you can call it sacrifice, brother, sister, you need to tarry at the cross. Many have given—Peter, Paul, James, John, Huss, Savonarola, Latimer, Ridley, John Bunyan, Roger Williams, Adoniram Judson. We, too, by the grace of God, by the vision of Christ, by the impulsion of the Spirit, are ready to give.

We are ready to go, to go with weeping, sowing the seed, so that we may come back rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us to deposit at the feet of Christ. Oh, the terrific need of going Christians! We have talented, trained, popular, influential, cultured Christians. We need going Christians, weeping Christians, sowing Christians, reaping Christians. We preachers must lead the parade; you deacons, stewards, elders, trustees, must come next; you Sunday-school officers, teachers, women's officers, young people's leaders, must close up the ranks. Like an army with invincible power, shoulder to shoulder, life to life, heart to heart, soul to soul, we must go afield to challenge, to combat the hordes, the hosts of hell.

Some of you know that when I was converted in 1925, my people turned their faces from me. I have no standing in the family circle. It is a hard, bitter cross of a thought, but there it is. In 1933 when I was pastor in Vickery, Texas, my father came from Chicago to see me, to take me home. He spent eight days with me, and I came closer to hell in agony of heart and soul during those eight days than I ever expect to be in time or eternity.

I took him off the train. We hugged and kissed each other, got into my car, drove home. On the way he told me about my precious mother, my four brothers, my sister, how much they loved me, how they wanted to see me, and began to ask me to give up my Lord and my work, to come home. I introduced him to my wife. He liked her and said so. I want him to like my wife and my children who have come since then. It is my prayer that somehow my family may be used of God to melt the hearts of my people and open the way for me to be with them.

During those eight days, by day and by night, I tried every way, I used every method to win my father to Christ, but to no avail. He refused even to look at a New Testament. He turned his back on my Christ. It broke my heart, and I was in deep soul agony.

Night after night he would stretch out his old hands to me and, with tears streaming down his face, in a trembling voice, he would ask me to come home. Night after night I would be obliged to refuse. He would go to his bed, I would go on my knees or face, weeping my heart out.

Came the day of his departure. Together we sat in the Pullman seat. Again he plead with me to turn my back on Christ and the church and my humble work, to come home. He said, "Son, Mamma's getting old, I am getting old, you are our firstborn, we have done all we could for you, as sacrificially as we knew how. Won't you come home? We haven't much longer to live. Cheer our old age. I've got some money with me. I'll buy your ticket. Don't get off the train. We'll send for your wife. We've got plenty of money. Come home."

Again I had to say, "I can't, Father; it's impossible and out of the question."

He kept on pleading, the tears splashing on his old cheeks, every tear a drop of burning acid on my soul. He kept on begging, pleading, reasoning. After a while someone called, "All aboard." I knew I had to get off. I stood up. My father tried to stand with me, but I knew it was of no use, so I pressed him down into the seat. Bending down, I pressed my lips to his:

"Daddy," I said, "this for Mamma. Tell her no matter how it seems, no matter how it looks, no matter how it appears, I love her with all my heart." Then I kissed him and said, "Daddy, this is for you. I love you more than you will ever know. Daddy, there is one thing I want you to know. Whether you can ever accept my way or not, whether you can ever agree with me or not, I want you to know that I am just as honest and sincere as I know how to be."

I jumped off the train, got into my car, and started to drive away, but the tears blinded me. Parking my car near the station, I bowed my head over the steering-wheel and poured out my heart to God that He might have mercy on my loved ones.

You turn to me, my beloved, and say, "Preacher, you love your people; why didn't you go? They needed you. They are getting old. They had sacrificed for you. Why didn't you go on home?"

I'll tell you why. All the time my daddy was weeping, all the time I was praying, all the time my heart was breaking, above his head I could see a hill, and on that hill a cross, on that cross the bleeding, broken body of my Savior.

Beloved, I may be a Jew, but I am not a dog! If Jesus Christ loved me enough to die for me, I love Him enough, and I want you to love Him enough, so that together we may be ready to live, to give, and to go. God, give us the grace to do it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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