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INTRODUCTION
ST. PAUL AND HIS WORLD

*“For us Paul is not a figure of the past
whom we remember with veneration.
He is our teacher, an Apostle
and herald of Jesus Christ for us too.”*

-Pope Benedict XVI

This Connections study is dedicated to the study of the great St Paul. His mark on the Church is well documented through countless artistic pieces, multitudes of Christian Churches named in his honor, and reams of books and articles that wrestle with his thought. The artistry of St. Peter's Basilica, in the center of Vatican City, also reveals his mark. Lining the roof of the basilica are statues of the first apostles, as if looking down upon St. Peter's square. Two prominent apostles are not among these statues on the roof, however. St. Peter's statue is set apart and stands to the left of the main entrance to the basilica. His statue is much more dominant in stature than those on the roof. Strikingly, St. Paul's statue matches St. Peter's prominence on the other side of the entrance, a powerful statement of St. Paul's authority and centrality in Christianity. St. Peter was the leader of the early Church and the Apostle to the Jews. St. Paul was chosen by the Lord to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, to the known world beyond the Jewish community. Together, Sts. Peter and Paul represent the universality of the Church's mission to the world. The statue of St. Peter holds the keys of the Kingdom of God that Jesus figuratively gave him in the Gospel according to St. Matthew. St. Paul holds a sword. The sword sculpted into Paul's hand traditionally represents both Paul's eventual beheading and also the "Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God," which he wielded as a missionary and continues to wield as our teacher, apostle, and herald.

With a full one-third of the New Testament books in Holy Scripture claiming his authorship, he is our great teacher. As one commissioned by Jesus himself to establish the early Church, he is our apostle. By his words, which continue to pierce the world with the light of the Gospel, he is our herald. So great is the influence of St. Paul upon the Church that we have four feast days dedicated to honor his life during the liturgical year: one for his Conversion (January 25), one for his Shipwreck (February 10), one dedicated for both Sts. Peter and Paul (June 29), and one for the dedication of the Basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul Outside the Walls (November 18).

Saint Paul and his World

In this six weeks of Connections, we enter an unfamiliar and fascinating world. A clairvoyant slave girl follows St. Paul around town yelling about him. An excited crowd mistakes St. Paul and his missionary partner Silas for Greek gods. A miraculous earthquake frees Paul and Barnabas from imprisonment. There is even a shipwreck.

All this and many other tales are told in the book of Acts. Full of stories of Paul's travels to Ephesus, Philippi, Galatia, Rome and other places, this book tells of the people and places St. Paul evangelized, and to whom he wrote his famous letters. These letters were collected by the church and became the Pauline epistles of the New Testament, from which we will also read. (Epistle is from the Latin word for letter.)

All of these stories and letters reveal Paul's intense love for Christ and for the people to whom he brought the good news of Christianity. In the midst of temptation, trial, and torture he proclaims the love of God in Christ. Even while in the Philippian prison Paul revealed his steadfast commitment to Christ when he wrote, "For to me to live is Christ, to die is gain." If he lived, he looked forward to laboring for Christ with his Christian brothers and sisters. If he died, his faith assured him the gain of eternal life with Christ. Paul's zeal and faith, even in the face of cultural pressures, inspired the earliest Christians and continues to speak to Christians in our age. It will be helpful for your discussions, however, to understand some of the cultural dynamics of Paul's time in order to draw deeper meaning from his life.

Three different cultures influenced the early church described in Acts: Jewish, Greek, and Roman. A little information about these will help us understand what we are reading. St. Paul, Jewish himself, became the apostle to the gentiles. Gentiles were everyone who was not Jewish. Because Alexander the Great conquered most of the known world in the fourth century before Christ, many people spoke Greek and practiced Greek religions.

In the cities, temples dedicated to various Greek gods were the centers of worship. The god considered a protector of a city would have a large temple and following. This was the case in Ephesus with Artemis, goddess of the hunt. In Acts 19 we read of silversmiths anger because Paul and his missionary team drew people away from the worship of Artemis. This depleted their customer base for silver idols. The silversmiths started a riot by accusing St. Paul of proclaiming a foreign god, Jesus Christ.

In week four of *Connection to St. Paul*, when the people of Lystra mistake St. Paul and Barnabas for the Greek gods Hermes and Zeus, it sounds strange to us now. Yet it is understandable that they would try to classify St. Paul's miraculous powers within familiar religious categories. The clash and confusion between the monotheism of Judaism and the polytheism of Hellenistic culture appears repeatedly throughout Acts.

Though St. Paul was Jewish, as of course were Jesus, all his apostles and probably most of his earliest disciples, we read in Acts of the Jews persecuting Paul after his conversion to Christianity. They often accuse him of false teaching and get him in trouble with the law. Though it seems that Jews and Jewish Christians co-existed in the synagogues in the early days of Christianity, eventually Christians were considered a heretical branch of the faith. Especially after the destruction of the second temple by the Romans in 70 A.D., Judaism struggled to maintain its identity. Divergent strains of thought such as Christianity were a danger to the very survival of their faith.

The law of the day was under the Roman emperor. In Acts we meet many Roman officials and soldiers, usually because Paul has been arrested yet again. As a Roman citizen, St. Paul had certain rights and privileges, including the right to take his legal case before the emperor. The end of Acts tells of Paul's travels to Rome to undergo trial there. Tradition holds that he died there.

Was Paul only Talking to Men?

Connections uses the Revised Standard Version of the Bible (RSV) because it is endorsed by the Magisterium of the Catholic Church as a valid translation and is no longer under copyright, as is the New American Bible (NAB) from which we read in church. Because the RSV is older, it contains some older translation traditions. For example, it uses the term “brothers” where newer translations might use “brothers and sisters.”

New Testament Greek, like Spanish and other romance languages, uses the masculine form for any group that contains men. For example, there could be six sisters and one brother, and the Spanish would still be “los hermanos.” Similarly, the Koine Greek would be “adelphos.” There is no equivalent to this in English. We never denote a group of brothers and sisters by the word brothers. We might use the word “siblings” to refer to brothers and sisters, but we would not use it as a form of address. “Greetings, siblings!” sounds silly.

Except in circumstances where there may well have only been men, such as on board the ship during the storm, we can safely assume Paul speaks both to men and women, even if your Bible’s translation says “brothers.” He must have preached to them and evangelized them, because Acts tells of women converts to the faith, such as Lydia, the purple dyer, and Priscilla (or Prisca) who runs a house Church with her husband Aquila.

Many people experiment with changing “brothers” to “brothers and sisters” when they read these passages. Members of your group may feel so inclined.

Pope Benedict XVI: St. Paul Continues to Speak

The following excerpt is taken from Pope Benedict's June 28, 2008 homily to open the Catholic Church's Jubilee Year to St. Paul.

“For us Paul is not a figure of the past whom we remember with veneration. He is also our teacher, an apostle and herald of Jesus Christ for us too.

“Thus we are not gathered to reflect on past history, irrevocably behind us. Paul wants to speak to us – today...Let us not ask ourselves only: who was Paul? Let us ask ourselves above all: who is Paul? What does he say to me?

“In the Letter to the Galatians, St. Paul gives a very personal profession of faith in which he opens his heart to readers of all times and reveals what was the most intimate drive of his life. “I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). All Paul's actions begin from this centre. His faith is the experience of being loved by Jesus Christ in a very personal way. It is awareness of the fact that Christ did not face death for something anonymous but rather for love of him – of Paul – and that, as the Risen One, he still loves him; in other words, Christ gave himself for him. Paul's faith is being struck by the love of Jesus Christ, a love that overwhelms him to his depths and transforms him. His faith is not a theory, an opinion about God and the world. His faith is the impact of God's love in his heart. Thus, this same faith was love for Jesus Christ.”

As we enter into this six-week series together, let us open ourselves to be impacted along with Paul by the love of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus lived, died, and rose from the dead so that we could know and experience this great love. Like Paul, we look to Jesus in order to be transformed by this truth—God knows our name and gave his Son for each of us so that we could live abundant, fulfilled lives in Him.



VIRTUE

WEEK 3

*“Those who belong to Christ Jesus
have crucified the flesh
with its passions and desires”*

Galatians 5:24

Opening Prayer



Have someone read the following passage of Scripture and the following prayer aloud for our opening prayer.

Colossians 1:1-6

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ²To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colos'sae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. ³We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all the saints, ⁵because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel ⁶which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing -- so among yourselves, from the day you heard and understood the grace of God in truth,

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Dear God, We ask for the grace to become like the Colossians. Build up our faith through our conversation. Help us to love one another and our neighbor so that all will know the good fruit borne from life in Christ Jesus. Help us to nurture the hope you offer in Christ through an intimate relationship with Him in prayer and sacrament. Allow us to be touched and changed by Paul's example and teaching about the way a follower of Christ should live. Make us a people of hope. We ask these things through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you for ever and ever. AMEN.

Introduction



Read aloud:

At the time St. Paul wrote, the word “saints” didn’t refer to those who had been officially beatified or canonized. No such procedure yet existed. St. Paul used the word “saints” to refer to all Christians. The Greek word is also sometimes translated as “holy ones.”

Paul’s Life and Mission



Have someone read the following passage aloud.

Paul’s Life and Mission: Acts 16:16-34, set in Philippi

¹⁶As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by soothsaying. ¹⁷She followed Paul and us, crying, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” ¹⁸And this she did for many days. But Paul was annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, “I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour. ¹⁹But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the rulers; ²⁰and when they had brought them to the magistrates they said, “These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. ²¹They advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice.” ²²The crowd joined in attacking them; and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴Having received this charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵But about

midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and every one's fetters were unfastened. ²⁷When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, ³⁰and brought them out and said, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³²And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. ³³And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family. ³⁴Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God.

- 1. Have you ever wanted desperately to know what will happen in the future? What was happening in your life? Why did you want to know so badly?**
- 2. In the Opening Prayer from the book of Colossians, St. Paul commended the Colossians for their faith, hope and love. Which of these virtues do you think Paul and Silas were primarily exercising as they prayed and sang hymns in prison?**
- 3. What would you do to nurture faith, hope, and love in such a situation?**
- 4. Why do you think Paul and Silas remained in prison when they could have escaped?**
- 5. In your own life, what interferes with the kind of faith and trust in God Paul and Silas showed?**
- 6. Why do you think the jailer after discovering them would immediately ask Paul and Silas how to be saved? What do you think he saw in Paul and Silas that he wanted for himself?**

VIRTUE

7. The jailer rejoices as he feeds Paul and Silas, because he, with his whole family, had come to believe in God. Does your faith in God bring you joy?

8. The meal they share could be an allusion to the Eucharist. Does the Eucharist bring you joy? Do you have any practices that help deepen your experience of the sacrament?

Holy Scripture



Have someone read the following passage aloud.

Galatians 5:1, 13-26

¹For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

¹³For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. ¹⁴For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁵But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another. ¹⁶But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, ²¹envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. ²⁶Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another.

9. What does it mean to be free? Given the rest of the passage we read, what kind of freedom do you think Paul has in mind?

10. How do you understand Paul's negative use of the term "the flesh?"

11. How would you define the word "fruit?" Paul describes things contrary to God as "works of the flesh." Why do you think Paul uses the phrase "fruit of the spirit" instead of "works of the spirit?"

12. Were there qualities that surprised you in either of the lists, the works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit?

13. Assuming the Galatians weren't literally chomping on one another, what do you think St. Paul meant by this metaphor? In what ways do we bite and devour one another now?

14. Jesus says that we must love not just those who love us, but also our enemies. How can that even be possible? Have you had a time when you tried to love someone who wronged you? How did you go about it? Was there anything that helped? Anything that hindered?

15. This passage tells us we can walk by the Spirit (v.16, 25), be led by the Spirit (v.18), and live by the Spirit (v.25). How do we do that in our daily lives?

Your Life and Mission



- When you lack joy and peace, patience and kindness, gentleness and self-control, do you look to see in what ways you are living "from the flesh" as a cause of these weaknesses? Plan some way this week to seek connections between your actions and your inner life either using the Galatians reading, or the Examen below.

VIRTUE

- Meditate this week on the “yoke of slavery” in your life. Ask Christ to make that yoke easy, that burden light. Then follow up by repeating in prayer, aloud or to yourself: “For freedom Christ has set me free.” Repeat it as many times as you like.... It’s the good news!
- St. Paul’s lists of the fruits of the flesh and the Spirit have long been an extremely important tool for Christians seeking to live more fully as a follower of Jesus. St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, used this passage in his Spiritual Exercises as a tool of discernment. By looking at the fruits in your life, and seeking correlations between your inner life and your acts, you can discern what keeps you bound, and what sets you free. To help people do that, St. Ignatius developed a prayer process known as “the Examen.” (Pronounced ex Ā men) Try this method of prayer this week.

A modern version of the Examen of St. Ignatius of Loyola

- We begin the Examen with an awareness of God’s presence with us and ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to prayerfully reflect on our day/week.
- We reflect on our day/week and ask ourselves how God has been present in the events of our day and in the feelings we experienced that day.
- We then look at how Christ has called us through these experiences as well as how we responded to these calls.
- Another helpful method for the Examen is to look at what we are grateful for and what has given us life this day. And then look, on the other hand, at what we are not so grateful for and what has drained life from us.
- We thank God for the blessings of the day.
- We also beg God’s forgiveness for any failures to respond well to Christ’s calls that day.
- We end by asking God’s help to respond generously to Christ’s calls to us during the coming day.

Closing Prayer



Invite members of the group to offer prayers of petition or thanksgiving. Then invite them to read aloud the closing prayer together, which is based upon Romans 12:1-2.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

[Prayers of petition or thanksgiving]

Lord, this week we ask that you would give us grace to live lives that are holy and acceptable to you. Renew our minds so that we will know your good, acceptable, and perfect will. We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Facilitator]: St. Paul

[Group members]: Pray for us.