

William Carey University
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Lecture on the Topic

**“How to do a Research Paper” –
A Paper on “Paul: A Tentmaking Apostle of the first Christian Century.”**

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To HIS 440—SENIOR SEMINAR
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1. HOW TO DO A RESEARCH PAPER

I am delighted to be in this class of HIS 4400 for a Senior Seminar on the topic **how to do a research paper**. I presume that you have already studied in detail the methodology of doing Research with the help of some of the available Manuals or Books on Research Methodology. So I would like to say only a few words about how you can choose a topic for your research. Once, my mentor told me during my research that choosing or finding a research topic is just like finding a parking place for your car in the midst of many cars already parked. It indeed is a challenging and discreet task of a researcher to find an area which is untouched, unearthed, undecided, unfinished, untrodden, unsolved and uninvestigated. You need to be attracted and deeply interested to such an area of studies. You may try to find how you can make your desired topic relevant, useful, meaningful, purposeful and beneficial for your area of studies and for the larger society. Your topic maybe a novel, creative and innovative one or it may be related to any particular problem, issue, crisis or lapses. I am presenting here an example of a small investigation or research on the topic “Paul: A Tentmaking Apostle of the first Christian Century.”

2. INTRODUCTION

Paul is generally studied and understood as a writer of some outstanding theological letters and a ceaseless traveler-missionary through the breadth and length of the Roman Empire. He is hardly envisaged as someone who spent long hours of day and night working manually.² We know that Paul has worked as a tentmaker missionary. As a tentmaking missionary he must have had a unique way to blend his mission work with tentmaking. How could he do both the works together? Why should he be called a tentmaking missionary? How far did he use his trade during his ministry? In this short research we shall look into details of Paul’s trade and the purpose of his trade.

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² Luis M. Bermejo, *Paul: Missionary, Mystic and Martyr* (Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2008), 187.

3. PAUL AS A TENTMAKER (*skenopoios*)

Paul precisely was a tentmaking-apostle in order to be a self-supported missionary, which is known from his own testimony, “You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the Gospel of God.” (cf. 1 Thes. 2: 9). This statement of Paul proves that his tentmaking profession took much of his time and energy during the period of his ministry as an apostle. R. Hock portrayed how Paul’s tentmaking was central to his missionary life, which was quoted by Bermejo:

We begin to realize that, far from being at the periphery of his life, tent-making was actually central to it. More than any of us has supposed, Paul was *Paul the tentmaker*. His trade occupied much of this time – from the years of apprenticeship through the years of his life as missionary for Christ, from before daylight through most of the day. Consequently his trade in large measure determined his daily experiences and his social status. His life was very much that of the workshop...of leather, knives and awls; of wearing toil; of being bent over a workbench like a slave and working side by side with slaves; or of thereby being perceived by others and by himself as slavish and humiliated; of suffering the artisan’s lack of status and of being reviled and abused.³

Paul the apostle practically used his tentmaking as a self-supporting strategy during his apostolic ministry. Like any other Jewish youth of his time, Paul also learnt a trade along with his religious studies. He had specialized in the tentmaking job. He chose this profession to support himself during his ministry.⁴ Luke, a companion of Paul, wrote in Acts 18:3, ‘Paul went to see them, and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together – by trade they were tentmakers.’

4. PAUL AND HIS TRADE

The Greek word for ‘Tentmaker’ is *skenopoios* which is nominative, singular and masculine⁵ and it is formed of two words *skene* (a feminine noun) meaning ‘tent’ or ‘leather’ and *poios* meaning ‘maker,’ which comes from the verb *poieo* meaning ‘to make’. The history of the word *skene* shows that, from the beginning, “tent” is the basic sense from which all other meanings were derived. Outside the Bible, *skene* seems to mean “dwelling,” “abode,” “lodging,” “accommodation” etc.⁶ From the New Testament standpoint, the most important part of the early history of *skene* lies within the LXX, in which about two thirds of the examples relate to the meaning, “tabernacle” and it is from here that the shift in the meaning of *skene* began. The word, *skenopoios* is rarely used outside the Bible, which refers broadly to pitching, stitching and making of tents.⁷ In the New Testament, *skenopoios* occurs only in Acts 18: 3, where it refers to some kind of manual work.⁸ It means ‘one who makes tents’ and probably not the one who pitches and uses it like the soldiers and hunters who used tents for their dwelling.⁹ It is known that when Paul went

³ Ibid.

⁴ Sebastian Kizhakkeyil, *The Pauline Epistles* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2006), 19-20.

⁵ William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 416.

⁶ Gerhard Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. VII, Σ, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 368.

⁷ Ibid. 369-393.

⁸ Ibid. 393.

⁹ A. Behera, *From Law To Grace* (Kolkata: A. Behera, 2009), 225.

to Corinth he got to know the couple Aquila and Priscilla, and whenever he visited them, he worked with them, because they were of the same trade (Acts 18: 2). Though the terms *par autois* refer to both Aquila and Priscilla, only Paul and Aquila can be the subjects of the main verb *ergazonto* and the 'be' verb *esan*. It is suggested that Paul and Aquila were "leather-workers" or "saddlers" and they manufactured tents, for which there was considerable use in antiquity.¹⁰ Patristic witnesses sometimes explain the meaning of *skenopoios* of Acts 18: 3 by *skutotomos* meaning "leather-worker." The fact that the apostle could work with the trade of a *skenopoios* means that he did not have to depend on the churches for support,¹¹ rather he was earning his own bread. Paul was educated at the feet of the Jewish Rabbi Gamaliel and side by side he had learned a trade, the trade of making tents, a skill that he practiced for supporting himself, even while he was founding new Christian communities (cf. 1 Cor. 4: 12; 9: 6; 1 Thess. 2: 9).¹²

5. HOW PAUL BEGAN TO USE HIS TRADE AS A SELF-SUPPORTING STRATEGY

It is suggested by one of the most recent biographers of Paul, J. Murphy-O'Connor that Paul began to realize the need to become self-supported while he was in Arabia and came back to Damascus. He suggests,

It was during his stay at Damascus and perhaps because of his travels in Arabia, that Paul is most likely to have become conscious of the need to be self-sufficient. His mission demanded a mobility which would enable him to reach to the whole Gentile world. Only financial independence could give him such freedom, and it was impossible without a marketable skill. According to Luke he decided to become a tentmaker (Acts 18: 3). The skill to acquire had to be in demand throughout the Roman Empire, in cities as well as on the road; it had to bring him into contact with all levels of the population; its tools had to be easily portable, and it had to be quiet and sedentary so that he could preach and work at the same time.¹³

Though Paul might have become conscious of the need to be self-supported during his stay at Damascus, it is being reappraised here that Paul could have normally learnt his trade from his childhood. Because it is generally accepted that Paul's family had the tentmaking business and he must have learnt this trade from his childhood. There is also a strong argument that every Rabbi had to learn a trade and as a result Paul learnt his trade from the time of his training to be a Rabbi.

6. INSTRUMENTS OF PAUL'S TRADE

We do not have records of what all instruments Paul used in his workshop for making tents. J. Murphy-O'Connor again suggests some possible instruments which Paul could have used in his workshop for tentmaking:

For his silent skill Paul needed only a moon-shaped knife, an awl, needles and waxed thread and he could be sure of finding jobs on every road he traveled and every sea he sailed. He

¹⁰ The view that Aquila was a tentmaker is supported by the fact that he had workshops in the great cities of Rome, Corinth and Ephesus, cf. Acts 18:2f; 1 Cor. 16: 19 etc. The manufacture of tents could well be a city job. It is suggested that though Paul and Aquila were of Jewish descent, they would not just be making booths for the feast of Tabernacles. This was a job for the pilgrims.

¹¹ Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary*---, 394.

¹² Richard S. Ascough & Sandy Cotton, *Passionate Visionary* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2008), 13.

¹³ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul. A Critical Life* (Oxford: University Press, 1996), 86-87.

could reinforce a sail and remake the tents that passengers and crews used for shelter on deck and for accommodation on shore at night. He could repair the canvas roof of a wagon or the harness of the draught animals. He could put a stitch or two in any of the multifarious articles of leather used by travelers, sandals, gaiters, belts, cloaks and gourds.¹⁴

7. PURPOSE OF PAUL'S TRADE

Although Paul insisted on the fact that the teachers have the right to be supported by their students, as he says, 'Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher,' (cf. Galatians 6: 6). nevertheless, he did not want to enjoy this right, partly because he did not want to be a 'burden' to the churches, as he mentions in several places (cf. 1 Thess. 2: 9; 2 Thess. 3: 8; 2 Cor. 12: 13), and partly to shun the accusation of ulterior motives by preaching the Gospel free of charge. Because Paul takes pride in saying, "What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the Gospel free of charge..." (cf. 1 Cor. 9: 18 (cf. 2 Cor. 11: 7)). He did his tentmaking as a self-supporting work not only to earn his living, but also to be an example more of a giver than a receiver, as Luke states in Acts 20: 34, "You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

The above mentioned Pauline statement has two implications. Firstly, it talks about self-supporting aptitude of Paul. Paul always loved to work hard for earning his own bread and at the same time proclaim the gospel, which was affirmed by Paul himself in II Thess.3:8-9, 'We did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it : but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. This was not because we do not have the right, but in order to give you an example to imitate.' It was against the principles of Paul to accept money or anything in return from anyone for his preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁵ Paul wanted to maintain this standard of his life always, as we find him affirming it in the statement, 'So I refrained and will continue to refrain from burdening you in any way.' (2 Cor.11:9b). Secondly, Paul never wanted to be at the receiving end. Rather he wanted to be an example of a giver, a giver even out of his poverty. Paul took support from others in order to serve others; as he boldly declared, 'I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you.' (2 Cor. 11: 8).

8. HOW PAUL FELL IN LOVE WITH HIS TRADE

Paul might have fallen in love with his trade for the following reasons. For Paul, the self-supporting ministry is one of the signs of a true apostleship, which no one could question. Paul says in another context to the Corinthians, 'the signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works. How have you been worse off than the other churches except that I myself did not burden you?' (cf. II Cor.12: 12-13). Another view is that Paul's tentmaking enabled him to stay for a longer period of time in one place.¹⁶ Because of this trade Paul could spend more time at a particular place, as we find him spending time while staying with Priscilla and Aquila. Another reason is that his trade gave him a joyful pride to feel free from

¹⁴ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul...*, 88.

¹⁵ Edgar J. Goodspeed, *Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1947), 33.

¹⁶ S. C. Baron, "Paul as Missionary and Pastor," *Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, edited by J. D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 42.

the accusation that he was preaching the Gospel to make his living (cf. 1 Thess. 2: 3-6).¹⁷ Paul always refused to be controlled by others with regard to his financial needs. He was not one who would take undue advantage of others' generosity (1 Thess. 2: 5; Acts 20: 33-34).¹⁸

9. PAUL'S TENTMAKING STRATEGY IS WORTH IMITATING

It is understood that Paul's trade as a tentmaker is an interesting profession, because Paul would proclaim the Gospel as a 'tabernacle maker', bringing the presence of God to the Gentiles. Paul's Tentmaking is compared with the Johannine phrase often translated as "he dwelt among us," which is sometimes more exactly translated from the Greek meaning, "he pitched his tent among us."¹⁹ Paul indeed continued to pitch and extend his tent by preaching the Gospel among the Gentiles in the new territories. This self-supporting ministry of Paul is worth imitating in the present context. John Stott comments that:

'Tentmaking-ministries' have rightly become popular in our day. The expression describes cross-cultural messengers of the Gospel, who support themselves by their own professional or business expertise, while at the same time being involved in mission ... The principal of self-support is the same, and the desire not to burden the churches, but the main motivation is different, namely that this may be the only way for Christians to enter those countries which do not grant visas to self-styled 'missionaries.'²⁰

10. CONCLUSION

Thus, we find that Paul the apostle practically used his wonderful trade of tentmaking as a self-supporting strategy during his apostolic ministry, which has been appreciated over the ages by scholars, mission workers and lay people. This strategy has also been imitated, as Paul desired, by many Priests, Evangelists, Mission workers and the laity. The purpose of this self-supporting mission work of Paul was that he might not become burden to the newly formed churches and that he might be able to undermine the accusation of the false apostles by preaching the Gospel free of cost.²¹ The self-supporting strategy of Paul is worth imitating, because it is ideal for all situations. For becoming self-supported any profession or favorite work can be taken up for generating the necessary funds. It is helpful to practice even in the hostile situations and countries where missionary works are restricted, because generally people will not oppose hard-working and self-supported mission workers. In the Asian contexts, many of our Christian brothers and sisters are not very rich in extending financial supports to the churches/mission workers. Alfred Ackenheil also suggests taking up the self-supporting strategy as there is lack of money.

Saul worked off and on as a tentmaker throughout his life, supporting himself as was needed while he traveled, preached and taught. Today, most church and religious organizations lack money for personnel needed to carry out Christian programmes. Local churches, national and overseas missions – all find themselves in this predicament. One of

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Thomas Manjaly, "Paul's Ways of Community Building," *Relevance of Saint Paul: An Indian Reading of His Letters*, edited by Kurien Kunnumpuram & Rekha M. Chennattu (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2009), 216-217.

¹⁹ <http://rccommentary2.blogspot.com/2008/12/st-paul-tent-maker.html>

²⁰ John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Leicester: IVP, 1990), 297.

²¹ Stott, *Acts---*, 297.

the solutions is “Tentmaking.” A Christian leader who earns part or all of his own support in a secular job is called a “tentmaker.”²²

Paul’s method of self-supporting ministry could encourage and inspire the mission workers and preachers in such contexts to take up any additional job, handicraft, profession, business, agriculture etc. and become as much self-supported and self-sufficient as possible in their mission endeavors. This kind of self-supporting mission can wipe out the misunderstandings among the non-Christians about the mission works done in different places. There are many ways and possibilities to imitate this great strategy of Paul in the church and mission fields in the Asian countries. It is expected that the unparalleled self-supporting strategy of Paul would be imitated by many more churches, Priests, Religious teachers, lay leaders and evangelists in their corporate and individual mission works.

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²² Alfred Ackenheil, *Day by Day with the Apostle Paul* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1983), January 5.