

Welcome Aboard

“A Powerful Partnership”

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Digging Deeper

Welcome Aboard: “A Powerful Partnership”

Written by: Robert Ismon Brown (bbrown@c1naz.org)

Background Notes

Key Scripture Text(s): Philippians 1:1-11; Philemon 1:1-6; Acts 16:6-40

Introduction to the New Series

Consider these words of St. Paul:

³ Make every effort to keep the *unity* of the Spirit through the *bond* of peace. ⁴ There is *one body* and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it (Ephesians 4:3-7).

“Make every effort” is an operative statement of connected church life, rooted in the great truths of Christian faith. We are “called” to this “connection” work, made possible by the Triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit. Through our faith, that connection has its first heart-felt commitment. Through our baptism, that connection has its first visible sign. The church is not our idea, but God’s, who through Christ “apportions” (“gives a place to”) each person within it. Making connections is necessary in order to realize the “hope” that comes to us from God’s new future for the best version of our lives. Baptism places us into the body of Christ upon the confession of our faith in him. The result is “unity,” the indispensable witness that the body is alive and well.

This series *welcomes aboard* a multiplicity of persons without respect to their status. The church is not a “club” which vets its members by ordinary rules for “respectable” inclusion. Who is “in” or who is “out” does not depend on external conditions determined by a committee, but on the free grace of our calling Lord. Our challenge as members of Christ’s church is to find helpful ways to facilitate the process of inclusion that are faithful to the Word of God and to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Many organizations with frequent arrivals of new employees make conscious efforts to aid their integration into the new corporate life and culture where they will now work. Human resource departments call this effort “onboarding.” Here’s the perspective of one consulting firm providing resources for onboarding to organizations:

Onboarding is more than just new hire orientation. Onboarding is a process. Orientation is an event – the first step in the onboarding process. The orientation step allows you to collect all relevant human resources, payroll and benefits forms.

The onboarding process helps you to develop a happy contributor. Onboarding conveys your organizational brand and values, explains your people and professional culture, aligns institutional expectations and performance and provides the tools for the employee to successfully assimilate into his or her position with a quicker ramp-up to productivity.

A sound onboarding process spans 1-2 years and includes constant communication, feedback, and performance measurement — all keys to employee longevity and loyalty. Onboarding follows the employee lifecycle for mentoring and development and includes automation for consistent and timely tracking of onboarding events. Seamlessly transitioning the candidate through the new hire and onboarding experience, then into the performance management process matriculates the new employee and ensures success.¹

Since the local church partners with God’s kingdom for the long-haul, longevity of participation is a crucial purpose. Our goal is fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ who love God and each other. Guests who

¹ From the website of *PeopleAdmin*: <https://www.peopleadmin.com/2013/01/what-is-onboarding-exactly/>

frequent our services are loved by God who intends the absolute best for them, now and in the future. To them we say, “Welcome Aboard,” guided by the commitments suggested in the quotation above and in the language of Paul’s words cited above.

Deep roots connect the people of God across many generations. From the prophet Isaiah comes this moving invitation to all sorts of persons who might otherwise be excluded in the broader social order. His words are a fitting introduction to the intention of our series, “Welcome Aboard”:

³ Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely exclude me from his people." And let not any eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree." ⁴ For this is what the LORD says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant-- ⁵ to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off. ⁶ And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant-- ⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:3-7).

Introduction to this Week’s Topic

The Greek word *koinonia* is the common term for English words like “fellowship” or “partnership.” The first of these is probably a bit too “light” since we often speak of “fellowship suppers” and “sweet fellowship” within the context of Christians (or others) just getting together for almost any form of interaction. However, when the term appears in the New Testament texts, the meaning extends deeper to include the more intense commitments exchanged between persons who take seriously the formation of a community where Jesus is present through the lives of his followers. Such a community is on mission to the world, the sign of God’s kingdom arriving, and made concrete in local expressions found everywhere throughout the world in neighborhoods “right down to the block.”

Local churches are special instances of the Church universal, that wonderfully mysterious “body of Christ” which witnesses to his presence in the world. Diverse in language, ethnicity, geography, and time, local congregations endeavor to express in unique ways the presence of Jesus at this time and that place for these persons. They are the centers for grace and communicants for glory, the God-shaped vehicles to bring the reality of the Lord’s kingdom into people’s lives. Together, local churches worship, serve, proclaim, teach, and witness to the truth of the Gospel. Together, they connect persons who otherwise might well have almost nothing in common through a transforming Spirit who takes up residence in them and among them. But to connect is not left to chance, flowing instead from intentional practices which make possible “a unity of Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Our study this week examines several texts which reveal the depth of Christian *partnership* through principles and examples that span the 2,000 year history of that strangely wonderful community called the Church.

Scripture Readings:

(See each section below, with the relevant texts printed out)

Powerful Partnership in the Gospel (Philippians 1:1-11)

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: ² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. ⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and praise of God (Philippians 1:1-11).

A few brief comments are in order concerning the destination and audience of the letter called *Philippians*. It was sent to the Philippians living in the city of Philippi. The father of Alexander the Great, Philip of Macedon, in 358 B.C.E., founded the city of Philippi. But it was left to the Romans to establish it under Roman law, shaped by Roman ideals. When the Romans beat the Persians in 168 B.C.E., they made the city of some importance, connecting Rome with the East along the *Via* ("road of") *Egnatia*. Only eight miles from the Mediterranean, the land was fertile and the gold mines rich. This city was the site of the battle which eventually set Octavian on the road to becoming Emperor Augustus, a fact assured by his defeat of Marc Antony in 31 B.C.E. at Actium. Augustus made Philippi a military outpost and a colony with the status of a Roman territory, a unique honor for a provincial city. Residents paid no poll or land taxes, and they could engage in real estate transactions, and have rights at court. In addition Augustus promoted the city to the status of a senatorial province in 27 B.C.E., and later, Tiberius made it into an imperial province (15 C.E.), though the senate reversed that in 44 C.E. *The idea of Roman citizenship was prominent in Philippi and a source of special pride to its residents.*

Philippi was, by all intents, a little Rome, filled with Romans, some Greeks, and not many Jews. From Acts 16 we learn by implication that Paul found no synagogue in Philippi when he arrived there. On the other hand, women seemed to be prominent, as the Acts 16 passage reveals (more on this later in these *Notes*) in the case of Lydia a seller of purple, no small occupation. This was a Gentile city populated with Greeks and Romans, with the power resting in the hands of the Romans. The various names appearing in the letter of Philippians suggest Greek backgrounds.

It was on his second missionary journey that Paul, in company with Silas, left the borders of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) and crossed over into Greece, led by the vision of the so-called "man from Macedonia", the province where Philippi was located (Acts 16:6-10) within the boundaries of Europe. Acts 15:39-18:22 records Paul's arrival in Philippi, an event that happened close to 50 C.E. gions.

Paul would return to Philippi as Acts 20:1-6, 2 Corinthians 2:13 and 7:5 indicate. Then, sometime after his initial visit to Philippi, Paul was placed in chains, and it was during this detainment that he wrote the Philippian letter. Philippians 4:10-20 seems to support a considerable period of time. But where was he detained? And was this detainment actual imprisonment? Scholars differ in their conclusions, with options ranging from Ephesus, to Caesarea, to Rome. Nothing in Philippians 1 states that Paul was in prison, only that he was in "chains", something expected in the case of "house arrest", his actual condition in Rome, according to Acts 28. From Philippians 4:21-22 we gather that other Christians are "with" him, and certainly the reference to "Caesar's household" points to the sort of imperial slaves who might have been associated with Paul in Rome. Such references would have gotten the attention of the Philippians who held their Roman status in great honor, and would certainly been familiar with the kind of language Paul used to describe his "legal surroundings". If Rome is the place of writing, then that likely puts the date at 62 C.E., following the general chronology of *Acts*. Following his release from his Roman detention, he again visited the city of Philippi as attested by 1 Timothy 1:3.

Throughout his letter, Paul communicates his love and thankfulness for the *connected partnership* of the Christ community at Philippi. At the same time, he urges them to embrace the virtues of unity, holiness and joy. His warmth is felt in each of the several sections, leading some scholars to theorize that Philippi was his favorite congregation (if apostles are allowed to play favorites!). In the Philippians he found a deep sensitivity to material needs (4:15-18, compare with 2 Corinthians 8:11). Unlike his letters to Galatia or Corinth, Paul's letter to the Philippians contains no deep-seated theological or practical crisis. And while the two "church ladies" (4:1-3) seemed to undermine the unity of the church, none of that muted Paul's affection, his gratitude for their gifts, his instruction for their continuing growth, his warnings about outside false teachers, and his transparency about his own circumstances of being "in chains". Honestly, he discloses news of his imprisonment and the progress of the gospel under his leadership. He wants them to receive Timothy as his personal emissary, and to also receive back their emissary to him, the man Epaphroditus.

Central to Paul's message in *Philippians* is the person of Christ, as contained in what is likely the key passage within the letter: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (1:21). Coupled with it is the way the person of Christ became embodied in Paul's own life when he writes: "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (4:12). And having made these points quite clear, Paul supports his arguments with the supreme example of Jesus as expressed in the famous "Christ-hymn" found in *Philippians* 2:5-11, presenting that example for the *Philippians* to follow for themselves. Paul operates, not from the circumference of the Christ-event, but from its very center when he pens these words: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (3:10). Refusing to become complacent about his own "training in Christ", he assures his audience, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on..." (3:12).

The Prescript (1:1-2)

Letter writing in Paul's day normally began with the sender identifying himself at the beginning. In this case, Paul and Timothy appear together as they do in 1 and 2 *Thessalonians*, and *Philemon*. Still, Paul actually wrote the letter but intends to send it with Timothy (2:19). What is more significant is the co-designation "slaves", translating the Greek word *doulos*, and binding both men to "Christ Jesus" as their true Lord and Master.

Now Paul identifies his recipients as "saints" (Greek: *hagioi*), a common designation of Paul's for people called by God and given status under the new covenant. The root meaning is "holy ones", but not because of canonization after death. Instead, these are persons set apart by God and dedicated to His purposes (see *Exodus* 19:5-6, *Leviticus* 11:45 and *Ephesians* 4:1; 5:3). Paul locates them "in Christ Jesus" and "in Philippi", showing their dual citizenship. Answering the question "where are you?" required two equally valid forms of residency!

By the time Paul wrote this letter, some ten years since his first visit to Philippi, the structure of church life had taken form, and Paul here identifies two kinds of leaders: *episkopoi* and *diakonoi*, both words in the plural form. We can't be sure how formalized church structures had become at this early date, but Paul would elsewhere make reference to leadership structures in 1 *Timothy* 3 and *Titus* 1, along with the qualifications of these positions. "Elder" and "Deacon" would appear in his letters, and he would offer advice on what sorts of people they should be. High on the list of qualifications was "teaching" (1 *Timothy* 3:2, 5:17, and *Titus* 1:9), something also confirmed in *Acts* 20:28-31. But we also know that non-teaching leadership existed in the Pauline churches, charged with general oversight and care for the needs of the congregations. "Deacons" are, by all accounts, "servants" who perform "service" for the needs of the community where they live. What we learn from Paul's use of these terms is his view that all leadership should be "servant-like", even when charged with the oversight of the churches. In his opening greeting, Paul goes to great pains to unite these different persons together, using words to that effect. Leadership was, in the Pauline communities, based on the model of the "servant", as Paul himself illustrates in this passage.

Ordinarily, letters would begin with words indicating "hello". But Paul modifies the traditional form to accommodate his Christian beliefs. He modifies the normal word *chairein* (=greetings) and uses *charis* (=grace) instead, reflecting his deep belief in the embracing "grace of God" recently visited on the world in the person of Jesus Christ. He also honors the Jewish greeting, part of his own heritage, *shalom* (Hebrew=peace). Much is made of "grace and peace" in Paul's letters, and they form a sort of "blessing" over the communities receiving his letters (see *Romans* 1:7, 1 *Corinthians* 1:3, 2 *Corinthians* 1:2, *Galatians* 1:3, *Colossians* 1:2, 1 *Thessalonians* 1:1, 2 *Thessalonians* 1:2, *Philemon* 3).

Exordium and Thanksgiving Prayer (1:3-11)

The *exordium* was the ordinary rhetorical form to *introduce* the material of a public speech. When speeches were wrapped in a letter envelope, so to speak, the *exordium* became the *salutation* or greeting. It appears at the beginning to make the listeners favorable to the message which followed. If the subject matter was sensitive or

controversial, the writer would "insinuate" the issues in this part of the letter. But in the case of Philippi, Paul's warm relationship allows him to directly approach his topics based on the goodwill of the community. The *exordium* was a place to lay out the groundwork for the whole letter, planting the ideas he would later develop in throughout the letter. Scholars point out that the purpose of this part of the letter is to gain the attention, reception, and goodwill of the audience. That is aptly done by Paul who plants the seeds he eventually cultivates in the letter. Consider a few cases of this:

1. "joy" (1:4)
2. "fellowship" (from the Greek *koinonia*) (1:5, 7)
3. "the gospel" (1:5, 7)
4. "conviction" (1:6)
5. "think intently" (1:7)
6. "affection and love" (1:8-9)
7. "being in Christ" (1:1, 13)
8. "day of Christ" (1:6, 10)
9. "the gift from Philippi" (1:3, 5)
10. Frequent use of "all" and "any" (1:2,4,7-8)

Paul treated opening prayers in his letters as tone-setters, and ways to introduce his heart-felt concerns for the recipients. Philippians is no exception. Thanksgiving ranks high in Paul's consideration of the Philippians, and included within it are such experiences as "joy" (Greek: *chara*) and "fellowship" (*koinonina*). This last term literally means "to share something in common with another" and is connected with the word for "gospel" (*euaggelion*). Paul extends this fellowship beyond any single event to include his whole relationship with the Philippians: "from the first day until now". No doubt Paul has in mind the generosity expressed by this Christian community throughout his relationship with them. That is why *koinonia* is an appropriate word because it best expresses the financial sharing and generosity of the Philippians (see 2 Corinthians 9:13, Romans 15:26, 2 Corinthians 8:3-4; Philemon 6, and Hebrews 13:16; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 2 Corinthians 11:9).

The idea of *koinonia* ("fellowship, partnership"), so notable in the life of the Philippian community, strengthens Paul's confidence that what has happened among the Philippians is the genuine article, the "real deal". When Paul includes the phrase "until now" (1:5), he stresses the consistency of the Philippians' *partnership* with him. All of that becomes evidence for Paul's "confidence" (Greek phrase: *pepoithos auto touto*, a settled certainty in Paul's mind arrived at through repeated confirmations) that the good work begun in the Philippians' lives is destined to reach completion at the coming of Christ. The intervening process is commonly called "sanctification", punctuated with the "beginning of a good work" (1:6). For Paul, the Christian life is a process punctuated by critical moments. In his experience with the Philippians, Paul has a deep "confidence", expressed in the perfect tense, that what God begins, he completes. And the lives of the Philippian believers give every evidence that this is true for them. What God begins, he finishes, grounded in the willing acceptance of his work in our lives.

What sort of connection with the Philippians does Paul describe in 1:7-8? Plainly it is "heart-felt" and affectionate. Nothing interferes with it, not even Paul's "chains", the ever-present reminder of his Roman detention awaiting trial. Court language appears in this passage; words like "defending" and "confirming" derived from *apologia*, something occurring before a judge and Paul's accusers prior to his trial. This phase of the trial, known as the *cognitio*, a kind of discovery process where facts were agreed on and the terms of judgment were decided. In spite of his life-altering involvement with the Roman judicial system in Rome, Paul has room in his heart for the Philippians. And he tells us why: "all of you share in God's grace with me". It is at this point that Paul uses the strongest language, approaching an oath, to explain the depth of his feeling: "God can testify" (compare, "by God, I say"). Paul uses the Greek word *splancha* to describe the depth of his feeling. This term refers to heart, liver, and lungs, "noble organs", in Paul's time, symbolizing such emotion.

Turning from his act of thanksgiving, Paul introduces his next section with the words "And this is my prayer..." Several parallels exist between 1:9 and Colossians 1:9-11, including the act of prayer, growth in knowledge, spiritual insight, fruitfulness, and the *doxa*, "glory", of God. When Paul petitions God for growth in the Philippians' "love" (Greek: *agape*), he stresses the ideas of "knowledge" (*epignosis*) and "insight" (*aisthesis*). He wants them to have discernment in the way they express their love, and perhaps reveals a tendency on their part to be naïve in their relationships with others. Love with discernment, Paul reminds them, is the better way.

He uses the word *dokimazo* in 1:10 to express this discernment. Its connotation is "to test with scrutiny". Perhaps the Philippians had a "soft spot" in their hearts, but lacked the ability to apply it in practical ways, leaving themselves open to being duped or taken in by people who were simply "on the take". We know the Philippians were generous, but Paul may be asking them to develop wisdom in the application of their generosity. As Paul will later reveal, enemies lurked in the shadows of the Philippians' world, and he did not want them to be injured by them. Is this an early case of "tough love"?

Two words describe character traits Paul seeks in the Philippians' lives: "pure and blameless" (Greek: *eilikrineis kai aposkopoi*). The first of these terms derives from "sunlight" along with "to judge", yielding the meaning "to examine in the light of the sun". Such an evaluation leads to a life that is "pure, unsullied, sincere", the common meanings of this word. By mentioning "the day of Christ", Paul reminds his audience that the final examination takes place when Christ returns, and so they ought to live their lives "in light of" that coming event. Elsewhere in 2 Corinthians 5:10, the apostle tells of the "judgment seat of Christ", from the Greek *bema*. To the Graeco-Roman world this meant the place where rewards were given the competitors in the Olympic games. In much the same way, the Philippians will one day give account for their lives which Paul hopes will be "pure and blameless".

However, before the final day of judgment, there are other evidences of God's approval in the lives of the Philippians, namely, that they are "filled with the fruit of righteousness" (Greek: *pepleromenoi karpon dikaiosunes ton dia Iesou Christou*). An "orchard" metaphor, this expression imagines trees loaded with fruit and ready for harvest. Paul often uses the word "righteousness" to describe the Christian's standing in God's courtroom: forgiven and counted among the people of God, a use sometimes called its "forensic (or legal)" meaning. In the present passage, the emphasis shifts to *actual deeds of goodness* which are the "fruit" of having a relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul makes clear that these deeds do not come from the Philippians' self-effort, since they are not capable, on their own, of producing such righteousness. Instead, such works are a "harvest" of a divinely appointed process for spiritual growth, and, as such, the work of God. That is why in *Galatians* Paul calls them "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22). In the larger Hebrew context, Paul would have had in mind such texts as Proverbs 11:30 and Amos 6:12 which use the same expression, stressing that human beings are incapable of producing such fruit on their own.

So as not to glorify the Philippians rather than Jesus Christ, Paul adds that this fruit-bearing process brings "glory and praise" to God. His use of the preposition *eis* before these two words (*doxan kai epainon*) shows that the "goal" or "purpose" for this fruitfulness is to magnify and throw attention on the person of God, and not on either Paul's own efforts or those of the Philippians. *One of the disciplines of the Christian life is the glorifying of God and not ourselves.*

To summarize Paul's use of the *exordium*, the rhetorical beginning of his letter, we note the main ideas he includes:

1. The Philippians are generous and have enhanced Paul's ministry.
2. God is evidently at work in the Philippians' lives, preparing them for Christ's return.
3. A discerning heart aimed at pleasing God and uniting the community guides the Philippians.
4. Sincere love binds Paul to the Philippians in *partnership* and they to him, even when they are suffering.
5. Though he is "in chains", Paul remains committed to defend the Gospel.

Some scholars have noted that Paul favors the word *proneo* ("to think") when describing the *mental attitude* of the Philippians, using it some ten times throughout the letter. Their "general frame of mind" and "overall attitude" matter to Paul, and he consistently reminds them to "have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (2:5), words written just prior to the famous "Christ-hymn" of 2:6-11. As is often the case, the preposition "in" can be translated "among" when applied to groups of persons, and so this attitude ought to be *among* ourselves as partners together in the local church.

Forming Powerful Partnerships (Acts 16:6-40)

The Macedonian Call (16:6-12)

⁶ And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. ¹¹ So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days.

Phrygia was a large ancient country of Central Asia Minor, very mountainous and with table-lands reaching 4,000 ft. in height. Its name is derived from *Phryges*, a tribe from Thrace, which in early times invaded the country and drove out or absorbed the earlier Asiatic inhabitants, among whom were the Hittites. Thus, the Phrygians borrowed much of oriental civilization, especially of art and mythology which they transferred to Europe. To define the boundaries of Phrygia would be exceedingly difficult, for as in the case of other Asia Minor countries, they were always vague and they shifted with nearly every age. It seems that at one period the country may have extended to the Hellespont, even including Troy, but later the Phrygians were driven toward the interior. In Roman times, however, when Paul journeyed there, the country was divided into two parts, one of which was known as *Galatian Phrygia*, and the other as *Asian Phrygia*, because it was a part of the Roman province of Asia, but the line between them was never sharply drawn. The Asian Phrygia was the larger of the two divisions, including the greater part of the older country; Galatian Phrygia was small, extending along the Pisidian Mountains, but among its important cities were Antioch, Iconium and Apollonia.

In effect, Paul revisited the towns and cities of his first missionary journey. However, a remarkable constraint of the Holy Spirit keeps him from pressing westward into Asia. Turning northward, his team seeks entry into Mysia, but is similarly held back from mission in that area. The following map offers an orientation to these various routes:



Mysia was an ancient district of northwestern Asia Minor containing the Bronze-Age city of Troy.² In the 6th century BC Mysia was subject to the Lydian empire of Croesus, and then became subject to Persia, then to Alexander the Great, and then to the Seleucids. It became part of the kingdom of Pergamum 190 BC and was included, with the rest of Pergamum, in the Roman province of Asia 133 BC. In ancient times, it was inhabited by the Mysi. Generally speaking, the northern portion was known as *Mysia Minor* or *Hellespontica* and the

² William Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, pp. 196ff.

southern as *Mysia Major* or *Pergamene*. The chief physical features of Mysia are the two mountain-chains, Olympus (7600 ft.) in the north and Temnus in the south. The whole sea-coast was studded with Greek towns, several of which were places of considerable importance including Assus and Adramyttium.

While it is true that Paul is "kept" from preaching in these regions, he does need to travel through them, guided by the Holy Spirit to yet another mission. Ordinarily, as Ramsay points out, Luke doesn't mention those places where Paul didn't preach — seemingly to "make haste" to the next destination. But in this case, the area Paul "neglects" is of such importance, that a word of explanation is required. The Greek of this passage is concise: Paul travels through but does not enter, *parelthontes*. Reading ahead, we learn that Paul is headed for Troas, and he cannot access it without first passing through Mysia. When Luke says they "passed by," he means that Paul and his companions did not stop along the way to preach. This journey required following the River Rhyndacos, skirting the neighboring "great lakes," and passing close to Artemaia which was famous for its hot springs. Following this route, Paul traveled across Asia from "the extreme southeast to the extreme northwest," yet prevented from preaching anywhere within it.

Similarly, the approach to Bithynia is blocked: Luke tells us "but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to." The similar phrase "Spirit of Jesus Christ" also appears in Philippians 1:19 and is associated with the "help" God extends to Paul for his "deliverance" from prison. The idea is that Jesus is the "director" of Paul's mission and that the Holy Spirit is the emissary of Jesus in the world, communicating instructions to his followers. Bithynia lies to the northwest, an ancient region with its north border along the Black Sea. Its most famous town, known to later Christians, is Nicea — scene of the first world-wide (ecumenical) church council. Marked by mountains and forests, it still has fertile valleys and coastal districts. Its important mountain range is the (so-called) "Mysian" Olympus (7600 ft., 2300 m), rising above Bursa and is visible as far away as Istanbul, a distance of some 70 miles. Snow covers its summits for the greater part of the year. So forested is its western region that it has earned the nickname "The Ocean of Trees."

But it is into an "ocean of human lives" that Paul launches his craft instead. Tempting though it might have been to venture into the grandeur of this region — with its roads and strategic position between the frontiers of the Danube in the north and the Euphrates in the southeast — a more wonderful frontier lay beyond, not in *Asia* but in *Europe*. To this end, the Spirit led Paul and his companions to the port city of Troas, from which the only reasonable destination would be colonies along the coast of Greece. From Troas he might travel to Neapolis, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth. Troas belonged to the Roman communications grid, allowing for commerce and trade through the region. A careful reading of Paul's letters (2 Corinthians 2:12-13; 2 Timothy 4:13) — in conjunction with Luke's later narrative in Acts 20:7-12 — reveals the appearance of a Christian church at Troas, perhaps part of Paul's presence there.³ In the ancient world, Troas was called "Alexandria of the Troad." We learn from Strabo (Greek historian, 64 B.C.E. – 24 C.E.) that Troas became a Roman colony during the time of Caesar Augustus and renamed "Alexandria Augusta Troas," or simply "Troas."

Once more, a vision brings clarity to Paul's mission. During the night, as Luke narrates his story, Paul sees "a man of Macedonia, standing and begging him" to come to Macedonia and "help us" (16:9). Commentators, preachers and poets have variously referred to this incident as "The Macedonian Call" or "The Vision of the Man from Macedonia." What does God want? No doubt the Holy Spirit has a new direction for Paul's ministry, one which does not follow the same strategy as before. The door has been shut in northwest Asia so that it might be opened in Greece. What will this mean for Paul? His roots were in Asia since he was a resident of Tarsus in Cilicia. While it was true that his educational experiences blended Hellenistic learning with rabbinic instruction, Paul had yet to confront the reality of European culture. The apostle would leave the familiar confines of Asia and embark on a Spirit-led venture which would stretch his vocation and expand his

³ Witherington, p. 479.

missionary efforts. Could the Gospel make progress in Greece, home to the great philosophers and heart of Hellenization?

The mysterious "man from Macedonia" who appeared in Paul's vision is described as "standing" and "begging (NIV)." The underlying Greek says: "A certain man of Macedonia had been standing and was urging him and was saying..." Grammatically, Luke uses the imperfect tense indicative with three different participles, the first in the perfect tense and the last two in the present. The combination of indicative and participle is known as a *periphrastic*. In this case, Paul sees a Macedonian man who *had already been standing* — perhaps in the posture of *anticipation, waiting* for someone to arrive. Once Paul enters the vision the man *repeatedly urges* him. The verb here is *parakaleō*, a familiar expression in the New Testament and the root of a word applied to the Holy Spirit: the *Paraklete*. Words like "exhort, urge, beg, beseech, counsel, ask earnestly, appeal, plead" frequently translate the term into English. At minimum, the man comes to Paul with urgency, making his appeal.

In his appeal, the man exhorts Paul with the word "help," a translation of the Greek verb *boētheō*. Classical Greek writings use it to mean "come to the aid, assist, aid, rescue." Certain forms of the root word describe "hastening to a battle shout or to a battle;" having the role of an auxiliary. If this military connotation is implied in 16:9, then we are led to see Paul as opening a new front in the battle for God's kingdom in Europe. By implication, there are already God-fearers and perhaps even some Christ followers in Macedonia, but they are in desperate need of Paul's help as an auxiliary to shore up the lines and make the advance.

The reign of Caesar Augustus began a long period of peace, prosperity and wealth for Macedonia, although its importance in the economic standing of the Roman world diminished when compared to its neighbor, Asia Minor. The economy was greatly stimulated by the construction of the highway *Via Egnatia*, the installation of Roman merchants in the cities, and the founding of Roman colonies. The Roman government brought, along with its roads and administrative system, an economic boom, which benefited both the Roman ruling class and the lower classes. With vast arable and rich pastures, the great ruling families amassed huge fortunes in the society based on slave labor. The improvement of the living conditions of the productive classes brought about an increase in the number artisans and craftspeople to the region. Stone-masons, miners, and blacksmiths were employed in every kind of commercial activity and craft. The Greeks were also tutors, educators and doctors throughout the Roman world. The export economy was based essentially on agriculture and livestock, while iron, copper, and gold along with such products as timber, resin, pitch, hemp, flax and fish were exported. Another source of wealth was the country's ports, in particular: Dion, Pella, Thessalonica, and Cassandria. Other places of importance included Philippi, Berea, and Edonis.

Paul and his companions did not delay their departure. "At once" (*eutheōs*) they laid plans because — as Luke reads Paul's thoughts — "God had called us to preach the Gospel to them" (16:10b). Some Greek manuscripts read "the Lord" (*kurios*) in place of "God" (*theos*), perhaps capturing the same idea as "the Spirit of Jesus" in 16:7) who forbade Paul from conducting a mission in northwestern Asia — "Lord" referring specifically to "the Lord Jesus."

A sudden change in personal pronouns takes place in 16:10. Until now, when Luke writes about the activities of Paul in his narratives, he uses the expected "they" — the third person plural pronoun. Without explanation, he abruptly changes the perspective of telling the story and begins mixing "they" and "we" or "they" and "us," until all the references collapse into a single "we/us" form. Scholars have concluded — based on this pronoun change — that the writer of *Acts* joined Paul's entourage at Troas. As Ramsay observed:

The first person, when used in the narrative of [chapters] XVI, XX, XXI, XXVII, XXVIII, marks the companionship of Luke and Paul; and, when we carry out this principle of interpretation consistently and minutely, it will prove an instructive guide. This is the nearest approach to personal reference that Luke permits himself; and he makes it subservient to his historical purpose by using it as a criterion of personal witness.

Luke, therefore, entered into the drama of the *Acts* at Troas.⁴

Furthermore, we might well discover a clue to the identity of "the man from Macedonia" by this sudden change of personal pronouns. Ramsay concludes that the grammar of 16:9-10 suggests that Paul recognized the man in the vision, and that this man was Luke who himself was a Macedonian.

Concerning Luke, a bare three references to his name appear in the New Testament, and none of them in *Acts* itself (see Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 1:24). From these we learn:

1. He became a dear friend of Paul, a *powerful partnership* therefore formed.
2. He was a physician (an *iatros*).
3. He was his last companion at the end of Paul's life.

Material outside of the New Testament reveals:⁵

1. "Luke, a native of Antioch, by profession a physician. He had become a disciple of the apostle Paul and later followed Paul until his [Paul's] martyrdom. Having served the Lord continuously, unmarried and without children, filled with the Holy Spirit he died at the age of 84 years." [*Anti-Marcionite Prologue to the Gospel of Luke*].
2. Epiphanius states that Luke was one of the Seventy (*Panarion* 51.11)
3. John Chrysostom indicates at one point that the "brother" Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians 8:18 is either Luke or Barnabas.
4. J. Wenham asserts that Luke was "one of the Seventy, the Emmaus disciple, Lucius of Cyrene and Paul's kinsman." Not all scholars are as confident of all of these attributes as Wenham is, not least because Luke's own statement at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke (1:1-4) freely admits that he was not an eyewitness to the events of the Gospel.
5. If we accept that Luke was in fact the author of the Gospel bearing his name and also the *Acts*, certain details of his personal life can be reasonably assumed. While he does exclude himself from those who were eyewitnesses to Jesus' ministry, he repeatedly uses the word "we" in describing the Pauline missions (starting at 16:10), indicating that he was personally there at those times.
6. There is similar evidence that Luke resided in Troas, specifically in *Acts* where he writes in the third person about Paul and his travels until arriving at Troas, where Luke switches to the first person plural. The "we" section of Acts continues until the group leaves Philippi, when his writing resumes the third person. This change happens again when the group returns to Philippi. There are three "we sections" in *Acts*, all following this rule.
7. The composition of the writings, as well as the vocabulary used, indicate that the writer was an educated man.
8. The quote in *Colossians* differentiating between Luke and other colleagues "of the circumcision" suggests that Luke was a Gentile, making him the only NT writer who was not Jewish.
9. Luke died at age 84 in Boeotia, according to a "fairly early and widespread tradition."

Luke's penchant for accurate seafaring language comes to the fore in 16:11ff where the travel log traces the Pauline journey:

1. **Samothrace.** This is an island in the northern Aegean Sea whose main claim to fame is the so-called "Sanctuary of the Great Gods," a temple complex used for celebrating the "Eleusinian Mysteries" whose rites, ceremonies, and beliefs were kept secret, as initiations believed to unite the worshipper with the gods

⁴ Ramsay, *Paul*, pp.201-202.

⁵ In the summary which follows, the *Notes* depend on information from: Helmut Koester. *Ancient Christian Gospels*, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1999; J. Wenham, "The Identification of Luke", *Evangelical Quarterly* 63 (1991), 3-44; Horatio Balch Hackett, *A Commentary on the Original Text of the Acts of the Apostles*, Gould and Lincoln; Sheldon, Blakeman & Co., 1858; Michael Walsh, ed. *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, HarperCollins Publishers: New York, 1991; George Milligan, *The New Testament Documents: Their Origin and Early History*, Macmillan and Co. limited, 1913.

and included promises of divine power and rewards in the afterlife.⁶ Paul spent no time here, leaving the next day for...

2. **Neapolis.** This is the modern city of "Kavala," the second largest metropolis in northern Greece and the main seaport in eastern Macedonia where Paul and his companions disembarked. Historically, it was famous for being the base for Brutus and Cassius in 42 BC, before their defeat at the Battle of Philippi. (Appian, *B.C.* iv. 106; Dion Cass. xlvii. 35.), resulting in its renaming to "Neapolis," meaning "New City." An important land route called the Egnatian Way passed through Neapolis, connecting it with cities both to the east and west. The primary purpose of the city was to act as a port for the nearby military garrison at Philippi, accessible only by a steep climb from the port over the western spur of Mt. Simvolos, and no doubt a rugged journey for Paul and his associates!⁷

3. **Philippi.**

"...the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days." With these words, Luke announces the arrival of Paul in the city of Philippi. What do we know about this new destination?

Vincent summarizes the key facts about Philippi:

The colony was used for three different purposes in the course of Roman history: as a fortified outpost in a conquered country; as a means of providing for the poor of Rome; and as a settlement for veterans who had served their time. It is with the third class, established by Augustus, that we have to do here. The Romans divided mankind into citizens and strangers. An inhabitant of Italy was a citizen; an inhabitant of any other part of the empire was a *peregrinus*, or stranger. The colonial policy abolished this distinction so far as privileges were concerned. The idea of a colony was, that it was another Rome transferred to the soil of another country. In his establishment of colonies, Augustus, in some instances, expelled the existing inhabitants and founded entirely new towns with his colonists; in others, he merely added his settlers to the existing population of the town then receiving the rank and title of a colony. In some instances a place received these without receiving any new citizens at all. Both classes of citizens were in possession of the same privileges, the principal of which were, exemption from scourging, freedom from arrest, except in extreme cases, and, in all cases, the right of appeal from the magistrate to the emperor. The names of the colonists were still enrolled in one of the Roman tribes. The traveler heard the Latin language and was amenable to the Roman law. The coinage of the city had Latin inscriptions. The affairs of the colony were regulated by their own magistrates named *Duumviri*, who took pride in calling themselves by the Roman title of praetors..."⁸

Partnership for Mission: Philippi (16:13-40)

A brief summary of his visit to Philippi is in order:

1. He meets a group of women, including Lydia, a seller of purple dye from Thyatira in Asia.
2. A slave girl possessed by an evil spirit encounters him, and Paul exorcises the spirit, stirring up the anger of her owners who profited from her condition.
3. Consequently the owners bring Paul and Silas before the magistrate, have them flogged and imprisoned.
4. During their imprisonment an earthquake rocks the jail, leading the jailer to fear that prisoners had escaped. Paul and Silas assure him, and he utters the famous words "What must I do to be saved?", followed by the famous reply "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).
5. At a hearing the next day, it is discovered that Paul and Silas are *Roman citizens*, held without proper processing, and they are subsequently released, departing for new regions.

We now examine the details of his visit.

Lydia (16:13-15)

¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to

⁶ K. Lehman, *Samothece, A Guide to the Excavations and the Museum*, Thessalonika, 1998.

⁷ William Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography*, 1856.

⁸ Marvin Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. I, pp. 529-530.

what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

There seems to have been no synagogue *structure* in the city of Philippi based on Paul's attendance at the riverside in search of a place for prayer. According to Bruce, the "river" was likely the Gangites (or Angites) a tributary of the Strymon.⁹ Further evidence that no synagogue met in the city is finding only women gathered for a Sabbath service. Jewish law required at least ten *men* in order to form a proper synagogue. The "women" may have been Jewish, but married to Greek husbands.¹⁰ Among them was non-Jewish Lydia who is described as a "dealer in purple cloth" (Greek: *porphuropōlis*) from the city of Thyatira¹¹ and also a "God-fearer" (Greek: *sebomenē ton theon*). Her professional merchant status places her among the middle class of the Roman world, someone who had a successful business in Philippi. The fact that Luke addresses her by her personal name suggests that she was, in fact Greek, as well as of "some status."¹² Dealing in purple cloth¹³ also meant that she had close dealings with the Empire, since Rome had a monopoly on this industry. We should not be surprised to find "women of importance" in a place like Philippi. Hellenistic culture valued women in such roles.¹⁴ They could own provincial property and acquire wealth, and wives of government officials appear favorably on inscriptions. Given currency and social standing, women might figure significantly in religious roles as well. Lydia, moreover, valued the God of Israel, as the text reveals, belonging as she did to that special class of Gentile worshipper known as the "God-fearers." Lydia's conduct suggests she was not married, perhaps a widow. Other prominent women figure *later* in the Philippian church (Philippians 4:2f).

Her heart, "opened by the Lord," accepts the message Paul preaches, and her conversion follows. That she is the "head" of her household is clear from Luke's phrasing in 16:15, namely, that her conversion is followed by that of her "household" (Greek: *ho oikos autēs*), and that she freely takes the lead in inviting Paul and his companions to her home. Her humility appears, however, in the manner by which she addresses Paul: "If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house." That is, she refuses to impose her obvious status and economic success on these visitors, but submits to them as one who wishes to be considered a "believer in the Lord." Such propriety may also reveal her sensitivity to her *Jewish* guests who are, after all, entering the house of a Gentile. Perhaps she is not certain how they will react to her, a God-fearer, and one who might not fully practice kosher or other requirements of a full-fledged Jewish person. Unattached to a male (Jew or Gentile), she is also testing the social boundaries with a group of people known for their patriarchal social structures.¹⁵

The clause, "and she persuaded us," (*kai parebiasato hēmas*) contains a modicum of "force" or at least "insistence" on Lydia's part. This does not necessarily imply that Paul required such persuasion, only that Lydia might have imagined she needed to urge her guests in light of the cultural differences between them. Had she only known the results of the Jerusalem Council, she might have saved her arguments!

⁹ Bruce, p. 313.

¹⁰ Wright, *Acts*, p.63.

¹¹ According to Bruce, "Thyatira was founded by Seleucus Nicator early in the third century B.C. as a garrison city to defend his realm against Lysimachus. Its original settlers were Macedonians. It passed under Roman control in 190 B.C., and was included in the province of Asia after 133 B.C. Lydia may have become acquainted with the Jewish religion in Thyatira, where there was a Jewish colony. The church founded in Thyatira at some date subsequent to this was one of the seven addressed in the Apocalypse" (p. 314).

¹² Witherington, pp. 491-492.

¹³ In 1872 Professor Mertzides discovered in Philippi the following text in Greek inscribed on a piece of white marble: 'The city honored from among the purple-dyers, an outstanding citizen, Antiochus the son of Lykus, a native of Thyatira, as a benefactor.' The marble with this inscription, which has unfortunately disappeared, indicates that the purple-dyers of Thyatira may have worked in Philippi as a guild and that their profession was held in high esteem." (Otto F. A. Meinardus, *St. Paul in Greece*, pp. 13-14).

¹⁴ W.D. Thomas, "The Place of Women in the Church at Philippi," *Expository Times*, 83, 1971-72, pp. 117-20. Also, Tarn and Griffith, *Hellenistic Civilisation*, p. 98; A.J. Marshall, "Roman Women and the Provinces," *Ancient Society* 6, 1975, pp. 108-127.

¹⁵ A useful treatment of women in the present context appears in Valerie Abrahamsen's "Women at Philippi : the Pagan and Christian Evidence," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 3 no 2 Fall 1987, p. 17-30.

Persons of notable standing in the early church were both a boon and a bane. If, like Lydia, they made no big deal out of their achievements or social influence, their contacts within the wider culture were invaluable to the Christian community, especially to its formation in places like Philippi. She became, no doubt, the nucleus for the church which Paul would later describe in such glowing terms in his letter to the Philippians — a church known for its generosity to others less fortunate. We can only imagine the contribution Lydia would have made to such a congregation. On the other hand, if we read the letter of *James*, we meet the risks: that conscious efforts to seek out the well-to-do might undermine the even-handed ethics taught by Jesus and practiced by the Jerusalem church in its earliest days (see James 2 and 5). Similar challenges face the contemporary church within communities where several social strands worship side-by-side. Leaders in such churches are tempted to pay attention to those with means while ignoring others who "can't do anything monetarily for them." Thankfully, Lydia made little of her social status and humbly acknowledged that it was faith in the Lord which mattered above all else. For her the *influence* which mattered most was from God and not from her.

Slave Girl (16:16-21)

¹⁶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." ¹⁸ And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. ¹⁹ But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. ²⁰ And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. ²¹ They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice."

By contrast is the story which Luke next relates in which a "slave girl" is the pawn in her owners' hands for greedy gain. If Lydia represented a truly free Gentile woman of means who submitted herself to the Lord for salvation, then the slave girl represented the opposite situation. Rapacious male merchants found in her an attractive source of income because she had, in the words of Luke, "a spirit of divination." The underlying Greek reads: *echousan pneuma puthōna*, literally, "having a Pythian spirit." According to popular belief, persons called the *puthōnes* were inspired by Apollo, the Pythian god — that is one embodied in a *snake* (Python) at Delphi. In his writings, Plutarch referred to such persons as "ventriloquists" who spoke words but *not willingly*. Similar language appears in the Old Testament in conjunction with a certain "witch" from the town of Endor who had a "familiar spirit" (Hebrew: 'ōb) (see 1 Samuel 28:7ff). Jesus encountered such "spirits" in his public ministry, and Luke recorded similar incidents in his Gospel (Luke 4:33-35; 8:28-35).¹⁶

The young girl harasses Paul and his companions over the course of several days, and her *mantra* consistently followed the patterns we find in Jesus' encounter with evil spirits: "These men are servants of the Most High God who proclaim the way of salvation." Ironically, her words are true in every respect, but they aren't the sort of publicity a minister of the Gospel really wants or needs! Potentially, guilt by association might win out and the preaching of the Gospel could become confused with the presence of this young slave and her words.

1. "God most high" was a familiar designation for God in the language of both Jews and Gentiles (Greek: *theos hupistos*), as noted in several others passages (Mark 5:7; Numbers 24:16; Isaiah 14:14; Daniel 3:26; Acts 7:48). The common Hebrew expression is 'El 'Elyōn.¹⁷
2. "Way of Salvation" (Greek: *hodon sōtērias*). The idea *sōtēria*, "salvation," had meaning among Gentiles as well as Jews. The mystery religions promised salvation for its initiates through secret rituals. *Soteria* was the goddess or spirit (*daimon*) of safety, and of deliverance and preservation from harm. Her male counterparts were the *daimon Soter* and the god *Dionysos Soter*. The Romans named her *Salus* (Preservation). In the New Testament the Greek word appears 46 times in 45 verses, and in Luke's writings appears some ten times (Luke 1:69, 71, 77; 19:9; Acts 4:12; 7:25; 13:26, 47; 16:17; 27:34). A sharp

¹⁶ A more detailed treatment can be found in *Women and Worship at Philippi: Diana/Artemis and Other Cults in the Early Christian Era*, by Valerie A. Abrahamsen. Portland, 1995.

¹⁷ See the excellent summary in Paul R. Trebilco's "Paul and Silas — 'Servants of the Most High God,'" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 36 (1989), pp. 51-73.

contrast exists between the pagan way of salvation and the unique way offered in Jesus. What the slave girl exclaims blurs that distinction.

In describing Paul's reaction, Luke says he was "troubled," from the Greek word *diaponeomai* meaning "to be strongly irked or provoked at something or someone, to become angry." In classical usage the emphasis falls on the amount of labor or work required by something. Here the verb is in the passive voice and so the idea shifts to "worked up" by something or someone. That is, because of the girl's constant harangue, the amount of effort required by Paul to do his work of preaching the Gospel *increased*. It made things so much harder. Paul's reaction is not to the girl — who herself was the slave and victim of the evil spirit's powers— but to the evil itself, treating it as a *daimon* possessing her and needing rebuke. Invoking "the name of Jesus Christ," Paul commands the departure of the spirit. Immediately, Luke tells us, the spirit "left her." The successful appeal to "the name of Jesus Christ" is paramount to a public vindication of Jesus as King.

What follows is a fascinating study of economic power when it confronts the kingdom of God. Paul and Silas become targets of the legal process when the girl's owners realize the impact of her exorcism as loss of revenue. As property, she was no longer of value to them, and they prepare to formally accuse the missionaries with "loss of income." It is the *agora*, "the marketplace," where they bring Paul and Silas to appear before the "magistrates," some of the *archōn*. The central theme is loss of "gain," that is, *ergasia*. What stands out at this point in the story is the total lack of concern for the girl herself and complete preoccupation with the *use to which her owners put her*. She is a commodity, a pawn, a slave. Her value consists not in her dignity as a human being but in her exploitation. Ironically, her owners plan to use the law to prop up her exploitation. What sort of legal system allows such an inhuman ploy?

But the strategy grows worse, for racism gets injected into the legal accusation: "These men are Jews" and they stand in opposition to the customs of "us Romans." Since there is no organized Jewish community in Philippi, the owners target the ethnic attachments of Paul and his companions not the fact that they are preachers of the Jesus Gospel. The complaints has several parts:

1. "Throwing our city in an uproar." The Greek word describing this agitation is *ektarassō* which has a particularly strong subversive undertone, expressing itself as a riot or incitement against authority (see Acts 14:19; 17:5, 9, 13; Luke 23:5; 21:30). Since the primary duty of the local authorities — even in Roman colonies — is to maintain the *pax Romana*. The owners use inflammatory language calculated to get the attention of the political establishment. The mere mention of "riot" brings out the soldiers — even the retired ones!
2. "Advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice." The Greek word *ethos* identifies a wide-ranging set of mores, social practices, ethical principles or rules that are distinctively Roman. By framing their argument in this way, the owners are pitting Jews against Romans, accusing the Jews of engaging in public proclamations (*kataggellō*) of these *etha* which are strictly "unwelcome" within Roman society.¹⁸

Something new emerges in the story Luke is telling: in the absence of a Jewish community in Philippi, the Jewish preachers of the Christian Gospel face a fresh challenge. They are being targeted *as Jews* who are subverting the Roman social order when they preach the message of Jesus, not because it attacks the authorities of Rome, but because it challenges the merchandising of human life within the economic system. An unholy alliance between politics and the economy is ventured by the slave girl's owners, and such alliance receives special treatment elsewhere in the New Testament where persons who did not receive the "mark" of Empire are unable to "buy and sell" (see Revelation 13:17). Historically, this form of economic pressure took on a number of forms, including, but not limited to, refusal of membership in a trade guild if a person did not give worship to the Roman or Greek gods. In the present case, loss of revenue becomes the reason.

¹⁸ See Craig Steven De Vos, "Finding a Charge that Fits : The Accusation against Paul and Silas at Philippi (Acts 16.19-21)." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (June 1999): 51-63.

Arrest and Imprisonment (16:22-24)

²² The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴ Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

In the absence of a well established Jewish presence in the city, this Roman colony took great liberties in scourging the accused, acknowledging no special considerations under the law.¹⁹ The humiliating practice of ripping off their clothes and wantonly beating Paul and Silas showed what little regard the officials had for the Jews as a *protected class* within Philippian society. This public shame is followed by severe incarceration, complete with placement in the dreaded stocks and chains. Placement in the "inner prison," the *εσωτεραν φυλακῆν*, follows and underscores the concern which the magistrates had over the potentially seditious nature of these Jewish men. The word "safely" is from *ασφαλῶς* and means "securely," "for certain," "without a doubt." It was not for the safety of Paul and Silas but that of the city!

The word for stocks is *xulon* and refers to more than simply a piece of restraining hardware. This prison apparatus was an instrument of torture with more than two holes for the legs capable of being forced apart, causing pain (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, v.I.27; Herodotus, *Persian Wars*, 9.37). Garnsey's examination of the legal status of *peregrinoi* (that is, non-citizens) reveals acceptance, by the Romans, of "arrest, beating, and imprisonment," as seen in the case of Paul and Silas.²⁰

All of which reveals the evident fact that being a Christian meant an intrinsic involvement with the political process. The whole idea that one could be a nice Christian preacher and not get in trouble with the law is naïve beyond comprehension. It was utterly impossible to split apart religion and politics in first century Roman life. Following Jesus had deeply political and economic implications, and a person could get into trouble simply by preaching the Gospel — a Gospel which set human beings free and altered the social landscape.

Prison and the Jailer (16:25-34)

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

"God is enthroned on the praises of His people" (Psalm 22:3). Paul and Silas were not merely having a chorus sing, they were invoking the praises of God who was king over all. Theirs was a *powerful partnership of praise*. In their prayers and in their hymns they were appealing the supreme ruler of the world to hear their cries and come to their aid. They were calling for God to stand up from his throne and give the orders that their chains might fall off and they might be set free. One can only imagine what psalms they sang. Nor were the words restricted to themselves alone. Luke explicitly tells us that "the prisoners were listening to them," as

¹⁹ One treatment of Jewish people in Roman society is Miriam Pucci Ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights in the Roman World: The Greek and Roman Documents Quoted by Josephus Flavius*, Tübingen, 1998). She concludes that the Jews did have certain rights to follow their own laws and customs, but these were not exceptional; they can be paralleled in the rights and privileges granted to other local and native peoples. The peculiarities of the Jews were to some extent catered for, but only so far as all such local customs were tolerated by the Romans. Contrary to common assumption, nowhere is there evidence that the Jews were granted exemption from the emperor cult; however, the sacrifices for the emperor in the Jerusalem temple and the dedications common in the synagogues seem to have been accepted as a reasonable substitute for the common rites. What happened to Paul and Silas — on the face of it — may not have been unusual. Of course, a few verses later that will all change as Paul introduced new evidence about himself!

²⁰ *Social Status and Legal Privilege*, Oxford, 1970, p. 268.

expressed in the verb *epakroaomai*, the sort of listening which sees *its own interest* in what is being said. That is, the prisoners readily hear things which could in all likelihood have consequences *for them*.

The Psalms contained hopeful words for prisoners, as these few examples show:
At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous rules (Psalm 119:62).

Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD: ¹⁹ that he looked down from his holy height; from heaven the LORD looked at the earth, ²⁰ to hear the groans of *the prisoners*, to set free those who were doomed to die, ²¹ that they may declare in Zion the name of the LORD, and in Jerusalem his praise, ²² when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the LORD (Psalm 102:18-22).

5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, 6 who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; 7 who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. *The LORD sets the prisoners free*; 8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous (Psalm 146:5-8).

¹¹ As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will *set your prisoners free* from the waterless pit. ¹² Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double (Zechariah 9:11-12).

We are also reminded of Job 35:10 where God is described as the one who gives "songs in the night." There are also curious parallels to the time of this incident — midnight. In the narrative of the Exodus God's angel makes his "rounds" during the last plague "about midnight" (Exodus 11:4; 12:29). Samson, Israel's famous "judge" (literally, *shophēt*), makes his famous jailbreak "at midnight" (Judges 16:3).

The earthquake is a cosmic event, an unsettling midnight call from nature's depths, reminding those who feel it that *terra firma* is not so firm after all! Seismic activity was attributed to the gods or an indication that a god had come to visit (see Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, 0.782-83; 15.669-78; Lucian *Lover of Lies*, 22). Dunn points to popular stories of the day showing how "escape stories" often involved unusual earthquakes.²¹ The Bible itself associates earthquakes with God's judgments and the timing of events (1 Kings 19:11f; Isaiah 29:6; Ezek. 3:12f; 38:19; Amos 1:1; Zechariah 14:5; Matthew 24:7; 27:54; 28:2; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11; Acts 16:26; Revelation 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18). The resurrection of Jesus was accompanied by an earthquake in Matthew 28:2. One can't help seeing the resurrection theme in Paul and Silas' unshackling. There are strong similarities with Peter's release in Acts 12, and Luke probably intended a comparison by the reader between the experiences of Peter and Paul: what God did for one he also did for the other. This is part of a theme in which Peter and Paul are seen, not as competitors but as complements and *partners* in their respective missions.

Paul and Silas were not the only prisoners released from their bonds. Unlike the angel who selectively set Peter free in chapter 12, the earthquake acted generally, placing every captive in jail-break mode. This, of course, overwhelmed the jailer with death-filled fear. Rome's military did not look kindly on keepers of its prisons who allowed detainees to escape. Roman law required that jailers receive the same punishment as had been assigned to the escapee(s). In the case of multiple escapes (like this one), the prospect for the guard looked grim. And the jailer knew it, preparing to fall on his own sword and spare Rome the need to execute him.

Ignoring his plight, the self-less Paul turned his heart and voice toward the keeper of the prison with words spoken in a "loud voice" (Greek: *megalē phonē*). With calming assurance that no prisoners have escaped — a remarkable claim in itself — Paul appeals to the jailer not to commit suicide: he had a far greater kind of salvation in mind for his vulnerable Philippian *gaoler*! Stricken by the extremity of his situation, the jailer asks frantically: *kurioi, ti me dei poiein hina sōthō*, literally, "Lords [sirs], what is necessary that I be doing in order to be saved?" No doubt the close connection between the singing of Paul and Silas at midnight with what has just happened (the earthquake) causes the jailer to address his prisoners with respect — even awe. Under ordinary conditions, the word *kurioi* implies something akin to our "sirs," but could have more serious meaning, in the same way the Lystrans treated Paul and Barnabas as gods. Since everyone present in the jail had heard

²¹ Dunn, p. 222 where he cites L. T. Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 300.

Paul and Silas praising God at midnight, perhaps with the sort of Psalms we indicated above, the total effect was stunning when combined with the earthquake — an event often marking the displeasure of the gods.²²

What sort of "salvation" did the jailer expect? Had he gotten wind of the slave girl's mantra-cry, "way of salvation!" as applied to Paul and Silas (16:17)? In any case, the earthquake acted as nature's vindication — at least in his mind — of the two prisoners, and so the jailer looks to them for deliverance and help. The Greek idea of salvation (*sōtēria*) is essentially "deliverance," and the jailer may intend no more than mere safety in the face of the damage caused by the earthquake. Or, sensing the presence of divine agencies, he may have been asking for more than physical rescue.²³

Reading the situation with Spirit-led insight, Paul seizes the opportunity to proclaim the Good News. As Barclay expresses it,

He was quite willing to open the door of salvation to the gaoler who had shut the door of the prison on him. There was never a grudge in Paul's nature. He would preach to the very man who had fastened him in the stocks.²⁴

Speaking in Greek to his captor, Paul freely offers the salvation so desperately sought: *pisteuson epi ton kurion Iēsoun kai sōthēsē su kai hoi oikos sou*, "Believe [at last] on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved [at last] — you and your household" (16:31). This reply is full of *assurance* for a troubled man. Perhaps by using the word "Lord" (*kurios*) as he does here, Paul is replying to the address of the jailer, calling his captives "Lords" (*kurioi*). "Believe, not in us, but in Jesus," is the net effect of this wordplay.

To "believe", when used with the preposition *epi*, implies "putting trust in someone" not merely holding a few intellectual ideas about that person! Paul is not asking the jailer to adopt a certain theological stance, but rather he is calling on him to throw himself *on the mighty Lord, Jesus who is able to deliver him at last*. As we have noted in previous studies, ideas like "faith" and "believe" have a deeply personal connotation: they involve putting one's *full weight* on Jesus for support, *relying on him* for the desired outcome. While the preposition *epi* can mean "in," we would more likely find *en* if that were the case here. We prefer "on" since it underscore supreme dependency and reliance on the Lord Jesus to take command of the situation — and of the jailer's life.

Mentioning "your household" is not surprising since the ancient world recognized something known as "corporate identity" — the idea that whole groups of people could be represented by one person. Households consisted in more than birth families, but also involved stewards (managers), slaves and other domestics. We saw similar language in the case of Lydia (16:15) where "members of her household" translated the same idea. The Graeco-Roman world recognized "household inclusion in the religion of the head of the household."²⁵ Within the Jewish world-view, the father clearly represented his entire family, and through his own circumcision made possible participation in the covenant with Yahweh. Baptism could be shared by a wider audience, and was available to both men and women in ways that circumcision could not be.

Paul and Silas "spoke the word" to all those assembled in the jailer's house — which was presumably attached the prison. Rather than describe the faith of the jailer in terms of an immediate profession of faith or declaration that he had accepted the message, Luke chooses to write about what the jailer *did*:

1. "At that hour of the night." Emphasis falls on *when* all of this happened. There was no delay and the mere fact that it was night did not deter the jailer from doing what was in his heart.
2. "Took them...washed their wounds..." Recall that Paul and Silas had been publicly flogged and that the "stocks" were calculated to wound the prisoner with almost every movement. The injury caused by Roman justice at its worst now finds relief at the gentle hands of the jailer whose heart has been transformed by all that he has seen and heard. The language used for the care of the prisoners' wounds looks similar to Luke's

²² Witherington, p.498. See also Cicero, *De Divinatione* 1.18-36.

²³ Bruce, p. 320.

²⁴ William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Philadelphia, 1953, p. 137.

²⁵ Witherington, p. 498.

telling of the Good Samaritan parable in Luke 10:34 where the Samaritan "bandaged" the wounds of the man who "fell among thieves." In the present case, a Roman Gentile jailer cares for the wounds of a Christian Jewish prisoner. The parallel is striking, and gives evidence of the power of the Gospel to change human lives.

3. "Immediately...baptized." As noted above, household baptisms were consistent with the way that culture understood social groups. Infants and adults shared in the same covenant blessings under the new covenant. The grace of God is no less under the new covenant than it was under the old. If infant boys could be circumcised as a sign that God included them in the covenant community, would it not make perfect sense for God to extend His covenant grace through baptism to infants under the covenant of Jesus? This by no means precludes the need for that same infant, when reaching adulthood, to make a personal choice to receive the same Lord Jesus whose grace had covered him from birth.

Among the early Christians, *baptism and faith* went hand-in-hand. Faith expressed itself in this water ritual which symbolized the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism was not seen as an added "work" as if by baptism salvation came to someone. Faith-expressed-through-baptism was a regular occurrence: a profession of faith. Baptism functioned as a dramatic re-enactment of what happened to the believer because she was believing on Jesus Christ. Even as Christ died and rose, so also would the Christian.

4. "Set a meal before them." Table fellowship was a continuing sign that God's kingdom had dawned in the world through the coming of Jesus. The irony of the Gospel — and its wonder — appears once more in the story. Prior to this, the church had debated table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles and had, in theory, agreed that questions of kosher should not divide the diverse people of God. Just as Cornelius the Roman centurion (Acts 10-11) had extended hospitality to Peter the Jewish Christian, so in this case the Roman jailer places food before Paul and Silas who would have readily accepted it as a sign that God had come to that household! This was not a matter of kosher but of kingdom!
5. "He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God — he and his whole family." The arrival of the Holy Spirit into a people's lives is consistently marked by joy in Scripture. In Acts 13:52 the disciples are said to be "filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." In a crucial passage from Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (14:17). To the Thessalonian Christians, Paul affirms that the word of God was preached "in much affliction" but "with the joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 1:6). Recall how Paul told the Lystrans that God had filled their hearts "with joy" (14:17), even through His general revelation in nature. Joy was a distinctive mark of salvation.

A *partnership* was formed!

Release and Departure (16:35-40)

³⁵ But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." ³⁶ And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." ³⁷ But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." ³⁸ The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. ³⁹ So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

An abruptness enters the story in 16:35 when the Roman officials in Philippi order the sudden release of Paul and Silas, offering no explanation of the sudden reverse in judgment. F.F. Bruce cleverly labels 16:35-40 with the words "Paul and Silas asked to leave Philippi!"²⁶ Some later Greek manuscripts expand the text of 16:35 to include an official meeting where it had been decided that these recent startling events — especially the earthquake (!) — strongly implied that Paul and Silas should be let go. In the absence of this addition to the text, we may surmise that the official flogging had been deemed sufficient punishment for the two, having been "taught a lesson." The magistrates exercised something known as *coercitio* — coercion calculated to deter further infractions. The officers sent to the prison to communicate the release to Paul and Silas are called

²⁶ Bruce, p. 321.

hrabdouchous, "lectors," or more literally, "rod bearers," persons who carried the famous *fasces et secures*, bundles of rods with axes attached. Their arrival would appear intimidating, as they carried this dreadful symbol of their profession. This was Rome's way of telling the prisoners, "You'd better accept the deal, or else!"

"Go in peace" seems poor comfort to two men who had been so badly treated by an Empire which prided itself on having invented the world's most perfect form of justice! Paul's response has the force of saying, "Not so fast!" Spoken to the carriers of the *fasces et secures*, these words show true courage under the influence of the Holy Spirit. We might have been tempted to whisper in Paul's ear, "Take the deal and leave!" But for the first time, a fresh revelation is given to the readers: *Paul and Silas are Roman citizens*. What has been done to them, as Paul now points out, makes the case a matter of Roman law and not just a disturbance in the marketplace incited by a couple of Jewish troublemakers. "What, let us go without even a modicum of investigation? What kind of jail are you running here, anyway?" That's the gist of what Paul tells them. "Get rid of us quietly?" (16:37). Evidently, the magistrates wanted no further contact with Paul and Silas, but sent their "heavies" to handle the release.

"Let them come themselves and escort us out." What follows is a courteous but curt escort from the prison. You could probably have cut the air with a knife! The word "appease" appears in the text (from the Greek *parakaleō*). This word has already been used in *Acts* to mean a number of things, including "to urge, to appeal" which it likely does in the present context. Put simply, the magistrates want Paul and Silas to leave Philippi, but they don't want negative publicity in the process. We might say that the officials are "over a barrel" in wanting this to happen, since the question of Roman citizenship still lingers in the background. Paul doesn't press that fact beyond the present safe departure. Bruce thinks that "Paul's insistence on an official apology may have helped to protect the covert from persecution."²⁷ There's no question that the magistrates wanted to avoid a public airing of this case since it would have revealed details about the flogging of a Roman citizen *without a hearing*. As Ramsay notes, "The same Praetors who had ordered them to be beaten and imprisoned now begged them to go away from the city."²⁸

Paul's objection to his treatment falls under the Roman principle *res incognita* as translated in the Greek phrase, "without investigating our case." Roman citizenship could be ignored by authorities, as Sherwin-White explains.²⁹ However, colonies like Philippi were in a unique category, having been granted their special status by Rome. Mishandling such legal cases could land a magistrate in hot water and cost him his post. Julian law was clear: Roman citizens should not be beaten without trial (see Cicero, *Pro Rabirio* 12). On this occasion, Paul didn't press this issue of violated rights beyond a simple acknowledgement of the magistrates. However, later in Paul's ministry, he would undergo the same indignities under circumstances where he could press his claim to the fullest — before a Roman procurator — and appeal to Caesar himself (see Acts 25:11-12; 26:32). The stakes would then be higher and the opportunity for witness to the emperor himself extraordinary.

Upon their release, Paul and Silas *do not leave the city* but accept the hospitality of Lydia. A *powerful partnership* had been born! Thus the story circles around to where it began. Lydia was their first recorded convert, and she faithfully extends *koinonia*, fellowship — *partnership*, to her mentors. Paul would later reflect on his experiences in Philippi, using warm expressions of affection in doing so (see 1 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 11:25). Future detentions of Paul will find him filled with thanksgiving for the compassion and generosity of his Philippian "family" (Philippians 4:10ff). The gratitude of Paul and Silas does not leave Philippi when they do. When we begin our reading of Acts 17, the personal pronoun switches back to "they" and does not return to "we" until Acts 20:5. This seems to be evidence that Luke remained in Philippi after Paul and his companions left the city. If, as Ramsay claimed earlier, Luke was "the man from Macedonia," he may have been from Philippi and used this opportunity to remain in his hometown until needed at some later time.

²⁷ Bruce, p. 323.

²⁸ Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, p.224.

²⁹ A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Law and Roman Society*, Reprint, Grand Rapids, 1992, pp. 72-76.

The same does not apply to Silas and Timothy (see 17:14) who accompany Paul for part of his future travels down the coast of Greece.

"Encourage the brothers" — this is Luke's favorite way of describing ongoing *partnership* in *Acts*, using the familiar Greek verb *parakaleō*. A wordplay seems likely between 16:39 where the magistrates "urge" (same Greek verb) the missionaries to leave town and 16:40 where Paul and Silas "encourage" (same Greek verb) the Christian disciples, his *strong partners*, in Philippi.

Conclusion

Perhaps one of the more interesting *partnerships* Paul formed in his ministry was with a Christian named "Philemon" who, as a matter of fact, held a slave named "Onesimus" (quite a different form of partnership!). Early in the history of the church, the composition of a typical Graeco-Roman household (or *oikos*) included persons held in servitude, having been acquired by inheritance, purchase, or as the spoils of war. When a non-Jew became a Christian, they would more than likely bring with them such slaves as an accepted part of cultural practice. For Philemon, such was the case. However, in due course, one of his slaves, Onesimus, escaped and fortuitously ended up in the companionship of Paul where he too became a Christian. From Paul's perspective, these three named persons (Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus) together now belonged to the church, the body of Christ, and as such were *partners*. Yet, the elephant in the room was the slave status of Onesimus, and how it could be justified among the wider community of Jesus. So, Paul sent his short letter to Philemon in order to open the dialog that would allow the two of them to navigate the tricky waters of a slave culture at-odds with the liberating message of the Gospel. The letter begins this way:

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, ² to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home: ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. ⁶ I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ (Philemon 1:1-6).

What follows is a brief verbatim of what has transpired, as I have summarized above. Be sure to read that verbatim found in Philemon 1:7-16. Then take special note in 1:17-21 of how Paul proposes to resolve the obvious cultural tension involving Onesimus' slave status:

¹⁷ So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸ If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back-- not to mention that you owe me your very self. ²⁰ I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹ Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask (Philemon 1:17-21).

Based on the strong *partnership* between Paul and Philemon, the apostle shows how a way forward is possible to free the slave from his chains and incorporate him into a new *full partnership* with all the people of God. As his *Salutation* (or *exordium*) indicates, Paul's *partnership* with Philemon takes the form of "our dear friend and fellow worker." This *partnership* thrives in the environment of "your love for all the saints." Beyond these, Paul imagines a new *elevation* of Philemon's spiritual life which "may be active in sharing your faith," the living evidence that Philemon is gaining "a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ Jesus."

By implication, Paul envisions Philemon's new relationship with his runaway slave as an elevation of what it means to be a full-fledged *partner* "with all the saints" in the body of Christ. In effect Paul believes that the category of slave is a culturally inherited practice that one day must give way to a more enlightened relationship between Philemon and Onesimus, one which both liberates and incorporates the slave into the egalitarian form of the body of Christ. Or, as Paul said much earlier in his writings:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, *slave nor free*, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

In that text Paul planted the resilient seeds for the liberation of all slaves, Greeks, and women. What Paul does in his dealings with Philemon is to cultivate and nurture that seed to fruition. Throughout the history of that *partnership* called *the church*, the fulfillment of such "seeds" has often been a long and laborious task, requiring faithful bonds within local churches where the sharp edges of prejudice and self-interest strike sparks of

disagreement until finally the “full understanding of everything we have in Christ Jesus” appears in the actual practices of the church.

We offer a final word, drawing from Kent Hughes' commentary on *Acts*:

Some meeting! Imagine the joy at Lydia's as Paul and his associates in the gospel recounted the events of the previous night. There were undoubtedly tears and maybe even some riotous laughter. Maybe they sang a few prison songs and acted out the *seismos* [earthquake]. Whatever the agenda, it culminated in praise.

Some church! Lydia the merchant princess, the ex-Pythoess, the Philippian jailer, and probably a few ex-inmates made up the first European church. The rich and the poor, the slave and the free, male and female were all one in Christ. The flag of the gospel was unfurled on a continent that needed it desperately!

Some life! Through thick and thin, despite the whirlwinds of Satan's opposition, the wind of the Spirit was always at the backs of Paul and his companions. Wherever they were — skimming the Aegean, preaching by the river, delivering souls from demons, taking their licks, singing in the night while the world shook away, or praying with a trembling man for his soul — they were serving an awesome God.

*Some Gospel!*³⁰

To God Be the Glory! Amen!

³⁰ R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Wheaton, 1996, p. 220.