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# THE METAPHORS OF PAUL'S WRITINGS

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## DAY 1: DAILY LIFE

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### INTRODUCTION

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Metaphors abound in the way we teach and are taught the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are part of worship every Sunday and certainly when we go to the temple. And they are found all through the scriptures, sometimes making it challenging to know when something is factual or metaphorical. Paul especially loved metaphors and used them often in his writings. Many of his metaphors involved things beyond the Jewish world of the Old Testament because he was speaking to people influenced by and living in Roman and Greek culture. When we have a greater understanding of this cultural context, we can better understand and apply Paul's writings to ourselves today. This class offers a few examples of such metaphors in Paul's writings.

Like Jesus, Paul often drew on items that people encountered in their daily lives to illustrate gospel principles and teachings. Unlike Jesus, however, more of his metaphors came from city life rather than the rural images that the Savior often invoked, though items from the countryside are still present in Pauline writings. Metaphors involving families were also important to the apostle, giving him the opportunity to express beautiful teachings in the language and experiences of his listeners.

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### CITY LIFE

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Until modern times, no period of history was more urban than Paul's. The Roman Empire emphasized city life and saw it as the fulfillment of civilization. Paul spent his life not in small towns or villages (like Jesus and the Twelve) but in the large, busy towns of what is today Turkey, Greece, Syria, and Italy.

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#### CHILDREN OF DARKNESS AND LIGHT

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At night, cities were dark and dangerous places. Narrow streets were more likely to be the home of robbers and murderers than anything else; being out after dark was avoided by most city dwellers (something we see in the early chapters of 1 Nephi as Nephi finds Laban in the streets at night with no one else around). Paul referred to these people as "the children of darkness" doing "the works of darkness" (**Romans 13:12-13**). For Paul, like many parents today counseling their children against staying out too late, sin happened at night, in the dark. Those who obeyed God were the "children of light" (**1 Thessalonians 5:5; Ephesians 5:8**), a phrase used by Jesus on at least two occasions (Luke 16:8; John 12:36) and found among the Dead Sea Scrolls texts as well (e.g., Wise, Abegg, and Cook, 127). It also relates to many of Jesus' other sayings, such as from the Sermon on the Mount: "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single [your vision is clear and sound], thy

whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (**Matthew 6:22-23**).

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## FOUNDATIONS

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**1 Corinthians 3:10-11** refers to how foundations for buildings were laid. With no building inspectors or approval processes like today, many city buildings had inadequate foundations and sometimes collapsed. **Ephesians 2:20-22** continues this, with a building founded on apostles, prophets, and Christ. This building miraculously "grows" to become a "holy temple in the Lord."

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## KANŌN

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To ensure that walls were straight and stones cut correctly, a tool called a *kanōn* was used. This was a straightedge measuring stick to check flatness and lengths so stones matched up correctly. (We get the word "canon" meaning 'standard' from this Greek term, by which we refer to accepted scripture.) Paul referred to *kanōn* three times in one passage, **2 Corinthians 10:12-16**, alluding to its purpose using the related verb 'measure' (*metreo*). In this case, Paul's *kanōn* is to preach the true gospel to those who haven't heard it (the measure of Paul's success), which measure he obtained from God through his call.

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## HARMOLOGEŌ

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Masons used a process called *harmologeō* (or *sunarmologeō*, which emphasizes the unity and ) to create a stone building, which involved cutting, rubbing (sanding), and fitting the stones precisely, then drilling holes and putting bronze dowels between the blocks, held in place with molten lead. Paul referred to this twice in **Ephesians 2:21** and **4:16**, translated "**fitly framed**" and "**fitly joined**" in the KJV. In the first, the building is the Church, made of many different 'blocks' or members, their diversity combining on the foundation of Christ and apostles to create a "holy temple." In the second, the Church is a body made of all its different and various members but still securely joined together to create a single, functioning unit. Both verses emphasize the solidity of the bond that exists between members when the Church is built on the correct foundation. Once the building is joined in this way, it becomes a single unit—a building, not a collection of stones—just as mixing ingredients together and baking them creates a new thing, such as a cake. The individual ingredients are still there but cannot be separated from each other anymore and have come together to create something greater.

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## TENTS

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We have come to so comfortably call bodies "tabernacles" that we may have lost the original metaphor, which is found in **2 Corinthians 5:1-4**. Paul made a contrast with a tent ("tabernacle") and a city house, comparing our bodies to the tent and our eternal state to the house. The comparison is striking because of the temporary nature of both the tent and our physical bodies, compared to the long-lasting nature of a stone-built house. Paul knew about tents, being a tentmaker by trade (Acts 18:1-3); in fact, it's perhaps surprising that he called upon his profession for metaphors so rarely.

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## VESSELS

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Homes were generally sparsely furnished in Paul's day, but the homes of the wealthy would have nice furnishings, art, and other items (lamps, pottery, dishes, etc.). Paul alludes to this in **2 Timothy 2:20** and **Romans 9:19-24**. In 2 Timothy, he encourages Timothy to be like the gold and silver

vessels which are used for good purposes and not the wood or clay vessels which can be used for mundane or even dirty things such as chamber pots. Being like the honorable vessel lets the servant be “prepared for every good work.” The Romans verses make a similar comparison and call to action on the part of the believer to be clean. The potter (symbolic of the Lord) makes honorable and dishonorable vessels of the same clay, he noted, and the vessel cannot complain about the way it was made. But God patiently waits for the unclean vessels to be cleansed because he is prepared to bestow “the riches of his glory” on the clean vessels, which are symbolic of his mercy and thus called “the vessels of mercy.” Paul himself was called to be a “**chosen vessel**” unto the Lord, carrying his name before Gentiles, kings, and the house of Israel (**Acts 9:15**). Elsewhere he speaks humbly of his own role, referring to himself as one of the “earthen vessels” (**2 Corinthians 4:6-7**) that carry “this treasure” of the gospel to the world, so that people will recognize that it is from God and not men.

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## COUNTRY LIFE

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### OXEN

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When Paul recounted to Agrippa the Lord’s appearance on the road to Damascus to him in **Acts 26:13-15**, he explained that the resurrected Lord said, “it is hard for thee to **kick against the pricks**.” (It also says this in the KJV in Acts 9:5, but that is not in the Greek text; it was added by Erasmus to harmonize with Acts 26.) A ‘prick’ is an ox goad, a pointy stick used to prod the animals along. Kicking against it only hurts the ox, which is how the Lord used it with Saul.

Oxen are referenced in a couple other contexts in Paul’s writings. The first is in **2 Corinthians 6:14**, “Be ye not unequally **yoked** together with unbelievers.” Some cite this as a warning against mixed marriages with Christians not to marry non-Christians, but understanding the metaphor helps clarify that it is broader than that. Oxen were put in pairs when they worked. Some oxen worked best on the left side, some on the right. When you had the right pair working together, they were ‘equally yoked,’ sharing the load and cooperating well. If you put two ‘left’ or two ‘right’ oxen together, they would be “unequally yoked,” causing problems getting the work done. The broader context of the verse is for believers to not work together in many contexts with non-believers, for their goals and interests would not match and they would work against each other.

Paul used a similar reference to yoking in a positive sense in **Philippians 4:3**. He referred to another person (unnamed) as his “**true yokefellow**,” meaning that they were an excellent pair. He admonished this person to help those in Philippi, with a confidence that it would go well based on the metaphor used.

One more reference to oxen comes from a JST change in Luke. In Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount, the Prophet added a phrase to Luke 12:30: “**And ye are sent unto them to be their ministers, and the laborer is worthy of his hire. For the law saith that a man shall not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn**” (Luke 12:30).

The quote from “the law” in Luke is found in Deuteronomy 25:4. What makes this change worth noting is that the only other place in the New Testament where this idea of not muzzling the ox is found is in the writings of Paul (1 Corinthians 9:9; 1 Timothy 5:18). In both cases, Paul is quoting the scripture as an example of how God will care for a worthy laborer in his kingdom. If Joseph Smith had inserted this reference to muzzling the ox in Matthew, Mark, or John, it would not

have had the same significance. First, Luke was Paul's missionary companion and friend, so for it to also be in his Gospel strengthens the tie between these two men. Secondly, Paul is alone in using this expression in the KJV New Testament, but in the JST Jesus said it first (strictly chronologically), and with the same allegorical meaning. Thus through a JST change of ancient scripture, Paul's use of the verse is actually quoting a teaching of the Savior.<sup>1</sup>

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## TRAPPING

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The Greek *skandalon* occurs several times in Paul's writings. Though translated variously in his letters in the KJV, *skandalon* is not once written as 'trap,' though that is the primary meaning. Instead, the translators were aware of the metaphor and attempted to select words that conveyed Paul's sense rather than a literal rendition. A trap, of course, is a hunter's tool for catching game. Hidden well and baited to attract prey, it is at best dangerous and potentially deadly to the unwary.

Paul used the word at least six times, most of them in Romans, which makes sense because of the prominence of hunting among the Romans:

- "a stumblingblock [*proskommatos*] and a **rock of offence** [*petran skandalou*]" (Romans 9:33).
- "a snare, and a trap [net], and a **stumblingblock** [*skandalon*]" (Romans 11:9).
- "no man put a stumblingblock [*proskomma*] or an **occasion to fall** [*skandalon*]" (Romans 14:13).
- "divisions and **offences** [*skandalon*]" (Romans 16:17).
- "unto the Jews a **stumblingblock** [*skandalon*]" (1 Corinthians 1:23).
- "the **offence** [*skandalon*] of the cross ceased" (Galatians 5:11).

In each case, Paul used *skandalon* in the hunting sense, meaning in most cases that the message of Christ was a 'trap' to those who could not accept it in faith—not a trap set by God to snare them but something that tripped them up and entangled them through their own culture and belief, their misunderstanding of the mission of the Messiah. This trap kept them from believing Paul's message and embracing the good news about Jesus.

Are we trapped by an incorrect or incomplete understanding of Christ's mission and atonement? Do we let long-held but perhaps less accurate views of grace and justice trip us up and keep us from fully applying the Atonement and thus hampering our eternal progression?

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## FARMING

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The people of Corinth were saying they belonged to different people—Paul, Apollos, Peter, or Christ (1 Corinthians 1:12). Paul's answer was to compare them to a farm, worked by several slaves and owned by a master. "I have **planted**, Apollos **watered**" (1 Corinthians 3:5), declaring that they are one (3:8). But they are just slaves working the land for God who "**gave the increase**" (3:6). Though

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<sup>1</sup> Strengthening the idea that muzzling the ox is a statement of Jesus, the second half of the verse in 1 Timothy 5:18 where Paul uses that phrase includes a parallel remark, "And, the labourer is worthy of his hire." This is not a quote from the Old Testament but is a quote from Jesus himself, as recorded in Luke 10:7. The phrase "and" ties the two quotations together, giving them equal weight. See George W. Knight III, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 234. Note also that although the book of Luke was written after 1 Corinthians and perhaps 1 Timothy, Luke's sources are "eyewitnesses" (Luke 1:2) who predated Paul and were probably some of the same sources from which Paul got his information about Jesus' sayings and ministry.

not in the English translation, in the Greek Paul's and Apollos' efforts are past tense (aorist)—something already done. But God giving the increase is in the present and ongoing tense (imperfect)—it is still happening. Paul also reminds us that the farmer works the land but the final outcome is beyond his control. Finally, in verse 9, he shifts abruptly to a building metaphor, already discussed above but making the same point.

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## FAMILY LIFE

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### ARRABŌN

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*Arrabōn* has two principle meanings. The first is a business transaction in which an item or amount was given as a pledge toward a final transaction or business relationship. The second is related in concept but a different application—the *arrabōn* was the pledge given to his wife-to-be at betrothal of his fidelity to her, typically in the form of a ring that she wore on the third finger of her left hand. In both cases, an *arrabōn* was a promise of something greater, a token of a full payment at a future date.

Paul used the word three times in his letters, which in the KJV is always translated “earnest” (think of earnest money in a real estate transaction which is a pledge to complete the transaction) and tied it to the Holy Spirit all three times:

- “...God, who hath also sealed us, and given the **earnest** of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).
- “Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the **earnest** of the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 5:5).
- “...sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the **earnest** of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Thus the Spirit is given to us as the promise or pledge of something greater—in this case, eternal life with God—and as a promise of the Lord's complete fidelity to us in our relationship.

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### MARRIAGE

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One of the customs of the Jews was a one-year betrothal—somewhat equivalent to a long engagement in our day. A role played by a good friend was ‘friend of the bride’ whose job it was to act as a liaison between the parties and to ensure that the bride was delivered on the wedding day with her virginity intact. It is common in the Old Testament to portray Israel as God's bride and Paul picked up on that same imagery with the Corinthians, speaking of himself as the friend of the bride in standing between the bride (his converts) and the groom (the Lord) and striving to present the bride as pure and clean to the groom. In **2 Corinthians 11:1-3**, he feared that the Corinthian Saints had been “beguiled” and “corrupted” by Satan and would not be ready for the wedding.

Dropping the friend of the bride role, Paul also used the marriage metaphor with the Saints in Ephesus (**Ephesians 5:25-28**) to instruct men to love their wives, using Christ's love of the Church as his example. Here are two parts of the wedding ceremony, both described in the obscure verse 26. First, the bride would wash herself before the wedding, a ritual cleaning (in a *miqva* among the Jews) symbolic of her purity and preparation. So the Ephesians were compared to a bride presented to the groom after “**the washing of water,**” which would also have reminded them of their own baptisms. Second, the bride is bound to the groom by **the spoken word**, a covenantal binding

through specific words spoken in the ceremony (often simply, 'I love you'). Baptism is thus a symbol of a marriage bond that not only cleanses the bride (church) but binds her to the husband by words properly spoken, and the groom presents the bride to himself "a glorious church, not having spot." Paul's conclusion draws the parallel to how men should treat their brides (alternate translation): 'So owe [a debt from the marriage covenant] men love to their wives.'

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#### SCHOOLMASTER/PEDAGOGUE

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Paul used many images of family life, but perhaps the most powerful was the *paidagōgos*, rendered "schoolmaster" in the KJV. The pedagogue was hired by the family to escort the child to school until age 16, protect him from harm or abuse, and educate him to be a decent, productive member of society. The best-known passage about this is **Galatians 3:23-26**, where he compares the Law of Moses to a pedagogue that prepared people for (or kept them from—"shut up") the gospel of Christ.

However, once they learned the gospel, it caused them to leave the pedagogue behind as they became 'adults' and thus fell under the influence of their Father. In other words, as he explained in **Galatians 4:1-3**, the period of pedagogy can be compared to slavery, though it is temporary, ending as the child comes of age. So the law was in effect "to lead us until Christ came" (3:24 NLT).

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#### ADOPTION

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Adoption was different in the Roman world than in ours today. Adoption was often practiced with older children, even adults, in order to shift them from one *paterfamilias* to another for political, financial, or other reasons. The formal adoption first consisted of the existing father or guardian relinquishing all authority over the child (*mancipatio*, which was actually a thrice-repeated sale) after which the new father went before the magistrate and declared the child his (*vindicatio*). If the former father had no objections, the magistrate declared it so, and it was as if the child had been reborn. All of this was witnessed by a neutral observer. The adoptee relinquished all claims to his former family and received full rights in the new one. His debts from the previous family were cancelled and no one could ever bring up any event from his former life—it was gone. He was reborn as a new person, and now fully subject to the rules (*potestas*) of this new family.

A good scripture on adoption is **Galatians 4:3-7**, immediately after Paul's discussion of the pedagogue. Here he emphasized the bondage of the Saints under the world (the previous 'family'). Then God sent Christ as a redeemer (*go'el*) of those who were slaves under the Law of Moses to adopt them into God's family. Once sons of God, we could call God *Abba*, and no more are we slaves but sons and heirs.

**Romans 8:12-17** also illustrates this concept, taking us from being debtors and doomed to death to heirs of all the Father has and joint-heirs with Christ. But this adoption has a price—we have to "subdue the works of the flesh" (8:13 AT) and be "led by the Spirit of God" (8:14). Finally, we have to "suffer with [Christ]" (8:17). That is the *potestas* of this new family. We are not slaves so that we should fear God but are truly adopted so that we may call him *Abba*, our Father. If we ever doubt, the Spirit acts in his role as the designated witness to tell us that it is true (8:16).