

PAUL THE ARTISAN—MISSIONARY

—MESSY (BUT BEAUTIFUL) CHRISTIANITY, WEEK 29—

I. WAYS FOR AN ANCIENT TEACHER OR PHILOSOPHER TO SUPPORT THEMSELVES

- Among ancient philosophers, appropriate and inappropriate ways to financially support oneself were debated. Four different possibilities were available:¹
 1. **Charging Fees** Popularized by philosophers called *Sophists*, fees could be charged either by the lecture or for a whole course of study. The philosopher Socrates criticized the taking of fees: “What man is more free than I, who accepts neither gifts nor fee from anyone?” (Xenophon, *Apol.* 6). But Sophists and others defended the practice by saying they were not greedy, and by saying the fees showed the value of their teaching.
 2. **Joining the Household of a Wealthy Family** The teacher would become the resident intellectual and serve the family in a variety of ways while being supported financially. The philosophers Plato and Aristotle both found support this way. But this practice was criticized by some, because the philosopher became “slavish” and was bound in some sense by the patronage of the family. The ancient critic Lucian says, “What does this splendid salary amount to? Was there no other way in which I could have earned more than this and could have kept my freedom?” (*De Mercede conductis*, 30).
 3. **Begging in Public** Made famous by Cynic philosophers, these teachers begged for their daily bread in order to attacking the greed they saw in other philosophers. Most famous of all was their founder, Diogenes “the Dog,” who famously begged in public and lived in a large jar. Some accounts have him dying in Corinth, and a statue of a dog was erected there in his honor. “Being asked what was the most beautiful thing in the world, he replied, ‘Freedom of speech’” (*Diog. Laert.* 6:69).
 4. **Working to Support Oneself.** This was the least common of the four options, but some advocated self-support as the best option for philosophers. One Musonius wrote, “Is not the one who procures for himself the necessities of life more free than the one who receives them from others?” (Lecture XI).
- Paul chose the fourth option. Notice what Paul says at the beginning of his discussion of payment with the Corinthians: “Am I not free?” (9:1) and later, “Though I am free and belong to no one...” (9:19). This emphasis on freedom indicates that Paul is familiar with the contours of the debate over appropriate ways to support a teacher or a philosopher. It also indicates part of his concern in not taking money from the Corinthians is to remain free to instruct them and rebuke them as necessary.

¹ I am indebted for most of the content in this message and on this handout to Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (2007).

II. PAUL'S PLACE AMONG THE ARTISANS: A TRAVELING TENTMAKER

- Paul speaks of his work which supported: “We work hard with our own hands” (1 Cor 4:12). Earlier, he wrote this to the church in Thessalonica:

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. ²We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition. ³For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. ⁴On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵You know we never used flattery, **nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed**—God is our witness. ⁶We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. ⁷Instead, we were like young children among you.

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, ⁸so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. 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.** ¹⁰You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. ¹¹For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹²encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

- Though Paul's letters never tell us exactly what his trade was, Acts fills in the gaps for us:

Acts 18:1-4

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³**and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.** ⁴Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

- It is not entirely clear, however, what the Greek word for “tentmaker” refers to.
 - Some suggest it refers to the production of theatrical sets for stage productions, so “**maker of stage properties,**” which would explain why Paul largely visited Greco-Roman cities, cities big enough to have theaters. Yet it is unlikely that Paul (and Aquila and Priscilla for that matter) would work within the theaters, because they, as God-fearing Jews, would view the sexuality and idolatry that took place in the Greco-Roman Theaters as sinful.
 - Most scholars recognize that the word does indeed refer to making tents, which were most often made out of leather. These would be used by soldiers in the army, traveling merchants, and by the more the wealthy who could use pavilions to host various events.
 - Yet craftsmen often labeled themselves with a more specialized name, while in fact they worked on products more broadly (Like a muffler shop or a brake shop may do more general car repairs). So it is likely that while Paul did indeed make tents, he also would have produced a variety of other leather products.

- Paul's Apprenticeship and Training
 - Most likely, Paul was taught this trade by his father, as was commonly done in both Jewish and Greco-Roman circles. Paul's family was somewhat wealthy, with Roman Citizenship (Acts 22:28), which suggests a successful business. This also helps explain Paul's high level of education and rhetorical ability in writing.
 - Drawing from ancient descriptions of trade apprenticeship, we can get an idea of what Paul's training would have been like:

“At the age of thirteen, give or take a year or so, Paul would have begun his apprenticeship and would have spent his days, except for Sabbaths and holidays, in his father's workshop (a shop, incidentally, that may have been responsible for his family's acquisition of Roman citizenship, if, as has been suggested, the tents made there had proved useful in a Roman military campaign). At any rate, Paul's apprenticeship may have lasted two—perhaps three—years, in an atmosphere of strict discipline and demanding standards, so that when he finished his training he was as skilled in leatherworking as his father, with skills that would have been widely recognized and admired.

Leatherworking involved two essential tasks: *cutting* the leather, which required round-edge and straight-edge knives; and *sewing* the leather, which required various awls. These tasks would have been done at a workbench, with the leatherworker sitting on a stool and bent over forward to work.

With respect to tentmaking, an apprentice like Paul would have learned how to cut the leather pieces so that their placement would take advantage of the natural strengths of the leather and thus best withstand strains and pulling. An apprentice like Paul would have also learned how to sew these leather pieces together, using either a basting stitch, a seam stitch, or a felling stitch, the latter two being used where seams needed to be waterproof.

At the conclusion of his apprenticeship Paul might have been given his own set of tools. The requisite knives and awls, incidentally, would have made tentmaking an easily portable trade, a fact that helps explain Paul's eventual use of his trade as his means of support during his travels as a missionary” (Hock, *Social Context*, 24-25).

III. SOCIETY'S VIEW OF ARTISANS LIKE PAUL

“As hard as the life of ... Paul was, it was made even more difficult by his having to ply his trade in a social world that was highly hostile toward him. To be sure, subworlds existed, largely among the artisans themselves, in which work and workers were more favorably evaluated. Nevertheless, artisans generally and Paul in particular could not avoid experiencing the hostility and contempt directed toward them by representatives of the dominant ethos. Indeed, these experiences must have been doubly difficult for Paul, who, though he shared the life of artisans, was by birth a member of the socially elite, the very circles that maintained this social world.

The chief stigma attached to the trades was that they were regarded as slavish. This objection stemmed from the fact that workshops—apart from those occupied by a poor, but free, artisan—employed virtually no one but slaves (recall Cerdon's shoemaking shop with its thirteen slave assistants). In addition, the very position of many artisans, bent over for work, was deemed a slavish position, which explains Cicero's famous remark that no workshop can have anything that befits a free man. Consequently, a free man who took up a trade was viewed as having done something humiliating.

Another stigma attached to the trades was that they left no time for helping one's city or friends or for developing one's own soul. Accordingly, artisans were regarded as incapable of achieving virtue, or they were viewed as uneducated. The latter is demonstrated by Micyllus's characterization as uneducated, by Tryphon's inability to write his own name, by a sculptor's stuttering and otherwise poor speech, and by tanners' and carpenters' fitness only for Cynic philosophy, because it had rejected education as a way of providing a shortcut to virtue. The trades, moreover, were seen as harmful to the body, sometimes by the very strenuousness and sometimes by the opposite, that is, by the sedentary character. [...]

Such, then was the social world within which artisans plied their trades. Stigmatized as slavish, uneducated, and often useless, artisans, to judge from scattered references, were frequently reviled or abused, often victimized, seldom if ever invited to dinner, never accorded status, and even excluded from one Stoic utopia. Paul's own statements accord well with this general description. He too not only found his tentmaking to be exhausting and toilsome (1 Thess 2:9), as we have seen, but also perceived that in taking up his trade he had thereby enslaved himself (1 Cor 9:19) and humiliated himself (2 Cor 11:7). His trade also is to be seen as at least partially responsible for his being accorded no status (1 Cor 4:10) and perhaps also as a cause of his being reviled (4:12).

The position of Paul that as emerged thus far is hardly enviable. As an apostle of Christ, Paul spent much of his time on the road and in the workshop. Traveling and plying a trade were always exhausting and were frequently painful; consequently, he could always summarize his experiences in catalogs of sufferings. Paul's travels, like those of other itinerant artisans and teachers, were often punctuated by delays, difficulties, and dangers. Once he was in a city there were days, perhaps weeks of staying in inns before Paul found lodging in a household; and instead of simply becoming its resident intellectual, as was his apostolic right, he refused to be a financial burden and so found work making tents and other leather products in order to be self-sufficient. Making tents meant rising before dawn, toiling until sunset with leather, knives, and awls, and accepting the various social stigmas and humiliations that were part of the artisans' lot, not to mention the poverty—being cold, hungry, and poorly clothed.

To be sure, Paul's experiences as an artisan-missionary were not wholly grim. There was the stimulation of discussion with travel companions; there was the hospitality extended by various hosts and hostesses; and there was the friendship of householders who provided not only a room but on occasion also protection (Acts 17:10), work (Acts 18:3), scribes (Rom 16:22-23), and gifts (Phil 4:18)" (Hock, *Social Context*, 35-37).

IV. CONFLICT OVER PAUL'S WORK CONTINUED BEYOND 1 CORINTHIANS

- **2 Corinthians 11:5-11**

⁵I do not think I am in the least inferior to those "super-apostles."⁶I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way. ⁷Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? ⁸I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. ⁹And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. ¹⁰As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. ¹¹Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

- **2 Corinthians 12:11-16**

¹¹ I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the “super-apostles,”^P even though I am nothing. ¹² I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles. ¹³ How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong! ¹⁴ Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. ¹⁵ So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less? ¹⁶ Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you.

IV. THE MISSIONARY AT WORK: PAUL IN THE WORKSHOP

- In the broader ancient culture, we have some evidence of philosophers who were also artisans using their workshops to teach philosophy:

“We can still point to a handful of philosophers who were workers—for example the Stoic Cleanthes, who, at least while a student of Zeno, worked as a water carrier and miller. But special attention must be accorded Simon the shoemaker, at least as he was depicted in Cynic traditions of the early empire. For in some of the Cynic epistles Simon is portrayed as regularly discussing philosophy in his workshop, at times with the Cynic Antisthenes and on other occasions with Socrates, Pericles, and numerous youths and public-minded men. The importance of Simon, the artisan-philosopher, is that he is presented in these sources as an ideal Cynic, as one whose trade allowed him to embody the Cynic virtue of self-sufficiency and as one whose artisan life-style—for example, his hunger and thirst—allowed him to be the true heir of Socratic-Cynic teaching” (Hock, *Social Context*, 39).

- So did Paul use his time in the workshop to discuss with customers and others the gospel of Jesus? This seems very likely:

“Is it likely that Paul made a comparable use of the tentmaking shops in which he worked? That is, can we suppose that Paul carried on missionary activity from these workshops? The answer, I submit, is a qualified yes. Such a use is inherently likely. It is difficult to imagine Paul *not* bringing up the subject of the gospel during discussions with fellow workers, customers, and others who entered the shops—given the relative quiet of a leatherworking shop, given the many hours that Paul spent at work, given the utter commitment of Paul to gain converts for Christ, and given the sympathy that Paul showed in other ways for Cynic traditions” (Hock, *Social Context*, 41).

- Consider a few possible biblical indications of Paul preaching at work:
 - **1 Thessalonians 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.” While this could simply mean Paul worked to support himself and preached at times when he was not working, it certainly also allows us to envision Paul preaching *while* he was working.

- **Acts 17:17:** “So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.” While the “marketplace” probably means the public areas of the marketplace, this could perhaps include discussion in his workshop (if indeed he practiced his trade in Athens).
- **Acts 17:11:** “Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” One scholar writes: “Where the Scriptures were examined is not said, but the workshop is again a possibility, since synagogue-going was probably confined to Sabbaths and feast days and since reading was one of the activities that went on in workshops” (Hock, *Social Context*, 42).

V. PAUL’S TEACHING ON THE IMPORTANCE OF WORK

1 Thessalonians 4:10-12 And in fact, you do love all of God’s family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more,¹¹ and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you,¹² so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-12⁶ In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you,⁸ nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.⁹ We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate.¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.”¹¹ We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies.¹² Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat.

Acts 20:33-35³³ I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing.³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions.³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Ephesians 4:28²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

THE BOTTOM LINE

_____ Paul’s _____ in _____ and _____

...by recognizing the _____ and _____ for _____-support and the support _____.

...by deliberately _____ a _____ of Christian _____ into your _____.

...by emulating the _____ the _____ in your _____:

Christ over _____

Honesty over _____

_____ over Pride

_____ over Ourselves