

The Letters of Paul, Part 2

Stake Education Class, 3 Oct 2019

Dave LeFevre

This class continues the one delivered in September.

Introduction

While detailed accounts and records of the Roman Empire's **economy** are few, all indications are that it enjoyed a generally **healthy** situation. There was farming, of course, but also manufacturing, industry, trade, marketing, and, of course, politics and administration. In Rome, food and goods were **imported** from all over the empire—Egypt and northern Africa, Spain and France, Greece and Cyprus, even the Arabian Peninsula, India, and China. The city was full of warehouses, manufacturing facilities, shops, and workers to handle it all.

Facilitating all this business was the **Pax Romana**. More than at any other time in the history of the world up to that time, the Roman Empire provided an opportunity for **travel** and **commerce**. People traveled for many reasons and all throughout the lands under the control of Rome in relative safety. Of course, **travel** was still a **laborious** and sometimes **dangerous** proposition, with weather problems, brigands, health challenges, lodging difficulties, and more. Paul was a man who traveled extensively both before and especially after his call as an apostle, journeying from the eastern to the western edges of the Mediterranean.

Three areas in Paul's writings use metaphors that relate to war and armies, regular worship activities in the Roman and Greek world, and sporting contests, which in their world were as big of events as in ours, with passionate loyalty for the local athletes at various multi-region contests. But like with many of the metaphors we have discussed this week, these words are often hidden in the KJV a bit (and even in Wayment's translation, to a lesser extent), so the language and cultural background helps us pull them out and get a deeper meaning and better understand the message being taught.

Business

The Workman

2 Timothy 2 is a chapter full of metaphors. Two of them are relevant here (others will be discussed below). In verse 6, Paul evokes the image of a hard-working farmer who tends to his vines and soil. He calls this to Timothy's remembrance to make the point that Timothy, as God's farmer, should be the **first one to receive** of his own work—if he is not being blessed by his efforts to serve others, that is a concern of the apostle.

A few verses later, he calls upon another image of a hard worker (verse 15). The translation in the KJV could use some help in being more clear. "Study" is not reading or something but 'to hurry' or 'to exert oneself'—"Be diligent" in TWNT. Paul is telling Timothy to **work hard** that he might present himself as a worthy **construction worker** ("proven work"), approved by God. He does not need to be ashamed of his work in any way when the master comes to check on his efforts, for he has been **cutting the blocks perfectly** straight—or, completing the metaphor, perfectly explaining "the word of truth" according to what he has received and been

taught. This echoes Paul's other metaphor about the **Church being a building** with Christ and the apostles as the foundation.

Paul knew about being a worker. He labored as a leather worker (Acts 18:3) and worked hard to support himself all his life (1 Thessalonians 2:9). Though speaking of the ministry, he brings this image of the leather worker to mind when he said, "**I worked harder than any of them**" (1 Corinthians 15:10). This would be the leather worker examining his week's efforts compared to fellow workers—he simply had more output and probably of better quality. But Paul tempered this boast with a qualifying statement of humility: "**but it was not me but the grace of God in me**" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Even though Paul worked hard to support himself, he did **accept the support** of some of the Church members as he traveled and preached. In some cases, he referred to this as "**wages**" (Romans 6:23) and told the Romans proverbially that "The **wage** for the one who works is not reckoned according to grace but according to an **obligation**" (Romans 4:4). Alluding to some generous material support he received from the Philippian Saints after laboring mightily with them, he said, "**I have received everything, and I have an abundance**" (Philippians 4:18). This is common language in the business world of that time, **acknowledging payment in full** for goods or services rendered. In other words, Paul is saying that he has been fully paid for his labors, not only through their generous financial gift but by their open love for him.

The Market

Roman, Greek, and Near Eastern cities were filled with **markets, shops, and warehouses**. Pompeii is an excellent example, with a relatively intact forum surrounded by **porticoes** that would have held shops and businesses of all kinds. There people could buy food of many varieties, fabrics, wines, and many other types of products. It would have been **noisy** and **busy**.

Paul drew on the image of a marketplace with people vying for products and prices in Ephesians 3:19. *Hyperballō*, here translated "surpasses," has several meanings, including to throw or **run beyond a mark**, to **overshoot** or **surpass**—and to **outbid** at an auction. If Paul was using the latter definition, we could see this phrase taking the meaning, '**the knowledge of the love of Christ outbids normal knowledge [for us, our souls]**.' The reason for the bidding is captured in another metaphor in the same verse: "**so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God**," where "**fullness**" refers to a **ship** being fully **outfitted** and ready to take a voyage. Said another way, '**the knowledge of the love of Christ outbids everyone else for us so that we might be fully prepared for our life's journey**' (AT).

Besides those in the shops and stalls, markets were full of people **peddling** their wares on foot, walking through the crowds. Sometimes these peddlers were not as favored as an established store owner—could you trust their **quality**, their **scales**, their **honesty**? Such peddlers were known to sell poorer product, watered-down wine, or otherwise items of lesser quality or value.

Paul uses this image in speaking of his own efforts—he is "not like so many others, **merchants** of the word of God for **financial gain**" (2 Corinthians 2:17). "**Merchants**" here sell "**for financial gain**." Paul reminds the Corinthian Saints that he did not come among them peddling the gospel in their streets for his own profit and their detriment; he gave them **quality** 'product' that has **proved** its **value** over time.

Likewise, Paul wants the Philippian converts to be both “**blameless and innocent**” (Philippians 2:15).

“**Innocent**” is also translated ‘**unmixed**’ or ‘**pure**,’ generally referring to **wine** or **metal**, telling them to be free from defect and adulteration, like high quality goods.

Contracts

Corinth was a **business** town; it existed because it was in a **strategic position** to move goods from one side of Greece to the other. In Paul’s letter to the Saints in Corinth, he drew on some business metaphors in the opening chapter (2 Corinthians 1:21-22) to debunk the notion that they were closely aligned to him or Peter or Apollos but instead wanted to assure them about their relationship to Christ and the Father.

“**Establishes**” means ‘**guarantees**,’ a confirmation that something is going to take place. In this case, Paul taught that the Corinthians were guaranteed with him (“**us with you**”) in Christ. “**In**” is also part of the metaphor—it represents the idea that they were ‘**entered into Christ’s account**,’ credited to him, as it were (and not part of Paul’s or Peter’s or Apollos’ ‘accounts’). God is the one who guarantees this.

“**Anointed**” is not a business term per se but fits the context nicely. An anointing was part of a king or priest taking office. Thus Paul is saying that we are guaranteed to be in Christ’s ‘account’ and thus symbolically **anointed** for **great things**.

“**Sealed**” refers to the ancient practice of sealing a contract with hot **wax** and pressing a **stamp** into it, verifying the **identity** and **authority** of the contract owner. A contract with a broken seal was invalid. Likewise, a seal implied **ownership**, so if God has sealed us, he has placed his stamp of ownership upon us.

“**Promise**” was discussed previously with regards to marriage but as mentioned then, it also has a business context. Like earnest money paid on a house by an interested purchaser, the promise here is a **deposit** or **down payment** of the full payment to come later. It anticipates that future event and is a promise that the contract will be fulfilled. Paul uses it here to show that the **Holy Spirit confirms** to our hearts [our thoughts, in Greek and Jewish culture] that God will keep his promise of salvation and blessings.

Travel

Travel documents

Documentation was important for the traveler. Besides personal identification—especially helpful for Roman **citizens**—if you were going to a new place, you would carry a **letter of recommendation** from a sponsor to open doors and make **alliances** with the right people upon arrival. Paul refers to such a letter in 2 Corinthians 3:1-3. Paul’s **opponents**, who had come to Corinth with such letters, were charging him with **promoting himself** and coming to Corinth without the support of any **sponsor**. He asked if he needed “letters of commendation” either from or to the Corinthians. His answer was no: “You are our **letters of commendation**, written upon our hearts, to be understood and read by all.” Their lives, testimonies, and commitment acted as his letter of commendation. They were, in fact, as letters from Christ himself, written not on a great stone monument set in the city square but in the humble **hearts** of the good **converts** in that city.

Sea Travel

Hundreds of **ships** plied the Mediterranean Sea and the rivers of the area each year. From small to large (some **large** enough to hold **grain** for an entire **city** for a **year**), these ships not only hugged the coastlines but some

ventured out into the deep waters, crossing between the major ports, many bringing supplies to the great capital of **Rome**.

One subtle but interesting use of a nautical term is in 1 Corinthians 12:28. Paul lists several leadership positions in the Church, including apostles, prophets, and teachers. Then he mentions some gifts, including “healing, helping, leadership, foreign languages.” The word translated “**leadership**” is *kubernēsis*, the term for the person piloting a ship (**helmsman**). Given its position in the list of gifts and the previous mention of general leadership, this seems to be a reference to local leadership, such as a stake president or bishop today.

When a ship **left** port, the sailors would **cast off the ropes** that held it in place and head out to sea. Like in the final scene of *The Lord of the Rings*, that familiar sight became an image for Paul of **leaving this life**. He used it both in Philippians 1:23 and 2 Timothy 4:6, where he had a desire to “**return**” (**‘cast off and head out to sea’**) and recognized that the time for his ship to **depart** had come. In Ephesians 2:18, Paul also described Christ’s role in bringing us to the Father in nautical terms: “**access**” is ‘a **safe haven for ships**’ (also 3:12 and Romans 5:2).

Safe havens were important because the seas could be dangerous. Paul had firsthand experience with that, being **shipwrecked** at least **four** times. He used that image in 1 Timothy 1:19 to describe how some, who had **weakened** their faith by rejecting their own conscience, had experienced **shipwreck** in their lives. **Shipwreck** usually starts with **rough seas**, and Paul’s counsel to the Ephesians was not to be like ships on the sea, “**tossed back and forth** by the waves and carried about by **every wind** of teaching” (Ephesians 4:14).

Land Travel

Most land travel was done by **foot**, though sometimes **animals** were involved. Either way, people took full advantage of the massive network of **Roman roads** constructed to speed the movement of the army but free to anyone else to use as well. But Roman roads were **not without their risks** and problems. For example, Paul speaks of wanting to come see the Thessalonians but “**Satan hindered us**” (1 Thessalonians 2:18), meaning he ‘**blocked the road**.’ Continuing that thought, he prayed that God and Christ would “**direct our way to you**” (1 Thessalonians 3:11), or ‘**clear the road**,’ that Paul might fulfill his desire to be with them in person.

Banking

Banking was typically done by the **government**, the **temple**, or certain **wealthy** individuals. In **Ephesus**, the temple of **Artemis** (**Diana** in the KJV) was likely the **major banking institution** in the area, taking deposits and giving loans to business and individuals alike, with **the city** of Ephesus being its **biggest customer**. When **Demetrius** and the silversmiths caused a riot in Ephesus because of Paul and other Christian teachings, the charges against them, which were quickly squelched by the town leader, were: 1) stealing from the temple; and, 2) blaspheming the goddess (Acts 19:37).

Paul probably had all of this in mind when he used the words “**wealth**” and “**riches**” (*ploutos*) several times in his letter to the Ephesians. He wanted to turn their attention away from the riches of the world to the **eternal ‘wealth’** that comes from Christ (Ephesians 1:7; 2:7; 3:8, 16).

Likewise, Paul counseled **Timothy** how he should teach the “**the rich in this present age**” (1 Timothy 6:17-19). They should not be **proud** in their wealth or trust in it, but put their faith in God who “**richly provides** for us in all things for our enjoyment.” All should “**do good**” and “**be rich in good works**,” always sharing and

supporting each other. In that way, they are “**setting aside treasure**” [depositing in a bank] against a future judgment.

To the **Philippians**, he thanked them for their financial **support**, which helped him continue his work and travels. “Not that I seek for a gift,” he assured them. His only desire was “**interest** that would add to your **account**” (Philippians 4:17). “**Interest**” in this phrase is a **double-metaphor**; that is, Paul uses it to represent an increase—**interest**—and uses the concept of increase applying to a person’s account to represent the blessings he hoped **accrued** to them by virtue of their generous support of him.

Another very personal reference to banking comes in Paul’s final letter as he is **summarizing** his own life and efforts. (2 Timothy 1:12). He explained that he has suffered as a result of his calling but he is not “ashamed” of any of it. He knows in whom he has trusted and is completely convinced that God is powerful and strong and thus can preserve the **deposit** that God has **entrusted** to him—the promise of eternal life—against the day of judgment.

Debt

Paul spoke often of **debt** and frequently used the verb “to **owe**,” with banking and borrowing in mind. When he applied it to Jews [**Judaisers**] who were teaching that Gentiles converts still needed to live the full Law of Moses, he said that such a person “**is obligated [in debt] to obey the entire law**” (Galatians 5:3). By this he meant that **seeking to earn salvation by living every law** given by God was **pointless**—such a person would always be in debt to the law, always behind on payments.

The **grace** that Paul taught was the reason for our hope and salvation in Christ is a gift from God, but even **gifts** can bring upon the receiver certain **obligations**. In the case of a Christian, we owe God our **obedience** and our dedicated **service**. Applying it to himself, he said he was “**debtor both to Greeks and foreigners**” (Romans 1:14), meaning he owed it to God and to them to “**proclaim the gospel**” (Romans 1:15). In terms of others, he invoked the image of being in debt and thus needing to do something for others several times, including:

- Pay to everyone what is **owed** them . . . Do no **owe** anyone anything except to love one another . . . (Romans 13:7-8).
- We who are strong **ought** [owe] to bear the shortcomings of the weak . . . (Romans 15:1).
- Thus, men **ought** [owe] to love their wives as they love their own bodies . . . (Ephesians 5:28).
- . . . For children **should not have to** [owe] save for the parents but the parents for their children (2 Corinthians 12:14).

Debts were acknowledged by a document called a *cheirographon*, something written and signed by the debtor (like an IOU) and given to the creditor as acknowledgment. Though these are found in many ancient documents, there is one in the New Testament—Philemon 1:18-19—where Paul promised to figuratively repay Philemon for any wrong **Onesimus**, his runaway slave, has caused him. He even wrote this part of the letter with **his own hand** to signify the **seriousness** of the IOU (most of the letter was written by his scribe). Then with a bit of a wink, he reminded Philemon how much he owed Paul, surely hoping that would temper any price he wished to charge Onesimus.

The normal way of **canceling** a debt or acknowledging it being **paid in full** was to cross it out on the IOU (Greek *chiazō*, meaning ‘**make the letter chi,**’ which is an X). There are numerous examples of ancient texts with such big Xs across the note of debt. But Paul intentionally evokes a different image in **Colossians 2:14**.

The writing on the IOU is not crossed out but is **blotted** out—**washed** away, and **scrubbed** off with a sponge. If the **writing** on the IOU was still **visible** after it was crossed out, the paid debt would still be **known** by anyone looking at the document. However, if it was **obliterated**, it is as if the debt **had never been incurred**—it is **gone** forever. That is what God does with our debt of sin to him—he forgives and forgets and it is never held to our account again; he “wiped [it] out.” How does this happen? Through the atonement of his Son, Jesus Christ, the Father symbolically **nailed our debt to the cross**, and it was **paid in full** and **expunged** forever through his sacrifice.

War

War is common in our day, and certainly the ancient world rarely experienced the kind of global situations that we’ve seen in the last one hundred or so years. But the Roman world kept the Pax Romana in large part because of their **massive army** that was strong in the provinces and ready to act against any insurrection or rebellion that might come up. During Paul’s lifetime, he would have seen or heard of many instances of Roman soldiers coming against the Jews and people in other areas to put down troublemakers.

Rome had a strong presence in Judea since the days of the Maccabees, about **160 BC.**, though **full Roman control** of the area didn’t come until about **63 BC**. By the time of Jesus and Paul, Rome in charge and soldiers everywhere was a **daily** fact of life, and the citizens knew well the penalty for crossing any of the boundaries that Rome set for proper behavior. Serious threats faced **crucifixion** or **death** in other ways, while **soldiers** in their cities enforced the peace with swift **brutality**. **Kings**, tetrarchs, tax collectors (**publicans**), and even the **high priest** were all **appointed** by Rome. This influence was resented by many but was nevertheless a fact of life, reflected in Jesus’ teachings and Paul’s writings.

Tactics

Speaking against Paul in **Caesarea**, **Tertullus**, the ‘hired gun’ of the Jewish leadership (their *patronus*, if you remember the discussion about legal terms), accused Paul of several things that would portray Paul as a troublemaker for Rome as well as the Jews. One of these in v. 5 is a reference to army tactics. (**Acts 24:5**). The KJV phrase “**ringleader**” is *protostates* in Greek, meaning a soldier who is on the **front line** of the battle, leading the charge—which is then a charge of leadership, because in those days, an army’s leaders led the charge in order to keep control of everything happening on the battlefield. This is an accurate term for Paul’s efforts as he was truly **leading out** in bringing the gospel to the Gentiles and the larger Roman world, with other **Christian soldiers following** in his wake and continuing the work.

In a section of the letter to the Corinthians that presents several kinds of behaviors that Paul considered proper, including behavior in Church meetings, Paul concluded with this remark (**1 Corinthians 14:40**). The word “orderly” means ‘in proper battle array,’ as with troops who lined up with their shields and spears and other gear, ready to give battle. In other words, he was telling the Corinthians that when they come to worship, they should do it in proper, organized battle array—collectively **prepared spiritually to fight off Satan** and fully support each other against any attack or threat.

In the next chapter, Paul was writing about the **resurrection**. Having just stated, “**for just as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all will be made alive**” (1 Corinthians 15:21), he said, “Each person in his own **order**—Christ as the firstfruit, then those who belong to Christ at his coming” (1 Corinthians 15:23). “**Order**” refers to a soldier’s rank or band, meaning that the army lines up according to **function** and **rank**, with the **leaders** at the front. Paul’s image is that **Christ leads** the charge in the battle, followed by a veritable ‘**resurrection army**’ of his **faithful** followers.

Writing to the Galatians, Paul talked about the fruits of the Spirit versus the works of the flesh in chapter 5, then counseled them about daily life (Galatians 5:25). The image evoked by “**follow**” here is that of a **soldier** keeping in step with the other soldiers around him, so their ranks are solid, disciplined, and prepared for battle. Paul thus counsels to ‘**keep in step with**’ the **Spirit** in our daily lives, because he is **setting the pace** and **leading the way** toward eternal life for each of us.

Siege

Siege tactics and weaponry were important to any army in those days in order to conquer their enemies. To **capture** a **city**, you had to tear down their **defenses**, preferably from a safe distance, or position to preserve as much of the army as possible for when the walls were breached and the army could take over the city. The **result** for the inhabitants of the conquered city was typically to be **enslaved**. Paul uses this image writing to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 10:3-6). The battle for souls was very real to Paul, and this ‘call to battle’ to the Corinthian saints encouraged them to continue the ‘siege’ of evil in the fight for men’s souls and in their personal lives.

Signals and watches

Armies communicated commands in various ways, in an age without radios or similar technologies. One way was to raise **banners** or ensigns high on a hill or tower, so the soldiers could see what the strategy was. Another was to **blow a horn** in various ways, the different patterns allowing soldiers, who **could not see** their leaders and who were in the middle of loud fighting, to receive **commands**, **move** in a different direction, or even **retreat**, if needed. Paul evoked this image in a couple of passages to the Corinthians.

Teaching about **spiritual gifts**, particularly about the gift of **tongues**, Paul was counseling the saints in this chapter to temper the speaking of tongues unless it was accompanied by **revelation**, then said this: “If the **trumpet** does not make a distinct sound, who will prepare for **war**?” (1 Corinthians 14:8). Tongues could be a good gift, if the message was **well understood**, which required the paired gift of **revelation**. But like an army that didn’t know what to do when the trumpet blowing did not give “a distinct sound,” Paul said that tongues alone might not benefit the Church.

As mentioned already, 1 Corinthians 15 is about the resurrection. After assuring them that everyone would be resurrected, Paul evokes the army call to action with a horn: “. . . but all will be changed—in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, at the last **trumpet**. For the **trumpet** will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). As mentioned, the trumpet calls the army to **battle**, signals to **break camp**, and calls for **advance** or **retreat**. So in the **resurrection** we will be called to rise up using various **trumpet calls**, and at the very **last one**, any who have not already been raised will have that blessing, making it a **universal experience**.

Armies set a **watch** around the perimeter to keep an eye out for attacks or other threats to the camp. Paul made a passing reference using this term near the end of his letter to the Philippians: “⁶Do not worry about anything, but in all things let your requests be known to God by means of prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. ⁷And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will **guard** your hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). God’s peace, through the **Holy Spirit**, **guards** us and **protects** us in our daily lives against attacks, as we give our **supplications** to God.

A armor

We spoke about the imagery of darkness and light in part 1. Paul combines that with a reference to a soldier’s protective armor in his letter to the Romans: “¹¹And you know the time, that the hour has arrived for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we began to believe. ¹²The night has advanced, and the day is drawing near. Then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the **armor of light**” (Romans 13:11-12). As the night ends, the army changes out of **sleeping clothing** and into **battle gear**, ready for the events of that day. Paul told the Romans to cast off any dark things that happened during the **darkness** of night (representing their lives **before they knew Christ**) and instead put on the armor of God’s light so they were fully prepared to do battle. Each morning we are called to ‘**put on Christ**’ and thus **live as Christ** each day.

The **body armor** of the Roman soldier comprised a pair of **back** and **front metal plates**, a set of curved metal **strips** over the **shoulders**, and a **leather apron**, covered on the outside by six or seven horizontal **strips** of **metal**. The apron hung from a **belt** at the waist. The head was covered by a metal **helmet**, with a projecting **plate** at the back to protect the neck. The face was protected by **cheek plates** hinged at the top of the helmet. A short woolen **tunic** and **loincloth** were worn beneath the armor. **Sandals** studded with **hobnails** completed the outfit. The **thongs** of the sandals were wound **halfway** up the **shin** and tied. In **cold** climates the legionaries were permitted to **wrap** their **feet** in **wood** and to wear knee-length **trousers**. Occasionally, a heavy **cloak** was also worn. Each man carried on his left arm a large **shield** that was curved to cover his body. It was made of **wood** edged with **metal**, and the handgrip on the inside was protected on the outside by a metal boss. The outside surface of the shield was covered with **leather** and embellished with metal **decorations**—it would be **soaked** in water before battle to fend off flaming arrows and javelins. The weapons of the right hand were the **javelin** (*pilum*), of which each man had **two**, and the **sword** (*gladius*), a short, two-edged weapon (the shorter the sword, the quicker the draw). The tactic in battle was to first **discharge** the two **javelins** and then draw **swords**, close ranks, and charge, using the sword as a thrusting weapon. The target was the opposing soldier’s lower abdomen or groin—the part of the body least well protected by armor.

With that understanding of their dress, Paul’s lengthy metaphor of putting on the armor comes into focus. He gets the initial imagery from Isaiah (59:17), who speaks of putting on similar armor, but Paul modifies it for the Roman soldier’s specific attire:

¹⁰Finally, be strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹Clothe yourselves in the **armor of God** so that you are able to stand against the schemes of the devil ¹²because we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against rulers, authorities, the cosmic powers of this time of darkness, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³For this reason take up the **armor of God** so that you will be able to stand in the day of wickedness, having done all to stand firm. ¹⁴Therefore, **stand**, having fastened the belt of truth **around your waist**, having put on the **breastplate** of righteousness, ¹⁵by

putting **shoes** on your feet in preparation for the gospel of peace, ¹⁶and in all things, taking up the **shield** of faith, by which you are able to extinguish all the fiery **arrows** of the evil one. ¹⁷And take the **helmet** of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:10-17).

Soldier's Life

Paul considered himself a 'soldier' for Christ and called others to join him in that battle, such as Timothy, reminding him that soldiers don't get tangled up and distracted by more mundane things, because he wants to please the commanding officer, meaning Jesus: "³Participate in suffering as a good **soldier** of Christ Jesus. ⁴No one **serving as a soldier** gets entangled in the **mundane concerns of life**, but the **soldier's** concern is to please the one who recruited him" (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

In the early days of the Roman empire, soldiers paid their own expenses while in battle, with the hope of plunder after conquering a city. But by NT times, conquering was more rare and soldiers mostly put down rebellions and enforced laws, so the state paid them a wage. Paul used that practice in his argument that he and the other apostles merited some form of financial support from the members of the Church to keep the work of Christ going: "Who pays his own **expenses** as a **soldier**? . . ." (1 Corinthians 9:7).

Worship

Paul does not refer to **pagan** worship practices metaphorically, which might seem surprising given the background of many of his converts. He does, however, use Jewish worship imagery, which makes sense since many of them were god-fearers or proselytes (partial or full converts to Judaism) prior to their conversions, so they knew something of Jewish practices.

Sacrifice

Calling on OT language, Paul compares **Jesus' sacrifice** to one made at the temple: "and walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an **offering of sacrifice** and a **sweet-smelling offering** to God" (Ephesians 5:2). What makes it sweet smelling to God is the **status** of the person **making** the sacrifice; Christ's **perfection** elevates his sacrifice to the sweetest of smells.

Passover imagery was quickly linked to Christ among NT people. To the Corinthians, Paul compared the Law of Moses to old leaven (yeast) and Christ to the Passover sacrifice: "⁶Your boasting is not good. Do you not understand that a little **yeast** leavens the entire lump of dough? ⁷Clean out the old **yeast** so that you have a new lump of dough, seeing that you are without yeast. For Christ, our **Passover lamb**, has been **sacrificed**. ⁸So let us celebrate the Passover not with old yeast, which is bad and wicked, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). Paul tells them that the sacrifice has already been made and yet they still have old leaven in the house, representing their desire to continue in sin and their former ways. They need to get rid of it and replace it with "sincerity and truth" in the full gospel of Christ.

Triumphal Procession

The **triumphal procession** was a well-known event in Roman times. It was the greatest honor that could be bestowed on a **conquering general**. They **marched** around Rome, led by **government officials** such as senators and magistrates, followed by the **spoils** of the conquest and scenes that represented the triumph (**painted** scenes, **statues**, etc.). **Priests** then followed the group carrying censers of burning **incense** as well as sacrifices (**animals**) that would later be offered to thank the gods for this great triumph. Next came the **triumphator**, the

person being honored by the procession, clothed in a **purple** toga with golden **stars**, carrying a **scepter** in one hand and a **laurel** branch in the other. A **slave** held a golden **wreath** above his head all while continuing to **remind** him that he was **but a man**. Finally, the last group was the **soldiers** who had fought for him, cheering for the commander, sometimes leading some of their captive slaves.

Paul uses this image in 2 Corinthians where **Christ** is the *Triumphator* and we are the **priests** carrying the sweet-smelling **incense**: “¹⁴But thanks be to God, who always leads us in **triumphal procession** and through us makes known the **sweet smell** that comes from knowing him, ¹⁵because we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing” (2 Corinthians 2:14-15). Notice that with God, this triumph is **ongoing**— we are “**always**” experiencing it through and with Christ.

He uses the same image of public acclaim again in **Colossians**, where the record of our sin was nailed to the cross with him and thus overcome, which we talked about above with debts. Extending that, v. 15 speaks of a triumph: “¹⁴having wiped out the handwritten accusation of debt made against us. He removed it by nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He **disarmed** the rulers and authorities and put them to **public shame, triumphing** over them in the cross” (Colossians 2:14-15). **Jesus** is the great **victor**, having **conquered** all things alone and bringing his conquests along symbolically as his **spoils** (putting them to shame), his triumphal march is made possible by his conquest of sin and death, represented by the **cross**.

Sports

Paul was very familiar with the sports events of his day. He likely attended some of the games in Corinth or other locations. Some of his references are obvious but some nuanced, only recognizable by the language used. And yes, the athletes, who were all male, typically competed in the nude.

Chariot Racing

Paul uses the language of a **chariot race**, with the driver not being distracted by other things behind or in front of him but focused on crossing the finish line, that he might in the end receive the summons (“the prize of the calling”) from God through Christ: “¹³Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have **obtained** this. But I do one thing, forgetting **what is in the past** and **striving** for what lies **ahead**, ¹⁴I seek for the goal, for the **prize** of the calling of God from above in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

Games

Paul knew of the **gladiator games** held in many Roman cities and of battles between wild animals or between humans and animals. Such games were held in several cities that he visited, including **Corinth**, **Ephesus**, and of course, **Rome**. It can be hard for us to appreciate the attraction of such events, given our modern aversion to such brutality. But in reality, these games were not much different than our fascination with **modern dangerous sports**, such as boxing, auto racing, football, or a host of other high-risk activities including downhill racing, luge, ski jumping, skateboarding, cliff diving, and many others.

Paul used references to such dangerous and deadly sports when:

- he mentioned fighting with **wild animals** (1 Corinthians 15:32) as part of his justification for belief in the resurrection.
- at his trial when he found himself abandoned by other men but knew the Lord was with him, which he likened to being rescued from **the lion’s mouth** (2 Timothy 4:17)

- he counseled the Saints to **stand together** in the arena and **work together to defend** each other (Philippians 1:27)
- and he alluded to being **in the middle** of such a battle as a metaphor for the challenges of getting the gospel message spread to the world (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

Athletic Events

Finally, Paul used the great **athletic events** of his day as metaphors. He spoke to the Galatians of **running** a race, comparing that to his efforts to convince Church leaders of the importance of the Gentile mission: “I went up according to revelation, and I set out for them (though privately to those who were prominent among them) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles so that I might not **run**, or **had run**, in vain” (Galatians 2:2).

He encouraged others to stay in the race, at the same time evoking the image of a wrestling match and a boxing fight: “²⁴Do you not understand that the **runners** in a stadium all **compete** but one receives the **prize**? **Run** so that you may **win**. ²⁵Every athlete works at self-control in all things. They **struggle** [wrestle] in order to receive a perishable crown, but we **struggle** in order to receive an imperishable one. ²⁶So I do not **run** without direction, and I do not **box** as though I were **punching air**” (1 Corinthians 9:24-26). “Punching air” refers to practicing or ‘shadow boxing’; Paul means that he is fully in the fight, not just training.

Finally, Paul concludes his own mission introspectively mixing both racing and boxing, alluding to the laurel wreath given to the victors in such contests:

⁶For I am already being poured out as an offering, and the time for my departure is at hand. ⁷I have **competed** well; I have finished the **race**; I have kept the faith. ⁸Finally, a **crown** of righteousness is reserved for me, which the Lord, the righteous **judge**, will give me in that day, and not only to me but to all who love his appearing (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Further Reading

Abbreviations:

- TWNT – Thomas Wayment’s New Testament for Latter-day Saints
- AT – Author’s translation
- BYU – BYU New Rendition
- JST – Joseph Smith Translation
- KJV – King James Version
- LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)

Anderson, Richard Lloyd, *Guide to Acts and the Apostles’ Letters*, 3rd ed. Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999.

Anderson, Richard Lloyd, *Understanding Paul (Revised Edition)*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007.

Arnold, Clinton E., ed., *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, 4 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.

Beale, G. K. and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.

- Blumell, Lincoln H., ed., *New Testament History, Culture, and Society*. Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2019.
- Brown, Raymond E., *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New York: Doubleday, 1997.
- Bruce, F. F., *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.
- Bruce, F. F., *The Book of the Acts*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988.
- Coogan, Michael D., ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, Fully Revised Fourth Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2010.
- Crossan, John Dominic and Jonathan I. Reed, *In Search of Paul*. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004.
- Draper, Richard D. and Michael D. Rhodes, *Pauls' First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015.
- Faulconer, James E., *Romans 1: Notes & Reflections*. Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999.
- Findlay, George, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle*, 4th ed. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1998.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A., *The Acts of the Apostles*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Gaventa, Beverly Roberts and David Petersen, eds., *The New Interpreters Bible: One Volume Commentary*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010.
- Hall, John F., *New Testament Witnesses of Christ: Peter, John, James, & Paul*. American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2002.
- Hawthorne, Gerald F., Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Holzapel, Richard Neitzel and Wayment, Thomas A., eds., *The Life and Teachings of the New Testament Apostles*. Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 2010.
- Holzapel, Richard Neitzel and Thomas A. Wayment, *Making Sense of the New Testament*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010.
- Holzapel, Richard Neitzel, Thomas A. Wayment, and Eric D. Huntsman, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament*. Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 2006.
- Hoskisson, Paul Y., ed., *The Apostle Paul: His Life and His Testimony. The 23rd Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1994.
- Huntington, Ray L., Thomas A. Wayment, Jerome M. Perkins, Patty A. Smith, *Go Ye Into All the World: Messages of the New Testament Apostles*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002.
- Judd, Daniel K., Craig J. Ostler, and Richard D. Draper, *The Testimony of John the Beloved: The 27th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998.
- MacArthur, John, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005.
- McRay, John, *Archaeology & the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2001.
- McRay, John, *Paul: His Life and Teaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Millet, Robert L., ed., *Studies in Scripture: Vol. 6, Acts to Revelation*. Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 1987.

- Moore, Beth, *The Beloved Disciple: Following John to the Heart of Jesus*. Nashville, TN: Boardman & Holman Publishers, 2003.
- Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome, *Paul: A Critical Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016.
- Ogden, D. Kelly and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: Acts Through Revelation*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998.
- Pollock, John, *The Apostle: A Life of Paul*. Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1985.
- Porter, Stanley E., *Paul in Acts*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001.
- Sperry, Sidney B., *Paul's Life and Letters*. Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1979.
- Wayment, Thomas, ed., *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005.
- Wayment, Thomas A., *From Persecutor to Apostle: A Biography of Paul*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006.
- Wayment, Thomas A., *The New Testament: A New Translation for Latter-day Saints*. Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2018.
- Welch, John & John Hall, *Charting the New Testament*. Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002.
- Williams, David J., *Paul's Metaphors: Their Context and Character*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999.
- Wilson, A. N., *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.
- Witherington, Ben III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.