Unfortunately, these brethren faced immediate persecution. Paul refers to this persecution in both of his epistles to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:7-7; 2 Thess. 1:3-4), which were likely written shortly after his time there. Luke records that envious Jews stirred up opposition against Paul forcing the brethren to send him away by night to Berea (17:5-10). This was a difficult time for Paul, which explains why Paul would emphasize the Philippians' care to him **"even in Thessalonica"** (Phil. 4:16). The Philippians supported him **"even"** during this most difficult time.

From Thessalonica he went to Berea, whose citizens are praised for their reception of the gospel (Acts 17:11). There, he established another church when **"many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men"** (17:12). He stayed in Berea until opponents from Thessalonica came (17:13), forcing the brethren to send him away by sea to Athens (17:14-15). Paul doesn't emphasize the Philippians' care to him in Berea, because (on the whole) this was not as difficult a period of time. Given that his time in Berea followed Thessalonica it is likely that it too falls in the period he considers **"when I departed from Macedonia."** It is very likely that Paul needed support from Philippi while in Berea as well, but before Paul made it to Corinth the circumstances would change significantly.

After leaving Berea Paul taught in Athens (17:16-33), where **"some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them"** (17:34). Luke doesn't indicate how long Paul was in Athens, but it is after this that he went to Corinth (18:1), where he worked among them for **"a year and six months"** (18:11). It was during his time in Corinth that he later explained to the Corinthians that he had **"robbed other churches"** having received support from **"brethren who came from Macedonia"** (2 Cor. 11:8-9). From the time Paul left Philippi until Corinth he had preached in at least five cities, establishing at least three churches. During this period of time many souls had been converted to Christ. The Bereans were described as **"fair-minded"** (Acts 17:11). The Thessalonians were said to have become **"examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe"** from whom **"the word of the Lord has sounded forth, . . . in Macedonia and Achaia"** (1 Thess. 1:7-8). This is a much different condition than the desperate situation Paul faced when he first came to Amphipolis, Apollonia, and **"even in Thessalonica"** where he saw intense persecution. It was at that time he would say, **"no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving"** except Philippi, but by the time Paul was in Corinth at least three churches had been established in the entire territory of Macedonia who were in a position to offer him support. That is not that same conditions he faced when he first left Philippi.

All of this makes it clear that the two passages are not describing the same time or the same situation and cannot therefore be used as authority for one church to send funds to another church in order to support a preacher. The pattern in Scripture is clear that churches always sent directly to preachers in order to support the preaching of the gospel. This prevents any exaltation of one church over another, and this is the pattern we must follow.

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BULLETIN OF THE OLSEN PARK CHURCH OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings



Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM
10:00 AM
11:00 AM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:
Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:
Steve Dixon
Ryan Ferguson
Arend Gressley
Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Brady McAlister
Walker McAnear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott
Justin Smiley
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:
Kyle Pope

Was Philippi a "Sponsoring Church"?

By Kyle Pope

Recently I had the privilege of participating in a three-day study in Cullman Alabama over issues that have divided brethren since the middle of the twentieth century concerning methods of church cooperation, church support of human institutions, and church sponsored social activities. Brethren from both sides were allowed to present their understanding of what the Bible teaches followed by a period of discussion. During this study brother Glenn B. Ramsey, professor of Religious Education at Tennessee Bible College in Cookeville, Tennessee, addressed the same topic I was also assigned—*Church Government and Cooperation.* In 1986 brother Ramsey had actually debated brother L.A. Stauffer on these same issues. I believe the recent study was conducted in a very brotherly manner and the discussion was quite constructive.

During his talk brother Ramsey made an interesting argument that I would like to explore. Brother Ramsey looked at two passages: Philippians 4:15-16 and 2 Corinthians 11:8-9. The first, addressing the support Philippi sent to Paul, reads:

> **Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities** (Phil. 4:15-16, NKJV).

In the second, as Paul explains why he did not accept support from Corinth while working with them, he writes:

> **I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in**

everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself (2 Cor. 11:8-9).

Brother Ramsey argued that when taken together these passages show that **"other churches"** supported Paul while he was in Corinth by sending their support to Philippi, who sent it to Paul directly. If so, this would constitute an authorized example of an arrangement to support evangelism that is often called a "sponsoring church" arrangement. This practice is common among mainstream churches of Christ, but is at the core of the divisions mentioned above. Brother Ramsey does not like the term "sponsoring church," but believes this approach is scriptural. Let's test this conclusion.

Brother Ramsey's argument rests on the conclusion that these passages refer to "the same *time* and *situation*" (81).[1] Let's consider some issues if this is correct.

1 The audio files of this study are freely accessible at: www.ecicon-ference.com. The written lectures are published in *Pursuing the Pattern: A Careful Examination of New Testament Practices,* Jim Deason, editor. Self-published, Jim Deason, 2017 available through Amazon.

If This Is the Same Time and Situation…

1. The Representative Plural. Paul told the Philippians, **"no church shared with me . . . but you only,"** but he tells Corinth **"other churches"** gave him support. If this is the same situation one of these statements is not technically accurate. Brother Ramsey explains this to mean **"other churches"** helped him *through* Philippi **"only,"** but is that the only way this could be explained? In linguistics there is something known as the *associative* (or *representative*) *plural* in which a plural form is used to refer to a part associated with the plurality. Someone might say, "I had to go to OTHERS for help," when only one person actually offered that help. Could this be what Paul is saying?

2. Fellowship in Giving. The word translated **"shared"** in Philippians 4:15 is the Greek word *koinōneō* (κοινωνέω), the verb form of the familiar word *koinōnia* (κοινωνία), usually translated "fellowship." Thayer defines it as "joint participation" in an endeavor. The New Testament focuses on what Paul calls **"fellowship in the gospel"** (Phil. 1:5), the spiritual partnership that comes through shared faith in the revelation of God (cf. 1 John 1:3).[2] Four times in the New Testament *koinōnia* is used of material or financial contributions made to support the teaching of the gospel (see Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13; Heb. 13:16). This shows that financial support given in the cause of Christ is **"fellowship in the gospel"** of Christ. The problem is, if Paul is describing the same situation, and churches sent support to him *through* Philippi according to Philippians 4:15 this does not constitute **"fellowship in the gospel."** Paul said, **"no church shared** (*koinōneō*) **with me . . . but you only."** So even if Philippians 4:15 shows an example of an authorized "sponsoring church" arrangement, churches that contribute to another church are not extending *financial fellowship* to the preacher supported by that church—only the "sponsoring church" is. Doesn't that elevate one church over another?

3. Ingratitude. According to a review of the 1986 debate, brother Ramsey raised this same argument on that occasion.[3] In response brother Stauffer made a point that I brought out during the discussion period. If this is the same situation, and other churches helped Paul through Philippi isn't this very ingracious on his part to tell Philippi **"no church shared with me . . . but you only"**? Would the Holy Spirit lead Paul to completely ignore the fact that other churches had helped in his support (*through* Philippi) and say inaccurately **"you only"** were involved in **"giving and receiving"** with me? How would other churches who contribute to a "sponsoring church" today feel if a preacher told the church that sends his support, "you were the only one that helped me"? It is hard to see that Paul would show such ingratitude if this is truly what is being described.

2 For a survey of this topic see my tract *Fellowship in the Gospel: A Study of the Greek Word Koinōnia* [online] http://www.ancientroadpublications.com/Tracts/FellowshipintheGospel.pdf.

3 Stringer, Johnny. "The Stauffer – Ramsey Debate" *Guardian of Truth* 30.19 (Oct. 2, 1986) 589, 598 [online] http://www.truthmagazine.com/the-stauffer-ramsay-debate.

Is This the Same Time and Situation?

If the two passages do not refer to the same time and situation then we cannot infer beyond question that Philippi supported Paul from funds sent to them from other churches.

How does Paul identify this timeframe? He says it was, **"in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia."** The book of Acts identifies when the gospel first came to Philippi. While in Troas, after receiving a vision of a **"man of Macedonia"** pleading, **"Come over to Macedonia and help us"** (Acts 16:9), Paul traveled to Philippi (16:12). There he converted Lydia (16:14-15), the jailer and his family (16:16-34), and perhaps others referred to simply as **"the brethren"** whom he encouraged in the house of Lydia before leaving the city upon his release from prison (16:40). This was certainly **"the beginning of the gospel"** for those in Philippi.

Paul further identifies the timeframe as **"when I departed from Macedonia."** How we identify this determines whether the two passages are the same or distinct situations. From Philippi Paul went to four other cities in Macedonia: Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica (Acts 17:1), and Berea (17:10), before going to Athens (17:14-15) and Corinth (18:1) which were both in Achaia. We might conclude that the phrase **"when I departed from Macedonia"** refers to his work after leaving Berea, but what is puzzling is the specific example he cites. He says, "**For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities"** (Phil. 4:16). Thessalonica was in Macedonia, but Paul considers this as a prime example of their help to him when he had **"departed from Macedonia."**

Why would Paul speak this way? Paul is writing to the Philippians. Luke identified Philippi as **"the foremost city of that PART of Macedonia"** (16:12b, emphasis mine). When the Romans took Macedonia in 168 BC Macedonia was divided into four regions (Livy, *History of Rome* 45.29.5-8). When Augustus was emperor Philippi was awarded the status of a Roman colony,[4] as Luke records (16:12c). Paul seems to be describing his departure from the *part* of Macedonia associated with Philippi, not the entire territory of Macedonia. An example from classical literature may speak in the same way. The Greek historian Thucydides in his history of the Peloponnesian War describes forces withdrawing from Macedonia to go to Berea (1.61).[5] Berea was also in Macedonia, but Thucydides, like Paul may be speaking of a departure from a specific region of Macedonia (not the entire territory).

If this is correct, what does it tell us about the question of these two passages? When Paul departed from Philippi he did not carry with him support from churches he had established before coming into Macedonia. Upon leaving Philippi he came to Thessalonica, and during his brief stay he established a church composed of **"some of them"** he has taught in the synagogue, along with **"a great multitude of devout Greeks"** and **"not a few of the leading women"** (17:4).

4 This is attested in Latin inscriptions (Johann Caspar von Orellius, *Inscriptionum Latinarum selectarum amplissima collectio: ad illustrandam romanae antiquitatis*. Vol. 1 [Orelli, Fuesslini et Sociorum, 1828] 512).

5 This reference has puzzled scholars, but it may be that Paul, like Thucydides, was addressing a departure from a specific part of Macedonia rather than the entire region generally identified as Macedonia.