**The Apostle Paul Goes Straight**

(Acts 16:11-15)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A man was riding in a car with his neighbor one day, when suddenly she drove *straight through a red light.* He cried, “What do you think you’re doing, we could’ve been killed!” His neighbor said, “Relax! My brother runs red lights all the time, and nothing ever happens to him.” Just then, she drove straight through *another* red light, and he was getting pretty nervous. Then he saw a green light coming up, and began to calm down a little. But when they got to the green light, *she stopped!* At this point the man exclaimed, “What are you doing now, the light is green?” She said, “I know, but—” and she paused, looked both ways, and said, “my brother might be coming!”

Speaking of going straight through things—things *other* than traffic lights—here in Acts 16, God has just given the Apostle Paul a vision of a man *begging* him to come preach the gospel in Macedonia. And in verse 11, we see Paul head straight through a couple of towns to *get* to Macedonia as quickly as possible. God gave him the vision while he was in the city of Troas (v.9,10), so in verse 11 it says,

**“Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis” (Acts 16:11).**

Now what you’re seeing Paul do here is a good example for all of us. God told him what to do and “therefore” he put himself on “a straight course” *to do it.* I’m writing this in late December, when people are busy making New Year’s resolutions. If you like to make them, make one to start doing that! Because I have to tell you, most of the miserable messes I’ve made in my life were the result of *not* doing what God tells us to do *in His Word,* and I’m sure you’ve found that to be true in your life as well.

Now Samothracia is an island that’s right off the *coast* of Macedonia, where Europe meets the Mideast, and Neapolis was a city on the mainland coast of Macedonia. Neapolis was actually a suburb of a *bigger* Macedonian city called Philippi. That explains why our text goes on to say of Paul and his company:

**“And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days” (Acts 16:12).**

Now if the city of Philippi sounds familiar, it’s because Paul wrote one of his thirteen epistles to the *church* in Philippi. That means we’re about to see how that church got started.

But first, when it says Paul has decided to go to the “chief city” of that part of Macedonia, that tells you that he’s been doing what we talked about in our last lesson. He’s been examining his methods to see if he could improve on them. You see, before that Paul had been going from one podunk town to the next preaching the gospel, and he was *never* going to reach the world that way.

So after God sent him to Macedonia, Paul decided on his own to go to the chief city in that part of Macedonia. He finally wised up and realized that if he targeted bigger cities and established *churches* in those cities that the gospel would then radiate out from those big cities to *all* the podunk towns in the world. Later on in our study of Acts, we’ll see that when Paul left *Philippi,* he went to Thessalonica, which was the *biggest* city in *all* of Macedonia. And from there he went to Corinth, the busiest seaport in the world. With ships constantly coming in and going out from that port, the gospel would get out as effectively as it did down the Roman roads we talked about in our last lesson. From Corinth, Paul went to Athens, the biggest city in Greece. And hey, his plan of targeting big cities must have worked, because the gospel *did* reach all the world. Aren’t you glad it reached you?

But when verse 11 says Philippi was a “colony,” we can’t be sure of what that meant, because that’s the only time the word is used in the Bible. That means we can’t define it by comparing Scripture with Scripture, as God instructs us to do when interpreting His Word (ICor.2:13). But history says that Rome designated certain cities as official Roman colonies, and the people who lived in them were automatically Roman citizens. If that’s true, that would explain why Paul picked the Philippian church to talk about being citizens of *heaven* in Philippians 3:20, where he says that

**“...our *conversation* is in heaven.”**

Newer Bible versions use the word “citizenship” there instead of *conversation,* but they really shouldn’t. The Greek text from which our English Bibles were translated has a *different* word for “citizen.” The word “conversation” has to do with your *behavior,* and Paul has been talking to the Philippians about their *behavior* as citizens of heaven from the very first verse of this chapter. That’s because two of the ladies in the Philippian church were quarreling, prompting Paul to write them and say,

**“I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, *that they be of the same mind in the Lord”***

**(Philippians 4:2).**

It seems clear from that verse that those two ladies *weren’t* being of the same mind in the Lord. If you study the Philippian epistle carefully, you’ll see evidence that all the other members of the church were taking sides, with some siding with Eudios and some with Syntyche. That’s why Paul told them,

**“...let your conversation be as it *becometh* the gospel of Christ: that...I may hear...that ye stand fast in *one spirit,* with *one mind* striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27).**

Instead of striving together for the faith of the gospel, those two dear ladies were striving with one another. And that’s no way to act if you’re a citizen of heaven.

It wasn’t even a good way to act if you were a citizen of *Rome.* As we’re going to see in our study of Acts, Rome was big on keeping the peace. If they thought you were guilty of *disturbing* the peace, they came down on you like a ton of bricks. They’d arrest you, and ask questions later. We know that to be the case because that’s what happened to Paul in Acts 21:27-33:

**“...the Jews*...stirred up all the people*...and they took Paul...and as they went about to *kill* him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, *that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.* Who immediately took soldiers and centurions...and took him, *and commanded him to be bound with two chains;* and demanded who he was, *and what he had done.”***

In other words, they chained Paul and *then* asked him what he’d done *after they restored order.* You see, Roman soldiers didn’t care who was right and who was wrong. All they cared about was keeping the peace.

That’s why Paul picked *the Philippians* to explain that when you disturb the peace in the local church, *God* doesn’t care who’s right and who’s wrong. He just wants the peace to be restored. The difference is that God doesn’t come down on us like a ton of bricks when the harmony in a local church is broken. Under grace, He begs *us* to restore order ourselves, just like He begged Euodias and Syntyche.

So when someone wrongs *you,* God expects you to forgive him and bury the hatchet. And I don’t mean bury it *in his back.* And I don’t mean burying it with the handle sticking out so you can find it later and bury it in his back later!

One of the reasons people *mock* Christianity is that, at Christmastime, we sing about how Christ came to bring peace on earth, and 2,000 years later, *there is no peace on earth.* People conclude from that that Christianity is a miserable failure. Even some Christians wonder about singing about how Christ came to bring peace on earth, as the angel told the shepherds in Luke 2, because they don’t know what you know as a grace believer. You know that someday Christ *will* bring peace on earth *in the kingdom of heaven on earth.* But in the meantime, we can show the world peace on earth *in our churches.*

Now you think about that the next time somebody in your church wrongs you, or slights you in some way. You can retaliate if you want to, but do you know what Paul said to all those saints who were quarrelling in Philippi? He told them to

***“...be likeminded,* having the same love, being of one accord, *of one mind*...in lowliness of mind let each esteem other *better than themselves...*Let this mind be in you, *which was also in Christ Jesus:* Who...took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men...and became obedient unto death, *even the death of the cross”* (Philippians 2:2-8).**

Paul reminded those bickering believers of what *the Lord* did when those unsaved religious leaders in Israel started to wrong *Him* when they came to arrest Him. He could have told them that He was right about being their king and they were wrong. Instead, when Peter went to save him by swinging a sword around, He told him, “Put that thing away,” as it were, adding: **“Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, *and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels?”* (Matthew 26:53).**

When those wicked men went to wrong the Lord, He could have called in the cavalry *and wiped them all out.* And He had every right to refuse to die, for “the wages of *sin* is death” (Rom.6:23), and He was no sinner. So He had every right to refuse to die, and insist on His right to keep on living. But He *waived* His rights instead.

Can’t you do that too? When someone wrongs you, let this mind be in *you* which was also in Christ Jesus, and waive *your* right to prove you’re right and the knothead who wronged you is wrong. It’s actually what you *have* to do if you want to show the world the only peace on earth that we *can* show them in this dispensation—peace amongst ourselves in our churches.

Speaking of waiving your rights, the Philippians even waived some rights that Paul didn’t *ask* them to waive. You see, history *also* says that citizens of Roman colonies were exempt from having to pay taxes to Rome. That’s something that I think we can prove from Scripture if we compare what happened when the *Jewish* tax collectors asked Peter a question in Matthew 17:24-26, when they asked him,

**“...*Doth not your master pay tribute?*  He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? *of their own children, or of strangers?* Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, *Then are the children free.”***

Peter didn’t really know if the Lord paid his Jewish taxes, but he said “yes” to satisfy them, and then went in the house to ask the Lord. The Lord then “prevented” him from asking *his* question by asking him a question about kings like the king of Rome. He pointed out that kings don’t tax their *own* people, they tax the people they conquered! A king’s own people got off scot free in those days.

His point was that *He* was the king *of Israel,* so He and His “children”—the disciples He called “little children” (John 13:33)—should have been free from having to pay tax tribute *to Israel.* But what did the Lord go on to tell Peter in the very next verse:

**“Notwithstanding, *lest we should offend them*, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for Me and thee” (Matthew 17:27).**

Now what that tells me is that I need a new fishing hole, because I’ve never found so much as a *nickel* in a fish’s mouth, let alone enough cash to pay my taxes. I once heard someone say you should pay your taxes with a smile, so I tried that. They insisted on being paid with cash instead.

But what that *also* tells me is that the Lord had a right not to pay taxes to Israel, but once again He *waived* His right, this time for the sake of not offending the Jews who didn’t *know* that He was their king.

Now to get to the point, the Philippians weren’t just exempt from *Rome’s* taxes. They were exempt from *Israel’s* taxes too! Israel’s tribute taxes were called *tithes.* Under the law, Jews had to pay 10% of their income to Israel’s government. That was their *tax* for living in a theocracy, a government ruled by God. But the Philippians were members of the Body of Christ, so they weren’t *under* the law! That means they were *exempt* from having to tithe, as we are today.

But do you know what the Philippians did when they found out about that? They *waived* their right not to have to tithe, and gave the Lord’s work *more* then ten percent! They helped Paul *so much* that he cited them as an example to the Corinthians. When the wealthy Corinthians didn’t help the Lord’s work *at all,* Paul told them,

**“Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that*...their deep poverty* abounded unto the *riches* of their *liberality*. For to their power, I bear record, yea, *and beyond their power* they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty *that we would receive the gift*” (IICorinthians 8:1-4).**

The Macedonian Philippians wanted to help with Paul’s collection *beyond their power* to help. For his part, Paul didn’t want to *take* their money because he knew they couldn’t afford to give it. But once they found out how much God had done for them in Christ, they begged Paul to take *more* than ten percent of their income.

And I’ve got good news for you. If grace has touched your heart like it did theirs, *you can give more than ten percent too!* You actually *should* if you’re as financially comfortable as the Corinthians. I mean, if I had their money, I’d throw my money away. The indication is from Scripture that they were rolling in dough.

Do you know who *else* Paul used as an example to the Corinthians? He went on to tell them,

**“...ye know the grace *of our Lord Jesus Christ,* that, *though He was rich,* yet for your sakes He became poor, *that ye through His poverty might be rich”* (II Corinthians 8:9).**

After Paul talked to them about the grace of God that was bestowed on the Macedonian Philippians, he cited the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ—and for good reason! Do you have any idea how rich the Lord was before He came to earth? He could point to any star in the heavens and say, *“Mine!* That’s *My* star!” But do you know how poor He became when He became a man? We just heard Paul say that He took upon Him *the form of a servant.* A servant can’t point to *anything* and say, “Mine,” because literally everything he owns is *actually* owned *by his master.* That means the Lord went from owning *everything* to owning *nothing* when He was born in that barn.

And here’s the kicker: He didn’t have to do it! When Adam sinned and doomed the human race, the Lord had every right to look down on us all and say, as it were, “Nuts to you guys, I’m staying up here!” But He *waived* that right for our sakes.

Did you notice what Paul *called it* when He did that? He called it “the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That’s because *that’s what grace does.* Grace does what it doesn’t *have* to do. Grace does *more* than it has to do. And grace believers should too—and not just with their finances, but in every area of life.

So while all the people in the world around you are constantly clamoring for their rights, and insisting they get what’s coming to them, you just remember that if you got what’s coming to you, you’d get *eternal death.* Instead, *Christ* got what was coming to you when He died your death on the cross.

And now, under grace, you have every right to respond to His gift of Himself *by not living for Him.* You can get saved and never give God another thought. That’s your right as a believer under grace. But you can also *waive* that right, and live for Him to thank Him for saving you from eternal death. If you like to give Christmas presents, give *the Lord* the gift of *your life.*

Okay, it’s time we moved on to see how the church in Philippi got started. Acts 16:13 says,

**“And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.”**

Now as we’ll see in a minute, the Philippian church got started as an *outgrowth* of this women’s prayer meeting. And we know that these women were *Jewish* women because they were meeting on the sabbath, right? And we assume that the church that grew out of this prayer group was mostly women because it was two women that were fighting, and women don’t quarrel any more than men do.

When I was a teen, training to be a pastor, I used to guest speak at a grace church in Oglesby, Illinois, that was made up almost entirely of women. They sometimes even had to do the preaching themselves because they couldn’t find *men* who wanted to do it, and there was only so much they could take of me. Actually, the truth is that in those days I would work up one message a month, and then preached the same message at four different grace churches that didn’t have pastors at that time. But God blessed and used those ladies greatly. They even had me and a bunch of friends of mine put on a Bible conference for them, and some members of the community came as well.

But now, if you know Paul’s M.O.—his *modus operandi,* his method of operation, you now that usually when he came to town, he didn’t go down by the riverside. Where’d he go instead? If you know your New Testament, you know that when Paul entered a town, he made a beeline *for the local synagogue.* So how come he didn’t do that here?

I personally think the reason had something to do with Philippi being a Roman colony. History says that colonies were known as “little Romes,” little cities of Rome. And in Acts 18:2,

**“Claudius had commanded *all Jews to depart from Rome...”***

So I believe the reason Paul didn’t go to the synagogue in Philippi was that there was no synagogue to go to! All the Jewish *men* had hightailed it out of town! But the Jewish *women* started this prayer group up that was meeting *outside* of town so Claudius wouldn’t catch them meeting in one of his little Romes.

That meant that if Paul was going to stay true to his policy during this time of transition from law to grace, his policy of going “to the Jew first” when he entered a town (cf.Rom.1:16), he was going to have to crash this women’s prayer meeting.

When he did, he noticed one lady who was listening carefully to what he said, as we see as we read on in our text in Acts 16:

**“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14).**

Now Lydia was obviously a businesswoman who sold purple clothing. Back in the ‘70s, I wore purple pants when I was a teen, and a lot of other young people did as well. But in Bible days, the dye that was needed to make clothes purple was hard to make. That made purple clothing too expensive for teens and common folk. So it was associated mostly with the wealthy, as we see when the Lord talked about

**“...a certain rich man, *which was clothed in purple and fine linen,* and fared sumptuously every day” (Luke 16:19).**

Kings were wealthy enough to afford purple clothing, so Judges 8:26 talks about

**“...purple raiment *that was on the kings of Midian...”***

So with purple being such a pricey item, it’s not surprising that Acts 16:14 says that this certain lady relocated from her home in Thyatira in Asia to sell it to the wealthy and royal people in Philippi.

And here I think we have proof that God didn’t have a a problem with women being involved in a business in addition to being a mom. We know Lydia was a mother because we’re about to meet her household in the last verse of our text. And if she was a *Jewish* mom who kept the sabbath, as we see here, she probably tried to keep all God’s *other* rules as well. That means God must not have had a rule against being a working mom, or she’d have been following that rule too. But we know that she was an *unsaved* Jew because verse 14 says the Lord had to open her heart.

Now that’s one of the verses that Christians use to say that God picks who will be saved, and opens *their* hearts, but *not* the hearts of people He *didn’t* choose to be saved. But God didn’t open Lydia’s heart by using some kind of spiritual Jaws of Life. Have you ever seen those hydraulic jacks that firemen use to pry open cars after there’s been an accident and they can’t get the passengers out of the car? Well, God didn’t use the Jaws of *Eternal* Life to open that lady’s heart. He opened it *by His Word.*

You see, the *heart* is the place where men *understand the gospel,* as you see when Isaiah 61:10 talked about people who needed to

**“...*understand* with their *heart*, and *convert...”***

Those two words “heart” and “understanding are used together *31 times* in the Bible. And the way God opens a heart to understand the gospel is by opening a man’s heart to an understanding of God’s Word. At least that’s what happened to those two disciples the Lord was talking to on the road to Emmaus. Luke 24:45 says,

**“Then *opened* He their *understanding*, that they might understand *the scriptures.”***

*That’s* how the Lord opened Lydia’s heart. *The Scriptures* opened her heart, causing her to “attend” to the things Paul was saying. That word “attend” means to pay *attention* to something, as it says in Proverbs 4:1,20:

***“Hear,* ye children, the instruction of a father, and *attend* to know *understanding*....My son, attend *to my words...*”**

Children should attend to the words if their father if they want to be saved from a lot of misery in life, and men have to attend to the Word of God if they want to be saved from the *ultimate* misery in the lake of fire.

Of course, in Bible days men had to do more than just attend to God’s *words* to be saved. They had to do what Lydia did in the final verse of our text:

**“And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us” (Acts 16:15).**

In Bible days, people had to be *baptized* to be saved from their sins. That’s what water baptism was for, as we see when it says of John the Baptist,

**“John did...preach the baptism of repentance *for the remission of sins”* (Mark 1:4).**

But there has been a dispensational change since that time, and today men *don’t* have to be baptized to be saved. That change came with the ministry of the Apostle Paul. He’s the one who said in Titus 3:5 that salvation is...

**“...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of *regeneration...”***

i.e., by the washing of being *reborn,* and *not* by the washing of water baptism.

But if all that is true—and it is—the question remains: Why did Paul baptize Lydia? The answer is that God revealed the new program of grace to Paul *gradually,* as he himself said in IICorinthians 12:1, where he wrote,

**“I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord”**

Paul wrote that *27 years after he got saved.* That means that 27 years after the Lord *began* to teach him things, there were still things God needed to teach him. And *that* means that here in Acts 16, Paul didn’t yet know what he knew later when he wrote,

**“Christ sent me *not* to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (I Corinthians 1:17).**

Before Paul was made an apostle, it was impossible to preach the gospel *without* baptizing people, because *baptism was part of the gospel.* The Lord said, “He that believeth *and is baptized* shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). But eventually Paul learned that water baptism was *no longer* part of the gospel of salvation, and he never baptized anyone else after that. Once he understood that men were getting saved *without* water baptism, there was no point to continue to baptize them.

But now, how could Paul have judged Lydia to be faithful to the Lord, as verse 15 says there? I mean, what had she done that would make Paul look at her and say, “That woman is faithful to the Lord”?

We can’t be sure of the answer, but I believe it was when she believed the grace message that Paul shared with her after years of believing the law. After all, by that time Paul had seen plenty of unsaved Jews who worshipped God under the law like Lydia did but *rejected* the grace message. So when she *accepted it* instead, he was able to judge *from that* that she was faithful to the Lord, faithful enough to accept the dispensational change that God wrought with Paul’s ministry.

But if he judged her to be faithful, why did she have to “constrain” him to stay with her? Why’d she have to twist the apostle’s arm to get him to lodge with a new believer who was offering him a free place to stay? We know it wasn’t because Paul thought it wouldn’t look right for him to stay with a woman who didn’t seem to have a husband, for it’s not like he could be alone with her. She had a household of children, and he had Silas, Timothy and Luke with him. So Paul wasn’t afraid of how it would look *to her neighbors.*

I think he was afraid of how it would look *to the Romans.* Remember, the Apostle Paul *was a Jew,* and Jews weren’t allowed in cities that were little Romes. Somehow Lydia herself had been flying under the radar of the Roman government, but if she got caught harboring *three more Jews,* she’d be in way more trouble than if they just caught on to *her.* So she had to constrain Paul to stay with her because Paul didn’t want to put her in any danger. But if she was willing to take the risk, Paul was willing to let her serve the Lord by helping him.

I have to tell you, it took me a long time to get to where I’d do the same. It took me a long time to let God’s people serve the Lord by helping me *financially,* because I knew that—unless they were wealthy—it would put their *finances* in danger. But it’s something that ministers must remember if you’re going to survive in the ministry. I’m sure Paul would have felt better about putting the life of a Jewish *man* in danger, but all the Jewish *men* in Philippi had got out of Dodge! So it’s not like Paul had a lot of choices. And when a pastor has no other choice, he has to let God’s people serve the Lord by helping him, no matter what it might cost them.

In closing, I should add that this wasn’t the first time in the Bible that women showed more courage than men. Do you remember what the men did when they came to arrest the Lord? Matthew 26:56 says,

**“Then all the disciples *forsook Him, and fled”***

But do you know who *didn’t* forsake Him and flee? In the very next chapter of Matthew’s gospel, we read that

**“...*many women were there* beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto Him” (Matthew 27:55).**

Those women weren’t being allowed to minister to the Lord any more, but they were still there. They were standing “afar off,” but they hadn’t forsook Him and fled. So anytime you hear anyone say the Bible puts down women, just put them on the pay-no-mind list, because they obviously haven’t *read* the Bible very carefully.

Here’s a challenge for you. Google the question, “Did the Apostle Paul hate women?” If you do, you’ll find what I found, that *over two million sites* will pop up in response. And a lot of those sites are run by atheists and other people who are trying to *discredit* the Bible by saying that it puts down women.

But Christians who don’t *honor* women have a lot more in common with the god of the *Koran* than the God of the Bible. If you want to talk about a religion that puts down women, look to the Muslim faith, not Christianity. And if you’re glad that a woman bore your Savior, why not thank God for Mary next Christmas? Where would any of us have been without her?