

ACTS
Paul Meets the Corrupt of Corinth
Acts 18:1-17

Any person who honestly looks at the United States of America today, as to where this country is morally, will conclude that our society is “going to the dogs.” We are in a rat race and the rats are winning. On every hand we see crime, graft, corruption, violence, greed and hundreds of other sins which are finding dominion in the lives of Americans. However, nowhere do we see the moral decline more in our nation than in the sexual promiscuity and debauchery, the uprise of homosexuality, the increase of alcoholism and the widespread use of illegal drugs.

As Christians, we might wonder if there is any hope for this country of ours. The answer is “yes.” There is hope and the hope is in a return to God, Christ and the Bible as our basis for life, law, economics, science, politics and education. Right now it looks very bleak for our country but so did the city of Corinth when Paul first came there. It was a city as bad or worse than any city in the United States of America. It was the cesspool of the Roman Empire, but the gospel of Christ penetrated that city and many turned to God from their wickedness to serve the living Christ. Our hope for America is in the gospel of Christ, for the gospel is just as revolutionary today as it was in the first century.

PAUL ARRIVES IN CORINTH - Acts 18:1-4

Description of Corinth (18:1)

“After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth.” -- Paul left Athens, the intellectual capital of the Roman Empire and went to Corinth the sin city of Greece and perhaps the whole empire. Athens was full of idolatry but Corinth was full of sensuality.

Politically Corinth was the capital of Achaia and a Roman colony. It was an important city.

Commercially it was one of the leading cities in the Roman Empire. It was a center of commerce and trade. Corinth was located on a narrow neck of land between the Adriatic Sea and the Aegean Sea. Greece was divided into the northern and southern sections by a body of water, and the only connection between the two was an isthmus about five miles wide. Corinth was built on this isthmus. It had two seaports, Lechaem on the west and Cenchrea on the east. The Greeks had ingeniously built a skidway across that narrow isthmus over which they actually dragged small ships on greased skids. Corinth was a very beautiful city located in a magnificent natural setting.

Spiritually and morally Corinth was a corrupt and wicked city. It was the most luxurious, effeminate, ostentatious and dissolute city in all of Greece. Morally Corinth was a depraved and debauched city. Its main attraction was the temple erected for Aphrodite or Venus, the goddess of sex. This temple set on a hill 1800 feet high back of the city, from which every evening a thousand priestesses (prostitutes) would come down into the city streets to ply their trade, indulging in the worship of sex. Even so-called respectable male and female citizens of Corinth would often carry out their worship of Aphrodite by giving themselves to prostitution a few weeks every year. Corinth was a seaport and military town so merchants and military men came from all over the empire to indulge themselves in this blatant lasciviousness. In the Roman Empire, when one wanted to speak of the most corrupt kind of life, they would use the expression, “To play the Corinthian.” Whenever a Corinthian was portrayed on the stage he or she was usually drunk, sexually debauched or perverted. Homosexuality ran rampant in the city of Corinth.

Corinth might compare with modern day Las Vegas, Hollywood, New York, New Orleans or San Francisco. Depravity was manifested at its worse in Corinth. Yet it was to this city that the gospel of Jesus Christ came with

mighty power. In the midst of all this open sin, there were many people who were aware they were living empty and meaningless lives. Wine, women and song had not filled the void in their hearts for reality. In this wicked city, many of these people were saved and gloriously transformed by the resurrected Christ.

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of God” (I Cor. 6:9-11).

The iniquity of Corinth became the opportunity for Paul to preach the gospel with power.

Companions of Paul (18:2)

“And he found a certain Jew named Aquilla, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, . . .” -- Aquilla was a tent-maker and Paul needed a job so he worked during the day and preached the gospel at night and on the Sabbath. It may be that Aquilla and Priscilla were already Christians since nothing is said about their conversion. Yet it is more likely that Paul led them to the Lord while he was working for Aquilla.

Aquilla and Priscilla were probably confused as to why they were driven out of Rome where they were making such a good living, but God designed it so they would meet Paul in Corinth and become Christians. What seemed to be a tragedy became the greatest blessing of all for Aquilla and Priscilla.

Aquilla and Priscilla became important Christians and are mentioned quite a few times in the New Testament and are last spoken of as having a house-church in Ephesus. It is interesting to note that in over half the references to this couple in the Bible, Priscilla's name precedes Aquilla's. A number of explanations have been given for this: 1) She was of a higher social class; 2) She was more educated; 3) She may have been more spiritually mature, for she apparently took the lead in the spiritual training of Apollos (Acts 18:28). My personal conviction is that Priscilla was mentioned first in some places because she was a sharp, outstanding, dynamic woman and when people thought of that couple they thought of Priscilla first.

Occupation of Paul (18:3)

“And because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent-makers.” -- Paul was a tent-maker by trade. Often on his pioneer missionary journeys he had to support himself because there was no organized mission's program for supporting missionaries. He sometimes worked in order not to be a burden or a stumbling block to those to whom he ministered, even though he had the right to be supported. All through the Roman Empire were itinerant religious teachers and philosophers who earned their livings by the free giving of the people. If the people would pay, they would teach and philosophize. Paul did not want to give these Corinthians the idea that he was preaching the gospel of Christ for their money, so he worked with his hands to support himself. This, however, gave him a natural foothold into his community to preach the gospel where the people were. Paul was a converted rabbi, and every male child in Israel was to learn some trade in order to support himself. Jewish people thought themselves thieves if they did not teach a trade to their sons. According to Jewish law, no scribe or rabbi could receive money for teaching. Rabbis were ordinarily men who worked for a living and taught the Scriptures on the side. This background, of course, prepared Paul well to be a pioneer missionary.

There is nothing wrong about attending seminary and after graduation taking a secular job. Some men are called to study, preach and teach on a full-time paid basis and others are called to work a secular job and study, preach and teach on a part-time basis without pay. Today, evangelicals, having a wrong concept of the ministry, say, when they see a man take a secular job after graduation from seminary, “What a pity. He is wasting all that training. He is a washout!” Not so, if this person is studying the Word, using his spiritual gifts, preaching and teaching and being an elder, he is not wasting his time or talents. He is doing the ministry as God called him to do it.

For Paul, making tents was an honorable, respectable and worthy vocation. This raises the whole question of Christian vocation. Is being a carpenter, plumber, teacher, lawyer or doctor an inferior calling to a missionary, preacher or teacher of the Word? Are Christians in secular jobs wasting their time when they should be out winning the world? First, it must be remembered that Jesus of Nazareth was a carpenter for thirty years before He began His active ministry of three years. Was Jesus wasting His time? Second, Paul made tents when he had to in order to support himself so he could preach the gospel. Was Paul wasting his time? Third, the Apostle Paul strongly implies that one's vocation in life is a calling from God.

“Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each man remain with God in that condition in which he was called” (1 Cor. 7:21-24).

The English word “vocation” is from the Latin which means calling. This does not mean that we are not free to change our vocation as we seek the Lord's will but that our occupation, whatever it is, should be viewed as a calling from God. We should believe that God has called us to be good lawyers, doctors, salesmen, merchants, teachers, government workers, truck drivers, plumbers, carpenters, masons or whatever. If we have a secular job, our calling is just as valid as a man called to be a pastor, evangelist or missionary. Most Christian men and women are not called to be paid full-time in the ministry, but all Christians are to see their jobs as a calling and are to minister to God through these jobs for the glory of God. In one sense, we have done a real injustice by speaking of full-time Christian work over against full-time secular work. Every Christian is serving the Lord full-time in different spheres of service. God expects the gardener and the grocer to perform his labor as a spiritual service unto God just as fully as a man called to be a pastor or missionary.

Evangelization by Paul (18:4)

“And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.” -- As was Paul's custom he reasoned with the Jews and Jewish proselytes first about Christ. He sought to lead these people to Jesus Christ by showing that Christ was the Messiah of the Old Testament. Then he told them that Christ died for sinners and that He was raised from the dead. He also told them they had to repent and accept Christ or they would perish in their sins and pass on into an eternal hell. Paul was always trying to win men to Christ.

PAUL MINISTERS IN CORINTH - Acts 18:5-11

Concentration on the Word (18:5)

“But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.” -- Apparently, Silas and Timothy not only brought good news of the churches in Thessalonica and Berea, which strengthened Paul's spirit to continue preaching, but they also brought a love offering from the church at Philippi which enabled Paul to give up his secular job and dedicated himself to study and the ministering of the Word of God.

“And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs (Philip. 4:15, 16).

The ministry became too demanding so the Lord made a financial provision so that Paul would not have to work a secular job.

The ideal situation is that a pastor, evangelist, teacher or missionary might not have to work so he might give himself one hundred percent to the ministry of the Word.

“I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things?

For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING.' God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. But I have used none of these things" (I Cor. 9:8-15a).

It is the responsibility of those to whom the Bible is taught to support those who teach them and pastor them. "And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches. Do not be deceived! God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Gal. 6:6, 7). Those elders who labor in the Word are to be worthy of double honor or remuneration.

"Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages'" (I Tim. 5:17, 18).

Therefore, we may conclude that the normal situation is for a man to be totally paid to minister the Word. It is an exception for a man to work and try to carry on a ministry at the same time. Even Paul realized that a growing ministry demanded more than just a few hours of his time a week. Praise God for the Philippians who saw the need to support Paul and free him up to dedicate all of his time and energy to the ministry.

Opposition from the Jews (18:6)

"And when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be upon your own heads, I am clean; from now on I shall go to the Gentiles.'" -- The Jews opposed the teaching of Jesus Christ as the suffering Messiah. They could not understand how a glorious king could suffer and die, so the gospel was a great stumbling block to them. "But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:23, 24). Finally, Paul gave up on those stubborn Jews in Corinth. He shook his garments against them which was a Jewish gesture of detachment. He had given them the gospel and he felt as though he had fulfilled his responsibility. This sounds very much like the words of Ezekiel.

"When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die;' and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet if you have warned the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself" (Ezk. 3:18, 19).

These are scary words. While it does not mean that men are lost or saved because we fail to give them the gospel, it does mean that somehow we share a certain amount of guilt if we fail to tell men about Christ when given the opportunity. These words ought to strike terror into our hearts, for they are solemn words. From this point on, Paul turned to the Gentiles in Corinth and it was with this wicked, debauched, licentious crowd that the gospel took root and found real success.

Relocation for More Effective Ministry (18:7)

"And he departed from there and went to the house of a certain man named Titius Justus, a worshipper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue." -- Paul moved from the Jewish home of Acquilla and Priscilla to the home of Justus, a Gentile. Why? Purely for a more effective ministry. Paul turned to the Gentiles and felt he could be more effective in reaching Gentiles in a Gentile home than in the house of a Jew. In God's providence, God put Paul right next to the synagogue. This is amazing since the Jews were already "hot" with Paul and his gospel. Yet, God always has a reason for what He does.

Conversion of Crispus (18:8)

“And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.” -- God had Paul live next to the synagogue so he could carry on discussions with Crispus, the leader of the synagogue in Corinth. This very influential Jew became a convert to Christianity and it shook the community and others believed.

This was a significant conversion. It would be like a Presbyterian elder or a Baptist deacon of some famous church getting converted to Christ. It would be like an Episcopalian bishop finding Christ or a Methodist steward being born again. The town was buzzing at the conversion of Crispus and his whole family, and this stirred even more opposition to Paul by the bigoted Jews.

Vision from God (18:9, 10)

Paul undoubtedly was somewhat downcast, disheartened and discouraged when he saw all the opposition in the city mounting against him. Just at the right moment the Lord Jesus Christ brought Paul a vision to encourage him to go on with the ministry in Corinth.

Paul Was Not to Fear (18:9)

“And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; . . .’” -- This tells us that the mighty Apostle Paul had genuine fears. He had his spiritual ups and downs. It looked to Paul as though he was headed for another riot and he was frightened. Perhaps he even thought about throwing in the towel in Corinth. We see here the humanity of Paul. He had apprehensions and fears just like every other man. “And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling” (I Cor. 2:3). He needed some assurance from Christ and he got it in a vision. Paul was told to keep on speaking the gospel. Why? It was through the gospel that men would be saved. The Corinthians had to hear about Christ before they could trust Him and be saved.

Paul Was to Count on Christ's Presence (18:10a)

“For I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, . . .” -- Christ promised Paul that no one in Corinth would do any bodily injury to Paul, even though there would be social persecution. Christ promised the Apostle Paul that He would be with him and never leave him. What a comfort!

Paul Was to Reach God's Elect (18:10b)

“For I have many people in this city.” -- Christ encouraged Paul to go on preaching because He had many people in Corinth He was going to save. The “many people” do not refer to the few converts who were in Corinth already but a great host of people Christ was about to save in that city. This in essence is the doctrine of sovereign election. Among these sensual, rich and effeminate pagans were some people who were destined to be saved. Christ did not say, “I'm going to get many people in the city” but “I have many people in the city.” They were already the Lord's by decree but they were not yet converted to Christ. They would come to know Christ through the preaching of the gospel and their personal response to it. As Paul preached to men and they received Christ, he was merely finding Christ's sheep who had been written in the Lamb's Book of Life. “And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one Shepherd” (Jn. 10:16). These sheep belonged to the Lord in one sense before they were ever converted. Christ, when praying to His Father, said of all who would ever believe, “Thine they were and Thou gavest them to Me, and they have kept Thy Word” (Jn. 17:6).

Nothing is more comforting to a Christian who is trying faithfully to reach men for Christ when nothing is happening than to realize the words, “I have many people.” Christ will move in power to save men whenever we are proclaiming Christ. Yes, some will come if we are faithfully proclaiming Christ. If we are not faithful, Christ will use some other faithful Christian to bring His sheep into the fold. Christ will not lose one of His sheep.

This verse also tells us something about evangelism. Evangelism is not finding a newer or better method, or getting into the culture of men so they can understand, or politely philosophizing about the gospel. No, evangelism is proclaiming the true gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit so Jesus Christ can reach His people as they respond to Jesus Christ by faith. The gospel saves whoever responds to Christ by faith, but those who respond were numbered among Christ's sheep in the plan of God. Paul preached to all but he never expected all to respond. "For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal. Glory" (II Tim. 2:10).

This verse also tells us that the most wicked, the most depraved, the most vile of men and women can be saved if Christ unleashes His mighty power to save them. No person is beyond the saving arm of God.

Continuation of Ministry (18:11)

"And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the Word of God among them." -- Paul stayed for a year and a half in Corinth preaching the gospel and teaching the saints, for Christ had many people in the city that had to be saved. While Paul was harassed for his faith, he was in no way molested as God had promised. What did Paul preach? He preached Christ.

"And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (I Cor. 2:1-5).

The church at Corinth grew strong because of good, solid doctrinal teaching and it had a wide impact upon the whole city of Corinth, all of Greece and the whole Roman Empire, even though this church was plagued at times by a carnal spirit.

PAUL BEFORE GALLIO - Acts 18:12-17

Insurrection by the Jews (18:12)

"But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat." -- Gallio is a famous figure in history. His father was Seneca, the theoretician. His brother was Seneca, the philosopher. History records Gallio as a man of great personal charm, mild disposition and a sense of justice for all. Seneca, his brother, describes him as being of the most lovely temperament. He said, "No mortal was ever so mild to anyone as he was to all." Gallio was the governor of Achaia. The Jews, furious with Paul, bypassed the Jewish and Greek official and took Paul right to the Roman authorities.

Accusation Against Paul (18:3)

"Saying, 'This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.'" -- These Jews claimed Paul was teaching an illegal religion not sanctioned by the Roman government. Rome acknowledged Judaism but the Jews wanted Gallio to condemn Christianity.

Dismissing the Case by Gallio (18:14-16)

"But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, 'If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; but if these are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters.' And he drove them away from the judgment seat." -- Before Paul could speak about Christianity, Gallio made a decision. He would not pass officially on Paul because he saw this as a doctrinal dispute between Jews. However, by not ruling on Paul and Christianity, Gallio undoubtedly set a precedent for other Roman governors. Christianity would be

considered part of Judaism and given the protection of the State. This decision made a tremendous difference in the advance of Christianity. As a result, Paul and his missionaries were able to propagate Christianity in the Roman Empire for the next ten or twelve years without fear of Roman reprisal.

Discrimination Against Jews (18:17 a)

“And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat.” -- The “they” may refer to the Greeks. If so, then the Greeks because of their anti-Semitism took this occasion to vent their hatred on the Jews. However, this may refer to the Jews, who were so disgusted with Sosthenes, the new ruler of the synagogue, because he could not persuade Gallio concerning the guilt of Paul, that they beat him up in front of the tribunal. This caused Sosthenes to lose faith in the Jewish cause. Whatever, God used this beating as a means to bring Sosthenes to Christ. “Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother” (I Cor. 1:1). Sosthenes was the second leader of the synagogue to become a Christian.

Oblivion by Gallio (18:17b)

“And Gallio was not concerned about any of these things.” -- This may mean that Gallio was completely unconcerned about a Jewish doctrinal dispute, or it may also mean that Gallio was totally apathetic about spiritual matters. He was a great humanitarian but he was lost, showing no interest whatsoever in Christ. Gallio did not care. He thought religion to be irrelevant, so he went through life a rejecter of Christ even though he was one of the great men of his time. How sad! A brilliant, sensitive governor who was totally insensitive to spiritual issues.

CONCLUSION

Are you like Gallio? Are you indifferent to spiritual realities? Are you unconcerned about the eternal destiny of your soul? Do you not care whether you go to heaven or hell? Gallio did not even bother to inquire into Christianity? Are you like Gallio?

Do you care at all about knowing Christ and the eternal destiny of your soul? If you do, Christ is at work in you. Surely Christ has “many people” in Roanoke He is going to save. Perhaps you are one of them. How can you know? Believe that Christ died for your sins and bow to Him as your Lord. Will you be a Crispus who accepts Christ or a Gallio who rejects Christ? Your eternal destiny hangs on your decision for Christ.