

Windows to the Heart of Paul

Paul's love of souls

Intro: Paul was one of the greatest Christians ever. We are indebted to him for thirteen wonderful epistles. His evangelistic efforts impacted Western civilization in ways that affect our life everyday; our laws, our freedom, our way of life depend a great deal on Paul's initial efforts to evangelize the Roman world. But we are also indebted to Paul for a wonderful example of a Christian heart.

However, for all of our indebtedness to Paul, it is remarkable that he should speak about his own indebtedness to all others. Let us study together another window into the heart of Paul, one that reveals the person that he was:

I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. (Romans 1:14)

I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. (Romans 1:14, NKJV)

This statement like a window into Paul's heart reflects his love of souls.

Paul's love of souls

Paul preached out of a sense of obligation. To whom was he obligated?

"Both to Greek and barbarian".

This label was a common cultural and linguistic distinction in the Greco-Roman world. "Greeks" were those who spoke Greek or practiced Greek culture. "Barbarians" describes all the rest. Perhaps the name comes from the sound of the foreign languages to the Greeks.

But what Paul is affirming that he is debtor to all men! There was no one who did not need the gospel; and there was no one to whom Paul would not preach it!

If only we too could have this wonderful sense of indebtedness that made our sights universal (to every country, and to every race, and to every level of society). That was the heart of Paul!

Why did he feel obligated?

Because God had charged him with the awesome task of preaching to all men.

For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Cor. 9:16)

Because he had received wonderful blessings from God which he felt were not destined for him alone but all men; therefore, having found them, he wanted to share them with others.

The evidence of Paul's love

Teaching constantly

You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:18-21)

This passage gives us a beautiful picture of Paul's teaching outlook:

Serving the Lord (not motivated by anything Paul thought he might receive from those he taught, but simply out of duty to Christ)

Not shrinking to declare anything profitable (not holding back what might not be as well-received but giving all the truth)

Teaching publicly and house to house (not just a preacher in assemblies but a personal teacher of others, available to individuals and families as much as crowds of people)

Solemnly testifying (revealing his own experiences with soberness and solemnity not with mass hysteria and sensationalism)

By these things Paul demonstrated his great love for souls. Do we show this love by seeking opportunities to talk about the Lord to others?

Praying fervently

Paul's own burden for the lost finds no greater expression than Rom. 9:3:

For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, (Romans 9:3)

To appreciate this statement we should remember that the "curse" of God was equivalent to eternal condemnation.

I could wish that I were going to hell for the sake of my brethren (the Jewish people).

This burden of sorrow took Paul to his knees and then his feet.

First to the throne of God:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. (Romans 10:1)

Then it took him to the synagogues (Ac. 13:14) where those Jews were in order that he might teach them. Paul's love could be seen in every prayer and footstep he made over his life. He traveled thousands of miles to tell others about Jesus.

Do you have those you love for which you pray? Do you remember those in foreign countries who have not heard? Do you remember those who attend here from service to service and have not obeyed the gospel?

Adjusting lovingly

Paul's love is further seen in how Paul approached the work of teaching others.

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you. (1 Cor. 9:19-23)

What does Paul mean?

First it might suggest that Paul's approach to the people in teaching was different.

The Jews knew the Law; the Gentiles were not familiar with it and did not believe in it. Thus, with Jewish audiences Paul began with the OT Scriptures (Ac. 17:2-3).

With Gentiles audiences Paul began with their own poetry or literature (Ac. 17:22).

Second it might suggest Paul's alteration of his own lifestyle to avoid giving unnecessary offense.

To avoid causing Jews to stumble and not listen to the gospel, Paul carefully respected and supported those who continued to observe the Law. Timothy was circumcised lest offense be given to Jewish adherents on Paul's journeys (Ac. 16:3).

In contrast, Paul removed the food distinctions of his past, to associate with and teach the Gentile people (Gal. 2:14).

Clearly Paul went the second mile to make sure that his personal habits did not get in the way of the message he taught. Do we?

Suffering greatly

Finally Paul's love of souls could be seen in the suffering he endured while seeking to teach others.

Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. (2 Timothy 2:10)

It is hard to imagine as the Lord put it "how much he must suffer for my name's sake" (Ac. 9:16).

None of us is beaten for our teaching; we may simply be inconvenienced. We may have to give up entertainment to visit someone. We may suffer only personal discomfort at the prospects of someone rejecting our invitation. Are we willing to endure just this much for the sake of saving others? Are we willing to give as

generously as possible to send teachers, to reach out to our community?

Conclusion: Surely Paul's love of souls is a great example for us. If only we could have his heart, think of how much more we could accomplish for the Lord! Think of how many more would be saved. Let us accept the challenge of Paul: "Be followers of me, even as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Let us teach constantly, pray fervently, adjust lovingly, suffer willingly.