

**PAUL**  
**AND HIS FRIENDS IN**  
**LEADERSHIP**

The title is rendered in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The word 'PAUL' is the largest and is filled with a detailed illustration of Paul, an older man with a grey beard, wearing a blue tunic and a yellow cloak, looking down. The word 'AND HIS FRIENDS IN' is smaller and filled with various illustrations of people in different settings. The word 'LEADERSHIP' is the same size as 'PAUL' and filled with illustrations of people in various poses. The background of the letters is a dark, textured grey.

**HOW THEY CHANGED THE WORLD**

**Paul W. Barnett**

## **The Bible Reading Fellowship**

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# **PAUL AND HIS FRIENDS IN LEADERSHIP**

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## PREFACE

The author owes a debt of gratitude to Professor F.F. Bruce for his typically insightful book *The Pauline Circle* (Paternoster, 1985), in which he discusses ten people who were associated in some way with the apostle Paul.

Bruce's book has articles about Ananias and Barnabas, whom Paul does not identify as 'fellow workers' in his mission. This present book, however, has a more distinct focus. It is specifically interested in those who were *directly* involved in Paul's mission. Of these I have chosen 24 individuals (plus one group of people).

In order to provide context I have identified and reflected on Paul's friends in chronological order, beginning with Paul's years in Damascus and Arabia and ending 30 years later in Rome. One striking thing about Paul was that he gathered more associates along the way. There are none that we know of from his time in Damascus and Arabia, but once Paul moves to Syria-Cilicia and particularly when he begins his journeys westward to Galatia, the Aegean region and Rome, the numbers expand dramatically.

If we combine references from Acts and Paul's letters, there are almost 100 names of those associated with Paul. Not all of these, however, were close mission colleagues. That number was probably just short of 40. In this study we are concentrating on the 24 we know most about.

Before I commenced writing this book, I was, like others, aware of Paul's friends, such as Timothy and Luke. But I was only dimly conscious of two things. One was the sheer number of other names

associated with Paul. The second was the degree to which they should be acknowledged for their part in Paul's amazing missionary achievements.

Paul was such a stellar figure – his intellect, his endurance, his love for Jesus – that we easily direct our spotlight only upon him. But his fellow workers helped him write his letters, delivered and explained his letters, acted as his ambassadors, and took a lead in encouraging the churches. It is their story that I am attempting to tell. Because Paul himself fills our horizons, the narratives about his mission friends are largely untold.

This is not merely a historical study, however, but more particularly a pastoral one. I have written about Paul the leader to encourage others with vision and drive to be inspired by him, and to begin to lead. And I have written about his friends because they, too, are shining examples of Christian commitment, who together with Paul achieved great things.

It is a mistake to look to institutions and church leaders to carry forward the cause of the gospel. Revival has usually followed the rise of charismatic leaders and those who supported them. This small book is written in the prayerful hope that God will raise up such leaders and their supporters in the coming days.

# 1

## PAUL'S GREATNESS

John the Baptist came before Jesus and Paul the apostle came after him. John was a great prophet and Paul was a great apostle, but both said that they were as nothing compared to Jesus. John the Baptist said that Jesus must increase and he, John, decrease. Paul wrote that he did not preach himself but Jesus Christ as Lord.

Jesus is the Son of God, the Lord, 'the man from heaven' and 'Saviour of the world', and Paul was a mere human, like one of us. But what a remarkable figure he was.

In his 30 years as a Christian believer, he established churches in a vast arc 'from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum [modern-day Albania]' (Romans 15:19). In terms of land mass this represented a quarter of the Roman Empire. That north-eastern quadrant of the empire included its wealthiest and most heavily populated cities. In the following centuries the lands in which Paul planted Christianity became the world centre of Christianity, based around Constantinople, capital of the eastern Roman Empire.

Leading scholars have not been slow in recognising Paul's achievements. James Dunn observed that it was Paul 'who ensured that the new movement stemming from Jesus would become a truly international and truly intellectually coherent religion'.<sup>1</sup> Martin Hengel claimed that Paul's mission was 'unique in the ancient world' and remained 'unparalleled over the subsequent 1900 years'.<sup>2</sup> Anthony

Flew, a leading atheist philosopher who later changed his mind and adopted theism, said that Paul was ‘a first-class intellectual’ who had ‘a brilliant philosophical mind’.<sup>3</sup> Larry Siedentop asked, ‘Was Paul *the greatest revolutionary* in human history?’ and expected the reader to agree with him that Paul was precisely that.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from that of Jesus whom he served, Paul’s is the most influential voice that speaks to us from the world of classical antiquity. Tiny numbers of dedicated readers read Homer, Cicero and Seneca, but millions hear Paul’s words read in churches Sunday by Sunday and reflect on his teachings in the privacy of their homes. Small groups meet regularly to study the Bible, including the details of Paul’s life in the Acts of the Apostles and the teachings in his letters.

## Explaining Paul’s greatness

How are we to explain the greatness of Paul’s achievements? Paul’s letters reveal him to have been both well educated and highly intelligent. He writes in fluent Greek with a large vocabulary expressed in flawless grammar. His letters employ a wide variety of styles, including thanksgiving prayers, personal memoirs, ironic speeches, lyrical hymns and carefully formatted teaching passages.

His expertise as a letter writer is consistent with what we know of Paul’s upbringing. He was born into a wealthy Jewish family who lived in the Roman province of Syria-Cilicia. His father was a Roman citizen and a citizen of his home city, Tarsus. The young Paul inherited both of these prized citizenships. His membership of a devout Jewish family exposed him to the teaching of the Old Testament at home, at the synagogue school and in the synagogue meetings.

As a teenager Paul went to Jerusalem to study under the leading scholar of the day, Rabbi Gamaliel. Paul was a star pupil among

the disciples of the great rabbi. Later, as a fully-fledged Pharisee, Paul took the lead in the violent suppression of the new sect of the Nazarenes. He was a highly focused and determined person, which helps explain his later achievements as a convert to Christ and as an apostle.

These elements in Paul – his intellect, his education, his driven temperament – were the qualities that marked the young man as suitable to go to Damascus to arrest the Christians who had fled there. When God converted Paul, he also converted and enhanced his mind, his knowledge and his determination. From now on his passion was no longer the law of Moses but the service of Jesus. The astonished Christians in Judea heard of the impact of his preaching in distant Syria-Cilicia and said:

He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.

GALATIANS 1:23

Above all, God's conversion of Paul explains his subsequent achievements and greatness. At the heart of Paul's conversion was his awareness that the Son of God loved him and had given himself for him (Galatians 2:20). Reciprocally, it was his love for Jesus that directed his paths (2 Corinthians 5:14).

His love for Jesus and Jesus' love for him explain why the converted Paul was so highly motivated to connect people to Jesus. He was extremely hard-working and innovative. He supported himself financially and underwent privations and sufferings in the pursuit of his ministry over the 30 years he was a Christian.

He sustained the churches he had established by his pastoral letters, which addressed their current concerns. Often these letters were a church's only 'scripture' to keep them on the right track theologically, spiritually and ethically.

## Paul's friends

There is one other thing that helps explain Paul's amazing achievements, something that has not been sufficiently appreciated. It was his capacity to recruit and retain gifted and dedicated workers for his mission. Paul established a large mission team of key men and women who helped write his letters, deliver and explain his letters, and carry the mission work forward on their own initiative.

This is well illustrated in Paul's letters to the church at Colossae and to his friend Philemon, who led an adjunct church in the same city. Paul wrote both letters from Ephesus at the same time.<sup>5</sup> With Paul in Ephesus were *Aristarchus*, *Mark* (cousin of Barnabas), *Jesus* who is called *Justus*, *Epaphras*, *Luke* and *Demas*. The bearer of the letters was *Tychicus*, who was accompanied by the returning runaway slave *Onesimus*. In Colossae were *Archippus*, *Philemon* and *Apphia*, and in nearby Laodicea was *Nympha* in whose house the church met. Those two letters show us that Paul had 12 named associates in Ephesus and Colossae and nearby Laodicea and Hierapolis who were proactively committed to him and to his mission.

If we are looking for explanations for Paul's establishment of the new faith in the north-eastern quadrant of the Roman Empire, we must include his astonishing capacity to multiply his own effectiveness through these and other co-workers.

## Paul the pastor of his friends

Paul suffers the undeserved reputation that he was a rather aloof, uncaring person. However, even a cursory reading of his letters reveals him to have been a sensitive and loving man.

Several examples establish this. He pleaded with Philemon to receive back as 'a beloved brother' the runaway slave Onesimus, whom he refers to as 'my very heart' (Philemon 16, 12). In writing to the

Christians in Philippi he was sensitive to their disappointment that Timothy would not be coming to them immediately, but also to the need to shield Epaphroditus from possible criticism over his failed mission in Rome (Philippians 2:19–30). These and other examples of his caring leadership help explain the tears of the Ephesian leaders as they said farewell to him for the last time (Acts 20:37).

## A list of Paul's friends

To highlight Paul as a team leader we will list some of his known friends. Their number may surprise us. There is a degree of fluidity in Paul's use of terms for his colleagues, whether 'fellow worker' or 'fellow soldier'. Some of those listed in Paul's letters may have offered hospitality; others may have had more distinct leadership roles. However, the mere listing of some of the names still makes the point: Paul was an effective team builder and the success of his mission owes much to those who were his loyal colleagues.

**AD47** Journey from Antioch to Jerusalem

Barnabas  
Titus

**AD47–48** Mission in Cyprus and Galatia

Barnabas  
John Mark (cousin of Barnabas)

**AD49–57** Mission in the Aegean provinces

Silas (also known as Silvanus)  
Timothy  
Luke  
Priscilla and Aquila  
Stephanas  
Titus  
Aristarchus  
John Mark

## Priscilla and Aquila, merchants

Paul first met this couple in Corinth in the year AD50. His preaching in Macedonia had provoked such a storm of opposition that he was forced to travel south, first to Athens and then to Corinth, capital of the province of Achaia. His first priority was to find the two fellow Christians who were rumoured to have arrived in Corinth from Rome. Like Paul, this couple, Priscilla and Aquila, were tentmakers (Acts 18:3). They also were to become some of Paul's most trusted friends.

Some years later (in AD57) Paul wrote this glowing reference to Priscilla (whose formal name was Prisca) and Aquila because of their exceptional importance in his mission network:

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the church in their house.

ROMANS 16:3–5

Paul was incredibly thankful to them for saving his life, but so too were all the churches of the Gentiles, Paul's mission network.

## How they came to be in Corinth

During the AD40s there had been troubles in Rome within the Jewish community because of the preaching of Jesus the Christ in the synagogues. Priscilla and Aquila seem to have been leaders among the Jewish Christians, and quite possibly were among those who through their witness to Christ contributed to the division among the wider community of Jews in Rome. We do not know how they became Christians.

Emperor Claudius, who was known to hate public disorder, took the drastic step of ordering all the Jews, Christian and non-Christian, from the city (see Acts 18:2). This was in the year AD49.

This was not the catastrophe for Priscilla and Aquila that it may have been for others expelled from Rome. This couple were not merely workers who made and repaired tents and other leather items. They appear to have been international merchants who purchased quantities of raw leather, from which they made tents, saddles, shoes and other leather goods, which they sold in various places. For them to relocate their business to Corinth therefore would not have been a problem.

### Priscilla's prominence

Interestingly, of the six references to them in the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's letters, Priscilla's name precedes Aquila's on four occasions. Aquila was a Jew but Priscilla may have been a Gentile. It is possible that she was distantly related to a famous Roman family, the gens Prisca.

Whatever the reason was for the prioritisation of her name it is safe to conclude that she was socially and financially more prominent than Aquila.

The first century had become the era of the 'new Roman woman'.<sup>13</sup> The wives and daughters of the emperors had become active in politics and public affairs in Rome, and Roman women could own property in their own right and initiate divorce. The elevated profiles of women in Rome appear to have in turn lifted the status of women in Roman cities and colonies throughout the empire.

One such woman was Junia Theodora, who was prominent in Corinth only a few years before Paul came to the city. She was wealthy and a generous patron:

Junia Theodora, a Roman resident in Corinth, a woman held in highest honour... who copiously supported from her own means many of our citizens with generosity... displaying her patronage...<sup>14</sup>

This helps explain references to women within the orbit of Paul's mission: Priscilla and Chloe in Corinth; Phoebe in Cenchreae; Lydia, Euodia and Syntyche in Philippi; and Junia and Mary in Rome. Christian women like these appear to have belonged to the new wave of socially advanced women in the first-century Roman world.

## **Their leadership**

After encountering them in Corinth (AD50–52) we meet Priscilla and Aquila next in Ephesus (AD52–55; Acts 18:18–19, 26; 1 Corinthians 16:19), then in Rome (AD57; Romans 16:3–4), and finally in Ephesus again (AD64). Once Paul passes from history (AD65) we lose sight of them. Their movements suggest that they had business branches in several cities.

They were hosts of Paul in Corinth and Ephesus and most probably would have fulfilled that role in Rome too, had Paul reached the city as a free man.

And leaders they surely were. A church met in their home in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:19) and in their home in Rome. Their initiative in taking on leadership stands out whenever we find them in the pages of the New Testament.

## **Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos**

During Priscilla and Aquila's time in Ephesus (circa AD52–55) a number of disciples of John the Baptist arrived, among them an Alexandrian Jew named Apollos. We assume that these disciples had been in Palestine in AD28–29 when John the Baptist was having such a profound influence there. Apollos was named after the god Apollo, which suggests that he had been converted from paganism to the Jewish faith.

John the Baptist preached that Jesus was the Messiah and no doubt would have taught more extensively about Jesus had his martyr's

death not intervened. Consequently, Apollos did not understand about the saving death of Jesus, his resurrection, and the blessings of the Holy Spirit to believers.

Apollos was a passionate preacher in the synagogue in Ephesus. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, but noted that his understanding was incomplete, ‘they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately’ (Acts 18:26). With the encouragement of the believers in Ephesus, Apollos travelled across to Corinth where he preached powerfully and effectively in the synagogue.

## Reflection

Priscilla and Aquila were among those who were closest to Paul, along with Titus, Timothy and Luke. They were initiative-taking leaders and loyal fellow workers in Paul’s missionary enterprise.

Priscilla and Aquila were merchants who supported Paul, and whose commitment to the gospel anticipated the roles of wealthy sponsors of Christian ministry in the coming centuries.<sup>15</sup>

In the 16th century Humphrey Monmouth, a wealthy London cloth merchant, became patron and protector of the linguist William Tyndale, whose translation of the Bible into English made possible the Reformation in England. Monmouth took Tyndale into his home to enable him to work on the translation. Later he used his importing networks to smuggle Bibles from Europe into England. Few people have heard of Humphrey Monmouth but he made possible Tyndale’s great objective of bringing the English Bible to the English people.

Also in the 16th century wealthy laymen like Admiral Gaspard de Coligny and Henry of Navarre were the leaders of the French Calvinists (known as Huguenots). Their loyalty to the Protestant cause cost them their lives.

In England in the first part of the 18th century Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, sponsored, supported and protected both John Wesley and George Whitefield, leaders of the evangelical revival known as Methodism. The countess used her upper-class connections to expose the nobility to the preaching of Whitefield and employed her wealth to found and fund dozens of chapels. Because the Church of England refused to train Methodist-inclined men for the ministry, she established a minister's training college for them in Wales.

Later in the 18th century, George Legge, the third Earl of Dartmouth, interceded for the ordination of John Newton in the Church of England. John Thornton, a wealthy philanthropist, supplemented Newton's salary in the poor parish of Olney and later secured his appointment as Rector of St Mary's Woolnoth in London. In London, Newton in turn influenced the philanthropist Hannah More and the politician William Wilberforce. Newton persuaded Wilberforce to remain a parliamentarian and supported him in the long and difficult campaign for England to abandon the slave trade.

These are just a few of the wealthy lay people who have supported and driven evangelical ministry. It is not known whether people in later times looked back to the example of Priscilla and Aquila. But in his day Paul was deeply conscious of their ministry to him.



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The more we understand biblical characters like the apostle Paul in their specific situations and in their own time, the more we will be able to apply biblical principles to today's church, its leaders and its mission – transforming and enriching the way we do church today. *Paul and His Friends in Leadership* examines the apostle Paul's critical relationships with key people, illustrating his humanity, faith, confidence in God and his leadership qualities. This novel approach, by an expert in the New Testament, will encourage us to reflect on leadership in the church today and help us to see how crucial authentic relationships are to our contemporary mission.



**Paul W. Barnett** is a former Bishop of North Sydney and lecturer in New Testament at Moore College, Sydney. He is the author of many well-received and influential books on the New Testament. His two interests are Christian ministry and the world of the early church. His passion is to encourage the practice of biblical principles for ministry in today's world.



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