

# **The Apostle Paul's Mission Mentality—"I Will Go"**

Defining the Future of IAD  
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## ***Introduction***

It has been a privilege to meet with you for these several days in such pleasant surroundings. We have assembled here to address a huge and complex task—Defining the Future of the Church in the Inter-American Division. The invitation given to me was to bring some devotional thoughts that would aid in establishing a spiritual foundation for the very practical exercise of developing plans and procedures for the future. I have chosen to think with you about the centrality of mission—the more clearly we understand mission and our role in it, the more effectively we engage with it.

On Friday evening we addressed the question, “Whose Mission Is It Anyway?” We observed that God did not create a mission for the Church. Instead He created the Church for His mission. This idea was underscored by the devotional from Pastor Prestol-Puesan on Monday morning.

Our worship time on Sabbath was devoted to exploring the work of the Holy Spirit in superintending the mission of God after the resurrection and departure of Jesus. We discovered from the book of Acts that the Holy Spirit lead the early church, and particularly its leaders, into new territory both geographical and conceptual. The Holy Spirit kept updating the map of mission.

In those first two devotionals we looked at mission from an organization's perspective. Then on Sunday morning we began to look at mission from a personal point of view. We talked about John the Baptist—A Man With a Mission. We learned about his deeply profound answers to three highly significant questions: Who are you?, What are you doing?, and What matters most to you? It was a time of reflection on how I think about myself and my purpose in life.

This morning we shall again look to scripture for some spiritual food to strengthen our individual response to the challenges of mission. Our teacher and example in this moment will be the Apostle Paul. We learned from John the Baptist how to look inward; how to think about ourselves in relation to mission. We shall learn from the Apostle Paul how to look outward; how to think about others in response to the challenge of mission. And thus I have titled this presentation: "The Apostle Paul's Mission Mentality—"I Will Go."

Certainly one of the persons who stands tall in the history of Christianity is the apostle Paul. Scholars tell us that he did not have a striking appearance nor an imposing presence. Perhaps he was somewhat like Jesus in that there was nothing physical about him that would attract us to him. Yet Paul's thought and energy became so dominant in the early Christian church and will continue so to the end of time.

Our text from Scripture today gives us a brief but revealing insight into how this man thought and lived.

"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 everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek."  
—Romans 1:14-16 KJV

Notice the three "I am..." statements. Let us examine briefly these bold assertions:

"I am debtor...."

"I am ready...."

"I am not ashamed...."

**1. "I am debtor...."—a way to view one's work.**

The first statement gives us an indication of how Paul looked at his work. His ministry was not seen by him as a job. Instead it was the fulfillment of a calling from which he could not, and would not if he could, escape. Paul opens this great letter to the church at Rome with the words: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God." (Romans 1:1)

Paul's idea of being in debt is not a result of financial mismanagement. It is instead the debt of gratitude. Because of what God had done for him, Paul had this constant awareness that "I owe something to others." My purpose in life is to give, not to get. "I am not so concerned about what I own, but what I owe."

Paul's sense of being in debt came from a realization of what God had done for him. As a result, the whole man is at God's beck and call—all he is, not just some selected qualities or attributes or a portion of his time. Paul was so completely devoted to Jesus Christ that this relationship dominated all his actions. He is separated from ordinary interests, responsibilities and concerns.

The term "slave" both in Paul's day and ours is not one that is very attractive. It is much easier to see ourselves as leaders in the church rather than slaves of Jesus Christ. And yet is there not a profound and disconcerting truth that lowliness is the secret of all service and the foundation of all greatness.

Is there not a danger to us that employment in the work of God can be more a convenience than a conviction? Do we somehow let the organization wrap itself around us in a safety net where we can be comfortable being in the Lord's work and at the same time enjoy a reasonable standard of living? Do we approach our responsibilities from the viewpoint of a missionary or a mercenary?

Elsewhere (2 Cor 4:1) Paul declares that it is "through God's mercy we have this ministry...." His life was seen in the context of ministry, not a project, a program, a contract or a job but a

ministry—something in which he was always giving. It is a powerfully energizing thing to see one's life cast in the dimensions of ministry. I refer here not to the professional ministry (preaching, evangelizing, baptizing) but to the attitude of ministry in whatever tasks we choose or are obligated to undertake.

The attitude of ministry has certain byproducts:

1) Ministry is service oriented not success conscious. Note Paul's words: "Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry we do not lose heart." Discouragement does not arise in the heart of one whose life and action is a result of devotion to God. There may be difficulty, defeat and disaster on all sides but ministry is not measured by achievement. It is measured by gratitude and singularity of purpose. It is measured by giving rather than by results. It looks to the needs of others rather than to the comfort of self.

2) An attitude of ministry fosters personal discipline, not a sense of entitlement. Again, we read from 2 Corinthians 4:1-2: "Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God." Paul's keen sense of ministry, his debt to God and to others, brought an internal discipline to his life that was far more purifying than external restraint, or rules, or policies or fear of public censure.

This is both frightening and encouraging. When we lose sight of life as ministry we also lose connection with the internal reference for moral and ethical behavior.

Note this quotation received from an Internet service entitled "Christian Quotation of the Day":

"The surest symbol of a heart not yet fully subdued to God and His will is going to be found in the areas of money, sex, and power: in wanting

these things for ourselves. The surest symbol of spiritual earnestness will be the checkbook, the affections, and the ego-drive surrendered to Him. A disciple must have discipline."—Samuel M. Shoemaker (1893-1963), *The Experiment of Faith*

So, in the context of fulfilling his debt to God Paul declares himself to be a debtor both to Greeks and barbarians, to the wise and the unwise. He is, of course, making this statement as a Jew. He recognizes a lifelong obligation to people outside his normal circle of acquaintance, outside the boundaries of his culture, beyond the borders of his nationality. What a broad and all-encompassing perspective! Paul had a Global Mission mentality. Until the gospel reaches everyone he is under a debt.

There are other ways of our being debt: to parents, to Sabbath School teachers, school teachers, friends, the church, etc. Sometimes we meet people who are so full of themselves that they don't realize the contributions that others have made to their lives. Some boast of being 'self-made' persons, as though they are a product of their own ingenuity, wisdom, energy, and resources. The truth is we are all in debt to others who have gone before us, to others who made sacrifices so that we could enjoy the fruit of their labors. It is good to go through life with a sense of indebtedness to others rather than a sense of entitlement.

## **2. "I am ready...."—a way to face the future.**

Faithfulness to the text and the context requires us to acknowledge that Paul was ready to go to Rome and preach there. But this is not a statement of ordinary readiness to undertake a journey, as in "I am ready to go for a vacation in Hawaii or to visit Paris." No, there is much more here. For Paul to be ready to go to Rome meant willingness to undergo again all the hostility and drama that accompanied his ministry in any new location. This man was not afraid of hardship. He could not be deterred by the threat of discomfort, pain or sacrifice. He was under obligation and he was ready....

Think of Rome in the days of its imperial splendor. It was the capital not just of a country, but of the civilized world. What could this obscure provincial tentmaker bring to a city swollen with imperial pride? Into that city came all the odds and ends of humanity from all over the Mediterranean world. And Paul would go to Rome as a Jew. He belonged to a race that had spread over the Roman world, making its influence felt without making its name respected. He had nothing to offer; no impressive bearing, no credentials that would ensure enthusiastic acceptance, not even a message that people would consider plausible. Paul was not ignorant of the odds against him—but he was ready. Ready for any eventuality.

What am I ready for? Positive recognition, affirmation from my peers, a promotion, an easier job, a more visible presence in the church or society, a raise in pay? Yes! But are there some jobs I wouldn't take or some places I wouldn't go because it is neither convenient nor pleasant—the odds for success are small, the opportunities for advancement are rare. Am I ready for sacrifice and suffering, for unpopularity, for rebuke and acrimony?

Let me remind you of the greatness of this man Paul. He writes his letter to the Philippians from a jail, possibly in Ephesus. He writes: "What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel." (Philippians 1:12.)

What a way to look at personal hardship! To be able to rejoice in the midst of personal suffering because the cause of God has been advanced. This is not the normal pattern. We generally project onto the work of the Church the same qualities of our personal experience. When things are going well for me, the Church is thriving. But when things are going tough for me, well then, the Church is going downhill, the leaders are faulted for this and that, the members are unfaithful, the organization is inefficient and ineffective.

Paul was ready for anything that may come. When he wrote those words of readiness to go to Rome little did he know that indeed he would travel to Rome—a free trip at the expense of the

government—but in chains. He was ready. No wonder he could say: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." (Philippians 4:11)

"I am debtor...." —A way to view one's work  
"I am ready...." —A way to face the future

### 3. *"I am not ashamed...."—a way to demonstrate faith.*

One can appreciate this statement only if it is seen in its first century setting. There were all manner of hindrances to the spread of the gospel. It was born out of Judaism and neither a Jew nor his religion commanded much respect in the Roman Empire. The claim that a healer/teacher, and also troublemaker, who was put to death as a criminal was God, to be worshiped and adored was an idea to be laughed about. People scorned the idea of Christianity. Some representation has been preserved which shows the attitude of the population: a cross with a dog's head on it.

The gospel was not a message that appealed to proud, satisfied people. The gospel was not about power, success, and popularity. The gospel made moral and ethical demands that were contrary to human nature. It was neither convenient nor comfortable to be a believer. There was great social cost in joining this new and controversial faith. Yet Paul could convincingly pronounce, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation...."

How is it with you and with me? Most of us live in an atmosphere that, while not embracing the gospel, at least is not hostile to it. Yet it is so easy to remain silent and inconspicuous and to allow secular compromises to dim our discipleship. Do we have boldness or timidity in sharing our faith? Is our testimony of God's goodness in our lives something that we can share with enthusiasm? Does the gospel bring joy in our lives?

How might the apostle express himself if he were in our midst? What are the things that he would not be ashamed of even though

the climate of the times pays little regard to such? Would he not boldly assert:

I am not ashamed of the Word of God!  
I am not ashamed to believe in creation!  
I am not ashamed of the Spirit of Prophecy!  
I am not ashamed of the Sabbath!  
I am not ashamed of my Church!  
I am not ashamed of the health message!

### ***Conclusion***

Paul's three statements present an enormous challenge for us today.

"I am debtor...."—a way we think about work.  
"I am ready...."—a way we face the future.  
"I am not ashamed...."—a way to demonstrate faith.

I pray that we today could make similar declarations. And I am convinced that when we can and do say these things, when the Church members join with us in saying these things, there is no power, there is no problem, there is no pressure that can thwart the mighty action of God in our day, in our lives and in our world.

Today as you conclude deliberations on the future of the Church in IAD I urge you to remember:

1. The mission is God's mission and we are invited to join Him.
2. The Holy Spirit will guide the Church through changing times.
3. It is the privilege of every member to think of themselves as messengers for God.
4. Appreciation for what God has done in and for us leads us to invest our energies and resources in the advancement of His mission.