

I hate the Apostle Paul. I hate Paul, Apollos, Timothy, Priscilla, and all the other followers of Jesus. Equally. If you are a follower of Jesus, I hate you, too. You've destroyed my job, my family, and my city.

Your world is upside down, and it has been that way for so long that you probably have no ability to see the world in any way other than how you see it. However, I will explain my reality to you, and you will understand Christianity in a new way. And...you will understand why I hate the Apostle Paul.

Thousands of years ago in a faraway cave in a deep forest. A hunter leaves his cave to hunt for a small deer. Desperate for food, desperate to feed his starving family. On the way out of the cave, he stumbles and reaches for a rock to steady himself. That day, in a short period of time, he finds a deer, kills it with ease. That night, he feeds his family, he stares at the rock, remembers how he touched it before his unusually successful hunt.

A few days later, that hunter goes out to hunt and furtively touches the rock on the way out of his cave. Wants to keep it on the down low. Once again, he has unusually quick success in his hunt. Suspicion confirmed! If he touches the rock before hunting, he is more likely to prosper. That night, tells his wife, convinces her to touch the rock so that she will become pregnant sooner. She touches the rock and becomes pregnant soon thereafter.

Now, there is no doubt. Touching the rock improves your chance of being prosperous. Future generations of the family touch the rock whenever they want to be prosperous, and even begin sacrificing to the rock to be more prosperous. As this family becomes prosperous, other families in their tribe find their own rocks or trees to sacrifice to, to worship. Idol worship appears to cause prosperity, in some cases. People would obviously be foolish not to have their own family idols to worship. There was seemingly only an upside with no downside when worshipping a family idol.

An example of family idols is found in the Bible as it tells the story of the beginning of the Jewish people.<sup>1</sup> Abraham's son, Isaac, had two wives who were sisters, Rachel and Leah. Isaac takes his wives and runs away from their father. In the escape, Rachel steals her father's household gods without telling Isaac. These gods were probably small carvings in wood or stone.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 31:22-35

The father chases them down, complains about Isaac running away, but he also accuses Isaac of stealing his gods. The charge of stealing the gods is so serious that Isaac says that if anyone is found with the gods, that person shall die. Even though Isaac knew the true God, he still understood the importance of household gods.

Over the course of time, people chose to worship every kind of inanimate object, ancestor, animal, or part of nature. People have always been desperate to be protected and prosperous, and willing to do anything to help make that happen.

As you can imagine, it was only a small step for gods to become important to cities or countries. In addition to families having their own gods, cities and countries began to have their own gods, too. Obviously, you want your own country to have the most powerful gods so your country will prevail over other countries. If your country ever gets beaten in battle, you just change to the winning gods.

The Bible has an example of such national gods in the story of the Philistines beating the Israelites and taking the Ark of the Covenant from them.<sup>2</sup> At first, the Philistines were afraid of the Ark of the Covenant because it held a powerful god, but then they rejoiced when they captured the Ark and took control of the powerful god inside. This was a sign that the Philistine gods were more powerful than the God of the Jews. They misunderstood which was more powerful, and after a sufficient amount of suffering, they sent the Ark back to the Jews.

Hundreds of years after that, on Mount Carmel, the prophet Elijah pitted the God of the Israelites against the foreign gods of Queen Jezebel and King Ahab. When the God of the Israelites won the contest, the people of Israel killed the prophets of the foreign gods. They had no use for loser gods.

Much of the Old Testament has to do with the worship of idols versus the worship of God. The first of the Ten Commandments is: "You shall have no other gods before me."<sup>3</sup> That commandment set the stage for the overall theme of the Old Testament: God commanded the Israelites to worship only him, and the Israelites refused to do so consistently.

The Old Testament stories ended about four hundred years before my time. In that four hundred years, the Roman Empire came into being and controlled the whole Western world. Here is what was obvious to the whole world - the Romans were the most prosperous people! Therefore, their gods must be the most powerful gods.

Excluding the tiny people group known as the Jews, most people in the Roman Empire during my time lived with a similar religious pattern. Each family had its own gods, often in the form of ancestor worship. Each tribe or city had its own gods. Each country had its own gods.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 4, 5

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 20:3

The purpose of gods was to provide protection and prosperity. Sometimes you had to borrow gods or switch gods to improve your own prosperity. This was not a matter of theology or philosophy, but a very practical matter that affected everyone in your community. Blasphemy was a practical matter, not a matter of going to heaven or hell. By disrespecting a god, you were endangering the prosperity of a family, city or country.

Which brings me to why I hate the Apostle Paul. My name is Demetrius and I am a silversmith, and I lived in the city of Ephesus in the year 56 AD.

Ephesus was located in modern day Turkey. It was one of the biggest and most prosperous cities in the Roman Empire.

One reason Ephesus was prosperous was that it had the giant temple of Artemis.<sup>4</sup> In this temple was the misshapen meteorite that the Ephesians worshiped.<sup>5</sup> It is important that you understand our logic. Ephesus was prosperous. Ephesus worshiped Artemis. Therefore, Artemis must be a powerful god. Since Artemis is a powerful god, anybody who worships Artemis will be prosperous.

Since people wanted to worship Artemis, the city built an entire economy based on selling little silver copies of the meteorite, having temple prostitutes, and selling sacrifices to Artemis. Since the demand for these services and products was high, the city prospered, and silversmiths like myself also prospered. Obviously, Artemis was a great and powerful god because we prospered.

Since the whole world had a similar thought process, we could compete economically against other cities under the protection of the Roman Empire. in such an orderly, controlled way of life, what could possibly go wrong? The Apostle Paul is what. The Apostle Paul turned the world upside down.<sup>6</sup>

The Apostle Paul offered a new way of thinking, the most dangerous thing in the world. Instead of offering prosperity in this life, Paul offered a personal relationship with the creator of the entire universe. He offered eternal salvation. He offered one, all-powerful universal God, instead of homemade idols of wood or stone or metal. Or silver.

We Ephesians could compete against the gods of other cities, but how could we compete against a God we could not see or touch. Or make silver copies of. Prosperity in this world could not compete with eternal life. Temple prostitutes could not compete with a personal relationship with God.

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<sup>4</sup> Or Diana as named in the King James Version

<sup>5</sup> Acts 19:35

<sup>6</sup> Acts 17:6

Within three years after coming to Ephesus, Paul's teaching had permeated Ephesus and the entire province of Asia. The number of pilgrims coming to worship Artemis plummeted. My sales plummeted. I got together with the other idol makers of town and told them what Paul had done, how he had turned our world upside down. He was telling people that gods made by human hands were no gods at all. I told my fellow silversmiths that if this were true, our jobs and our city and our gods would become worthless. And that threatened the well-being of my family. We had had enough of Paul and his dangerous thought processes. We started a riot.<sup>7</sup>

It quickly spread to the rest of the city. We grabbed Paul and his companions and headed to our giant city theater. It was complete chaos. We shouted "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians" for two whole hours! Done!

Finally, one of the city officials took over. He urged my fellow citizens to calm down or we would be charged by the Romans with disturbing the peace. This was a very serious charge, and we knew it. He told us that Paul and his group had broken no laws and that the silversmiths should take up our case in court. He dismissed the huge crowd and made them disperse peacefully. Our city and our way of life was mortally wounded at that moment.

When you read Paul's letters, you probably think of all kinds of theological niceties and religious intricacies. Things like: church unity, being saved by grace through faith, spiritual warfare, the role of the Holy Spirit. When you hear about the spread of the Gospel, you think that we Greeks and Romans were thrilled to be receiving the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Definitely not me, and definitely not what most Romans and Greeks first thought of, as is obvious by the fact that Christianity actually spread very slowly over the next five plus years. What you think of as Good News, most of us thought of as Bad News. Very Bad News.

We were trying to understand how our cultures and families would change if they followed the things Paul taught. What would happen if gods were no longer made by us, by our hands? if those gods had no role in making us more prosperous, how would we teach our children about our city's gods? The biggest income sources for much of our economy would go away. Our political systems would be undermined.

Me? I was trying to figure out how to feed my children since fewer and fewer people wanted to buy the expertly fabricated silver copies of Artemis. Handcrafted, with love, by yours truly.

The Apostle Paul killed our way of life. He killed my job. He killed my family's future. And he did it in a way that I could not fight. His teachings destroyed everything I held dear. Now you surely understand why I hate the Apostle Paul.

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<sup>7</sup> Acts 19:19

To understand the book of *Galatians*, you need to understand my story. To understand my story, you need to understand my husband's story. But, you can't understand his story without some knowledge of the ancient Greeks.

My name is Eunice. I am a Jew. I married a Greek, and our marriage set up an irreconcilable difference in worldviews.

Ancient Greece, here we go: The Parthenon, famous Greek philosophers and playwrights, democracy, Greek art. When you think of these things, you're probably thinking of The Golden Age of Athens, which was from 480 BC to 404 BC. Although Athens was only one of the great Greek cities, it has had a more lasting influence on civilization than any of its other cities. Athens lost its independence when it was conquered by Philip the Second of Macedonia. Macedonia was a different country from Greece, but most of the rest of the world saw little difference. Philip's son, Alexander the Great, conquered most of the known world, and Greek influence expanded. Greek became the accepted international language, and Greek philosophies impacted thinking of intellectuals as far away as India.

Two hundred years later, the Romans struck back. They conquered the Greeks and made Greece into a Roman province. They stole everything the Greeks owned, including their gods, philosophies, and art.

Greek art reflected the way the Greeks revered the human body. To them, there were no private parts. Every part of the body was on display, and perfection of looks was highly desired. You can verify this yourself if you go to any museum with classical Greek art on display. This is all leading somewhere.

An abhorrent thing to the Greeks, even in my time, was to mutilate any part of your body. For a man, one of the worse things that you could do was to be circumcised. If you did so, you would likely be publicly shamed. If you were single, it was unlikely you would find a good wife. My husband was a Greek,<sup>1</sup> and he hated the idea of circumcision.

<sup>1</sup> Acts 16:1

I don't have time to explain why I married a Greek, but I did. And I got pregnant soon after our marriage, and I begged God to let me to have a daughter. God sent me a son. Eight days after his birth, my marriage essentially ended.

According to Jewish custom and law, any male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. The father was to oversee the ritual. My husband not only refused to circumcise my son, but refused to let that happen for the entirety of my son's childhood. Because he was not circumcised, my son could not participate in any Jewish rites, including studying with rabbis or becoming a part of the Jewish community.

Well, not on my watch. I tried hard to teach my son the Jewish Scriptures, but didn't have enough training to do a good job. What I lacked in intellect, I tried to make up with prayer, fasting, and faith.<sup>2</sup>

My family lived in Lystra, a city in the Roman province of Galatia. We were located on a major road that led from Ephesus to Antioch in Pisidia to Tarsus to Antioch in Syria. Paul initially visited my city on his First Missionary Journey.

I heard that Jews were traveling through, so I tracked them down to offer customary hospitality. It's just what good people did. And I could use all the points I could get. I thought I was being hospitable. But they gave me infinitely more than I gave them. They gave me two pieces of good news.

Paul and Barnabas told me about the Good News of Jesus and how he was the promised Messiah of the Jews. They proved this to me by using the Scriptures of the Old Testament...and by who they were as people, their story, their actions.

The second piece of good news was that my son and I could participate in the Good News by believing in Jesus and being baptized. If we did, we could receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. These were the same things Paul and Barnabas taught everywhere they went.

I hope you did not miss a subtle thing I did NOT say. My son did NOT have to be circumcised to be a Christian. That was the best possible news we could have possibly heard. My son, Timothy, was overjoyed.

Later, some Jewish Christians came from Jerusalem. They insisted that my son be circumcised in order to be a Christian. We refused. I immediately sent a letter to Paul telling him about their teaching. He was furious.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Timothy 1:5

Soon thereafter, Paul came into conflict with these same types of Jewish Christians in Antioch. The brothers there sent them all to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders to get their opinion about the necessity of circumcision for Christian believers.<sup>3</sup>

Acts 15, tells more about this meeting, but the result was extremely good news for us. Non-Jews could become Christians without being circumcised or following the laws of Moses.

That was a monumental decision which helped influence the future of Christian evangelism forever. No longer was Christianity a sect of Judaism. No longer did new believers have to be circumcised. No longer would the Greeks have a reason to refuse to become Christians. And, Paul was given a letter that proved that to be the case.<sup>4</sup>

He arrived with that letter in my city of Lystra at the start of his Second Missionary Journey. You cannot believe my family's joy. When Paul left Lystra to continue his Second Missionary Journey, my son, Timothy, went with him.

Timothy, my son! He was not a Jew, he had not been circumcised and accepted into the Jewish Community. He was not Greek, because he had a Jewish mother. When he became a Christian, it wiped out all of his other identities. No longer did he have an identity outside of Christ.

Ironically, even though it wasn't required of him, Timothy chose to get circumcised. Before leaving with Paul and Barnabas he, well, you know. After all of his missed opportunities in childhood, after all the back and forth between Paul and Barnabas and the apostles and elders, after all I stood against, and stood for on his behalf, Timothy made a decision. His own decision. My son, growing into the man I'd always hoped and prayed he would be. He decided to be circumcised, as a grown adult, just so he could go into the synagogues and tell the Jews about Jesus.<sup>5</sup> I don't know who was prouder, me or his grandmother.

Timothy understood that a critical time in history was at hand. Paul would soon focus on going to the Gentiles. The last chance for Jews was approaching. Jews who became Christians would change the course for their future generations, as they also became Christians. Jews who refused Christianity, kept their future generations on course to be Jews. Everlasting legacies in the balance.

It was also a critical time in history because the understanding of Christianity was radically changing. Christianity was essentially a Jewish sect at the beginning. Virtually all Christians were Jews, and all followed the laws of Moses. Then about a decade after the death of Jesus, Peter at

<sup>3</sup> Acts 15

<sup>4</sup> Acts 15:22-29

<sup>5</sup> Acts 16:3

the Council of Jerusalem declares “From now on, It is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved.”<sup>6</sup> No longer the law, but faith and grace!

It is within the context of these critical events that Paul wrote a letter addressed to the churches in my province of Galatia. You may know the letter as *Galatians*. This letter written to us, Christians living in Galatia, and will prove to be applicable to people of all time.

Paul begins his letter by assuring us that the gospel he preached to us is the only true gospel. He tells us that the true gospel does not require us to follow the rites of the laws of Moses, such as circumcision.

In order to prove his authority in the matter, Paul reminds us of his background of being a persecutor of Christians before becoming a believer himself. Only revealed in this letter, he went into Arabia for three years after becoming a believer. It is where he received revelation from Jesus! This was before he went back to Jerusalem. After Jerusalem, he went and preached in Syria and Cilicia. He returned to Jerusalem where he was accepted by the apostles and was assured his gospel message was valid. At that time, Paul’s message was vindicated because his protégé, Titus, was not required to be circumcised.

By telling his story in such detail, it becomes clear that Paul is fighting for his proverbial life. He absolutely needs to establish his authority, not only to us, but to all others. Why? Why does Paul need to establish his authority? Because we are unsure of who to believe!

Paul tells us that following the law of Moses is not important, but others are telling us that it is. Who are we to believe? We have no New Testament? How are we to decide who to believe? How do you know who to believe?

Anyway, back to Paul’s main point. The law will weed out any burgeoning Christian, and Paul knew it. He summarizes his point by talking about the life and death nature of the matter: “For through the law, I am dead to the law that I might live for God. I am crucified with Christ. It is not I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”<sup>7</sup>

So, Ancient Greeks, check, my husband’s story, check, my story, check. What you need to know now is the story of Timothy’s grandmother, Lois.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 15:11

<sup>7</sup> Galatians 2:19-20



I may not be the person most people think I am. The Bible's only mention of me is when Paul told Timothy that he had a sincere faith that first lived in his grandmother, me, and in his mother, Eunice.<sup>1</sup> From that mention, virtually everybody assumes I am Timothy's Jewish maternal grandmother.

I could just as easily be Timothy's Greek paternal grandmother, and the faith that first lived in me was faith in Jesus Christ, not the faith of the Jews. While Timothy grew up, his mother taught him about Judaism, while I might have been teaching him how to live as a Greek living in the Roman Empire.

I bring this possibility up for a simple reason. Our lives were highly complicated by social, religious, and ethical considerations. That was one reason we were attracted to Paul's message. It greatly simplified our lives.

I'll pick up where Eunice left off...Chapter Three of Galatians...Paul launches into a discussion of faith. He assures us, in a very lengthy discourse, that we are saved by grace and faith, not by following the Laws of Moses. He turns back to the prophet, Habakkuk, to remind us that even the old prophets knew that the righteous live by faith, not the law.<sup>2</sup>

In precious words, especially to my family, Paul makes the observation that there are no distinctions among Christians. He said, "For those who have been baptized have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male and female. You are all one in Christ Jesus." He reminds us that if we want to be slaves to the Laws of Moses that we cannot enjoy the freedom of Christ. That would be a special shame since Christians should consider themselves not to be slaves of the law, but children and heirs of God.

Paul launches into many examples from the Old Testament which show how the law enslaves, but freedom is found in Christ. Then... Paul writes the most special words that my grandson, and I, could have hoped to hear. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The valuable thing is faith which works by love."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 1:5

<sup>2</sup> Hab. 2:4

<sup>3</sup> Galatians 5:6

"The valuable thing is faith which works by love." Such loving words coming from a man that many of you consider a perfect saint. How could such a loving man ever lose his temper? Well, a man that understood the magnitude of the situation. Imagine Paul spitting angry, throwing up his hands in disgust at the false teachers as he hisses, "I wish those who trouble you with circumcision would go all the way and emasculate themselves."<sup>4</sup>

After calming down, Paul reminds us that fulfilling the law of love is the most important thing. "For the entire law is kept if you keep one commandment, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" That was a relief to hear, although we later came to understand how very difficult it is to keep that simple five-word command.<sup>5</sup>

Paul spends most of his letter giving us the reassurances we need to hear. His words are so convincing that we are absolutely clear that we have freedom with Christ.

You know, I realize that Paul and the leaders at Jerusalem have made it easy for the Greeks and Romans to accept Christianity by not mandating circumcision. *But* they do demand other extreme things. They demand that the Greeks and Romans give up their religious beliefs, ways of life, pleasures, and economy. Paul, and God, demand a complete change in how Greeks and Romans think and act. I know Timothy's father will not do so, and I expect most of the Greek and Romans will not either.

What do Paul and God demand that people quit doing? Sexual immorality, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, jealousy, selfish ambition, envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like.

There is no way most Greeks and Romans want to give up those things. They enjoy them. In his letter to us, the Galatians, Paul is starting a long and bitter battle not just convert to people to Christianity but to change entire cultures.

That makes it even more precious when he starts closing his letter by telling us more about the Holy Spirit. Paul writes that since we live by the Spirit, it is necessary that we keep in step with the Spirit. If we are in step with the Spirit, we will not do all those immoral things that we used to want to do.<sup>6</sup>

Paul launches into one of the most famous passages in the Bible. A passage that virtually every child that goes to any kind of Bible class knows. A passage that we brand-new Christians can hold on to: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."<sup>7</sup> Now those are the things I want for myself and for my grandson, Timothy.

<sup>4</sup> Galatians 5:12

<sup>5</sup> Galatians 5:14

<sup>6</sup> Gal. 5:16, 25

<sup>7</sup> Galatians 5:22-23

Paul instructs our little church with some words we definitely need to hear. He tells us how to live in peace with each other. Restore people caught in sin. Watch our own actions so we don't fall into temptation. Carry each other's burdens. Don't be arrogant. Share good things with our instructors. Don't get tired of being good, but do good to all people, especially other Christians.

In one of the most clear rules of life, Paul says what is obvious to us all. Don't deceive yourself, a person harvests what they plant. Plant evil deeds, harvest destruction. Sow to the Spirit, reap eternal life. Period. End of sentence.

That would have been a perfect place to end his letter to us, but my dear Paul could not be that patient. He grabbed the pen and started writing in his large handwriting so we would know beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was his words.<sup>8</sup>

He lashes out against the false teachers once again. In one of his worse criticisms, he says they teach circumcision only to avoid persecution. He says again, that circumcision means nothing, the new creation of believers is all that counts. In another back-handed slap at the false teachers avoiding persecution, Paul says that no one should cause him troubles because his body has the marks of Jesus.

Many people believe the letter Paul sent to Christians in Galatia was the first of Paul's letters. It sets the stage for the subjects and logic Paul will address in most of his future letters. It comforts the new believers as we conclude that we should consider Paul's teachings to be authoritative.

Maybe more importantly, when coupled with the Council of Jerusalem and its letter, *Galatians* is an important part of a changing era in Christianity. Christianity was originally considered a sect of the Jews. Virtually all believers were Jewish who continued to be practicing Jews.

Peter and Cornelius ushered in the beginning of non-Jews being believers, but that movement was slow, and unclear about what to do with the Laws of Moses. The Council of Jerusalem made it easy for non-Jews to become Christians.

But as Paul recognized, it also made it easy for the Jews to become Christians! Paul sees the time of irrevocable choice is at hand for each individual Jew. A choice that could likely decide the future for their descendants since children often follow the religious leanings of their parents. Become a Christian, you and your descendants have an increased opportunity to receive the freedom of Christ. Stay a Jew, you will be shackled to the law of Moses and potentially be blinded to Christ's offer of freedom.

Two decades after the death of Jesus, the teachings of the church are clear. It is no longer just the Jews who are God's people, it is everyone who believes in Jesus. It is no longer the laws of

<sup>8</sup> Gal. 6:11

Moses, but the Gospel and God's grace. It is no longer obedience to the laws of Moses, but following Jesus and being obedient to him.

Every day, this grandmother thanks God that her grandson is part of this movement, and that I lived to see it. Now, I can't wait to see what happens to Timothy and the Church over the next two decades.

The Second Missionary Journey started like a bad soap opera. Barnabas wanted to take his relative, Mark, who had deserted Barnabas and Paul on the First Missionary Journey. Paul refused to take Mark. After a sharp disagreement, Paul and Barnabas split after more than a decade of working together.

Barnabas took Mark and went to Cyprus. Paul chose me as his new companion for the Second Missionary Journey, possibly because I was famous for always finding the best food in any town. Timothy joined us when we went through Lystra.<sup>1</sup> Luke joined us when we reached Troas, a city on the coast of modern day Turkey.<sup>2</sup>

From Troas, we crossed into modern day Greece. That means we crossed from Asia to Europe. We were making the first concerted evangelical effort in Europe! Although we would deal with some Jews, the vast majority of our evangelical efforts would be with Greeks and Romans. That would be a change of audience, and a big change in opportunities and problems.

Our new audiences knew the gods of the Greeks and Romans, not the God of the Jews. They knew the myths of their gods, not the Scriptures of the Old Testament. They were not looking for a Savior. They considered their lifestyles pleasurable, not sinful. This was going to be a challenge even for Paul's great intellect. Without the Holy Spirit, we had no chance to succeed.

Our group of four traveled to Philippi, the place where Lydia heard the Gospel message and became a Christian. After a stint in a Philippian prison, three of us traveled to Thessalonica, leaving Luke behind. I hated to leave Philippi because Lydia had one of the best cooks in the country.

As was Paul's custom, he went to the synagogue in Thessalonica and preached that Jesus was the Messiah, using the Old Testament scriptures as evidence. After three weeks, some of the Jews were persuaded, as well as a number of Greek God-fearers and prominent women.

Just when I thought we might get through the city without trouble, our success infuriated the other Jews who led a riot against us. Although one of the new believers, Jason, was accosted and accused, nothing came out of it. However, Paul, Timothy and I had to leave the city.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 16:1-4

<sup>2</sup> Acts 16:8-10. The language changes to "we" indicating the writer of Acts joined the group.

While in Thessalonica, Paul taught about future times when Jesus would return.<sup>3</sup> That teaching captured people's attention, just as Paul's heart was captured by the Thessalonians. A few months later, when we reached Athens, Paul sent both Timothy and me back to Thessalonica to see how the young church was doing and to strengthen the Christians there.<sup>4</sup> I was happy to go back without Paul, because that would lessen my chances of getting another beating... and increase my chances of finding a good restaurant.

Months later, when Paul was in Corinth, Timothy and I returned and gave him the good news that the Thessalonian church was doing well.<sup>5</sup> As part of his rejoicing, Paul wrote the letter that is known as the book, *First Thessalonians*. This is probably the first letter Paul wrote to a specific church that is in your New Testament.

Paul opens his letter with such love and affection that it is clear he cares for the Thessalonians. His description of them verifies that Timothy and I had brought back a good report about them. He compliments them for turning from foreign gods to the true God, and for their good behavior. Paul also mentions themes of faith, power of the Holy Spirit, and being chosen. These are themes he would return to in his future letters.

Paul reminds them about how he had been abused for the sake of the Gospel, and that they are experiencing the same thing. He urges them to continue leading lives worthy of God's kingdom and glory. He assures them how much he loves them and wants to come be with them.

Paul reminds them that he had sent Timothy to be with them, not to tattle on them, but to strengthen and encourage their faith. He tells them again to expect persecution, but to keep the faith. Paul reassures them that Timothy had given him a good report about them, and encourages them to have more and more love for each other and for everyone else.

I think the first half of First Thessalonians is the most loving and encouraging passage that Paul ever wrote. He was clearly a proud father of these new Christians. But as a proud father, he knew he needed to correct and discipline his children. He chose to use honey-covered words, just as Luke used honey-covered medicine.

Paul says they are behaving well, but need to behave better and better. He urges them to avoid sexual immorality and control their lusts. He tells them that leading an impure life is tantamount to rejecting God and the Holy Spirit. Rather than being specific about what he means, Paul makes very broad statements. This is to keep the Thessalonians from finding loopholes in the instructions like people are apt to do. As I'm sure you've experienced.

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:5

<sup>4</sup> 1 Thess. 3:1-5, Acts 18:5

<sup>5</sup> 1 Thess. 3:6-10

After growing up in a world where sexual immorality and lust is the normal way of life, you can just imagine the questions and talks they had. I bet it sounded just like your current day teenagers who debate just what they can do and how far they can go. You can just imagine how the Thessalonians debated among themselves what an impure life was or was not.

Paul slips in a little encouragement that may be hard for you to understand. He asks them to make it their ambition to lead quiet lives, mind their own business, and work with their hands so that they can be financially independent, and win the respect of non-Christians.

Paul had already learned that Christianity best spreads when non-Christians admire the lifestyle and behavior of Christians. He knows nothing worse for the Christian cause than Christians who are lazy busybodies. I believe the Holy Spirit guided Paul to write this specific instruction because he knows this problem will haunt future churches.

Why will Christians behave in this way? In the case of the Thessalonians, it is partly because they expect Jesus to return any day, so what is the use in working? The Thessalonians are fascinated with the ideas of resurrection and the return of Jesus. If those things are true, why should they worry about anything in this life? They were taking Paul's teachings and coming to an inaccurate conclusion because they misunderstood the timing involved.

This is the way that the early Bible translators repeat Paul's response, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."<sup>6</sup>

These may be the most famous words in *First Thessalonians*. This is the description of what many modern people call The Rapture. Paul considers these words to be comforting enough that the Thessalonians should encourage each other with them.

At that point, Paul is wise enough to follow the wisdom of good forecasters – give a date or give an event...but never give both. He gives the event, but now the Thessalonians are eager to know when that is going to happen. Tomorrow? Next week? Next year? The answer to that question will surely affect their behavior.

Paul continues his discussion by insisting that the date of the day of the Lord cannot be known. He insists that the event will surely happen, but it will come like a thief in the night. Living in the light means to live as if it may happen the next moment, but it may not happen in your lifetime. For that reason, it is important that Christians always encourage and build-up each other.

Like a good preacher, Paul lets them know that he is coming to the end of his letter. He encourages the Christians in Thessalonica to honor their leaders and hold them in high regard.

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

Paul also acknowledges that not everything is going perfectly in their church. He instructs them to live in peace, and to warn those who are idle and disruptive. He also tells them to encourage the disheartened and weak, and to always strive to do what is good for others. By doing this, Paul is telling them that he knows there are Christians in their church who fit these negative descriptions.

As Paul reaches the end of his letter, he tells them not to quench the Spirit or treat prophecies with contempt, but to test them all. He tells them to hold on to the good and reject every kind of evil.

Some of my favorite verses in all of the Bible are toward the end of Paul's letter, and I will end my story with them. Three short verses that you will do well to memorize and live by.

“Rejoice always. Pray without stopping. In everything give thanks: Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”



There I was sitting in my frigid house with a bit of a hangover, wrapped in a blanket. It was January, I'd been out all night. I was musing about the month being named after Janus, the two-faced Roman god. It was said that Janus could see the past and the future at the same time. That'd be awesome, because if I could see the future, I would soon be rich enough to buy all the liquor and women I could want!

The Apostle Paul had been staying at my house, I wasn't the best host, being out all night. He had almost convinced me that my Roman gods were not real. I was on the verge of becoming a Christian, but let's just say I wasn't quite ready to give up my wild lifestyle.

All of a sudden, reverie interrupted. A group of totally out of control dudes burst through my door. Rough dudes. Rougher than me. What could I do but sit there quietly as they ransacked my house looking for Paul and Silas. Finally, I got their attention. "Paul and Silas aren't here," I shouted. They were out, somewhere. So, they grabbed me instead. They dragged me toward the city officials. And I wasn't the only one either, they were also dragging a few people I recognized who had become believers in Jesus.

At the town center, the officials were in a turmoil. A few Jews and the rough dudes - accused me of hosting someone who opposed the Roman government, someone who followed a king other than Caesar. This was an extremely serious charge. The officials had me post bond and let me go.<sup>1</sup> That was a close one.

Paul and Silas left town and went to Berea that night. Over the next few months, I became a devout believer. How devout? The only other time you see my name in the New Testament, Paul mentions me as his companion at the end of his letter to the Romans written about five years later.<sup>2</sup>

I one of the first Europeans to become a believer in Jesus, I grew up in Thessalonica. I really struggled with giving up a lifestyle of wine, women, and song. Like so many of my fellow Christian men. Well, I could easily give up the song, but the wine and women part was very challenging. I really enjoyed them.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 17:5-9

<sup>2</sup> Romans 16:21

I guess what I really wanted was to follow Jesus, but keep my lifestyle. Sound familiar? Paul warned us against trying to do such a thing in his first letter to our little church. Maybe that led to him writing a second letter to us a few months later. Let me tell you about that letter you know as *Second Thessalonians*.

The letter is written from Paul, Silas, and Timothy...but we all know that Paul wrote the letter, as he confirms at the end of the letter. However, we love Silas and Timothy and are convinced that they approve of everything written in the letter.

They encourage us by telling us that they use us as an example of faith and righteousness even in the face of persecution and affliction. We need that encouragement, because some of us are a little discouraged that though we have given up our old ways of life, we still aren't doing enough. We not only need to give up our negative behavior, but we need to institute more positive stuff.

Paul also encourages us to continue to be a good example so that Jesus will be glorified through us. He never tires of telling us that the important thing is for Jesus to be glorified through everything we do and say.

Concerning the coming of Jesus, Paul tells us not to be alarmed by false teachings that were purportedly coming from them, whether these teachings were by prophecy, oral teachings, or by letter.

It would be easy for you to miss the importance of this one sentence. You already know how some of the Jews had falsely taught that Christians had to follow the laws of Moses. That false teaching had been refuted by the apostles and church leaders. Now, other false teachers are beginning to teach differently than Paul on all sorts of matters.

This is the first salvo of accusations in a long-lasting war over what is true and what is false. Paul insists that what he teaches is correct, and any teachings in opposition to his are false. This war is still being fought in your world. Today. However, you have the New Testament to use as a measuring stick of what is right and wrong...we have to rely on the Holy Spirit and our own discernment. As you can imagine, as new believers, we are easily misled by false teachers.

By his description of the coming punishment for our enemies, we are to understand that the day of the Lord has not yet arrived. We are assured that we have not missed that important event. One of the punishments in store for those who do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus is that they will suffer eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord. We cannot think of anything more horrifying.

Paul continues by writing about something that is quite mysterious to you. He writes about the rebellion and the man of lawlessness. He describes this man as someone who opposes everything godly, and even proclaims himself to be God. Paul describes how this man will be killed directly by Jesus when he returns. This all sounds so cryptic to you, but it is fairly clear to

us because we remember all that Paul had taught us about that subject while he was with us before.

In any event, we learn that anyone who opposes God and refuses to love the truth will perish instead of being saved. Worse, because of their attitude, God will even send them the ability to delude themselves further so that they are unable to believe the truth but will take pleasure in unrighteousness.

We look at our friends and relatives and see that many people around us refuse to hear the gospel and believe. Many of those who refuse to believe the gospel punish us for doing so. That is why Paul continually encourages us to stand firm and take our comfort from God, not from earthly pleasures.

Paul isn't voicing empty words. He reminds us to pray for him because he is often in danger from corrupt people who oppose him and his teachings. We know that to be true, because we know how often he has been beaten and hurt by his enemies. In fact, the first time we met him was when he escaped from his persecutors in Philippi on his second missionary journey.

Maybe you're thinking that we Thessalonians must be preoccupied with the second return of Jesus. If so, you're correct. We *are* focused on that event because of all the good things that it portends for us. Not only will we get to be with Jesus, but we will rule over others instead of being persecuted by them. We cannot wait for Jesus to come back. We perceive that all Christians will be like us until Jesus returns. You're completely focused on his return, right?

Well, one problem with that focus is that many of us concluded Jesus is coming back so soon that we can quit working. As you can imagine, this quickly becomes a problem as more and more Christians need to be fed, while fewer and fewer Christians work to meet the needs of our church.

Paul tries to put a stop to that thought process immediately. He is so bold as to bluntly command that anyone who does not work should not eat. He knows that idleness breeds discontent, it is a bad example for the city to see. He reminds us how he personally worked to pay for himself so we would not be burdened with his care. He commands us to work quietly, earn our own living, and earn the respect of outsiders.

At the same time, Paul also encourages us to continue doing good deeds. Somehow, we have to help people, but not enable them to cross a line. I suspect Christians will always have trouble walking that line.

Paul ends his letter to using his own handwriting. He says His last handwritten line is a sign that the letter is genuine because it is the way he writes all his letters. From this you can infer two

things. First, he typically dictates his letters to a scribe. Second, his handwriting is very distinct since he writes each word in very large letters.<sup>3</sup> Probably due his bad eyesight.

When you think of my church at Thessalonica, think of a rather typical early Greek church. We accept the gospel message because it is truthful, and we are tired of the old, useless mythical Greek gods. We are not perfect little angels, but we repent of our old ways, our wild lifestyles for some of us, and try to live as Paul instructs us.

We look forward to the return of Jesus, and our way of life reflects it. Unfortunately, that way of life means that some of us choose not to work. We're just ordinary Christians, maybe a bit like yourselves. That is all Paul wants from us. And from you. Be faithful, be firm in our beliefs, and trust Jesus.

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<sup>3</sup> Galatians 6:11

## Aquila

My wife and I are the definition of equal partners. In fact, in the New Testament, we are mentioned six times, always together, never individually. Three times Priscilla is mentioned first, and three times I am. That indicates we are considered as equally important. And I'm totally okay with that. But before I tell you more about our relationship, you need to know a little bit more about Corinth, and its relationship to Rome.

In 150 BC, it was not clear which city would dominate the Mediterranean Sea. The main two powers were Carthage and Rome. They had been fighting for over one hundred years with the three Punic Wars. Heard of Hannibal? And his elephants? They were fighting Rome in the Second Punic War. In 146 BC, Rome defeated Carthage and completely wiped it from the face of the Earth.

The main remaining obstacle to Rome's complete domination of the Mediterranean Sea was Corinth and its allies. In the Battle of Corinth, also in 146 BC, the Romans defeated Corinth and wiped it from the face of the Earth, after killing all the men and selling the women and children into slavery.

From that time on, the Romans plundered Greece. They stole statues, treasures, and artists. They took over the Greek language and philosophies. They even stole the Greek gods and gave them Roman names. They took ownership of the land, but they had to stop there. They couldn't take the land back to Rome.

A hundred years after Corinth's demise, Julius Caesar recognized the strategic value of the city and re-founded it as a colony in 44 BC, shortly before his assassination. It was rebuilt as a major city with a mixed population of Romans, Greeks and other ethnic groups.

Corinth was perfectly situated to control the short Isthmus of Corinth. Ships could avoid traveling around the lengthy and dangerous Peloponnese if they landed at one side of the isthmus and transferred their goods to a ship on the other side. This made Corinth a rich, important port city. And port cities are known for their loose morals. Corinth became the byword for brothels, drunkenness, and worship of idols. Not a place where a good Jewish couple would want to live.

## Priscilla

Aquila and I were living happily in Rome when we received word that Emperor Claudius was expelling all the Jews from Rome. I never really understood why he did, but we immediately left the city because we knew the Emperor could be erratic and deadly. After living in the Italian countryside for a while, we concluded that we had to move somewhere more permanently.

We were tentmakers and it was important that we had a location where we could establish a good reputation. We considered going to my husband's hometown of Pontus, located in the northeast portion of modern Turkey. But, we found there was not a strong Jewish community, and it would be hard to establish a good business there.

One of our friends mentioned Corinth was in need of a good tentmaker, so we considered going there. We quickly concluded it was not the type of place we wanted to live and rejected the idea completely. While praying one night, God led us to reconsider. So, we moved to Corinth and established our business.

After living there for several years, I began to wonder why God would want us in such a hellish place. I trusted Aquila completely, but was always a little concerned about all the temptations that were constantly shoved in his face. If I had trusted God just a little more, I would have understood that those temptations were the price we had to pay to truly understand the minds of the Corinthians. That understanding would underpin all of our future ministry.

The Corinthians love to sin. There, I said it. It is as if they are in a contest to create new ways to be evil. There is nothing they won't do if it sounds like it will satisfy their cravings. Greed, sexual immorality, and violence are their normal modes of behavior.

## Aquila

My lovely wife is not exaggerating. If Satan has a home, his mailing address is in Corinth. One way we survive is by having complete trust in each other.

When Paul first came to our home, we were a little disconcerted. We didn't need a new co-worker, but the Holy Spirit told us to take him in. It wasn't long before we understood why. Paul began explaining the Scriptures to us in a way that we had never heard. Soon, we believed the Gospel and became followers of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Paul became our private teacher, and we learned the Scriptures better than ever before.

One night, Paul came to Priscilla and me, and asked if we could talk about something very important. After dinner that night, we prayed for two hours and asked Holy Spirit to be the leader of our discussion. Paul believed we needed to have a long-term strategy of how to grow God's kingdom much, much faster. The Good News had to get out.

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<sup>1</sup> Some scholars believe Aquila and Priscilla were Christians before Paul came to Corinth.

Holy Spirit led us to a two-part strategy. We needed to grow churches in the most important cities, and then grow churches in surrounding areas. We knew that flourishing churches already existed in the two important cities of Antioch and Jerusalem. The most important place in the world for a new church was Rome. The second most important place was Ephesus. Those two were simply obvious. The third was a little less obvious because it was right under our noses. Corinth.

Rome, Ephesus and Corinth were to become the centers of our attention for the next decade. No matter what it would take, we needed to establish strong churches for the believers in those places!

We loved the Corinthians, but they were like lost sheep going astray at every opportunity. Over the next several years, Paul wrote letters and sent his assistants back to guide and discipline the fledgling Church. Your New Testament has two of those letters that provide snapshots of some of the issues and opportunities that we dealt with. We Christian leaders spent an inordinate amount of time on the church at Corinth.

On his second missionary journey, Paul stayed in Corinth for eighteen months and taught about Jesus at every opportunity. We established a church, and we knew everybody in it personally. These close relationships gave us the moral right to speak frankly to them over the next many years.

When Paul left Corinth, he took Priscilla and me with him to the next major target city, Ephesus.<sup>2</sup> Paul left us there, while he continued on to Jerusalem. He returned to Ephesus a couple of years later and stayed about three years. We had established a house church before Paul arrived, and he helped us to really grow it.

It was during this three-year period in Ephesus that Paul wrote *First Corinthians*. This was not the first letter he had written to them, and he had already sent representatives to Corinth, including Apollos and Timothy, and had probably even gone back for a visit himself. The name *First Corinthians* is a bit misleading. It was a very long letter written in the midst of a string of personal and written communication concerning some messy situations.

## Priscilla

As typical, Paul opens his letter with favorable greetings, reminding the Corinthians that God has given them every necessary gift, and that God is always faithful. He immediately addresses the problem of divisions in their church. He wants them to be unified in all of their actions and words. Paul is crystal clear that there is no distinction in his or Apollos' teachings concerning Jesus, so that is not reason for division. This will not be the last time that Paul pleads for unity in a church.

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 18:19

Paul immediately moves to talk about the power of the crucified Jesus. He reminds them that the cross is central to the Gospel. He talks about the Holy Spirit being the only source of wisdom. As Greeks, the Corinthians are inclined to see wisdom in philosophy, but Paul reminds them that wisdom comes from having the mind of Christ.

After establishing the authority of Jesus and Holy Spirit, Paul returns to the subject of divisions in the Corinthian church. He reminds them that no individual is as important as a unified church. Any individual who wants to be inappropriately important is essentially destroying God's temple, something that God will not accept. He tells them that they each belong to Christ, and has no right or capability to be important on their own.

Some of the Corinthians think they are as wise and knowledgeable as the apostles and Christian leaders. They think that their teachings are just as important and authoritative. Paul directly confronts these people and reminds them that the leaders are God's servants who are charged with leading the churches, no matter what personal hardships they endure.

### Aquila

Corinthians like to engage in sexual immorality. I know of no other way to put it. Paul confronts them with the fact that one man in the church had started having sexual relationships with his father's wife. Paul is amazed because not even the pagans do such a thing, but the Corinthian church seems to pride themselves about being tolerant of such a sin. He commands them to ostracize the man in hopes he will repent and be saved from destruction.

Paul commands them to purify their church of those committing sexual immorality, the greedy, the idolators, and drunkards. The Christians have had plenty of time to start bringing their actions in line with Jesus' teachings, and Paul demands that they do so. Jesus words after forgiving a woman caught in sexual sin was to go and sin no more. The actions of these Corinthian believers are an affront to Jesus and all other Christians.

In a most reasonable manner, Paul offers them solutions to their problems. He gives them principles for successful marriages. Paul lived with Priscilla and me. He watched us live and work and worship together. Paul saw first-hand how a marriage submitted to God can function. He knows that good marriages will allow the Corinthians to avoid many problems that entangle them. His instructions are so clear and lengthy that nobody can misinterpret them.

He says that good marriages involve good sex lives. That husbands and wives should meet each other's sexual needs. If they do so, this will remove a huge amount of temptation. He goes on to address situations where people are not married, or are divorced or widowed. Paul leaves no one out of his discussion. He knows that many temptations start with physical needs being unmet.

Although out of fashion in Corinth, Paul's instructions for Christ followers about their actions and behavior in *First Corinthians 7* will solve many of the problems in your world, too. The



complications and consequences of sin are no joke. But many would rather be like the Corinthians...enjoy and be tolerant of obvious sin. Don't fall for it, your love for Jesus and the relationships you have are too precious. Trust me, I know.

A life without Priscilla...I can't even imagine it. I've watched many people destroy their lives and the lives of their family members by loving sin. I don't want that to happen to you.

As I lay there on the ground, bleeding and slowly coming to my senses, I felt a pair of gentle hands lift my head and pour water in my mouth. When I could open my eyes, I realized my nurse was none other than my former opponent, Priscilla. She and Aquila tended to my care as if they were the Good Samaritans.

Let me catch you up to that fateful moment. I was the leader of the synagogue in Corinth when Paul first preached there. We Jews were quite irate that Paul was successfully converting people to the cause of Christ, so we went to Gallio, the Roman proconsul of the region, to complain. We no more than started to raise our complaint when Gallio stopped us and told us that he was not concerned with our religious disputes, and he threw us out.<sup>1</sup>

My fellow Jews were so upset at my being an ineffectual leader that they beat me in front of the Roman proconsul. He didn't pay any attention to my distress, and even seemed to enjoy it. My fellow Jews could see that Christianity was on the rise at the expense of Judaism and they reacted violently against their helplessness, even though I was powerless to change our plight.

So, there I was, beaten to a pulp. Enter Priscilla and Aquila.

It was their love that caused me to begin to listen...really listen... to Paul's teaching. And once I listened, it wasn't long before I became a Christian. Some time later, when they left for Ephesus, I went with Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila. I was still there when Paul wrote *First Corinthians*. In fact, he addressed the letter from him and me!<sup>2</sup>

In the middle of that letter to the church at Corinth, Paul addresses a problem that does not seem to face you in your world today. In Corinth, food that was offered to pagan idols was later sold in the market place for a cheap price. The question arose whether it was right for Christians to eat this food or not. I mean, after all, it was used in anti-Christian rituals, touched by...` In his letter, Paul rightly judges that it doesn't really matter. Eating the meat that was offered by someone else to an idol does not mean you are worshiping the idol. However, the facts of the situation are important to discuss for a variety of reasons that *do* impact people in today's world.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 18:12-17

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:1

Paul points out that anything you think is a sin to do...is a sin to you. Don't do it. Further, you shouldn't do anything that causes a fellow Christian to sin. Their good is much more important than you exerting any rights you think you have. If you cause anyone to stumble, you are sinning against Jesus. So, if you or another Christian believes it is a sin to eat meat that was offered to an idol, eat something else!

In pointing these things out, Paul addresses an overall thought process that should help the Corinthian church become more unified – Christians don't have personal rights because they are servants of Jesus. As the Corinthians know, Paul has given up all of his personal rights for the cause of Christ.

Rather than exerting his personal rights, Paul insists that he give up whatever it takes to bring people to belief in Jesus. In one of his most famous lines, Paul writes, "I become all things to all people, that by doing so I will save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel."<sup>3</sup> None of us should seek our own good, but the good of others.

As a Jew, I am steeped in the knowledge of the Old Testament. I know that the history of the Jews is one of repeated worship of idols. This particular sin has been their historical downfall. So, it isn't a surprise to me when Paul switches the subject of the letter to that of avoiding idolatry. He defines idolatry as anything you do in which you participate in the worship of idols or demons. Paul makes it very clear that it is impossible to worship both the Lord Jesus and demons.

Paul gives a simple rule that will help the Corinthians avoid sin, while giving God the glory. He writes, "Whatever you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God."<sup>4</sup> If they have any questions about what to do, he advises them to imitate him, just as he imitates Christ.

I have to admit that I shuddered a bit when he wrote that. I was well aware that I wasn't a good enough imitator Christ that I would want others to imitate me. Would you want people to imitate you?

Paul moves on to another cause of strife among the Corinthians. A cause that may be hard for many of you to understand. Most Christians of your day still take communion, sometimes called the Lord's Supper or Eucharist. For most of you the bread is a small bite of bread or cracker or a tiny wafer. The wine is a small sip of wine or grape juice taken from a large cup or a tiny cup.

In my time, communion was part of a meal. How could that possibly cause a problem, you might wonder? The Corinthians brought their own meals and ate them together, they did not do it potluck or community style. So, rich people ate sumptuous, large meals while the poor people had little or nothing to eat. By acting in this manner, the Christians were disrespecting

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 9:22-23

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. 10:31

communion and Jesus. They were bringing judgment on themselves. Although people interpret some of his words differently, Paul gives some very important guidance on communion that is not found elsewhere.

Paul ends his discussion of causes of disunity by talking about spiritual gifts. The Corinthians seem to rank the importance of various spiritual gifts, and that is another source of dissension. Paul makes it clear that all spiritual gifts come through the Holy Spirit, and all are to be deemed equally valuable because the church body cannot work in harmony unless all members work together as the Body of Christ.

Paul's language makes perfect sense to Christians of my time because we see the gifts in action. However, over time the subject of spiritual gifts has mystified and confused many people, and caused much disharmony among Christians. That would have been very disappointing to Paul, who very much wanted churches to be in harmony and worship in an orderly manner.

However, one thing has not caused much dissension, and that is Paul's famous chapter on love, found in *First Corinthians* Chapter 13. This chapter has been so famous that it was often used in American public schools in previous decades to illustrate excellent prose. Until a few decades ago, any person in the United States would have been considered uneducated if not familiar with lines such as: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am like a clanging brass or a tinkling cymbal," or "love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things," or "three things remain: faith, hope and love; but the greatest of these is love."

Movies and television shows have cheapened the concept of love immeasurably. Just think of this famous Hollywood line, "Love means never having to say you're sorry."<sup>5</sup> What a dumb thing to say. Empty, really. To get a good sense of what love really is, I recommend that you spend time reading and re-reading *First Corinthians* 13. From that chapter you will begin to understand what love is.

Paul ends our letter to the Corinthians by reminding them that the true source of unity is faith in the gospel. This is one time when Paul ranks the importance of what he writes. He says that what he passes on to the Corinthians as the highest priority is this: Jesus died for our sins according to Scripture, he was buried, he was raised on the third day according to Scripture, and he appeared to more than five hundred Christians and their leaders.

Paul ends his letter with that succinct message because many of the Corinthians are teaching that there is no resurrection from the dead. Paul is insistent that if there is no resurrection from the dead, then not even Jesus was raised from the dead. In that case, the faith of all Christians is futile and they are to be pitied above all people for living a delusion.

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<sup>5</sup> From the novel and movie *Love Story*, by Erich Segal

However, Paul insists that Jesus was raised from the dead, and that gives Jesus power over death and all other things. He finishes the letter by describing to the Corinthians about resurrected bodies and the end of time when Christians are raised and receive victory in Jesus.

Because we Jesus followers will be victorious, we have every reason to stand firm and give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

With that incredible message of hope, Paul encourages the Corinthians to act like the Lord wants them to. Paul knows this encouragement is needed, but ...he also knows this will not be the last letter he writes to them... they are kind of a mess.

Paul ends his letter with a batch of personal requests and greetings. My favorite line of his is, "Do everything in love." I wish he had sent that message to Corinth before my fellow Jews nearly beat me to death and left me laying on the floor in front of Gallio... No, I guess I don't wish that... Otherwise I may never have met Priscilla, Aquila, and Paul.

By the time Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem the second time, I was already their faithful assistant.<sup>1</sup> That was about ten years before Paul wrote *First Corinthians*. I served Paul through most of his ministry, but my name is not even mentioned by Luke in his book of *Acts*. If Paul had not mentioned me a few times in some of his letters and written one short letter to me that is in the New Testament, you would not know I ever existed. It was a good day whenever I was second fiddle in Paul's band. Most of the time I was third or fourth.

When Paul needed someone to carry his important letter to the Corinthians, he chose me.<sup>2</sup> I may not have been his first choice, but Timothy<sup>3</sup> was in Macedonia and I was probably the next best choice. Paul and I agreed that we would meet in Troas after I stayed in Corinth long enough to get their response to the letter.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, when I got to Troas, Paul was nowhere to be found, so I went to Macedonia, hoping to find him there. I suspected Timothy was still in Macedonia and I knew Paul wanted to see him, too.

Fortunately, it wasn't long before Paul showed up in Macedonia, and we all had a joyful reunion.<sup>5</sup> I told Paul of the repentant spirit of the Corinthians and he was overjoyed, although I also told him that some issues needed to be addressed.<sup>6</sup> Paul waited a few days, then had me scribe for him while he wrote another letter to them that you know as *Second Corinthians*.<sup>7</sup> Even though I was the one who brought him news from Corinth, Paul added Timothy's name to the letter.<sup>8</sup> It hurt my feelings at the time, but later I would find out why he did that.

As you read *Second Corinthians*, you will definitely get the understanding that Paul personally knows the Corinthians, and that they had talked and corresponded about many topics in the past. He was plowing old ground, not new ground.

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 2:1

<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:12-14

<sup>3</sup> Acts 19:22

<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:12-13

<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:5-7

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:15-23, 10:10-12

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:1

<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:1

As usual, Paul starts his letter by praising God and giving thanks for the Corinthians. He makes it exceeding clear that he has suffered for the cause of Christ and for the good of others. He will return to this theme later, but he sets the groundwork early in his letter.

Paul explains his change of plans about visiting Corinth. He is trying to give them the message that he did not avoid going there because it might be unpleasant, but because it was God's desire and because it was in the best interest of the Corinthians.

Returning to a previous letter, Paul compliments them for being obedient in disciplining a member for bad behavior, but he implores them to forgive the member and accept him back so that he will not be overwhelmed and Satan does not get a foothold in his life or in Corinth.

Paul explains the glory of the Gospel message, and compares the present life with the resurrected life. Then Paul writes one of my favorite passages – a passage that I often thought of when one of us was beaten or persecuted. “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”<sup>9</sup>

There were so many nights that my body ached, and I wanted to give up, but the echo of those words drove me on...”for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” Eternal glory! For me, somebody who is second-fiddle at best.

Paul loves to talk about resurrection and reconciliation. From personal experience he knows what it was to be resurrected from a dead life, and be reconciled to Jesus. I never knew Paul to feel guilty, but I also knew him to be realistic about his life. When he writes Second Corinthians 5:10, he is just expressing a fact. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”<sup>10</sup>

He knows that verse will strike home to the Corinthians since there is a literal judgement seat sitting in the middle of their city.<sup>11</sup> He knows they will visualize Jesus sitting on that judgment seat giving each of them what they deserve...whether good or bad.

Surrounding that judgment seat in Corinth are temples and false idols. So, Paul takes the opportunity in his letter to warn the Corinthians about idolatry. He knows idolatry has been the downfall of the Israelites many times, and is certain it can be the downfall of the Corinthians, too.

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<sup>9</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NIV)

<sup>10</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:10

<sup>11</sup> This “Bema” seat is an important tourist site

Remembering my report to him, Paul takes special notice of their repentance for their past actions, and even tosses a little credit my way. Just when I was getting frustrated at Paul, he tosses in some good words about me. That guy!

And then, the other shoe drops. Paul informs the Corinthians that he wants them to collect money and be ready to give it to me when I come to them again...sooooo, that was my notice that I will be headed back to Corinth in the fairly near future. He challenges them to give even more generously than the Macedonians. It is assumed that the gifts are going to the church in Jerusalem that is in desperate need. The church there has long been under stress from persecution of the Jewish leaders and suffered from a long famine. Because of the persecution, it is next to impossible for them to buy or sell within the standard Jewish economy.

As he challenges them, Paul gives them information about giving that will be repeated throughout the ages to Christians everywhere. He says that we reap what we sow. He is comparing giving to sowing or planting, and that reaping or harvesting, will be future blessings. Next, he says the Corinthians should give what they have decided in their hearts to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion. Why?...because God loves a cheerful giver!

One of the constant problems Paul has is false teachers who oppose him on various teachings. One of their typical accusations is that Paul is not truly an apostle so his teachings are not authoritative. Some people think that these false teachers are what he was referring to when he said that he was given a thorn in the flesh to keep from becoming conceited.<sup>12</sup>

Paul uses his sufferings and persecutions as one proof of his dedication to Jesus. He also offers his consistent and faithful actions as proof of his authority.

Paul maintains that he is actually a weak person. Something that I never saw. He boasts in his weakness, because it proves his strength derives only from Jesus. In fact, Paul tells the Corinthians that Jesus had personally told him, "My grace is enough for you, for my power is perfected by weakness."<sup>13</sup> This quotation emphasizes once again that Paul has a special relationship with Jesus.

Throughout his letter, Paul continually stresses his care and love for the Corinthians. He is always torn between the need to show his love for them, but the need to discipline them when they need it. Paul is no naive prude. In a rather back-handed way, he makes it clear that they have the tendency for discord, jealousy, rage, gossip, arrogance, impurity, sexual sin and debauchery. I can't imagine that they won't be a little embarrassed that he knows them so well.

I mentioned earlier that Paul added Timothy's name to this letter and it hurt my feelings at the time. I learned pretty quickly why Paul did. He had me carry this letter back to the Corinthians,

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<sup>12</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:7

<sup>13</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:9



and he didn't want them to resent me...especially since I was supposed to make final arrangements for a relief collection from them.<sup>14</sup>

I must have done a pretty good job, because the Corinthians fulfilled their responsibilities and were able to provide a collection to Paul on his next trip there.<sup>15</sup> For once, his problem children at Corinth acted like responsible adults. Maybe all of Paul's writings and all of my time with them did make a lasting difference!

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<sup>14</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15

<sup>15</sup> Romans 15:26

Most Christians think the Apostle Paul wrote the book in the Bible known as *Romans*. But the Bible says I wrote it. Me! Go to Romans 16:22 in the King James Version and read, “I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

Okay, okay, that is my attempt at a little humor and wordplay, as is made clear in modern translations. I “wrote *down*” the letter that Paul dictated to me. Paul often dictated his letters, and I was fortunate to be the scribe for this long and scholarly letter. I’m not a big deal. The only mention of me, my name anyway, in the Bible is when Paul let me slip in this little personal greeting. Better than nothing, right?

The Bible doesn’t tell you more about me, but early Church tradition leads you to believe I was from Iconium, in modern day Turkey. If that is so, you might presume I met Paul in Iconium on his first missionary journey, approximately ten years before the writing of *Romans*.

*Romans* was written in the late 50’s AD while Paul was visiting Corinth. Paul stayed with Gaius while in Corinth.<sup>2</sup> Timothy and a long list of others were in Paul’s entourage. He was there to take up a collection for the destitute church in Jerusalem. Paul was intent on gathering an offering from the Corinthians, and from other churches, and personally taking it to Jerusalem.

*Romans* is different from most of the other letters of Paul’s in a way that most people today don’t think about. With the possible exception of *Ephesians*, all of Paul’s other letters were written to churches or individuals to address particular problems or circumstances. He did not have to do that with this letter for at least two reasons: Rome was a new church and hadn’t developed significant problems known to Paul, and Rome was under the influence of Paul’s two faithful trainees...Priscilla and Aquila!<sup>3</sup>

Months before *Romans* was written, Paul had been expelled from Ephesus. After that, Priscilla and Aquila also left Ephesus and went back to Rome where a church met in their home. They were living in Rome when Paul wrote *Romans*.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps you remember that Paul first met Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth after they had been expelled from Rome with all the other Jews many years before?

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 16:22 King James Version

<sup>2</sup> Romans 16:23

<sup>3</sup> Romans 16:3

<sup>4</sup> Romans 16:3-5

*Romans* was placed as the first of Paul's letters in the New Testament not because it was written first, but because it was the longest one written to a church. Paul wrote it toward the end of his Third Missionary Journey. This was a time when Christianity was growing, churches were being started, the Judaizers were still contentious, and there were false teachers opposing Paul. It was also a time when some of the doctrinal aspects of Christianity needed more clarity.

If *Romans* seems a little stilted and formal, you need to forgive Paul. He had a lot of material to cover as he gave guidance to the new church in Rome during rapidly changing circumstances. Nero had been the emperor for a few years, and he was proving to be, shall we say, incredibly erratic in his behavior.

There is another huge difference in Paul's letter to the Romans that many don't consider. Its long-term effect. There is no reason to think that any of the other churches that Paul wrote to continuously existed into the modern age without interruption. The church in Rome? It is the location of what is known in the modern world as...the Roman Catholic Church.

It is likely that when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, the church in Rome consisted of a pretty wide mix of Jews from various countries, Roman slaves and citizens, and people from other countries. Paul personally knew many of them. You can infer that from his closing statements in Romans Chapter 16 plus some of the things he says in his letter. With such a broad audience, you can expect that his letter covers many topics. With inspiration from the Holy Spirit, Paul addresses things in a way that all future generations will be inspired and informed.

At the start, Paul reveals why he is eager to preach the Gospel – because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. Not just Jews. Not just rich people. Not just a few good people. *Everyone* who believes! This will be extremely good news to his audience of such varied backgrounds.

Paul then introduces a theme that he will follow in many other places – *the righteous shall live by faith*. Paul takes this quote from the prophet Habakkuk, and will develop it into a foundational piece of his theology.<sup>5</sup>

Paul launches into a lecture on how God and his righteousness are revealed through nature so that nobody has an excuse for their immoral behavior. Evildoers will be punished, and those who do good will be rewarded with glory, honor and peace.

As Paul moves through this section, he uses some phrases that might remind you the time you live in. Right now. . When he talks about people who go against God's nature, he says, "God

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<sup>5</sup> Habakkuk 2:4

gave them over to debased minds to do what ought *not* to be done;” he calls them “inventors of evil;” and says they not only do evil things but give approval to those who practice them.<sup>6</sup>

As typical, Paul brings the Jews into the conversation. He says that the Jews have an advantage because they had the Old Testament first. But...in the end...God treats all people equally. Nobody can be considered righteous on their own, but righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. For all people, *all people*, have sinned and fall short off the glory of God, but all are justified freely by God’s grace through the redemption of Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Returning to a theme that permeates his writings, Paul quotes the prophet Habakkuk, “The righteous will live by faith.”<sup>8</sup> He uses Abraham as an example of someone who believed God and was deemed to be righteous. Here is how Paul describes Abraham’s faith...he was “fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he promised to do.” Because he was fully persuaded, he was able to reason that God could bring Isaac back from the dead!<sup>9</sup> That’s crazy! I can’t even imagine how being that “fully persuaded” could change my life. Are you with me on that?

Today people want more and more things. But one thing that everybody wants is peace. Paul gives this comforting message to the Romans: “Since you have justified through faith, you have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>10</sup> What a relief that will be to the Romans living in a chaotic and dangerous city.

Rather than accusing the Romans of unrighteous behaviors, Paul simply makes this statement: “You are slaves to whatever you obey.”<sup>11</sup> Do you sin? You are a slave to sin. Do you have greed or sexual immorality? You are slaves to those. Do you constantly act with righteousness? You are a slave to righteousness. Simple.

The concepts of God and sin must have been mysterious to the Roman. Their gods were thought to behave in a completely different way. Roman gods acted capriciously, on any little whim, and had little regard for humans. A god who loved humans was a completely foreign concept. And sin was a completely new concept to the Romans.

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<sup>6</sup> Romans 1:28-32

<sup>7</sup> Romans 3:22-24

<sup>8</sup> Hab. 2:4

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 11:19

<sup>10</sup> Romans 5:1

<sup>11</sup> Romans 6:5

Paul really gets the Romans' attention when he writes such things as: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this way – while we were sinners, Christ died for us."<sup>12</sup> "For the wages of sin is death. But...the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus."<sup>13</sup>

The Jewish Christians had a background in understanding the behavior God wanted from them, but the Gentile Christians were having to learn what it meant to behave like God wanted. The whole concept of sin must have been bewildering.

Then, as now, there were many Christians who couldn't get their actions in line. In order to encourage them not to give up, Paul lets them know that sin is a constant problem, even for him. He does not sugarcoat it, either. He tells them, from personal experience, that he doesn't do the good he wants to do, but the evil he doesn't want to do. When he behaves like that, he is under control of the sin that lives within him. But...he also says that he can only be delivered from that type of behavior by Jesus Christ. There is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus. Thank God!

As always, Paul makes it clear that life comes through the Holy Spirit. He tells the Romans that if they set their minds on physical things, they will live as physical beings and die that way. But if they set their minds on the Spirit, they will have life and peace.

Another concept that must have baffled the Romans? If they are led by the Holy Spirit, they can consider themselves as adopted children of God. To them, adoption was a huge privilege that only happened to a few people. To be an adopted child of God was an unimaginable privilege.

As adopted children, they expect to be heirs of their father and to be treated very well. It would have made sense for them to hear such things as: "We know that for those who love God, all things work together for their good." "If God is for us, who can be against us."  
"Nothing...nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ."

I remember crying when Paul said some of those things. He would have to repeat them because I couldn't see my hands. I had always wondered how an all-powerful God could love someone like me. Now I know why. He loves me because of who he is! His very nature causes him to love me. Me! I, Tertius. Not a big deal. In anybody's book. God loves me!

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<sup>12</sup> Romans 5:8

<sup>13</sup> Romans 6:23

Paul always had a way with words and women. Well, with words anyway. Here is the name he gave me. Factory. He called me a factory!

Actually, that's only part of it. He actually called me a "blessing factory." I blushed for an hour when he called me that. There could not be a more complimentary name.<sup>1</sup>

My name is Phoebe, and I'm from the small port city of Cenchreae. This is the port on the eastern side of the Isthmus of Corinth. My little town was tied to the city of Corinth, just as our church was tied closely to the church at Corinth. I was good friends with Priscilla and Aquila, and the other Christians there.

Paul came through my town on his Second Missionary Journey, and cut his hair because of a vow he had taken.<sup>2</sup> The church he established there flourished.

Paul wrote that I was a *diakonon* and *prostatis*.<sup>3</sup> Translated into English, those words mean deacon, and helper or benefactor. Benefactor can be loosely translated as "blessing factory."

Although the Bible isn't specific, many scholars believe that Paul entrusted me to carry the letter of *Romans* to the church at Rome.<sup>4</sup> He certainly instructed them to treat me well.

The second half of *Romans* begins with a description of God's sovereignty. That's a term that isn't really familiar to you guys, but it derives from the ways that ancient kings and queens behaved. Just because they were kings and queens, they had complete ability to enforce their desires and commands. They had supreme authority and power. Fair? Not to modern minds probably.

God made the universe and everything in it. He is the supreme Creator. He is sovereign over all. Paul maintains that God has the right to be how he wants to be. As Paul writes, God will have mercy on whoever he wants, and he hardens whoever he wants.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 16:1-2. Mitch Wilburn points out that the way the word "benefactor" is used indicates a blessing factory.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 18:18

<sup>3</sup> Romans 16:1-2

<sup>4</sup> Based on the wording off Romans 16:1-2

<sup>5</sup> Romans 9:18

Knowing there are many Jewish Christians in Rome, Paul returns to the subject of the Jews. He has such a tender heart for his people that he never can quit thinking about them and desiring that they come to salvation. He reminds them that everyone, everyone, who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.<sup>6</sup> But the flip side of that encouragement is the self-condemnation of those who choose not to call on the name of the Lord.

Paul wants so badly to convince his people that the Law of Moses cannot save them, only Jesus can. While he is giving that message to the Jews, he wants the non-Jews to hear the same message.

As he often does, Paul returns to the subject of faith. In one of his most famous lines, Paul says that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Christians throughout the centuries will take these as marching orders to make sure everyone in the world hears the Gospel.

To make sure that the Romans didn’t think that faith means some kind of shallow, mental assent, Paul launches into my own favorite chapter of any of his writings, *Romans* Chapter 12. In this chapter, Paul is very clear and detailed about what it means to live a life of humble service, a life of sacrifice, a life showing love in action.

Every verse in this chapter is a nugget of priceless treasure. “In view of God’s mercy, I urge you to offer you bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your true worship.” How amazing. How different than the goals of other religions or personal passions. This chapter is a barrage of holiness, from that first verse in the chapter to the last, “Don’t be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Paul moves toward the end of his letter with three important messages. The first is especially important to those living in a dangerous, conniving world – be submissive to the governing authorities. He says that people in authority are placed there by God. So, pay taxes to whom you owe taxes, okay, and give respect to whom you owe respect. This attitude will keep the Romans out of a lot of trouble, and remains good advice for the modern world.

The second message is the importance of the supreme power of love. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This simple command is different from the thoughts of ancient peoples who normally phrased it, “don’t harm your neighbors.” To Paul, it is not enough to stay neutral with the people around you. It is important to contribute positively to their lives. It’s just so great.

The third message has to do with keeping perspective in a troubled world. Jesus is coming back in the near future. With that end in mind, fix your priorities. As Paul tells the Corinthians, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God to give an account of what we have done.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Romans 10:13

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:10

The closing of Paul's instructions is like the original WWJD bracelet, remember those? What Would Jesus Do – be like Jesus, live in accord with how Jesus would live. And how did Jesus live? Like a servant.

Paul reminds us the importance of being a positive influence on others. Even if you don't think something is wrong for you to do, you shouldn't do it if it causes someone else to sin. If this seems like a little thing to you, Paul is probably remembering what Jesus said, "Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone that causes them to stumble. It would be better for them to drown with a millstone around their neck."<sup>8</sup> I mean think about it.

Scattered throughout the book of Romans are nuggets that would have been precious to us, but you probably skim right over. Example.

The lives of those living in Rome were hopeless. Millions of slaves were destined for lives of danger or forced service. Their biggest hope was to be freed from slavery, in which case they might be facing a life of starvation. Children and most wives were under the domination of the oldest male in the family. Their biggest hope was to exist with few problems. Free males were probably either soldiers or merchants, and were likely beholden to a patron.

Virtually everyone was destined for a short, brutal life. The Roman and Greek gods were, at best, indifferent to the lives of people. Life was hopeless.

How amazing it is to have Paul tell the Christians, "May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Hope. Hope. Hope.

Paul moves toward the end of his letter by reminding the Romans how he is a minister to all non-Jews, and how he makes it his ambition to preach the Gospel. Paul tells the Romans that he could not come to them at the present time because he has to take the contribution to the Jerusalem church, but says he will come to them when he is on his way to Spain. Spain!... Well, Paul did come to Rome a few years later, but he was to come as a prisoner.

Many people breeze through the last chapter of *Romans* because it is Paul's greetings to people in the church at Rome, but there are many nuggets to gather from that chapter. I've already mentioned myself as being mentioned there as a blessing factory, but here are some of the other things you can find. Paul knows a lot of people in the Roman church, so the church is not small. Priscilla and Aquila are there, and the church meets in their house. Epenetus was Paul's first convert in the province of Asia. Rufus, whose father carried the cross of Jesus, is in Rome. On and on and on. The world-wide Christian movement is thriving, and you can see it in the church in Rome.

All of Paul's hard work is paying off. Christianity is on the verge of a huge growth spurt. Maybe I better enlarge my blessing factory!

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<sup>8</sup> Luke 17:1-2



In 1908, there was a huge shift in the country of Turkey. A political party made up of exiles, students, and civil servants led a successful rebellion against the ruler of the Ottoman Empire: They will long be remembered for bravely ushering in a time of radical change in the modern-day country of Turkey. They were called the Young Turks.

In New Testament times, I helped usher in a radical change in the part of that country known in my time as the province of Asia.<sup>1</sup> Ephesus was the capital of the province. I knew well the people of Ephesus and the entire province of Asia. I was the original Young Turk.

I first met Paul when he lived in Ephesus for a couple years during his Third Missionary Journey. I was one of the young men he trained to share the Gospel in Ephesus and nearby cities. Later, I accompanied Paul when he took a relief fund to Jerusalem at the end of the Third Missionary Journey. I watched the elders of Ephesus cry when Paul said he would never see them again. It broke my heart, many of those elders were my close friends.

I was with Paul in Rome during his imprisonment. I was with him when he wrote his letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, and to Philemon. When it came time to have someone carry those letters, Paul chose me. I think he chose me because he believed me to be an encourager, and because I knew everything about Paul's circumstances.<sup>2</sup> That would become important because of the other letter I was taking to Philemon. Onesimus talks about it.

Paul lived in Ephesus for nearly three years. He was old friends with the Christians there. They knew each other well, and Paul saw no need to be timid or deferential when he wrote to them. He wrote frankly, like good friends do.

Paul quickly reminds the Ephesians of their huge privilege of belonging to Jesus. Listen to his encouraging words: "For God chose us before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love...in love (wistful sigh) he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ." The Ephesians will quickly recognize that God must love them very much to voluntarily choose to adopt them. In their world, adoption is a huge privilege.

Paul tells them that he has not stopped praying for them from the first time he heard about their faith, which was before he personally knew them. He wants them to understand that God

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 20:4

<sup>2</sup> Col. 4:7-8

had ordered the world and everything in it so that he will be glorified. The Ephesians learn from Paul that the world is an orderly place because of God, not a chaotic and unpredictable world resulting from control of the old Greek gods.

Paul never tires of saying how God loves them, so much that he gave his only Son so that they could be saved. My most favorite words that Paul ever wrote, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”<sup>3</sup>

Saved by grace, through faith. This is a theme that Paul repeats over and over throughout his teachings. Salvation is a gift, and it cannot be earned through works. What a joyous message for the Ephesians to hear. God is not like the pagan gods. He doesn’t demand unreasonable works to get his favor. He gives his favor because he loves those who are his children.

Yet, in an almost paradoxical way, his children are created to do good works. It is in their very nature, their DNA, to do good works. God’s people cannot help doing good works, especially when it glorifies God whom they love. What a message of hope that Paul shares with them. Sometimes, I wish he had just ended the letter right there. It is almost more than any person can comprehend.

Instead, Paul goes ahead to remind them that they were once separated from God, but now they are brought back to him through the sacrifice of the life of Jesus. This sacrifice changes them from being strangers and foreigners to God, to being members of his household.

I need to pause here and talk to those of you who read the Bible in English. You have one significant disadvantage when it comes to the Bible that will become apparent in just a moment. A disadvantage that has led many people to misunderstand portions of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.

In English, it is often difficult to discern whether the writer is talking to one person or to a group of people. The word “you” is used both ways, and statements are made in such a way that you cannot always tell. As an example, later in *Ephesians*, Paul will write, “Put on the full armor of God.” Does Paul mean that I personally, should put on my armor, or that my group of people should put on our armor, or both?

In English, that answer is usually apparent by looking at the context of the statement. But that causes other problems. Sometimes it is hard to tell the context, the context changes but the change isn’t clear, or the audience forgets the context.

Returning to the first verse of *Ephesians*, you see that Paul wrote the letter to all the Christians living in Ephesus. A careful reading of the letter, especially in some other languages, reveals

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV

that Paul does not move away from that audience in the letter. From the start to the finish, he is talking to all the Christians in Ephesus!

This is obvious when you read Chapter 4, but many people today lose that idea as Chapters 5 and 6 unfold.

In Chapter 4, Paul urges the Christians in Ephesus to be united in the church. Ever since Paul wrote to the Corinthians, some ten years before, Paul understood and preached the importance of unity in the church body. He points out that Jesus equips his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. When those in the body reach unity in the knowledge and faith of Jesus, they become mature and reach the fullness of Christ. In doing so, the body grows and builds itself up in love.

What kind of people were in the church at Ephesus? It likely consisted of people from that city, some Romans, some Greeks, some Jews, and a mix of others from different backgrounds. Paul needs to be very detailed with them about the proper way for people to live. After all, these Christians represent Jesus to the rest of the world. Faults in the way they live will reflect on Jesus and his church.

He cautions the Ephesians to live with righteousness and holiness, not with impurity and greed. Knowing that their different backgrounds will lead them to different thoughts about what that means, Paul chooses to be very detailed about what he means. Speak truthfully, do not lie. Don't sin while angry. Work and share instead steal.

Don't use unwholesome speech, don't grieve the Holy Spirit. Get rid of bitterness, rage and slander. Instead of having those faulty habits, be kind and compassionate, forgiving each other as Christ forgave. No sexual immorality or greed. On and on and on. Apparently, Paul knows the Ephesians will search for a loophole, and he is not going to give them one.

Instead of loopholes, Paul gives them this overarching command: Be filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. Always give thanks to God the Father for everything.

Let me interject another piece of information that you may not know. Perhaps you have been taught that in the time of the New Testament women had very few rights. That they were essentially property of their husbands and had few more rights than the slaves. That was somewhat true during the time of the Roman Republic when legal control of the woman passed from her father to her husband. Her husband had *patria potestas*, absolute power over her, like he did their children, slaves and servants.<sup>4</sup>

With the end of the Republic in 27 BC, that form of marriage began to be replaced by *sine manu*, in which the power over the woman remained with her family of origin. In essence,

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<sup>4</sup> *The Reach of Rome* by Alberto Angela pages 122-126

women began to have economic independence and choice of marriage, which quickly evolved into people freely divorcing and remarrying, and declining birth rates.

By the time *Ephesians* was written, women's rights were mostly a *fait accompli* in the Roman empire. You can see how Paul highly respects women in several places. For instance, he trusts Phoebe to take his letter to the Romans, and Priscilla to start churches. He certainly never treated women as property.

So, as Paul continues his quest to teach about unity in the body of Christ, he talks about unity in the families of Christians. Families at that time often included wives, husbands, children, and slaves. The husbands and wives were the masters of the slaves. Paul begins with this directive, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Paul knows that the people of the church will not have a servant's heart at church if they don't have a servant's heart at home. Assuming that everyone has a servant's attitude, and a Christian love for one another, it makes sense to Paul to lay out the orderly way for them to run their households. Wives, submit to husbands as they submit to Christ. Husbands, love wives as they love their own bodies and as Christ loved the church. Children, obey parents. Fathers, don't exasperate children but bring them up in the Lord. Slaves, obey masters as they obey Christ. Masters, treat slaves as a fellow Christian.

All of that sounds very strange to your modern day ears, but it makes perfect sense to the Ephesians, and everybody will be thrilled to live in that kind of an orderly, loving household.

Paul ends his letter with his famous passage about spiritual warfare. It is so well-known that I won't comment on it except to say this. Paul spent two years in the jail at Caesarea watching soldiers drill in formation. He knows the Roman armies are powerful because they fight in formations, in unity. Although the passage on spiritual warfare is applicable to individuals, it is written to the church in Ephesus. From Roman history, they know the importance of fighting as a unit. It is almost tantamount to suicide for a Roman soldier to fight on his own. Try reading the passage with that in mind.

I was with Paul when he wrote some of his letters. I must confess that this letter to the *Ephesians* is my favorite. It is so powerful and practical that it is unimaginable to me that the church at Ephesus won't flourish for centuries. Unfortunately, the beneficial effects of the letter will not last many decades. How can you know that? Read another letter from Jesus to the Ephesians...it is found in the book of *Revelation*.

I remained a faithful companion to Paul. Many years after he sent me to deliver *Ephesians*, he sent me to relieve Titus in Cyprus, and another time I was sent to relieve Timothy in Ephesus.<sup>5</sup> Kinda funny when I think about it. I was an energetic, revolutionary Young Turk when I first

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<sup>5</sup> Titus 3:12, 2 Timothy 4:12

worked with Paul. A dozen years later...he sent me to be just a substitute pastor. May not seem like a promotion to you, but it was to me.

Roman law dictates that my master can punish me in any way he chooses if I'm captured and returned to him. Forgive me if I seem a bit distracted. I may be dead in a few days. Or at least have a foot cut-off. Or an eye removed. It is all disconcerting.

While a runaway, I became a Christian, and I became very devoted to Paul. When Paul found out my secret, that I was a runaway slave, owned by a Christian, Paul had no choice but to send me back.

Paul recently wrote letters to the Christians at Ephesus and Colossae, and is having them carried by Tychicus. He is also carrying a letter from Paul to my master, Philemon, who lives in Colossae. Although Paul wrote an effective letter, Philemon may still choose to punish me severely as a runaway slave. The suspense of what he will choose to do is crushing me.

I imagine slavery is abhorrent to you now. I hope so. But for us it's how things are, how they've always been in the Roman Empire. Captured in battle, kidnapped, born to a slave. Doesn't matter. What I think doesn't matter.

But it mattered to Paul. I know Paul is pleading for me in the letter, and I know Tychicus is the perfect person to encourage Philemon to be kind. I'm sure you can understand the anxiety I have about that letter.

Now, let me tell you about a different letter Paul wrote... to the Christians at Colossae, the letter you know as the book in the Bible named *Colossians*. I hope I convey to you that this is the most underrated of all of Paul's letters, and it has huge implications for your life.

Colossae is a small town in my time. It is only a way station about ten miles away from Laodicea, and 120 miles due east of Ephesus. In previous centuries it was an important city, but its current low stature will be diminished even further in a few years because of a devastating earthquake.

The church at Colossae was established at the same time as many others when Paul lived in Ephesus for nearly three years, and was training young men to scour the countryside looking for people to share the Gospel with. Epaphras was one of those young men that knew the people of Colossae well. Paul has not yet been to Colossae, and has no friends there, but he has heard that they are being subjected to false teachings. He wants to get them back on the right track.

Paul adds Timothy's name to the letter's greeting because the people in Colossae love Timothy and will want to know that he approves of the things Paul says in the letter. Paul soon adds Epaphras to the greeting because he is well known by the Colossians since he had lived there.

Paul tells them how much he gives thanks for them and prays for them because of their faith in Jesus. He reminds them that their faith comes from hearing the Gospel, the same Gospel that is growing throughout the whole world. He also reminds them that they heard the Gospel from Epaphras. I overheard Paul talk about his motives, I know that his long introduction is subtle support for what is next.

This most underrated of Paul's letters has huge implications for your life. This is why: from the beginning, Christianity had been attacked from outside forces, now it is beginning to be attacked from the inside, this attack is from false teachers in our midst. And, these attacks will continue until the end of time.

There is a movement that has been growing in the ranks of the Christians. It is called Gnosticism. Gnosticism as a philosophy is not yet fully developed, but it has its roots in Greek thought. It is based on the idea that matter is evil and cannot come into contact with God. If that is true, the work of Christ and the sufficiency of his saving sacrifice will be nullified. There are other types of false teachings, too.

From reading *Colossians*, you can see that Paul attacks certain features of the false teachers. They seek to diminish the role of Christ, and increase the role of human action. They seek to rely on human traditions and philosophies, not on the Gospel. They seek to rely on human speculation, not revelation from God. The false teachers want people to attain righteousness through deprivation, and their teachings lead to the worship of angels.

However, Paul's main strategy of dealing with false teaching is this: Be very careful about the qualifications and traits of your teachers of the Gospel. They should teach the true Gospel of Jesus. Anything different is not from God.

This strategy will serve Christians well from my time until the end of time. It has one weak point though. It demands that listeners understand the Bible on their own so they can discern what is from God and what is not. Without this understanding, countless people through the ages will succumb to false teachings and false teachers. Look around you. It is still happening in your world. Hopefully it is not happening to you. And, you have it easier than we did since you have the New Testament as a sure guide.

With that strategy in mind, Paul reminds the Colossians that Jesus is the exact representation of the invisible God, but that we are reconciled to God by the death of Jesus' physical body if we continue in faith and do not move from the hope held out in the Gospel. With those declarations, Paul unites the importance of the physical and spiritual natures of Jesus.

Paul reminds them that he is a servant by God's commission to present the Gospel. He says that he strenuously contends with all the energy he has because of Christ working through him. His goal is that all people have the full riches of complete understanding of Christ. After establishing his credentials and the Gospel he teaches, Paul delivers a telling blow to false teachers.

In one sentence Paul sums up his argument against false teachers. He implores the Colossians to, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than Christ."<sup>1</sup>

With that pronouncement, Paul has no trouble moving from the divinity of Christ and his forgiveness of sins, to reminding them that there is not reason to worry about human restrictions on worship or the futility of worshiping angels. These things have the appearance of wisdom, but truly have no value.

Maybe you're like me, you like to use your mind more than your heart when it comes to Scriptural things. Listen to this order of Paul's thoughts: "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."<sup>2</sup> Did you get that? Heart first, head second.

Although Paul denies that forced abstinence has value, that doesn't mean he wants people to live undisciplined or unrighteous lives. To that end, Paul says to put death on any unwholesome physical activities, such as: sexual immorality, greed, anger, and lying. These sinful activities should be replaced with compassion, kindness, humility, and forgiveness. Over all of these virtues, put on love...which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Christians today often see these commands of Paul as comprehensive, lists of things to do or not do. A better way to think of them is: be like this, don't be like that; do these sorts of things, don't do those sorts of things. Remember that Paul is changing their entire world view.

To the Colossians who live in a sinful society, these commands must sound strange. But Paul follows up with things that they will cherish. Paul says to let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts and be thankful. Rather than give a long, long list of rules, Paul finishes this part of his letter by saying, "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."<sup>3</sup>

Paul gives the Colossians about the same instructions for Christian households as he gives the Ephesians, which isn't odd since he wrote their letters at about the same time. I believe he does

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<sup>1</sup> Col. 2:8 (NIV)

<sup>2</sup> Col. 3:1-2

<sup>3</sup> Col. 3:17



this in the case of the Colossians to make sure that the false teachers are not burdening families unduly.

Paul ends his letter by reminding the Colossians to devote themselves to prayer and to be watchful. It is kind of a last swipe at the false teachers. He also asks that they pray for him to proclaim the Gospel as clearly as possible. Where the false teachers shroud their teachings in mystery, Paul wants to be crystal clear.

Paul asks the Colossians to share this letter with the Laodiceans who live about ten miles away...and that the Laodiceans share their letter. It is a shame, but I understand that no copy of that letter to Laodicea has survived to modern times.

Since scroll space is precious, Paul lets the Colossians know that they can ask Tychicus and me about him. He lets them know that we are precious to him...even though I am a slave. An escaped slave.

Okay, that's it, I've finished telling you about the letter known as *Colossians*, I need to rejoin Tychicus and keep traveling. It is only a few more days until we reach my master, Philemon, and I find out my fate. What will he do to me? What would you do to me?

I haven't slept well because I am concerned about the reception of the letter I sent to Philemon. I don't know Philemon, and I'm not sure how committed he is to the cause of Christ. Even though Holy Spirit guided me in writing the letter, I am uneasy.

I haven't slept well in the weeks since I sent Tychicus and Onesimus to deliver my letters to Ephesus, Colossae, Laodicea, and to Philemon. I am not worried about the letters getting delivered since Tychicus and Onesimus are trustworthy and the sailing weather is good. I am not worried about the reception of the letters in Ephesus, Colossae, and Laodicea. They are letters of encouragement and instruction, not letters of discipline like I regularly send to Corinth.

Why my angst? Onesimus has become like a son to me. But....I found that he is a runaway slave belonging to Philemon. Though I hate the institution of slavery, it is the right thing to send Onesimus back to Philemon and ask for his forgiveness. Philemon has the power of life and death over his runaway slave. I hope that my letter convinces him to be merciful.

Slavery in the Roman Empire plays an important part in society and in the economy. Besides manual labor and domestic services, slaves might be highly skilled as accountants, doctors, scribes, even. Or farmers. On the opposite end, slaves might work in deadly conditions in the mines, and military.

There are no reliable statistics, but it is possible that 20-30% of the population of the entire Empire are slaves. People come to be slaves through military victories, kidnapping, to pay debts, and by way of birth to slaves. Slaves are considered property. As property, it is impossible for them to have legal rights.

I did not bother to ask why Onesimus ran away from Philemon. He may have been mistreated or he may have been treated well. He may have stolen money and feared getting caught, or stolen money when he left, or been a good and faithful servant. None of those things really matter since he needs to go back to serve his brother in Christ.

Sometimes, I have wondered if I had been so insistent if Philemon had not been a Christian. Would that have given me reason to shield Onesimus instead of returning him? Would I have been so willing to risk the potential wrath of the owner of a runaway slave? Fortunately, I was never placed in that position.

When Onesimus confessed to me that he was a runaway slave, I quickly put together a game plan. I was writing a letter to the Ephesians already, so I decided to write a letter to the church in Colossae, where Onesimus had escaped from, and a letter to Laodicea. With those two letters in hand, it would not seem so strange that another letter was being delivered to Colossae.

Next, Onesimus and I discussed all of the people we knew who had influence in the town, and might know Philemon personally. I would use their names and influence to sway Philemon's response. Timothy and Epaphras were easy choices since they had helped establish the church in Colossae. We added Apphia because of her good spirit, and Archippus who works with us. We also added the names of Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke so that Philemon would know how many influential people were aware of the situation. Tychicus was another good choice since he knew the people in Colossae and had a good reputation.

I chose Tychicus to deliver the letters because he has the same encouraging spirit and ability to persuade that my old friend, Barnabas, has. I also believe that Tychicus can accompany Onesimus and keep him from being so fearful that he will run away again. I advised Tychicus to leave Onesimus in a nearby town, take the letter to the church, and give the letter to Philemon at the church so that everyone would know something was up. Yes, Tychicus was the right choice, since I am in jail and cannot go myself.

I understand that today's English-speaking teenagers and their mothers have created a new verb – to guilt. As in, "I guilted my mother into buying me new shoes," or "I guilted my daughter into cleaning her room." Well, in my letter to Philemon, I try to guilt him into forgiving Onesimus and accepting him as a Christian brother. Frankly, I try everything I can think of to make that happen.

As you follow through my short letter to Philemon, you see that I try every trick in the book. I start by describing myself as a prisoner, which puts me on nearly the same plane as a slave. I call Philemon a fellow-worker, which implies we are equals on the same team, and I remind Philemon that he is an influential Christian that everyone will watch since the church meets in his house.

I let Philemon know that I pray for him because he has a reputation for loving his fellow Christians and has faith in Jesus. I remind him that we are partners, and that he is a source of great encouragement for me and others.

With all that in place, I mention that I could use my authority as an apostle to order him to act as I want, but I much prefer to have in act in love. That I, as an old man and prisoner of Jesus, appeal to him on behalf of Onesimus, who became like a son to me while in jail.

My next statement to Philemon doesn't make a lot of sense in English, but I was using a word play in the Greek language. I say that Onesimus was previously useless to Philemon, but now he is useful to both him and me. In Greek, Onesimus means "useful". In a spiritual sense he was

useless before he became a Christian, but he became useful in the faith once he became a Christian.

That statement will surely give Philemon a little shock, too. How in the world did I know his runaway slave, and how can he possibly be like my son? And, if that statement gives him a shock, the next will, also.

I tell Philemon that I am sending his runaway slave back to him. I emphasize how dear Onesimus is to me, and that he is essentially acting in a support role that Philemon himself, should be doing. I tell Philemon again that I want him to act out of voluntary love, not out of duress.

As I wind down my letter, I use an old trick that my teacher, Gamaliel, taught me in Jerusalem. I put Philemon on the horns of a dilemma. I force him into choosing between two difficult choices that have very different outcomes. I tell Philemon that if he considers me a partner, he will welcome back Onesimus. I tell him that if Onesimus owes him anything, that I will personally pay it back. The unstated dilemma is, of course, if he doesn't welcome back Onesimus then he does not consider me a partner or being trustworthy to pay back a debt.

In my last attempt at guilting him, I tell Philemon that I know he will do even more than I ask. I am placing him in the role of a host. In the culture of the Roman Empire, hosts have an inherent obligation to do more than is expected.

Even though I am in jail in Rome, in the letter I ask Philemon to prepare a guest room to host me. That indicates I might be coming to see him in the near future. I surely hope I get that opportunity.

As I sit here in jail, I pray that Holy Spirit sends me a vision of what is happening in Colossae. I can't wait to hear what Philemon does. In modern times, you analyze every word of every sentence in my letters to the Ephesians and Colossians. Today, I am thinking back through every word in my letter to Philemon, wondering if there is anything else I could have said to reduce the punishment, or to help save the life of my dear Onesimus.

## Epaphroditus

I almost died a few months ago. If I pass out at least once while talking to you, don't be too shocked. I've been doing that every so often since...the incident<sup>1</sup> Of course, sometimes, I have a seizure instead, but don't let that bother you either. Just give me a few minutes to recover, and I will resume my story.

You have no idea what it is like to almost die when you are with Paul. He prays and prays. And prays. As I floated in and out of consciousness, I kept wondering why he didn't heal me miraculously like he had so many others. But, I also remembered that there were many people that Paul was not led to heal. Then, one morning, I began to get better, and was soon completely healed. Well, except for these occasional fits I warned you about.

We didn't know the medical cause for my illness, I contracted it in the swamps surrounding Philippi as I went to Rome to be with Paul. Oh, I think you call it malaria. If you go to Philippi today, you don't see those swamps, only beautiful farm land. But long ago, the swamps west of Philippi were famous, because they changed Roman history.

42 BC, about a hundred years before I got sick, the Battle of Philippi determined the future of Rome. Octavian and Mark Antony's forces fought the forces of Brutus and Cassius. If Brutus and Cassius win, the Roman Republic will stay intact. If Octavian and Mark Antony win, the Republic will be dismantled and Rome will become an empire under Octavian. Each side had about 100,000 soldiers.

Mark Antony brilliantly used the swamps to his advantage and defeated Cassius. This led to the victory of Mark Antony and Octavian. As you know, Octavian eventually battled and defeated Mark Antony and became the first emperor of Rome, Emperor Augustus. He was the emperor in power when Jesus was born. Got it? Good. Moving on.

Philippi was a major city in Macedonia, named after Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. He conquered the city to attain its nearby gold mines and establish a fort at its strategic position.

Paul came to Philippi on his First Missionary Journey, and converted Lydia and her household to Christianity. Under the guidance of Timothy and Luke, a church was established, and it

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 2:27

flourished. Luke had a special fondness for Philippi because of its excellent medical school. I can't remember for sure, but that may have been where he became a doctor.

In 62 AD, Paul had been in prison in Rome for over a year. He frequently received reports about the various churches throughout Greece and Macedonia. I brought him news from Philippi and many other churches in Macedonia. The church there had sent me to Rome to take him money so he could continue to afford to stay in a private house while under arrest.

The news about Philippi was good. The church was growing, and most of its leaders, such as Lydia and Clement, were doing great. We had a little contention going on, but it was mild compared to the problems that Paul had to deal with in Corinth. It was contention that caused the opening to the letter to the Philippians be slightly different than Paul's other letters to churches.

The letter is sent from Paul and Timothy. We all know that Paul dictated most of the letter, but Timothy is beloved in Philippi and his name gives the letter a friendly tone. Paul describes themselves as servants, so everyone knows that all Christians are on the same level, and that none have any special rights. He addresses the letter to all the holy people at Philippi, along with their leaders. He points out the leaders so everyone knows Paul is not exempting them from any of his coming criticisms.

As usual, Paul opens his letter with thanksgiving and prayers for the Philippians. Since he knows many of them, you can tell that he means every word. He says that the Philippians are partners with him in the gospel, and that God will enable them to complete their work. His prayer for them is simple – that their love will grow and grow.

It may be a little difficult for you to understand the importance of Paul's next statements without a little historical context. Emperor Augustus, the first Roman emperor, established an elite unit of personal body guards known as the Praetorian Guard, or Palace Guard. Although Paul is allowed to live in a house, it seems that one or more of the Guards are assigned to oversee Paul.

Rather than complaining about being under house arrest, Paul uses it as an opportunity to evangelize. Apparently, the soldiers rotate their guard, so over a period of time, Paul is able to share the Gospel with the entire Palace Guard. This show of bravery encourages the other Christians to share the gospel without fear. Paul sees his circumstances as an opportunity to advance the Gospel. The important thing is that the Gospel is preached in every way so that people can experience the freedom Christ offers

Paul considers his dangerous situation and ponders his dilemma – is he better off staying alive and helping others come to Christ, or dying to be united with Christ? After consideration, he concludes it is best for him to stay alive so he can be an encouragement to the Colossians. He knows they will be subject to suffering in the future, just as he is suffering in the present.

Knowing the stress that the Philippians will endure, Paul returns to a theme that he often uses – be united in Christ. He encourages them to be so united that their minds will be alike and their spirits will be alike. He admonishes them to do nothing out of self-centeredness, but to value others above themselves, just as Jesus did. Because Jesus acted as a humble servant, God exalted him above everything. From that position, someday everyone will bow down to Jesus. No exceptions. Everyone will bow down to him, and acknowledge him as Lord.

Paul writes several passages in his many letters that set the stage for confusion and disagreement among Christians throughout the ages. In this case, Paul writes for the Philippians to, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”<sup>2</sup>

We don’t have time to discuss that passage to the satisfaction of everyone, but I do recommend that you spend time to study that passage. The next lines are not nearly as mysterious. Paul says for them to do everything without grumbling or arguing. Not much room for multiple interpretations of that! In any time in history!!

Seeking to reaffirm his relationship with them, he tells the Philippians that he wanted to send Timothy back to them, but in the mean time he needs Timothy to stay with him. Instead, he is sending someone else they know...me! I am to be the messenger carrying the letter in person, so they can be reassured that I am healed from my near-death situation. Paul is excited to send me because he knows I will be happy to be with them again.

The first major problem confronting the church was whether Christians had to follow the laws of Moses or not. Even a decade and a half after it was decided that Christians did not have to follow the laws of Moses, there was a remnant of the Jewish Christians who boasted that they were better Christians than others because they had been circumcised. Paul negated their claim and then gave a little new information about himself. Classic Paul.

Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin, had been a Pharisee, and followed the law faultlessly. Though that was so, in hindsight he considers all of his former way of life to be like garbage, manure. He considers everything a total loss, because in contrast he has an invaluable relationship with Christ.

Have you ever considered the relative value of your relationship with Jesus versus all of the things the world has to offer? No matter how valuable the world says things are, if you view them as garbage, they are garbage to you! Manure, even!

Okay? Okay. Not dead. didn’t pass out. Good. Great.

If you truly view your relationship with Jesus as invaluable, you will act like it.

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<sup>2</sup> Colossians 2:12-13

## Euodia

That late evening is burned into my memory. Our little church was meeting in the house of Philemon. It was dark and only a couple of oil lamps were burning. Epaphroditus was at the front reading the letter from Paul to us. He had been reading for about ten minutes, and I was in total synch with everything he said.

I thought to myself, “Yes, we should be unified. Yes, we should be humble. Yes, we should consider the things of the world as garbage. We mostly do that. We have a few little problems, but doesn’t every church?” Smug and self-satisfied. That was me.

Paul’s letter continued with something else I agreed with. He said there was one thing he did – he forgot the past and strained forward toward the future. He pressed on toward the goal to win the prize for which God had called him. Amen, I thought. I do exactly that myself. He continued to encourage us to model our lives after true Christ followers, and not set our minds on earthly things. He reminded us that we are citizens of heaven, not citizens of earth. That our bodies will be transformed. Amen, Amen, I thought. I have not set my mind on earthly things.

I could not wait to hear more...Until I heard more.

“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.” My world crashed. I couldn’t hear another word. How did Paul know about the drama with Syntyche? My contentious relationship with her, I thought, was not public knowledge.. How did he know? We who had been as close as sisters could not even talk to one another? Smugness collapsed in a fearful crash.

When Epaphroditus looked at me, I knew I had two choices. I could continue my proud, self-centered life. Or, I could repent, ask forgiveness of Syntyche, and work to unify our church again. I looked at Syntyche, and could tell she was having the same exact thoughts. Sisters. That was it. We walked toward each other, hugged, cried, and experienced the forgiveness of each other and those around us. Amazing.

I guess Paul must have known we would react like that, because his following words were written as if to only Syntyche and me. Here is what I remember from that night, “Rejoice in the Lord always! Let your gentleness be evident to all. Do not be anxious about anything...whatever is true, noble and pure, think about those things and the God of peace will be with you.”

That is what I remember from that night. Later, I got to read the letter myself, and many of Paul’s words were burned into my memory. Read the letter yourself, and let Paul’s words burn into your memory, too. Then you will feel like I do...Paul wrote the whole letter of *Philippians* just to you!



Timothy, Titus and John Mark. Paul treats them as sons, often writes letters to them, some of which will survive and be included in your Bible. Am I jealous?

One time, Paul even instructed Titus to help me.<sup>1</sup>

As a matter of fact, I am not jealous. I am more like Paul than they are, but I'm not his son. Like Paul, I am a scholar of the Scriptures. Like Paul, I am a powerful preacher. Like Paul, I can refute and argue with the best of the Jewish teachers. Like Paul, I am better with words than I am with people.<sup>2</sup> It's not about favorites, it's about legacy. Passing Jesus to the next generation.

One time, Paul sent me to Corinth to help straighten out some of their issues. It was the one and only time I was sent to do that.<sup>3</sup> Solving relationship issues is not my gift, but I am such a good preacher that there are many people who prefer my teachings over Paul's.<sup>4</sup>

I am also a lot like Timothy, Titus and John Mark. We have a thorough understanding of the Gospel, the Old Testament Scriptures, and an understanding of doctrinal issues. We know exactly how Paul thinks, and we completely agree with his interpretations and convictions. There is no disagreement among us, although I can tell you that complete accord comes through countless hours of teaching, discussion and debate. We have absolute unity when it comes to the Gospel.

That is why Paul does not spend much time discussing those types of matters in his letters to Timothy and Titus. Why preach to the choir when Paul has critical things to discuss with those who will lead the church after he is gone?

By your calendar, it is about 65 AD. It has been three-and-a-half decades since the death of Jesus and the beginning of the Church. It has been almost two decades since the Council of Jerusalem where it was decided by the Holy Spirit and Church leaders that Christians do not have to follow the Laws of Moses. Paul has completed his first three missionary journeys, been released from prison, and written the letters to the churches that are in your Bible. You might

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<sup>1</sup> Titus 3:13

<sup>2</sup> Acts 18:24-28

<sup>3</sup> Acts 19:1

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:12, 1 Corinthians 3:4-6

expect that things are stable and unified in each church and between the churches. If you expect that, your expectation will be unmet.

We church leaders are still contending with those who believe that Christians should follow at least some of the Laws of Moses. Those enemies of the freedom of the Gospel are known as Judaizers. We are also contending with many other false teachers who more typically have local impact due to their teachings, which are influenced by local religions or customs. For instance, teachings on angels and demons are often influenced by what the people have been taught before or the level of influence that those things have had on people's lives.

In your world today, as an example, there is demon worship in many Central American, Caribbean, and African countries. However, demon worship often tends to be more influential in the rural areas than in the cities. How your missionaries deal with that subject will surely depend on where they are preaching.

Just as your church leaders have to be aware of big picture items for the long-term benefit of your church, they have to deal with smaller items just to survive day-to-day. We are no different, so you see Paul writing accordingly in his letters to Timothy and Titus.

In First Timothy, Paul writes to Timothy about the big picture items Timothy is dealing with as a pastor in Ephesus. These big picture items are: false teachers and false doctrine, disorderly worship, the need for proper church leadership, and materialism.

Paul begins his letter by telling Timothy to command certain people to quit teaching false doctrines and quit talking about things they don't understand. Paul personally knows some of these people from the three years he lived in Ephesus, and later names at least two of them to be Hymenaeus and Alexander, who Paul handed over to Satan so they will be taught not to blaspheme.

As you may remember from Paul's other letters, he is insistent on having unified and orderly churches. He urges that Christians pray for all people, especially those in authority, so that they may live peaceful and quiet lives in holiness and godliness. Paul reminds Timothy that God wants all people to be saved and come to know the truth. (smiles) I'm sure Timothy heard Paul say that a few hundred times.

He goes on to say that in every place he wants men to live lives of prayer and peace, and women to live modestly and with self-control.

In a statement that will be controversial in the modern world, Paul says "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Timothy 2:12 ESV

Wow! If Paul had known what a controversy that one verse would cause, perhaps he would have expounded on whether that was just his desire, or whether it is a universal command for all times. Maybe he would have given better direction about whether it was for the Ephesians only, or for all cultures in all times.

Instead, we have to settle with what Peter once wrote about Paul's letters, "There are some things in them that are hard to understand."

Paul continues his discussion of an orderly church by giving a detailed description of how church leaders should be and act. Paul considers the Church to be a sacred institution which holds the position as the *wife* of Christ. An esteemed position, not inferior. And surely nobody would mistreat the wife of Jesus! The top leaders are called overseers, elders, or bishops. The leaders who do mostly service tasks are named deacons. Paul clearly holds these leaders to very high standards.

Paul continues his letter by going after false teachings and false teachers. It is not perfectly clear who he is referencing, but he is certainly against the false teachings so much that he says they are being taught by demons, deceiving spirits and hypocritical liars. Pretty much an all-out attack by Paul. It seems as if these false teachers promised salvation not through the Gospel, but through celibacy, abstinence, belief in myths, and other behaviors. Not on Paul's watch.

I have to smile when I read that Paul writes that Timothy is young, and hints that people disparage him for that reason. You might remember that Timothy started traveling with Paul on the Second Missionary Journey. If he was at least sixteen then, he is more than thirty years old now. "Young" has more to do with Paul thinking of him as a son rather than his chronological age. Paul instructs him to spend his time being devoted to public reading of Scripture, preaching and teaching. Those are good instructions for pastors in all places and times, don't you think?

Paul then returns to instructions for the church. He starts with talking about how the church should treat widows. In that time, widows were likely going to live on the verge of death unless their families or church took care of them. Paul maintains that it is the responsibility of the family first, and if the family absolutely can't, the church should do it. But Paul also makes it clear that the church's funds should be used for widows who need the help, so that nobody will have an unhealthy feeling of being entitled.

As Paul returns to the subject of elders, he says some things that are probably clear to Timothy, but will be puzzling to future generations. You must remember that some of our churches have been in existence for many years, and are very large. We have several elders, some of which spend a majority of their time on church matters.

These elders have an enormous responsibility to teach correctly. When they don't, they are to be corrected. When they sin, they are to be reproved. When they teach and act honorably, they are to receive double honor. What is not clear is whether these elders are to be paid or not.

Paul slips in a little personal advice to Timothy that will cause plenty of controversy in future centuries. He advises Timothy to drink a little wine because of his stomach and frequent illnesses. It makes me laugh to think how people will use that personal advice to justify their actions and beliefs in one way or the other.

Paul winds down his letter by pointing out that false teachers often teach the way they do for personal gain. And, sometimes the hearers of the false teachers, believe what they want to for personal gain. He reminds us that godliness with contentment is very valuable. However, the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. For that reason, people who want to be rich fall into all kinds of traps and have foolish and harmful desires and goals.

He commands those who are financially rich not to be arrogant or put their hope and trust in riches, but to put their hope in God who truly provides. Rich people are to use their riches to do good and be generous, so they will be spiritually rich. Why should they do this? Because they are laying a foundation for a future time when true life will occur for all eternity.

The letter from Paul concludes with these admonitions: run from all kinds of sins, not look away, or walk away, but run! And pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love and gentleness. This cannot be done passively He points out that it is a continual fight. Another part of that fight is to guard the true gospel and teachings that have been entrusted to Timothy's care.

I smile every time I read the end of this letter. Paul sounds so much a father who is sending his son to a faraway country. He gives him instructions, and then says, "Oh, and just one more thing. And just one more thing. And just one more thing." Paul knows his end is in sight, and he is about to pass the baton to the next generation. My hope is that you will do that someday, as well: Pass on the legacy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I am an elder of the First Church of Crete. And I am a liar. And an evil brute and a lazy glutton.

In his letter to Titus, Paul quoted one of our local writers, who said “All Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, and lazy gluttons.” Well, if that’s true, I am all those things because I am Cretan. Our writer took things to extremes, but maybe he was closer to the truth than I would like to admit. We Cretans are hard to get along with, and we have many bad habits. But I’m not sure that separates us from most of the other people in the Roman Empire. Or you.

Crete is the largest island in Greece, and the fifth largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. It was the center of the powerful Minoan civilization from about 2700-1420 BC, when a powerful volcano on a nearby island almost destroyed us. Since Crete is far from the Greek mainland, we have always had our own cultural traits.

In the time of the Roman Empire, Crete had a special place in the shipping business. If ships wanted to take a little extra risk and shorten their distances between Egypt and Rome, they could use Crete instead of hugging the mainland. Consequently, we have many sailors who live in Crete. Our society is pretty rough.

Paul wrote his letter to Titus in the mid-60’s AD, when Nero’s reign as emperor was nearing an end. Nero was a big supporter of the arts and public works, and was a good politician, but his time as emperor was turbulent. And violent. According to one historian, he blamed the Christians for the great fire in Rome and had many of them burned alive. His time as emperor ended when one of his generals rebelled. Nero was the first emperor to commit suicide.

Actually, the lying brutish glutton reference is a little joke we have in our church. Our church has been so plagued with struggles that Paul and Titus came to help us. Paul didn’t get to stay long, but he left Titus. In order to give him some guidance, Paul later sent a letter to him to give him information about how to lead us<sup>1</sup>

Titus certainly faces a lot of challenges as he deals with our little church. It’s a good thing he has been Paul’s understudy for at least two decades. I can tell he is going to need all of his experience and wisdom as he deals with us. I was a little apprehensive when he gathered us together to read Paul’s letter, but in retrospect, it was the right thing for him to do.

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<sup>1</sup> Titus 1:5

Although he addresses the letter to Titus, Paul says that the purpose of the letter is to further the faith and knowledge of God's people. As Titus reads the letter to us, we understand Paul has words for us that are for our own benefit. The letter reminds me of the letter that Paul wrote Timothy, the letter you know as *First Timothy*. Paul showed a copy of that letter to the elders of our church when he was here.

Paul reminds Titus that elders must be blameless. That doesn't mean we have to be sinless, just that we consistently act godly. Paul goes on to add additional qualifications for elders, such as: be faithful to his wife, have obedient children, not be overbearing or quick-tempered, or violent. He must encourage others by his sound doctrine and be able to refute those who do not teach sound doctrine.

Just as Timothy is having to deal with false teachers, we are having to do the same. We are still having to deal with Jewish Christians who maintain that Christians must follow the laws of Moses, and we are having to deal with teachers who teach that physical things are evil. We can often tell which teachers are false just because they are doing it for personal financial gain. Sound familiar?

Paul insists that Titus teach us how to behave in accordance with true doctrine. This may seem self-evident to you, but to Cretans, the Christian notions of good behavior seem a little bizarre. Remember, we are evil brutes and lazy gluttons, supposedly. That may be over-stated, but we certainly grew up in a society known for drunkenness and sexual excesses. We have to be taught to behave in ways that seem obvious to you.

Older men are supposed to be temperate and self-controlled. Young men are supposed to be self-controlled, serious, and have integrity. Older women are to teach the younger women to love their husbands and children, and to be self-controlled and pure. As Titus reads those words, I can tell that we elders will need to spend hours in prayer and discussion to even begin to have an understanding of what it means to be self-controlled, have integrity, and love family members. Maybe we should use Paul's following words as a guideline.

Say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions while we wait for the appearing of Jesus. Maybe that is a good rule-of-thumb...always behave in such a way that if Jesus appears, you will not be ashamed of what you are doing. Makes me sad when I say that, because we Cretans are not yet ashamed of doing anything that sounds like fun.

Paul knows us to be contentious people, so he reminds us that we need to be subject to the authorities over us...not just governmental authorities, but all authorities in our lives. We are to be peaceful and considerate...quite the opposite from the reputation we have.

Paul's next words brings all of us to our knees. Perhaps Titus has heard these words before, but we have not. Let me tell you exactly what Paul writes: "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he

poured out generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”<sup>2</sup>

So, there you have the Gospel in a nutshell. We Cretans are so far away from being able to understand these things. Mercy? Grace? Holy Spirit? Titus has his work cut out for him...but... he has been specially gifted by Holy Spirit to bring us into God’s Kingdom.

As we hear Paul’s next instructions, we look around the room at a few people who have pretended to have authority, and think of others who chose not to join us for the reading of the letter.

Paul says that divisive people are self-condemned. Titus is to warn them not more than twice, and then have nothing to do with them. How does Paul define divisive? They cause foolish controversies and arguments over genealogies and the law. We are used to hearing these arguments, and feel shame that we have so often been led astray.

There is a subtle warning in Paul’s final words to our church. He says for us to learn to be devoted to doing what is good. Why? In order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives.

A good rule-of-thumb...always behave in such a way that if Jesus appears, you will not be ashamed of what you are doing. That means we know Jesus will come back and appear to us. That is our blessed hope.

Well, just like the Thessalonians and other Christians, many of us are so sure that Jesus will come back soon, that some of us are just sitting around waiting for him to appear. Rather than being productive so that we can help others, we are depending on the church to meet our needs. And by needs I mean, everyday basic needs. We’re not doing a thing. Paul definitely is putting an end to that kind of behavior.

Paul ends his letter with some personal comments to Titus. He tells him that he will soon send Artemas or Tychicus to replace him. When he does, Titus is to meet Paul at Nicopolis, where he will winter. I’m sure you remember that the ships cannot safely sail in the winter.

Paul asked Titus to tell us that those who are with Paul send their greetings. And he personally greets those who love him in the faith of Jesus. See? I grin when I read that last line. I’ve heard how prickly Paul was early in his career. Now, he knows that many, many people love him.

So, what eventually happened to all of us Cretan Christians who were supposed to have always been liars, evil brutes, and lazy gluttons?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Titus 3:4-7 NIV

<sup>3</sup> Christiansincrete.org

There were Cretan Jews in Jerusalem who were converted to Christianity on Pentecost.<sup>4</sup> About three decades later, Paul was in Crete when being taken prisoner to Rome.<sup>5</sup> So, Paul was not a stranger to Crete when he and Titus came to help our church. It appears from the writings of Eusebius that the church in Crete flourished through the second century. By the eighth century, there were more than 70 churches in Crete. The letter that you know as *Titus* certainly had good long-term effects on God's Kingdom on Crete. No longer the capital of liars, evil brutes and lazy gluttons.

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 2:1-41

<sup>5</sup> Acts 27:11-22



It is the year 67 AD. In three years, the Temple in Jerusalem will be destroyed, but we do not know that. I have been working with Paul for about two decades, but he won't be alive much longer. My mother, Eunice, and my grandmother, Lois, have been dead for several years. On one hand, I am sad that I didn't get to see them very much over the last twenty years. On the other hand, I am glad that I have been living a life that they so wanted me to live.

I spent virtually all of the last twenty years establishing churches and helping them overcome problems. Most of my time has been spent in lands you know as Turkey, Greece, and Italy. In my time, Turkey was comprised of areas known as Asia, Galatia, Cilicia, Lycia and Cappadocia...and Greece was known by names such as Greece, Macedonia, and Achaia.

The Church faced a lot of problems over the last two decades. The first was settling the notion whether Christians did or did not have to follow the Laws of Moses. Fortunately, that was settled at the Council of Jerusalem; Christians did not have to follow the laws of Moses. However, over the last two decades many Jewish Christians continue to teach that Christians should follow at least some of those laws.

Another big problem was how Christians should behave. This wasn't a big problem as long as all Christians were Jews, because the Jews generally followed good rules of behavior as taught in the Old Testament. New believers that did not grow up as Jews had to be completely taught how to live godly lives.

The third big problem was the establishment of what is good doctrine and what is not. This had several facets. How much of Judaism should Christians follow, how much of Paul's teaching should be followed, and how much should teachings divergent from Paul's be followed? You might think that twenty years would be long enough to settle these issues, but you also know that two millennia has not been long enough. You current day Christians face quite a wide variety of teachers, all who claim to teach the truth.

All of these problems are in Paul's mind as he writes me the letter you know as *Second Timothy*. And whether by old age or execution, Paul knows he is nearing the end of his life, so this may very well be the last letter he writes to me. With that in mind, you can be assured that he is making the most of every word he writes.

Even though I have been faithful for twenty years, Paul wants to leave me with words of encouragement that will last the rest of my life. He knows that the level of persecution and false teachings will be greatly raised in future years. So, he starts his letter with words of

encouragement to stay faithful to God, the gospel, and to him. He reminds me that God gives us a spirit of power and love and self-control.

I am saddened to learn that people are starting to turn away from Paul. The false teachings and persecutions are already getting unbearable. But, I am glad to learn that others, such as Onesiphorus, are staying true to Paul and the Gospel.

Paul reminds me that he is suffering for the sake of the Gospel, and for the sake of people who need salvation. As I read his words, I realize that he is telling me that I will soon take his place, and that I will suffer as he is suffering...but the price of suffering is well worth the eternal rewards ahead of us.

Paul shares with me an image that will constantly be illustrated to me. In my life, I am constantly in view of Roman soldiers. Their only goal is to please their Emperor. Because of that, they don't let their lives get entangled in other things. I am to be the same way. My only goal is to be faithful to God, and I should live accordingly. In my case, faithfulness is measured by how I share the Gospel with others in such a way that they come to faith, too.

Paul encourages me to do my best to present myself to God as an approved worker who rightly handles the word of truth. His words remind me that not only am I the craftmanship of God, but I am to be a craftsman with the Word of Truth.<sup>1</sup>

As a soldier and a craftsman, I need to run from the passions that could entangle me, and pursue righteousness, faith and love. I need to flee false teachings that mislead, and pursue the true Gospel. And, when possible, I need to correct those who teach and follow incorrect words.

All of that may sound melodramatic to you. But it did not seem so to me. I can see the persecution with my own eyes. I also have a firm belief that Jesus could come back any day, and that persecution will increase as that day gets closer. To be honest, I am scared. I am not so arrogant as to believe that I may not fall away as others are doing. As I continue reading his letter, I think Paul must be reading my mind. He describes what I see happening, and, maybe, what you see happening around you.

As the last days approach, it will get more difficult. People will love themselves, love pleasure rather than love of God. They will appear to have godliness, but will deny the power of the Gospel. Teachers will creep into the lives of weak people and tell them what they want to hear. It is imperative to stay away from these kinds of people.

The key for faithful living is to remember that all Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, correction, and training in righteousness. Those who use Scripture correctly will be complete, equipped for every good work. I am to preach the word, and be ready all the time to correct and rebuke false teachers.

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 2:8-10

Sometimes, Paul uses the best word pictures. Here's one elaborated in my own words...The time is coming when people won't stand to hear truth, but will have an itch to hear only what they want to hear, and they will pay good money to hear what they want to hear. They will find teachers who use their words like long fingernails to reach inside and scratch their hearers' itching ears.

Rather than teaching that way, Paul says that he has been faithful to preach the truth, and the result is his nearing death. In a famous line, he says "I have fought the good fight, and finished the race by keeping the faith. So, there is a crown of righteousness waiting for me. And, those crowns await all those who are faithful and love his coming appearance."

Paul ends his letter talking about many people we both know – some people that you have met through *Acts* and Paul's other letters.

A few have become unfaithful. Demas has become in love with the world. Alexander the coppersmith who did great harm to Paul and opposed the true Gospel. Rather than being bitter, Paul says the Lord will take care of everything.

Many others have stayed faithful. You have met some of them. Titus has gone to Dalmatia to spread the Gospel. Luke is still with Paul. Tychicus is in Ephesus where Paul sent him. I am to greet Priscilla and Aquila. And, there is a long list of others that have remained faithful.

He tells me to come meet him and bring his scrolls and parchments. Have you ever wondered about Paul's financial situation? Was he rich or poor? These parting words to me may tell you something about that.

He worked as a tentmaker in Corinth until he received enough support to teach full-time. So, you can infer that Paul did not have much money. Over time, he must have acquired a number of scrolls and parchments. These were very valuable because of the precious materials and the cost of hand-writing them. Paul may have paid for many of these, but it is likely that he was gifted some of them, too.

What do you think will happen to these scrolls and parchments when Paul dies? You can be assured that his spiritual sons, Titus and I, want them. Certainly, Apollos will want them. But, here is my best guess. Luke will get them. He and Paul have plans for Luke to write more books about Jesus and the church, and he will need all the reference material he can get.