

Case Studies

This case study can be carried out as a dramatic reading followed by discussion of the questions provided at the end. Two narrators, a slave girl, Paul, and a slave owner are needed to do this short reading.

Swindlers at Philippi – Acts 16 **A Case Study in Conscience and Conversion**

Narrator 1 The mind is a complicated thing. Not everybody's works the same way. Take the slave girl of Philippi, for instance. She was not normal. But she sensed things that you and I might easily miss. She became a public wonder for her curious insights, some of which were amazingly accurate. Add a few greedy men to the picture who saw that they could exploit the girl's talents for personal gain, and we have the tragic scene that Paul and Silas faced when they got to Philippi. How did the girl come to know why Paul and Silas were there? She obviously heard them preach the gospel and quickly caught the sense of who they were.

Slave Girl "These men are the servants of the Most High God. They show us the way of salvation!"

Narrator 2 She was right on the money, of course, and pronouncements like this put her owners in the money, too! The girl was fascinated by Paul and Silas. She followed them everywhere and advertised their mission. But it was unwanted publicity. The apostles were not fortune tellers! And they were not part of any money-making scheme. The kingdom of God that they preached was offered to everyone "without money and without price." They could also see that the exploited girl needed help. Paul finally took action to clear her mind and make it possible for her to understand the good news she was so vigorously announcing. He rebuked the spirit that trapped the girl's mind:

Paul "In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her!"

Narrator 1 The results were instant, and her owners were almost as quick to realize that their game was up. The girl was no longer trapped in a mental state that fascinated superstitious people ... and drained money from their pockets!

Narrator 2 But when you frustrate the greed of men, you are asking for trouble. The Apostle Paul undoubtedly knew this when he healed the girl, but he simply refused to let life-saving truth be confused with the self-serving ambitions of men. The apostles were assaulted by the slave owners and dragged into court.

Slave owner “These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city, and teach things that are not lawful for us to do, being Romans.”

Narrator 1 Really? One wonders why the slave owners hadn’t pressed these charges against Paul and Silas before the girl was healed, if that was what really bothered them. The charges were phony. They were a cover up for the real motive: revenge.

Narrator 2 What goes on in the hearts of men, anyway? Without a conscience before God, men will do anything. Honesty doesn’t matter. Can you imagine how far the slave owners would have gotten if they had told the magistrates their real motive for dragging the apostles into court? We can hear it now:

Slave owner “These men have healed the crazy girl who used to make us rich. Now we can’t swindle the public anymore! Make them pay!”

Narrator 1 Human nature hasn’t changed in 20 centuries. Men are still dishonest, and they still do whatever it takes to cover themselves. The desire to have a clear conscience before God is no more common today than it was in Philippi 2,000 years ago. Unless honesty strips away our covering and lays us bare before God, we will never be candidates for the kingdom of God.

Questions

- 1 – The slave girl was right. Paul and Silas did serve the Most High God, and they did show people the way of salvation. Why were her public announcements of this unwanted by Paul and Silas?
- 2 – What do you think about the conscience and honesty of the slave owners? What causes men to be like them? How does this kind of mindset affect anyone’s chances of salvation?
- 3 – Why is the public taken in by fortune telling and eager to spend money for it? How does this kind of mindset affect anyone’s chances of salvation?
- 4 – What are the counterparts of fortune telling in our society today?
- 5 – Read Deuteronomy 18:9-15; 1 Chronicles 10:13-14, and Isaiah 8:19-22 (especially clear in ESV, NIV). What’s wrong with fortune telling?
- 6 – The slave owners in Philippi said and did whatever worked for them. Honesty and integrity did not matter as far as they were concerned.

How easy do you think it would have been for them to come clean with God and with other people? What does it take to be honest with ourselves and recognize the need to change the way we think and act?

Find Bible passages that address the subject of honesty.