

ISLANDS OF HEALING

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Rom. 1:14-16

A few weeks ago, I noticed a little paragraph in one of the professional magazines to which I subscribe which struck me as being almost uncanny in its description of the age in which we live. It seems two Hollywood actresses were discussing their respective horoscopes. In the course of the conversation, one of them turned to the other and said, 'I didn't know you believed in astrology.' 'Oh yes,' replied her companion, 'I believe in everything a little bit.'

If I ever have read a description of 20th Century America, that's it. We are a people without any real, robust convictions. Oh, we have notions, feelings, theories, leanings. We believe in everything a little bit, but we have no great life-directing, soul-consuming, sacrifice-demanding convictions. When the great issues of life are at stake, we cast about to see how the winds of public opinion are blowing and then we adjust our so-called 'beliefs' to comply.

Perhaps you've heard about the senator who made a political speech. After he was finished, one of his admirers came up and shook his hand warmly and said, 'Congratulations, Senator! That was a great speech. I liked the straightforward way in which you dodged the issues.'

I wonder, if tonight, instead of trying to dodge the issues, we might meet them head on. Is it possible that there are people in this great crowd who believe in Christ's Great Commission, a little bit? There are people like that, you know, people whose whole Christian experience consists of doing just as little for the cause of world evangelism as they dare.

They give just enough to make them look respectable in the eyes of the 'right' people, but rarely a penny more. They may equal the average of charitable giving and think they have given enough. Apparently they have forgotten, if they ever bothered thinking about it, it is not doing more than the average that keeps the average down.

Somewhere along the line far too many of us have gotten the idea that participation in the great world mission of the church is a matter of local option.

We have been deluded into thinking Christ's Great Commission was only meant for the dreamy-eyed few who were willing to Go into all the world. The gallant lads and lassies who, without hesitation, have laid down their personal aims and aspirations to pick up a crudely fashioned wooden cross in response to him who said, Follow me.

No greater heresy has ever been perpetrated on the church of Jesus Christ than that satanic delusion that God's command to do the work of an evangelist was only addressed to a few. The very same Savior who said, Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, also said, Go, ye into all the world. The first was the Savior's invitation. The second is the saint's obligation. And if you were willing to come, then you must be willing to go!

That does not mean you must be in full-time service. The secret of being an effective Christian is not full-time service, but full-time devotion. Full-time devotion to the cause and will of Christ. That's what Paul was getting at when he wrote these challenging words, I am a debtor.

I Am A Debtor

He was facing up to the fact that every Christian must be motivated by a sense of debt. Debt to God for his incredible generosity in giving us the gift of Jesus Christ. Debt to the pilgrims of the past, that long brave line of faithful followers whose daring and courageous sacrifice made possible the building of that which we call our Christian heritage. And debt, perhaps most of all, to the great myriad masses of men and women who have never known, or even heard, the name of Jesus.

Do you realize there are two billion such people in the world today? Two billion human beings who have never even heard the name of Jesus. To these we are debtors.

Do you realize that while we have spent multiplied millions for the military, we have spent a few measly mites for missions, and therefore nations which once were fertile fields of missionary conquest are now closed off behind some kind of man-made curtain? In a special way to these, we are debtors.

I read the other day of a man who bought a drugstore from a fellow who said it was a going concern. It turned out to be a bad investment. Things went from bad to worse. About six months later he met the original owner and said, "Do you remember that business you sold me as a going concern? Well, it's gone!"

It is something like that with us and our evangelistic opportunities. We seem to think we will have open doors forever. That just because a field has been ripe for the picking in the past, it will be ripe for the picking in the future. That simply is not so. God may have all eternity to work out his plan for creation. We mortals don't. We have a brief threescore years and ten. And everywhere we turn today, we hear nothing but the sound of closing doors. In the last few years alone, more than one billion souls have had their faces turned away from him who is the Light of the World.

Someone has said that there is a time to laugh and a time to cry. My friends, this is the time to cry. Do you realize that while we worry about our waistlines, and spend hundreds of thousands of dollars each year for medical aids to keep us from overeating, two-thirds of the world's population goes to bed hungry every night? To these we are debtors.

Do you realize that while we frantically struggle to get a better house in a better neighborhood, more than one million women and children sleep in the streets of Calcutta, India, every night because they have no house at all? To these we are debtors.

Do you realize that while we have been fretting and stewing about the high cost of living, our fellow Christians in China and Korea have been learning what the high cost of living really means?

And when they discovered it meant the renunciation of their Christian faith, they chose to die rather than to live without Christ. In the last few years more than fifteen million -- that's fifteen million -- Chinese and Korean Christians have been martyred for the sake of Christ. To these we are debtors.

It is true, of course, that people in distant lands do not need Christ any more than we do, but they need him just as much! And we will be held eternally responsible if we do not make every human effort to pay our debt to God for his amazing grace, by telling them the story of Jesus.

All of the Church's obligations are not on the foreign field. In the city of Chicago, there are 2,000,000 people who do not have any church affiliation. The number may not be that large in your town, there are still hundreds and thousands of men and women, boys and girls, right where you live, who do not have the hope of heaven in their hearts.

In the United States, there are about 65,000,000 young people, nearly half of whom have never been inside a church. To these we are debtors. Read J. Edgar Hoover's account of the one million cases in our juvenile courts and you will be appalled at the crime rate amongst our youth. And perhaps you will begin to see how great is the debt we owe to our own United States.

Some Christians cannot see a need for Jesus unless it is more than 2,000 miles away! But one need not go to dark and distant jungle lands in order to fulfill Christ's Great Commission. When Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world," he included "Hometown - U.S.A." Go into any city or hamlet in our nation. Walk down any street. Knock on almost any door and you will find people who are spiritually unenlisted. People who are lost. People for whom Christ died, and therefore people to whom we are in debt.

And every Christian must be awakened to the task. Too long Christian lay people have been content to sit back and let their pastors do the job. I say to you with all of the earnestness of my heart, the world will never be won if God is to depend solely upon the professional clergy. There

simply are not enough ministers to go around. It must be every Christian an evangelist, or we are doomed to failure.

Edmund Burke said, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." We cannot be neutral. We are either part of the problem, or we are part of the answer. We cannot be satisfied to make an ordinary contribution to a world of extraordinary need, for we are debtors. To Christ. To our own country. And to the world.

But Paul had something more to say. Not only did he write, "I am a debtor," but also, "I am not ashamed."

I Am Not Ashamed

It was Bishop W.F. McDowell who said, "I would not walk across the street to give India a new theology. India already has more theology than it can understand. I would not cross the street to give China a new code of ethics. China already has a better ethical code than she is capable of using. I would not cross the street to give Japan a new religious literature. Japan has a better religious literature than a religious life. But I would go around the world again, and yet again, if it pleased God, to tell India and China and Africa and the whole wide world, 'There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.'" And Bishop McDowell was right.

There is one great question on the lips of men and women today, "To whom shall we turn?" A few decades ago men were asking, "To what shall we turn?" But now, instinctively, they seem to know that man-made philosophies and scientific gadgets are not enough and they are asking, "To whom shall we turn?"

What a privilege to turn them to Jesus! How wonderful to know that while we may need to apologize for ourselves and our feeble attempts at serving him, we need never apologize for Jesus. The world can find no fault with him. Indeed, "The label of Christ becomes a libel if we do not

magnify him.@ For while there are many who would point the way to truth and life, only Jesus Christ can say, I am the way, the truth, the life.@

No wonder Paul wrote, I am not ashamed.@ He had seen a vision of the risen King. He had warmed his soul in the brightness of the manifold glories of Christ, and once having walked in the company of the Galilean he had to say, I am ready to preach.@

I Am Ready To Preach

I am a debtor. I am not ashamed. I am ready. Such is the progression of those who would give their lives, as well as, their lips to Jesus. You see, my friend, it isn't what you say with your lips that really counts. It's what you say with your life. The world is much more concerned with your demonstration of the Christian life, than it is with your declaration of the Christian truth, however great the truth may be.

A young Chinese Communist stood before the firing squad of Chiang Kai-shek's soldiers, and as the captain gave the order to take aim, the girl cried out, I'm dying for a cause. What are you living for?@

I haven't been able to get away from it. Maybe it will give you a few hours of sleeplessness too. I'm dying for a cause. What are you living for?@ It gets under your skin, doesn't it? It doesn't let you rest. Every time you see a cross on the steeple of a church . . . every time you hear the story of Calvary . . . every time you think about the incredible condescension of Christ who left the glories of heaven for a straw-strewn stable and a cruel Roman rack . . . every time you take communion . . . every time you see a lost one die . . . every time you take communion . . . every time you think of a world that is staggering under the weight of incredible need . . . every time you read of a new baby being born and you remember this is not just a body, but an immortal soul . . . every time you think of the tremendous thing that Jesus did for you and you reflect on the little you do for him . . . every time . . . it comes back and hits you where it really hurts, I'm dying for a cause. What are you living for?@

You remember the time you spent three dollars to see a ball game, and then felt a glow of pride when you put a whole dollar in the offering plate on Sunday!

You remember the time you gave your kid a buck to see the latest movie, and a dime to take to Sunday school!

You remember the time you said *Yes* to a request to teach a gang of junior boys, because, well, what was your reason? Tell me, did you really pray about it? Did you really ask God to give you the wisdom and strength you felt you didn't have? Or did you just say, *Yes*?

You see, I'm not only talking about going to the foreign field. I'm talking about the Sunday school in your church. I'm not talking about giving up your job to become an itinerant preacher. I'm talking about using your job as a sounding board for the Gospel. So whether you dig ditches, work in an office, care for a home, or go to school, your primary concern is to be a witness for Jesus. That's what I mean when I say, *Every Christian an evangelist.*

Phillip Brooks said, *It seems as though the heroes have done about all they can for the world. Now nothing much will be accomplished until the common people rise up to do their common tasks.* And that, of course, is the challenge of this hour. And, in finality, that is the only real hope for the world. Let me show you what I mean.

Medical science has recently discovered a new method of treating serious, and in the past, oftentimes fatal burns. A surgeon, with special skills, removes a section of healthy skin from the body of the burned person, and cuts it into infinitesimal pieces. He then scatters it over the open wound where the tiny bits of healthy skin begin to grow and multiply. They become veritable islands of healing, reaching out until the entire area is covered and the wound is healed.

It seems to me that's our mission as Christians. Each of us is an island of healing for a broken and bleeding world. By ourselves, our frail and feeble efforts seem small and unimportant. But

together, as we stretch and grow, reaching out to bind up the wounds of a suffering humanity, our growing edges join. And when they do, our weaknesses become strength. Our sacrifices become splendid. For we are more than commoners. We are children of the King. And with a regal bearing, we must be extraordinary people for an extraordinary time.

How about it Mr. and Mrs. Christian? Can you say with Paul, I am ready?@ Are you ready to face up to the simple fact that we will never win this world by depending on the professional clergy? It must be every Christian as an evangelist. Are you ready to let God use you, as you are and where you are, to do a job that is distinctly yours? A job nobody else but you can do? So if you do not do it, it will never get done?

And to the hundreds of young people here tonight, let me say this: God needs you.@ He needs your time, your training, and your talents. He needs your aims and aspirations. He needs your high ideals and lofty dreams. And he needs you now! While you're young and vigorous and vibrantly alive. God needs young people who have whole lifetime of service to give to his kingdom cause. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said it over a half century ago, but it is equally true today, Young people, if God is calling you to be a minister or a missionary, don't cheapen your life by becoming a king.@

How about it, fellas? How about it, girls? Will you say with Paul, I am a debtor. I am not ashamed. I am ready?@ The little girl who was a Chinese Communist put it in a way you cannot escape, I am dying for a cause, what are you living for?@