

Series: "Church the Way It's Supposed to Be"

Sermon #16

"Paul at Corinth"

Acts 18

Introduction: From Athens, Paul made his way to Corinth, one of the greatest cities of his day. It was known for several things: its bronze and pottery works; its great sporting events, not unlike the Olympics; and its immorality and wickedness. From a cultured, refined city like Athens, Paul takes the Gospel to the wicked city of Corinth and the grace of God establishes a church there!

1. PAUL FINDS NEW FRIENDS - 18:1-3

It was customary for Jewish fathers to teach their sons a trade, even if the sons were going to be rabbis. Paul's trade was tent-making, a skill which he used profitably to support his ministry at Corinth (I Cor. 9:15). It was through his trade that he met a Christian couple with whom he lived and ministered while establishing the church in Corinth. How it must have rejoiced Paul's heart to fellowship with these saints! Paul had no family of his own, and his travels made it difficult to fellowship too long in anyone place. Priscilla and Aquila later went with him to Ephesus where they instructed Apollos (18, 24-28). They had a Christian gathering in their house in Ephesus (I Cor. 16:19); but later Paul greets them in Rome (Romans 16:3). They are good examples to us of Christians who open their hearts and homes to serve the Lord.

In vss. 24-28 we find Priscilla and Aquila explaining the Gospel of grace to the visiting speaker, Apollos. He knew only the baptism of John, which meant he had never learned of the baptism of the Spirit and the founding of the church. Instead of embarrassing the man in public, Priscilla and Aquila took him home and taught him the Word. Apollos proves to us that it is possible to have eloquence, zeal, and Sincerity, and still be wrong! God led Apollos to go to Corinth, and there God gave him a mighty ministry (I Cor. 3:6, 16:12).

We might add one word about Paul's employment at Corinth. He himself recognized that this practice of earning his own bread was unique. The Scriptural program is that "*they which preach the Gospel should live of the*

Gospel." (I Cor. 9:14). In his pioneer missionary work, Paul deliberately paid his own way so that no one could accuse him of "*preaching for money.*" 1 Cor. 9.

II. PAUL FOUNDS A NEW CHURCH - 18: 4-17

He began in the synagogue, but that lasted but a short time; then he turned to the Gentiles. See 13:46. At this same time he moved out from the house of Priscilla and Aquila and moved in with a Gentile named Justus who was a Jewish proselyte and whose house was near the synagogue. Apparently he did not want to bring difficulties to his Jewish host and hostess, not that he had turned to the Gentiles. But vs. 8 tells us that the chief ruler of the synagogue had believed, as did many of the Corinthians! Note the sequence in vs. 8 - hearing, believing, being baptized. This is the pattern today. In I Cor. 1:14-17, Paul informs us that he himself baptized some in Corinth (I Cor. 1:11-17), which proves that water baptism is commanded for this age.

It is likely that Silas and Timothy (18:5) did most of the baptizing, since Paul's special commission was to evangelize. God gave Paul a special promise of victory, and he continued for 18 months in the city. A change in political leaders brought about new opposition, but Paul still tarried (vs. 18) to preach and teach ~I

Note that there is a new ruler of the synagogue, Sosthenes (vs. 17, see also vs. 8). It seems that Crispus' salvation made it necessary for the Jews to elect a new ruler; but if the Sosthenes of 18:17 is the same as the one named in I Cor. 1:1, then HE WAS ALSO CONVERTED! Note that those who were baptized were believers (vs. 8) which excludes infants.

III. PAUL FINISHES HIS NEW JOURNEY - 18:18-22

The vow mentioned in vs. 18 poses a problem, and perhaps we cannot answer all the questions it raises. Since it involved letting the hair grow, this must have been a Nazarite vow (Num. 6). The hair was cut at the close of the period of the vow, and this Paul did at Cenchræa, the seaport of Corinth.

It is possible that this vow may have been in thanksgiving to God, since such vows were purely voluntary. To the Jews, he became as a Jew (see I Cor. 9:19-23), not in compromise, but in courtesy. Certainly Paul knew that there were no merits in such vows, nor is he necessarily setting an example for us today. Paul clearly understood (better than we do) the meaning of God's grace, and did not step back into legalism or ceremonialism. Apparently, the completion of this vow in Jerusalem was uppermost in his mind, so much so that he did not tarry at Ephesus even though the Jews asked him to stay!

Paul returned to Antioch and reported to the church. He also saluted the brethren at Jerusalem. After some time (perhaps several months) Paul revisited the churches to establish them in the faith. If you will review Galatians, you will see why: the Judaizing teachers had invaded these young churches and were teaching them that they had to obey the law of Moses. Paul was burdened for the churches, and so makes the trip again to teach them the Word and confirm them in the faith. Luke records this third journey in chapters 19-21:16. Most of the record deals with his great ministry for three years in Ephesus.

We have dealt briefly with the last section (24-28) in the first part of these notes.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The Gospel is suited to the cultured city (Athens) as well as the pagan city (Corinth). But the publicans and sinners of Corinth respond better than do the cultured sinners of Athens! Read I Cor. 1 and keep this in mind.
2. Christians should work together. As great a man as Paul was, he valued the help and friendship of two humble Jewish tentmakers.
3. God's promise (9-10) enabled Paul to remain 18 months in the city. The sin of the people must have burdened him, yet he knew that God was going to work.
4. We can expect opposition when Christ begins to change men's lives.