

Debtor

November 29, 2009

Hearing the apostle Paul say that he was a debtor immediately calls to mind his poverty resulting from years of neglecting his financial well-being for his passion to spread the Gospel everywhere that he might be. But in **Romans 1:14**, he reckons his debt as the obligation to preach the Gospel to everyone without partiality. *"I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise."* He owed the Greeks, that is the cultured Greek speaking citizens who went about doing business according to the rules of society and generally behaving themselves with self-control, personal discipline, and courtesy and decency toward their neighbors. But he also felt obligated to preach to the barbarians who did not speak Greek and did not respect the conventions of civil business or discourse. We know who the barbarians were: they were the wild men of the north, the Mongols of Asia, the Huns, the Goths and Visigoths, the Norsemen, Vikings, Normans, Saxons, and Anglos. Early on, the Gospel was reaching the shores of our English speaking ancestors; English, French, and German -- all languages of the barbarians. In time, the descendants of those barbarians modified a wine-press into a printing press and began mass-producing copies of the Bible in Latin and then later into the languages of the peoples -- the non-Latin-speaking barbarians of that age developing scholars of the Bible that impacted the world for centuries; experts in the Biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew and scientists in the analysis of the ancient hand-written copies of the Bible.

Paul was a debtor to wise and unwise. Jesus had taught the Pharisees and scribes, wise in the Laws of Moses, but also the "sinners" who were foolish in the matters of Scripture. *The common people heard him gladly*(**Mark 12:37**). After all was said and done, *"not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called."*(**1 Corinthians 1:26**) Paul certainly enjoyed sitting with his equals who shared his zeal for knowledge and could converse on nearly any Bible question in depth. Alas, few were willing to converse much beyond their prejudices (see Acts 17:32 and 14:2). Even a casual reading of the experiences of Paul in his journeys would cause one to wonder how he could go on to write, *"So as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also."* The only way that it makes sense is to look beyond the unbelievers and see the power of God working in those who do believe, v. 16.