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PAUL'S ROMAN CITIZENSHIP AS REFLECTED IN HIS MISSIONARY EXPERIENCES AND HIS LETTERS

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WHEN the apostle Paul first appears in the narrative of the Acts, there is no hint that he is a Roman citizen. Indeed, it is not until he has arrived at Paphos in the course of his first missionary journey that the record gives us any clew to his Roman citizenship. Prior to that time he is known only as a Jew and a Tarsean, and is spoken of as Saul. The fact that he was a Jew and a Tarsean would not indicate anything as to whether he was a Roman citizen; but the Hebrew name Saul would seem to indicate that he was not a Roman, for a Latin name was inseparably connected with Roman citizenship.

In the record of the happenings at Paphos, however, we find that Saul has another name which is Paul. This name Paul is Latin, as is witnessed by the name of Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul of Cyprus, whom Paul met on this occasion. In the first part of the Acts where Paul's work was essentially wrapped up with the Jews, Luke apparently preferred to speak of him by his Jewish name; but after Paul actually became a missionary to the Gentiles, Luke usually spoke of him by his Latin name. It would be of interest for us to know Paul's complete name—a Roman always had three—for the full name would probably give us a clew to how Paul's family had received the grant of citizenship, and would thus throw considerable light on his family history. Luke, however, was a Greek and apparently had no interest in such details as full Roman names. He does not even have a uniform method of using them; the proconsul of Achaia is spoken of as Gallio, but the proconsul of Cyprus is called Sergius Paulus, and the successor of Felix is spoken of as Porcius Festus and again simply as Festus.

In all the work that Paul and Barnabas had been engaged in as co-laborers before the incident at Paphos, Barnabas seems to have been the leader, but when they

were summoned into the presence of the proconsul of the island, Paul acted as the spokesman. The shift of leaders at this particular point is plain, however, for Paul was a Roman citizen and Barnabas was not. Paul's Roman citizenship gave him an exceptionally fine approach in conversation with the proconsul. In the course of Paul's remarks and miracle-working, the Roman governor was converted. This seems to have made a very strong impression upon Paul, for he apparently accepted it as a divine sign urging him to hasten to his special field as "Apostle to the Gentiles." From this time on, he laid increasing emphasis on the Gentile mission field, where his rare combination of Jewish, Greek and Roman knowledge fitted him as a special leader.

The next definite point in the narrative of the Acts where Paul's citizenship was especially involved was at Lystra, where he was stoned at the hands of a mob incited by Jews from Antioch and Iconium. Here was a critical situation for a Roman citizen. Citizenship meant above all else that the citizen should be protected by his government. But here was a *Roman citizen* "lynched" in a *Roman colony!* It seems most unlikely that Paul would let such a crime go unnoticed. Upon this point the narrative of the Acts is very interesting:—

> "They stoned Paul, and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and entered into the city: and on the morrow he went forth with Barnabas to Derbe."

There is one preeminent reason why he should return to the city, *i. e.*, to report the case to the governing officials and to rebuke them for permitting so serious a breach of Roman law. His departure on the morrow is perfectly logical in connection with this interpretation. If Paul remained to press his case in the court, he would (in accordance with Roman law) have had to conduct the prosecution of those that had assaulted him. But such action would have been seriously detrimental to his past and future evangelistic efforts in the colony. His wisest policy was to forgive his enemies and to leave the city

till the whole affair had quieted down. This he did, departing from Lystra the next morning after the stoning and going to Derbe where he preached for some time.

After the affair had quieted down, Paul returned to Lystra, "confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith," and also arranging for elders in the church. This work took some little time but it was all done in peace. Then Paul returned to Iconium and Pisidian Antioch, where he was also permitted to work in peace, although he had been persecuted at both cities on his former visit. It seems that the Lystrian officials were trying to atone for their negligence by giving Paul proper protection upon his return to Lystra. And since the riot had been instigated by Jews from Antioch and Iconium, it is likely that the Lystrian officials had reported the affair to the officials of those cities with their consequent protection of Paul as a Roman citizen. On Paul's second missionary journey he again stopped a considerable time in Lystra, in order that Timothy might receive the rite of circumcision. But this stay also seems to have been quiet.

At Philippi, Paul's Roman citizenship again came to the fore. Paul had healed the "maid with the spirit of divination" and had thereby ruined the financial income of her owners, for she was a slave. These men brought Paul and Silas before the local magistrates—in Roman law, the accuser acted both as sheriff and prosecuting attorney—and insisted that Paul and Silas, "being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and set forth customs which it is not lawful for us to receive, or to observe, being Romans." As the local magistrates were not only the judicial authorities of the colony, but also its supreme religious authorities, they were directly involved in the case. They were made to appear in an unfavorable light, as if they were not doing their full duty in keeping the Roman faith pure. Furthermore a mob was rising and mobs were serious things for an official to explain. So, in the excitement, to justify themselves as zealous for the Roman faith, and also to prevent mob rule, the magistrates order Paul and Silas to be beaten by the lictors and to

be cast into prison. This course was apparently taken without giving Paul and Silas a chance to defend themselves; the nature of the accusation and the rising mob easily account for the action of the officials—it was another example of the political theory of the age, "peace at any price."

After the earthquake that night, however, the tables were turned. The magistrate sent word that Paul and Silas were to be released, but Paul replied:

> "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men that are Romans, and have cast us into prison; and do they now cast us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and bring us out."

When the officials received this news they were terrified and went in person to the prison and brought out Paul and Silas, begging them to leave the city. Paul with the true spirit of forgiveness complied with their request, but not until he had first seen the little Christian group and comforted its members.

It is to be noted that Paul's companion Silas, who had taken the place of Barnabas on the second missionary journey, was also a Roman citizen; the choice of such a man shows another step in Paul's policy of evangelizing the Gentile world. This same idea was also carried out at Corinth where Aquila was associated with him, and where the Christian church met at the home of Titus Justus, after Paul had been driven from the synagogue. Both of these men were Latin or Roman citizens—there was a slight difference in the rights of the two classes. The use of a Gentile's house for the Christian Church was surely a far reaching step toward the evangelization of the Gentiles of Corinth.

In that city Paul was again arrested, but his case was not tried by the local court as at Philippi, but by Gallio the proconsul of Achaia. From the records of the trial we know that Paul was acquitted, or rather that the case was thrown out of court; and that Paul tarried after this yet many days. But greater than Paul's acquittal and his opportunity to work longer in the city was the apparent

sanction by the proconsul of the preaching of Christianity. Gallio doubtless never meant that his judgment should carry any such interpretation, for he seems to have thought Christianity and Judaism the same; but his action, nevertheless, was a legal blessing to the church.

In connection with the riot of Ephesus, there is a statement that sheds a peculiar light upon Paul's friendship with high government officials, whose duties were distinctly religious.

> "And certain also of the Asiarchs, being his friends, sent unto him and besought him not to adventure himself into the theatre."

This statement shows an unexpected realm of Paul's acquaintanceship, and we wish that the record might have been more in detail. It is sufficiently long, however, to show us at least these two points: that as yet, Christianity was not receiving any hindrance from those men who had charge of the worship of "Rome and the Emperors"; and that Paul had been able to make several personal friends among this important official class.

With Paul's rescue from the temple mob by the Roman soldiery under Claudius Lysias, begins a great legal struggle whose record is not completed even at the close of the Acts. When Claudius Lysias was unable to get any definite idea from the crowd as to why they had attacked Paul and when Paul's address to the mob only created more uproar, he ordered Paul to be removed to the castle and to be examined by scourging. The centurion who had received these orders proceeded to put them into execution and was binding Paul preparatory to the scourging, when Paul addressed him saying, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" At once the centurion hastened to the commanding officer with this knowledge saying, "What art thou about to do? for this man is a Roman!" Immediately Claudius Lysias came to Paul to investigate the matter, and in conversation with his prisoner found out that Paul was a *freeborn Roman!* whereas he himself was only a citizen by purchase right.

From that time on, although Paul was held as a pris-

oner, he was treated with the highest courtesy. His nephew was allowed to visit him, and when he informed Paul of a plot against his life, he was sent at Paul's request to the commanding officer who at once took special means to protect Paul's life by transferring him to Caesarea under a strong military guard. And with Paul went a letter written by Claudius Lysias explaining the case to the governor. In this letter the facts were slightly warped so as to make it appear as if Paul had been rescued because he was a Roman citizen—more glory to Claudius Lysias! —but Paul's legal position was stated honestly. As a Roman citizen Paul could ask for no better treatment than he received from the soldiery after they became aware of his citizenship.

After a preliminary examination by the governor at Caesarea, Paul was returned to prison there, but the guards were given specific orders "that he should have indulgence; and not to forbid any of his friends to minister unto him." For two years he remained a prisoner here until Felix, the governor, was succeeded by Festus. During these two years Paul was often invited into the presence of Felix and various hearings granted.

Felix was governor of Judea, and it was his supreme duty to keep peace in the country and to prevent any serious uprisings. This was an almost impossible task in Judea at any date before the destruction of Jerusalem. To have released Paul at any time during the two years imprisonment would have been to jeopardize at least to some degree the peace of the country. The Jews were determined now to kill Paul; they were like wolves waiting for their victim who, they were sure, could not escape them. So to protect the peace of the country, Paul was refused his freedom, though Felix recognized that he was innocent.

When Festus became governor, the Jews immediately clamored for Paul's trial. They thought their chance to kill him had at last arrived. In the course of the trial, however, the whole question as to Paul's release was settled by his appealing to the Emperor, and Festus' sending him to Rome. The question is naturally asked why Paul

did not make this same appeal to Felix. Probably this is the point at which the bribe Luke speaks of is involved. It was in the hand of the governor to send these appealed cases to the Emperor, and Felix may have delayed Paul's appeal to the Emperor hoping that he might receive a bribe to expedite the appeal.

But during all Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea, there is no record of ill treatment, and upon his actual sailing to Rome the same courteous treatment was furnished him. Aristarchus and Luke accompanied him on the journey. At Sidon Paul was permitted to go ashore and refresh himself among his friends. He was on good terms with both the captain of the ship and the centurion in charge of the prisoners, and took the liberty to advise them to winter in Fairhaven. And later during the wreck, Paul virtually took command of the ship by dictating orders to the centurion. This action was somewhat audacious, for if Paul's orders had proved incorrect and any of the prisoners had escaped, the centurion and his soldiers would have paid dearly for their loss under such conditions. At Melita Paul was entertained at the home of the chief man of the island. Thus all through his journey, although a prisoner, he traveled as a Roman citizen of consequence.

Upon his arrival at Rome this courtesy was continued and he was placed under the lightest type of custody. He was allowed to live in his own hired house, guarded only by a single soldier; and was free to preach during the two years' stay in Rome. To realize just what treatment Paul received at Rome, it is interesting to note that Gallio, former proconsul of Achaia, under whom Paul had been tried and acquitted at Corinth, was a prisoner in Rome at approximately the same time as Paul and under the same type of custody.

At this point it might be well to crystallize these remarks on Paul's Roman citizenship by comparing the courtroom experiences of Christ and Paul as they stood before the governors of Judea. Both of them were charged with inciting a Jewish insurrection against the Roman government. Both were shown innocent by the evidence

produced. Each Roman governor, however, was more anxious to keep peace and to court Jewish favor than to administer Justice. Pilate, fearing that the Jews would betray his maladministration to Caesar, ordered Christ to be crucified. Festus, like Pilate, courted Jewish favor, and to that end he requested Paul to submit himself to a second trial at Jerusalem (which was an illegal procedure). But Paul turned to Festus and said:

> "I am standing before Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou also very well knowest. If then I am a wrong-doer and have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die; but if none of those things is true whereof these accuse me, no man can give me up unto them. I appeal unto Caesar."

Christ was not a Roman citizen, therefore for him the procurator's court was the last appeal. Pilate's judgment was final. Pilate's judgment was crucifixion and the sentence was executed at once.

But Paul was a Roman citizen! If a Roman citizen did not think he got justice in the procurator's court he still had the right of appeal to the emperor. And Paul, seeing that he could not get justice in Festus' court appealed unto Caesar, and unto Caesar he went. By this right of appeal and the freedom that subsequently resulted from it, approximately eight years were added to Paul's missionary career and during that time he wrote more than half of the epistles that Scripture has preserved for us.

The influence of Paul's Roman citizenship is by no means restricted to his missionary experiences as recorded in the Acts. This same influence is to be found also in the epistles which he wrote to the various churches. The presence of this Roman influence in the letters, however, is not so quickly grasped nor so easily understood as in the Acts. Therefore a few words of explanation may be helpful at this point.

There must always be a common ground between the teacher and the pupil. With a Jewish audience Paul always had this common ground in the Old Testament, since both teacher and audience accepted it. Paul's task was thus simplified into convincing his hearers that Jesus

was the Messiah. With a Greek audience, as at Athens, there was the common ground of philosophy. Paul and his audience both accepted natural theology and from this common point Paul took the next step by preaching revealed theology in the person of Christ Jesus. When Paul was in a distinctly Roman audience, it is also natural to suppose that he reached his hearers with the Gospel message through some peculiarly Roman approach. This is shown at Paphos where Paul rather than Barnabas was the spokesman in the presence of the Roman proconsul; and Paul's warm friendship with the Asiarchs at Ephesus is another example of how he was able to make a Roman approach to the Roman world.

But Paul's interpretation of Christianity to the Roman mind is best seen in his epistles. Here he often took the common ground of Roman law with which he and his readers were familiar, and then builded some metaphor of Christian faith upon this legal foundation. These legal metaphors were not only intelligible to all Roman citizens (for each citizen was ordinarily his own lawyer) but they were also quite intelligible to the non-citizens who were always waiting and watching for someone to advance them to citizenship. Let us take one of these legal metaphors and study it, namely Adoption.

In Paul's use of the word Adoption there is a distinctly Roman thought. The Jew had no relish for the word—his idea was a pure blood strain, to be a blood descendant of Abraham. True, there was a method by which a Gentile might be adopted into Israel, but a study of Paul's Adoption passages shows that he could not have had reference to the Jewish custom. But a glance at the Roman law of adoption shows instantly that this is the basis of Paul's metaphor.

By the legal act of adoption, a Roman citizen might admit into his family any relative or even a total stranger, and this adopted son would then have the same rights and the same privileges as any natural born sons that were in the family. Technically speaking, he became a new person. His old personality was lost at his adoption and if he had had the legal power to contract debts and was

in debt at the time of his adoption these debts were no longer collectible. This practice of adoption was very common and well known by all classes of the Empire; most of the Roman emperors of the first century were adopted sons of the preceding Emperors.

This legal policy of adoption lent itself in fine form to Paul's ideal of the Christian's relation to God. Just as the adopted son was dead to his former family and alive to the family adopting him, so was the Christian dead unto sin and alive unto God; nor could the debt of sin ever be collected from him. The figure of adoption also helps us to understand how we can be considered as brothers of Jesus Christ—He being the born Son, we being the adopted sons.

Several minor details in connection with the legal rite of adoption and its consequent privileges are shown in Rom. 8:15-17a. Note that this passage was written to the church in Rome where the Roman metaphor would be instantly understood.

15. "For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.
16. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God:
17. and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ;"

In verse 15 the "Spirit of bondage" is brought into close contrast with the "Spirit of adoption." The significance of this juxtaposition lies in the formula of the legal act of adoption. This formula is almost identical with that used for a sale into slavery; and well might the candidate for adoption rejoice upon hearing the particular word that gave him the right to say "Father" rather than "Master." And to the Roman's mind the spirit of gratitude toward the father who had adopted such a son would remain all through life.

In the 16th verse, the Spirit is spoken of as a witness to our adoption. In Roman law the act of adoption demanded the presence of witnesses whose testimony would at all times prove the validity of the adoption. The Holy

Spirit is our witness to the world that "we are children of God."

In the 17th verse, we have the strange expression "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." According to American legal theory God can have no heirs since he will never die. But in Roman legal theory a son was considered an heir as soon as he was born or adopted into the family. Thus the expression "Heirs of God" was full of pregnant meaning to the church at Rome, for as soon as a Christian was born into the kingdom he became thereby an heir of God. Furthermore in Roman law, an adopted son shared equally in the inheritance with a natural born son and thus comes the expression "joint-heirs with Christ."

Truly the Roman metaphor of Adoption conveyed a wealth of spiritual thought to the early church. And many other technical Roman legal terms served likewise as a vehicle of spiritual truth.

These remarks upon the Roman influence in Paul's life and letters, are perhaps sufficient to show that Paul was not only "called" to be an apostle but was also richly "endowed" for that task. He was the ideal evangelist of his generation for the Roman world.