

# “STRENGTHENING THE BODY”

(An example of selfless-service)

Acts 16:35-40

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## INTRODUCTION

Paul gives us an amazing example of **selfless service**. His circumstances were so miserable, [review briefly] yet his whole focus was on others—especially the **body of believers** who had believed the gospel and were now the members of a local fellowship—a church—*The Church of Philippi*. Paul already had evidenced selfless service in witnessing to and winning the Philippian jailer and his household to Christ in the midst of his miserable suffering in the dark, damp, ugly, smelly, painful imprisonment he was experiencing. Now he evidences this selfless service in two additional ways:

- 1) He defends the Church’s liberty and peace by defending the citizenship rights of himself and Silas.
- 2) He encouraged the believers and exhorted them to grow strong and to remain true—when he is the one who needed strengthening by them!

Studying a passage like this will do us no good, will be of no value to us unless we apply in personally!

**You must practice selfless-service if you would honor the Lord and experience his JOY.** [Philippians is all about JOY in the Lord!]

### I. SEEKING THE \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ OF THE CHURCH (35-39)

If Paul had not handled this crucial situation with the self-less service that he did, possibly things would have turned out much worse for these believers. If the messengers to this small church could be treated with such indecency, what would happen with the members of the church?

#### A. The Order for Paul’s release (35)

We cannot be certain of the motive for this change of heart; possibly a combination of the 1) effect of the earthquake, 2) Lydia’s influence upon them, and 3) a “belated sense of justice on the part of the praetors” (Robertson, 263). They possibly reflected on “their hasty action, taken without investigation” and then decided not to “pursue the case” (Harrison). Such is even more likely if they had discovered the true motive for the accusations against the two men.

#### B. The Happy communication of the order (36)

He was happy for this outcome, but did not realize Paul’s greater concern.

“Go in peace”—likely with a deeper meaning now that he knew the “peace” of salvation.

#### C. The Surprising refusal of Paul (37); Paul’s refusal was based on **four issues**:

1. They had been publicly beaten.
2. There had been no proper trial—no chance for defense
3. These men were Romans—possessing citizenship. [Note the deliberate play on the words of his accusers in vv. 20, 21!]
4. They had been imprisoned.

5. Now, if the chief magistrates want them to be released, **let them come themselves and take them out! That is the least they can do!**

- Note the contrast: **publicly beaten/secret release; thrown us in/throw us out**
- “No indeed!” is a strong denial by Paul

D. The Humbled response of the Magistrates (38-39)

1. “They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.”
2. “They came and appealed to them.”
3. “They kept begging them to leave the city.”

Note that Paul’s insistence upon an “official apology” may have discouraged the leaders of Philippi from future persecution of the church there. Kent notes, “By insisting upon a dignified exit and the personal presence of the magistrates, they doubtless secured a measure of protection for the Philippian believers who might otherwise have suffered continued persecution” (pp. 136-37). The abuse, injustice, and disgrace toward the gospel delegates might be transferred to their followers and therefore hinder the acceptance of the message; Paul wished to avoid this situation.

*Paul and Silas were “looking out for” the well-being of the fledgling congregation in relation to the political powers of Philippi. But, they also were looking out for their spiritual well-being.*

II. SEEKING THE \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ OF THE CHURCH (40)

Note: “They went out of the prison and entered into the house (implied) of Lydia.”

A. They saw the brethren—**Do you long to see and be with God’s people?**

B. They encouraged the brethren—**When they needed encouragement and TLC themselves!**

- They wanted the believers to be strong in the Lord and to move forward in their faith.
- They wanted them to love and care for one another.
- They wanted them to be faithful in serving Christ.

C. They departed—leaving the congregation in good hands:

1. Of the Lord—undoubtedly commending them to His grace
2. Of Luke—who was left behind until Paul again picked him up on his third missionary journey—20:5-6.

## CONCLUSION

Why no name for the jailer? Could he have been Epaphroditus? We do not know.

Once again, the events at Philippi vividly portray the Gospel’s universal reach in harmony with Jesus’ example and teaching to them. “The Jew could express his thankfulness in his morning prayer that God had not made him **a gentile—a woman—a slave**” (K. p. 355). But here a gentile Jailer, a wealthy business-woman, and a demon-possessed slave girl all became followers of Christ.

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