

Paul – A Legal Case Study

Paul's Occupation

“What do you do for a living?” It seems a common enough question. It's frequently asked of those in the working world, and students get the variation, “What do you want to do when you grow up?” or “...when you get out of college?”

When I take on a new client, I ask this important question. Of course, one's job should never be equated with one's value, but how one earns a living does give insight into one's skill set, activities, where one finds meaning, and more. When someone says, “I am a teacher,” I suspect that person likes to explain or teach things. If the person is an elementary school teacher, especially in the early years of elementary school, I can generally figure the person likes children. If someone is an accountant, I surmise that person is good with numbers and math. If someone is a successful salesperson, it makes sense such a person has good interpersonal skills.

Of course, the answer I get to the question is only as valid as the honesty of the answer. I rarely hear anyone say, “I'm a faker” or “I'm a charlatan!”

I went to law school in Lubbock, Texas, at Texas Tech University, a large campus with about 25,000 students at the time. Mixed with my legal studies, I was blessed to stay active in the campus ministry of my home church. One day, I was in the student ministry building when a dark-haired fellow, about 6 feet tall, and maybe 220 pounds came into the room. With a British accent, he identified himself as “Thomas Justin Phelps III.” He was looking for “Mark Lanier, a law student.” I identified myself and asked him what brought him into our student center. Thomas told me he was a legal assistant for Exxon, and was sent as part of an advance placement team. He was identifying local resources, finding necessary offices and personnel for an upcoming matter.

Needless to say, he got my attention! I asked him for some details, and he told me it was all extremely confidential, and he could only tell me if I would assure him I would not tell anyone what he was about. I gave my assurances, and then he told me about a big case coming soon. He needed to rent a large suite of offices, identify local people suitable to help, and get things ready for the coming advance team. He hinted that I might be able to be a part of things, perhaps researching as a law student. The pay, he suggested, would be quite good. Of course, he added that if things went well, it could even mean a job after graduation.

I wasn't quite hooked, but I was definitely interested! Over the next few weeks, Thomas became a fixture around the Campus Center. As it turned out, he was quite talented – a jack of all trades. He played a decent guitar, a good game of ping pong, and he knew a smattering of just about any subject that came up. Plus, his British accent made him

sound extra intelligent, at least to those of us in Lubbock, Texas where British accents were pretty much limited to television shows.

Thomas endeared himself to several in the ministry, although each relationship was fairly independent. I knew he had a budding romance with a young gal named Sara; at least I suspected it was a romance. Thomas told me his concern was for her soul. He thought her faith was precarious and at one point, with tears in his eyes, he begged me to pray for his outreach to her and her belief in God.

It was the following day when Thomas asked me if he could borrow my car to pick up Sara and take her to lunch for a faith discussion. I was glad to loan him my car, and wished him the best success. He dropped me back home, and drove off in my car. I have never talked to Thomas again.

Much later in the day, I was concerned that he never returned my car. I called Sara's parents' home and found out that he had indeed picked her up before lunch, but that was the last they had heard of Sara as well.

Without detailing each moment, I can give you the end result. Thomas stole my car, picked up Sara and her "hope chest," and then helped her drain her bank account as he promised to rescue her from Lubbock, Texas and run away with her. Thomas then checked them into a motel on the outskirts of town. Over dinner, he drugged Sara so she went to sleep, and then drove north to Amarillo, Texas, where he left my car in the Amarillo airport and disappeared.

Sara's parents alerted the F.B.I. Many of us spoke to the F.B.I. and learned more of "Thomas." For starters, his name was not really Thomas Justin Phelps III (surprise, surprise). He had no affiliation with Exxon or anyone else. He was a grifter. He had spent time in prison, but upon release, had moved through various churches and campus ministries, taking on a different persona each time, bilking a select few of various treasures and money before moving down the road to find his next victims. As for the accent, he was originally from California. It seems we in Lubbock were the first people where Thomas employed an accent and pretended to be foreign.

It cost me a few days without a car, a few singed feelings at my inability to ferret out the truth earlier, but it cost poor Sara a lot more. I did get an amazing story out of whether one might not be what one seems to be. It would have been a lot simpler if Thomas had told us he was a fake!

"What do you do for a living?" is important, but it is equally important to look at something more than one's answer. You need to examine the life and see if the answer is truthful! That needs to be done with all of my clients. It needs to be done with Paul.

PAUL'S OCCUPATION

What did Paul do for a living? Was he an apostle? Was he a missionary? Was he a tent maker? Was he genuine or was he fleecing others for money? These are important questions that I examine in this chapter.

Paul the Apostle

“Apostle,” that’s not a word we use in a lot of settings. What does that word conjure up? Since this legal case study is linked to the Bible, some might answer, “the ‘twelve’ apostles selected by Jesus in the gospels.”¹ That number was dropped to eleven after the death of Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Jesus, but soon afterwards, the other apostles chose a replacement (Matthias) and kept the number at twelve (Acts 1:26).

If one is a movie buff, “apostle” might remind one of the Robert Duvall movie, “The Apostle.” Perhaps some people from different religious traditions and faiths might think about “apostle” differently. Muhammad is known in Islam as one of the *rasul*, which means a “messenger” or “apostle.” In the Mormon Church, there is a position of “Apostle” for twelve men who “constitute the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”²

If one has a good familiarity with the Bible, and since I am writing on Paul, one might think of Paul, as the “apostle to the Gentiles.” Paul certainly makes the claim to apostleship. Paul wrote in his letters:

- “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, *called to be an apostle*, set apart for the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1).
- “Paul, *called by the will of God to be an apostle* of Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1:1).
- “Am I not an *apostle*?” (1 Cor. 9:1).
- “Paul, an *apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God*” (2 Cor. 1:1).

¹ The names of the apostles are given in different frameworks in the gospels. Simon is also called Peter (Mt 4:18), Cephas (Jn. 1:42), and Simon Barjonah (Mt. 16:17, KJV). James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were renamed Boanerges by Jesus, meaning “sons of thunder” (Mk 3:17). Andrew and Philip keep their names, but Matthew is also called Levi (Mk 2:14). Most scholars believe Bartholomew (Mt. 10:3) to be the same person as Nathanael (Jn. 1:43). Mark uses the name Thaddaeus (Mk 3:18) for the same apostle that Luke calls Judas, son of James (Lk. 6:16), and is also called Jude (Jude 1:1). Simon and Thomas are the remaining faithful apostles, with Judas Iscariot as the final twelfth apostle as selected by Jesus (Mk 3:13-19).

² See the Latter Day Saints Bible Dictionary online at <http://scriptures.lds.org/en/bd/a/103>.

- “Paul, an *apostle*—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead” (Gal. 1:1).
- “Paul, an *apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God*” (Eph. 1:1).
- “Paul, an *apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God* our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope” (1 Tim. 1:1).
- “Paul, an *apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God* according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:1), and
- “Paul, a servant of God and an *apostle of Jesus Christ*” (Tit. 1:1).

Paul’s claim is clear, but in light of the other possible answers, the research needs to be done to understand the claim. What *exactly* is an apostle? Do we have them today? Were there 12? 13? 14? More? What was/is their job? How did/do they fit into the first-generation church?

This is important research for my ultimate question for this case study, what does my client mean when he calls himself an apostle? It is apparent that Paul saw his apostleship as significant not only for himself, but for the churches he started and the disciples he mentored. I need to understand both what Paul meant and why it was important to him.

In researching this, one immediately learns that with the Bible, the transitive theory of mathematics does not apply! Remember the transitive theory? If $A = B$ and $B = C$, then A must equal C . That works with math, and some mistakenly use that approach blindly with the Bible. For example, “The Bible says there are twelve apostles. Paul says he is an apostle. Therefore, Paul must be one of the twelve or Paul must be wrong.”

The transitive theory of math, however, has no place in this arena of Biblical interpretation. Two readily apparent reasons show why.

First, it is fairly obvious that the same word can have a different meaning in a different context. I might write of the president in a political context and mean an entirely different persona and office than if I seek to know who the president is of a corporation I am representing (or suing). One cannot use the transitive theory of math on the English word “president.”

A second reason, that is a bit related to the first, is a recognition that the Bible claims to be both a divine book as well as a human book. Like the claims for Jesus (divine and human in one), Paul himself writes of the Bible as the “oracles of God,” yet at the same

time as a work entrusted to people (Rom. 3:2). As such, the Bible is an accumulation of books and writings from various authors in various languages composed over a span of over a thousand years. The New Testament, the source for my study on “apostle” is not one book, but a collection of writings by assorted people over a time span of half a century. Not surprisingly, one person might use the word “apostle” with a different meaning or intention than another.

So, in studying the Biblical idea of “apostle,” one cannot simply read all the references to the word and think that the word means the same each time. That doesn’t work with a lot of words in the Bible.³

What is an “apostle”?

A key to understanding Paul’s claim to be an apostle begins simply with what “apostle” would have meant to Paul and his audience. In this I start with the English word and work backwards.

The English word *apostle* comes from the Latin word *apostolus*. The Latin word, however, was a legal term for a notice sent to a higher tribunal or judge. That clearly is not the usage of *apostolus* that gives the English word, “apostle.” The Latin usage of *apostolus* that is relevant to “apostle” is not the natural Latin word. Instead it is usage of that Latin word from an association with a Greek word *apostolos* (ἀπόστολος).

When the Greek office or role of an “apostle” was used in Latin circles (including the Latin translation of the Bible in the 4th century), the Greek word was viewed in a special light, and hence it was simply turned into Latin letters and pronunciation rather than being more directly translated.

The Greek word *apostolos* (ἀπόστολος) referenced “one sent out.”⁴ Not surprisingly, the English words “postal” and “post office” come from this same Greek root. However, knowing the English “derivatives” of the Greek word doesn’t determine the meaning as used by Paul. It is a starting place, and it helps one remember a core meaning of the word, but it isn’t a final product.

³ It does not work with a lot of scriptures. Consider Matthew 5:22, “whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.” Yet Paul will write to the Romans of ones who “became fools” (Rom. 1:22). Paul will also write of fools in 1 Corinthians 3:17-19, 2 Corinthians 11:22. James will accuse “you foolish man” (James 2:20). If I apply the transitive theory, the result is that Paul and James are destined for Hell. Hell (A) is the end of the road for those who say “You Fool!” (B). (A = B). “You Fool!” (B) is uttered in some form by Paul and James (C). (B = C). Therefore, Paul and James (C) are going to Hell (A). (A = C). Silly result, right? I should try to understand these words before I blindly link such verses together.

⁴ The Greek noun is derived from a verb *apostello* (ἀποστέλλω), which means “to send away” or “to send out.”

In trying to understand the meaning of the Greek word as used in the New Testament, scholars have a number of places they turn:

1. Scholars look to the Greek usage before the writing of the New Testament.

In pre-Christian era Greek, *apostolos* is used, but rarely. Its usage is typically a reference to a naval expedition sent out into the sea. Over time it also came to be used for a group of men that were sent out for some particular purpose.

Interestingly, a common key to the old Greek usage was the passive nature of the “apostle.” Whether naval ship or group of men, the “apostle” didn’t initiate the trip or activity. Someone else did. Nor did the apostle have its own authorization for the mission. That came from the sender. The apostle was simply “sent.”⁵

2. Scholars also examine the Greek translations of the Old Testament (called the “Septuagint”) for any usage of the word there.

This is important because Paul was not only familiar with the Septuagint, he often quoted from it and used it in his writings and ministry. The male word *apostolos* appears only once, however, in the Septuagint/Old Testament, so this is no real help. 1 Kings 14:6 reads,

But when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, he said, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why do you pretend to be another? For I am charged [*apostolos*] with unbearable news for you.

The NIV translates it as, “I have been sent.” The Greek translates a Hebrew word (*shaluach* – שְׁלוּחַ) that is used for Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and Ezekiel, prophets commissioned and sent by God for certain purposes.

3. Another important way that scholars deduce the import and meaning of a New Testament Greek word is by examining the word’s usage throughout the various New Testament books.

The New Testament uses *apostolos* in 81 places. To make this count, one must use a Greek “concordance” (a thorough index of each usage of a word in the

⁵ This research is easiest tracked down through the reference work, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Eerdmans 1964), edited by Kittel and Friedrich and translated by Bromiley. See entry, “ἀπόστολος” in Volume 1 at 407.

Bible) rather than an English one, because the Greek word is not always translated as “apostle” in the English! (This is part of the problem in understanding what the Greek *apostolos* means.)

Matthew and Mark each use *apostolos* once.⁶ Luke uses it 6 times in his gospel and 30 times in Acts. John uses it once in his gospel,⁷ and three times in Revelation. Paul uses *apostolos* thirty-four times, while Peter uses it three. We find *apostolos* used once in Hebrews and once in Jude. This means Paul and his travel companion Luke use the word 70 of the 81 times it is used, 86% of the uses.

The New Testament usage can be divided into several categories:

- The word is used in a number of places to refer to the twelve disciples chosen by Jesus and commissioned to go into the world taking his message. This usage is found in multiple places, notably Matthew 10:2 (“The names of the twelve **apostles** are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew...”), and Luke 6:13 (“And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named **apostles**”). These twelve clearly held an office referred to as *apostolos*, as reflected in the Biblical passages that speak of the apostles as authorities in the church. For example, in Acts 15, Luke uses *apostolos* five times in that chapter alone. Paul and Barnabas “go up to Jerusalem to the *apostles*” concerning a question in the early church (15:2). Paul and Barnabas are then “welcomed by the church and the *apostles* and the elders” (15:4). The question is posed and “the *apostles* and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter” (15:6). The apostles then assert their authority over the church in verse 22 and 23 as the apostles co-write a letter with the elders instructing Gentiles how to conduct their lives in holiness.
- The word is also used in the sense of a representative or envoy. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 8:23 of “apostles,” although modern versions generally do not translate it as such. Paul wrote, “As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives [plural of *apostolos*] of the churches and an honor to Christ.” This is similar to the usage by John noted in footnote 7 earlier. Paul used *apostolos* as “messenger” in

⁶ Some manuscripts have Mark using it not only in 6:30, but also in 3:14, for a total of twice.

⁷ John uses it in 3:16 where English translators do not translate it “apostle”: “Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger [*apostolos*] greater than the one who sent him.”

Philippians 2:25 referring to Epaphroditus.⁸ Some scholars construe this usage as equivalent to the modern term “missionary.”⁹ This is likely Paul’s meaning when he writes of apostles as a role for some in the church, “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers... Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?” (1 Cor. 12:28-29).¹⁰

- In the New Testament book of Hebrews, in chapter three, verse one, *apostolos* is used and applied to Christ himself. Hebrews reads, “consider Jesus, the *apostle* and high priest of our confession.” This statement comes in the context of teaching that Jesus was greater than Moses and that people should not abandon the Christian faith and return to basic Judaism. The use of *apostolos* demonstrates that Jesus was the envoy, the personal representative of God, followed up in the passage by the title of “high priest” of our confession. Hebrews taught that Jesus is both God’s envoy to humanity, and humanity’s representative to God.
- Importantly, the New Testament also considers those who are “false” *apostolos*. Paul writes of “false apostles” who claimed to be “super apostles” in 2 Corinthians 11:5, 13. Paul’s usage there indicates that he was not concerned with people “pretending” to be part of the chosen twelve. Paul’s concerns were the people who claimed a superlative or special missionary status or commission. To Paul, these claiming superior status as missionaries were in fact false and fake.

⁸ “I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger [*apostolos*] and minister to my need.”

⁹ *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (Doubleday 1992) Vol. 1 at 309. Such scholars also point to the usage in Romans 16:7 which some translators believe includes Andronicus and Junia as “apostles” in a missionary sense as well as the reference to Barnabas as an apostle in Acts 14:14. (Compare Rom. 16:7 “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me,” in the ESV with the same passage in the NIV, “Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.”)

¹⁰ For a discussion on how Paul is listing *functions* within the church rather than “offices,” see Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1987) at 619-620.

From this examination¹¹ it is clear that the Greek word *apostolos* carried a variety of meaning, beyond simply a specific church office for Jesus' chosen twelve, with a replacement of Matthias for Judas Iscariot. It would never be fair to take the Greek word *apostolos* and assume it must have one meaning or another. One must consider the context in which the word is used.

What kind of apostle was Paul?

In light of the many meanings, the question I must answer is, "What kind of apostle was Paul?" This becomes most clear in reading the claims that Paul personally made.

Paul knew and spoke of the apostles in Jerusalem. In his letter to the Galatian churches, Paul wrote of going to

Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me (Gal. 1:17).

On this trip, Paul said he "saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19).

Careful examination of this passage helps explain Paul's meaning of himself as an *apostolos*. Paul started the Galatian letter by introducing himself as,

Paul, an *apostolos* - not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father..." (1:1).

Paul then wrote of the twelve in Jerusalem who were *apostolos* "before him," which ties to his own label he used when he began the letter. Paul understood himself to be an *apostolos* in the same sense of the word as those in Jerusalem.¹² Paul viewed himself to hold the same "office" or commission as those of the twelve.

How did Paul meet "apostle" criteria? In Acts 1, Peter is urging the apostles to choose a successor to Judas. Peter says the candidate should be "one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John" (1:21-22). This was also to be one who had

¹¹ Scholars can go to other sources to determine the full meaning of words as used, but I have chosen to use the main sources here, to introduce and explain the concepts adequate for these purposes, even though a book could be written on this alone.

¹² It is notable also that Paul seems to include "James the Lord's brother" as an apostle in Gal. 1:19. That is the sense of the ESV translators. Other versions believe Paul is not including James as an apostle, but rather simply a person of interest. (See, e.g., the NIV: "I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother." The passage could fairly be read either way.)

witnessed the resurrection (1:22). Paul certainly did not seem to meet the first of these two criteria as a follower from the time of Jesus' baptism.¹³

Paul does, however, meet Peter's requirement of witnessing the resurrected Jesus – Paul leaves no room for debate on that point. Paul is clear in 1 Corinthians 15 writing that Jesus was

raised on the third day ... and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve... Last of all... he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles..." (1 Cor. 15:4-9).

Paul often had to defend his apostleship, as some in the early church challenged him.¹⁴ Paul confirmed his apostleship through his encounter with the risen Jesus (Gal. 1:16; 1 Cor. 9:1-5). Paul also noted that he was called by God to be an apostle of Jesus (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1). In this, Paul was like the twelve, whom Christ personally called, each to his work (Mk. 1:16-20; 6:6-8; Mt. 10:1-3).

Paul knew his position in Christ. Not just by his calling, but through his body and life. Paul never felt his apostleship a cause for boasting. He was clear; saying,

may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Gal. 6:14).

For Paul apostleship was passive as in the old Greek usage. He was "sent" by God. The book that closes the New Testament that is the recording of a vision experienced by John toward the end of the first century, several decades after the death of Paul. The book is called, "Revelation." In the 21st chapter of that book, in a projection of the coming kingdom of God, there are twelve apostles who have their names on the twelve foundations of the "New Jerusalem." It seems that the twelve apostles found themselves the new covenant corollary to the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 19:28,

Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

¹³ Some scholars argue that 2 Cor. 5:16 means that Paul in fact did see Jesus prior to the crucifixion. That is a minority view, however, and no scholar seems to argue that Paul actually followed Jesus from the baptism of John forward.

¹⁴ We should note here that Paul never had to defend his apostleship or teaching before the other apostolic leaders. Peter notes that Paul's writings were considered "scripture" or oracles of God (2 Pet. 3:15-16). The twelve in Jerusalem not only commended Paul and his teaching in writing (Acts 15:23-29), but they were actively sending Paul out in the mission field (Acts 15:22).

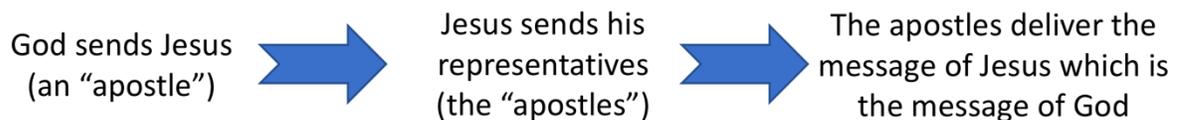
That might explain Paul's emphasis to himself as the "apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13).

What difference does it make if Paul is an apostle?

Many people consider the writings of the apostles as second rate in importance compared to the "red letter" words of Jesus. It is common to hear, "Jesus was a good man who taught valuable lessons, but those apostles took good teaching and turned them into a bad religion!" I would want to be ready to address anyone with those attitudes if I represented Paul, and understanding his role as an apostle, in the full meaning of that word, would be where I would start.

When one understands the importance of the word "apostle" as more than simply an office, as one of calling, one of personal representation, as the earthly envoy of a heavenly master with the authority and instruction of Jesus, then the writings of Paul and the other apostles are not so easily minimized. The biblical usage of "apostle" gives the authority of Jesus to the teaching of Paul. Paul and the apostles are not people taking the teachings of Jesus in a different direction. They are his envoys, like links in a chain, delivering the message of God no differently than Jesus himself. It is set up in a chain of apostleship.

The Implications of Apostleship



God in heaven sends Jesus as his personal envoy/messenger (Heb. 3:1). Jesus then picks twelve apostles for the twelve tribes of Israel. With one falling away (Judas), a replacement is chosen meeting all the same criteria as the first twelve. Paul is then included in this role of apostleship as one God sent to the non-Jewish world ("the apostle to the Gentiles").

One may not agree with the teachings of Paul, but certainly Paul was genuine in representing his teachings as those that God had charged him to give. Paul explained that the churches he planted, and the churches planted elsewhere, were built on the foundation of the apostolic authority and teaching.

You [the church] are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:19-20).

This was not a usurpation of authority away from the teachings of Jesus. It was Jesus who sent and authorized the apostles, the envoys or representatives, to give the message. The gospel of Mark tells of Jesus calling out his twelve apostles and giving them authority over the unclean spirits as he charged them to take his message and bless the people (Mk. 6:7-13).

The true apostles also were able to confirm their role by performing many of the same miracles as Jesus, their sender. The book of Acts explained that “many signs and wonders were being done through the apostles” (Acts 2:43). The people saw that the apostles had a unique ability to dispense a level of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18 Simon the Sorcerer sees that “the Spirit was given through the laying on of the *apostles*’ hands”). Similarly, Paul spoke of the miracles performed through him as “the signs of a true apostle ... signs and wonders and mighty works” (2 Cor. 12:12).

The apostles made major decisions of the church,¹⁵ and they did so as emissaries, sent forth by Jesus and God the Father.

Paul the tentmaker

As a lawyer, I often see many motivated by money. The money motivator is everywhere. Some people steal for money. Others break other laws for money. For money, some cut corners to the hurt and detriment of others. For money, some seek compensation when they are not entitled to it. Greed is seemingly ubiquitous, and it is nauseating.

This brings me back to focus on Paul. Was Paul getting rich off his apostleship? I would want to know, because if he was, the apostleship wouldn’t pass my smell test. I would immediately be leery of his claims.

Examining the record, however, I would quickly be put at ease. Paul must have come from a wealthy and held a position associated with wealth as both a citizen of Tarsus and a Roman citizen, discussed earlier. Furthermore, Paul was able to move between Tarsus and Jerusalem, completing his education under the tutelage of Gamaliel. This would not have been for the economically disadvantaged.

Once Paul embraced his Christian faith, we see the picture changing for Paul dramatically. He didn’t go on the payroll of the church. Quite the opposite. The church

¹⁵ See Acts 15, along with many of Paul’s letters where he instructs the church while asserting his calling as an apostle.

was not initially embracing Paul. The history shows Paul went off by himself for quite a bit of time before plugging into the formal church in Jerusalem. As Paul explained in his letter to the churches in Galatia (modern central-southern Turkey),

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Peter and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God because of me.

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me.

Paul's foray into faith was not one of chasing money. It was no different once his level of involvement increased. Paul's charge from the Jerusalem church was to go into the mission field with a special reminder to "remember the poor," something Paul was already conscientious to do. Paul wasn't out courting the wealthy. He went out and courted any who would listen, especially mindful of those generally ignored (the poor).

Paul had a foot in the Jewish world and a foot in the Greek world. The two worlds had contrasting views on whether one should charge for such things as teaching and preaching. In the Jewish world, it was generally thought that one who taught God's word for money was out of line. The Jewish rabbi and sage Hillel (discussed in the earlier section on Paul's Pharisaical heritage) said,

He who makes a profit from the crown of the Torah [the Jewish books we commonly call Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy] shall waste away.¹⁶

Gamaliel III (the great grandson of Paul's mentor Gamaliel the Elder) explained,

¹⁶ *Pirqê 'Abot*, 4.7.

All study of the Torah which is not combined with work will ultimately be futile and lead to sin.¹⁷

So, from the Jewish world, Paul would be expected, if not admired for pursuing an occupation while also teaching God's will.

From a Greek perspective, things were different. Greek culture readily paid rhetoricians to go around and speak and teach, while they tended to think poorly of people who made their living by manual labor.

Within this cultural framework, we find Paul. Paul never found fault with those who worked in the church and received their income from those labors. In fact, he saw it as a church's responsibility to take care of full-time ministers,

Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel (1 Cor. 9:13-14).

While being paid to lead and serve in the church was a fine and expected thing, it was not something of which Paul personally took advantage.

But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting... [which Paul says he really can't do anyway!] What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel (1 Cor. 9:15-18).

How did Paul make his living? He was a "tentmaker," which likely meant a worker in leather. In Acts 18:3 we read that Paul associated with two other Christian Jews, Aquila and Priscilla, because they were all working in the same trade of tent making (Acts 18:3). This was how Paul supported himself and those who were his co-missionaries. Consider these passages.

- Acts 20:34 – "You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions."
- 2 Cor. 11:7 – "Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge?"

¹⁷ *Pirqê 'Abot*, 2.2.

- 1 Thess. 2:9 – “Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.”
- 2 Thess. 3:8 – “nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.”

Paul wasn’t in the preaching business for any reason other than a compulsion to honor the mandate that God gave him. God sent Paul into the world to take the news of Jesus as Messiah to those that would listen.

Conclusion

What did Paul do for a living? He was a leatherworker. Why? So he could be an apostle, sent by the Lord to deliver his message. In this, I would find a client with pure motives, that would go a long way in his defense.

Points for Home

1. *“If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ... If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied”* (1 Cor. 15:19).

There is a tremendous power in Paul’s words. These words don’t come from one who has any personal interest in his message beyond obedience to the Lord. From a human perspective, Paul’s life would be much happier, certainly more cushy, if he stayed in his prior lifestyle, or at least stayed put at his home plying his trade. But Paul couldn’t. God sent him as an envoy!

2. Paul *“was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher”* (2 Tim. 1:11).

Paul wasn’t out in the world on his own initiative. Paul wasn’t seeking his own will or his own mission. Paul wasn’t self-interested in what he did. Paul was following the instructions of God, often at great personal price and suffering. This speaks to me. I need to follow God.

3. “*Remember the poor*” (Gal. 2:10).

This instruction given Paul by the early church leaders gives me pause.

Remember the poor? Is this an instruction to give beyond tithing? Is this an instruction to preach the word to those who have less to offer as well as those who have lots? Is this a warning against a natural tendency to find the haves rather than the have-nots? How does one “remember the poor?” Is it by giving them a fish or by teaching them to fish? Is it by doing both? Is this an admonition like that of Jesus’ “to whom much is given, much is expected” (Luke 12:48)? Or is this an echo of Jesus’ instruction when his twelve were sent out and Jesus said, “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay” (Mt. 10:8).

I have a lot of thinking to do about this.