

Acts of the Apostles – Paul and the Spread of the Church

New Testament Survey – Lesson 17 (Part 6)

Recently I had a marvelous telephone conversation with one of my daughters. She has been reading Tim Keller's book, *The Meaning of Marriage*. She has also been listening to Andy Stanley's sermons on marriage. Oh, did I mention she is engaged to be married next spring?

As we were talking about what she was learning, she commented on the importance of her becoming the kind of person that she needs to be. She was explaining that by looking at the traits she appreciated, wanted, and needed from her prospective husband, she was also identifying traits that she wanted to have to be the right kind of person for him.

As she told me, "Dad, since I respect so much the way he is patient and kind toward me, I need to be sure I am being patient and kind back!"

She then let me know that she was not satisfied simply saying, "Well, this is just the way I am!" Instead through prayer, deliberate living, study, and worship, she was convinced God would grow these traits more fully in her.

I enjoy hearing these maturing conversations with my children. I applauded her insight and sensitivity, and then added a bit of my fatherly perception! Pointing her to Paul's expression of the "fruit" of the Spirit, I suggested that she had just explained why his metaphor is so profound. God does promise to grow in us love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). These are termed "fruits" because they do grow. One does not go outside one day and suddenly find an apple on the tree fully-grown and ripe the very day it appears. It takes time to grow, and it grows from the inside out!

Now I am into my 50's. There are lessons that the Lord taught me long ago, that I would think are so deeply settled into my soul, that they are simply part of who I am now. Yet, it seems to me that regardless of my age, some of the most simple things God has taught me constantly need refreshing. It is a bit like the requirement for lawyers to get a certain number of hours each year as "continuing legal education." I am already a lawyer, but the State Bar Association still requires me to take refresher hours annually.

I would be upset over this, labeling it spiritual immaturity, if not for the journey of Paul this week. Paul experienced some tremendous mountain-top experiences with the Lord. He had given his life to God unusually completely, and had been used by God to work great miracles. Yet even Paul seemed to need that time of

growth and continuing education from the Lord. Even Paul needed some spiritual touch-ups of fairly fundamental lessons. It is reassuring to me!

THE TRIP CONTINUES

We rejoin Luke's narrative as Paul left Athens and walked (or sailed) to Corinth, a distance of about 50 miles. Our knowledge of Corinth at the time is fairly broad. A number of writers both before and after Paul give us insight into the town that Gordon Fee calls "the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world."¹

One early writer with a wealth of insight into Corinth was the Greek traveler and writer Pausanias (120-180 A.D.). Book 2 of Pausanias's *Description of Greece* centers on Corinth.² Pausanias gives a bit of history explaining that the ancient city of Corinth was destroyed by the Romans and then rebuilt by Julius Caesar. When Caesar rebuilt Corinth, he populated it with Roman colonists. Paul would have come into the picture roughly 100 years later. By that time, Corinth was already a prosperous and wealthy city.

The city's wealth came from several places. First, Corinth held a unique place for trade and travel. Corinth was positioned with two harbors, one that faced Italy to the west and another facing Turkey to the East. The safest way to sail from Italy to Troas, Ephesus, or other key cities in the eastern Mediterranean was to sail into the Western harbor of Corinth ("Lechaeum"). At that point, the Corinthians had a kind of ancient railroad track made of logs that allowed the boats to be pulled across land the four and one-half miles to the Eastern harbor ("Cenchreae"). The logs were set out where a boat could be pulled onto the logs that would then roll under the boat. After the boat rolled off a set of logs, those logs would be carried to the front of the line to be used again in the movement of the boat. The sailing around the bottom of Greece was notoriously treacherous. Needless to say, this trafficking through Corinth brought a great deal of money into the city.

¹ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans 1987) at 3.

² Book 1 covered Attica, the area of Greece that included Athens. Pausanias writes of the Athenians having "altars of the gods named Unknown" (1.4). This echoes Paul's comment to the Athenians in Acts 17:23, "I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.'" See Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Book 2, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard 1918), translation by W.H.S. Jones.



A second source of money came from a derivative source. Boat captains came into port with money to burn. Add to that the time it would take for their boats to be portaged four and one-half miles, and there was time for certain excursions by the captains. Strabo (64B.C.–25 A.D.) wrote that, “Corinth is called ‘wealthy’ because of its commerce, since it is situated on the isthmus and is master of two harbors.”³ Strabo later adds that Corinth had a temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, lust, and beauty. This temple had many slaves and courtesans⁴ available for a price. Strabo wrote, “the ship-captains freely squandered their money” which gave birth to a first century proverb, “Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth.”⁵ (In light of these facts, we will not be shocked when we later read of the struggles Paul had trying to address the sexual problems of the Corinthians!)

³ Strabo, *Geography* Book 8, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard 1927) translation by Horace Leonard Jones at 8.6. 20.

⁴ The Greek word Strabo uses is ἱεροδούλους (*hierodoulous*), which means literally a “sacred servant.” In everyday parlance, this was a temple prostitute who sold sex for a price.

⁵ *Ibid.*

A third source of money for Corinth came from the “Isthmian Games.” These were Olympic-type games that occurred in Corinth every other year. The games drew great “crowds of people” and their money as well!⁶ They are also a reason Paul would speak to the Corinthians with sports analogies. Consider 1 Corinthians 9:24-27:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

These were analogies the Corinthians readily understood!

We do not know for certain the size of Corinth when Paul visited, but scholars estimate the population around 145,000.⁷ Into this city came Paul the missionary.

Luke tells us that after arriving, Paul found a Jew named Aquila and his wife Priscilla. They had recently arrived at Corinth from Rome. They had left Rome because the Emperor Claudius had commanded Jews to leave. Luke does not give any more details, but secular history does. The Roman writer Suetonius (born c.70AD) wrote a number of volumes on the lives of the Caesars around 130AD. Book Five covers Claudius. As Suetonius recounted the facts, Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because “the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus.”⁸ Scholars generally believe this happened in 49AD.

God’s hand providently placed Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth. The E.S.V. gives their occupation as “tentmakers,” the same as Paul. That translation is not too clear, but for our purposes we can note that they worked at a trade with their hands.⁹ Paul worked with them using his tent making skills to make ends meet

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ John McRay, *Paul His Life and Teaching* (Baker Academic 2003) at 164.

⁸ See the Loeb Classical Library edition (Harvard 1997) translation by J.C. Rolfe at 25.4. Chrestus could possibly be related to another Jew other than Jesus Christ, but many, if not most, scholars consider this to be the Roman Jewish division over Christianity. We will consider this in greater depth when we look at Paul’s letter to the Roman church which came about to address the issues that arose when the Jews returned to Rome and tried to reintegrate within the church.

A thorough discussion on the identity of “Chrestus” as Jesus Christ is found in Reisner, Rainer, *Paul’s Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology*, (Eerdmans 1998), at 157-201.

⁹ The Greek for “tentmakers” is σκηνοποιός (*skēnopoios*), which technically means a “a maker of stage properties.” However, some view it unlikely that Paul, Priscilla, or Aquila would

while teaching in the synagogues. Scholars point to the oral law at the time of Paul (which was later written down around 200 and forms the *Mishnah*) for the principle that one was to work as well as teach the Torah. To charge for teaching the Torah was to take one's reward on earth.¹⁰ While Paul would take ministry help *after* people became Christians, he always seemed to have worked or used his own resources when teaching unbelievers.

We should note that while Paul supporting himself was seen by Jewish practice as admirable for one teaching the *Torah*, the manner of his work was not highly regarded by the Greeks! The early Christian writers were quick to note that Paul's manual labor held a strong negative connotation in the Greco-Roman world. Paul, and as a result, the early church, turned to manual labor as an opportunity to be productive rather than lazy or slothful.¹¹

Paul spent time in the Corinthian synagogue reasoning with Jews and Greeks about Jesus as Messiah. Acts 18:4 in the English Version reads,

And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

We should pause here and go into a bit of depth on the various early Greek copies we have of Acts.

As we discussed early on in our New testament survey, there are a number of different Greek manuscripts. While they differ only in minor ways, some of the more significant differences are found in Acts, in particular in this verse. The various early Greek versions are grouped into "families" based upon which were used in various areas of the early church. The English Standard Version, and most

participate in an occupation closely related to the bawdiness often associated with theater. It has therefore become traditional to see in this term a "tent maker," since the same Greek for scene, can also translate the Hebrew word for a "tent." Others see it as a leather worker who would with and on tents, as well as many other leather goods. See F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles, The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Eerdmans 1951) at 343.

The early church father Origen (185-254AD), fond of allegorical readings of Scripture, considered Luke to mean "tentmaker." Origen wrote that it was God's symbolic work, just as he turned the apostles Peter, Andrew, James, and John from fishers of fish to fishers of men, so he turned Paul from a builder of men's tents, to a builder of God's heavenly tents (the church). *Homilies on Numbers 17:4.6-7*.

¹⁰ In the section of the Mishnah called "*Pirke Abot*," we read, "Do not make [Torah teachings] a crown with which to glorify yourself or a spade with which to dig...Whoever derives worldly benefit from teachings of Torah takes his life out of this world." (4.7).

¹¹ Oden, Thomas, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Acts*, (I.V.P. 2006), at 223.

modern versions, follows what scholars call the “neutral version” which was prevalent in many of the earliest and most prominent manuscripts.¹²

Another family of manuscripts that are also in use very early in the church are called the “Western Texts,” after their greater usage in the Western part of the early church.¹³ While most scholars do not use the Western Text where it conflicts with the Neutral text, there is a section added to this verse worthy of note. Bruce makes a good argument that these manuscripts are worthy of attention in deciding what Luke originally wrote, adding that even if this statement was not in Luke’s original, it seems nevertheless to be true! As Bruce says, “It is undoubtedly a correct statement of what Paul did.”¹⁴

So, what does the Western Version add? We will compare the two versions, highlighting some of the Western Version differences in Italics:

<u>Neutral Text</u>	<u>Western Text</u>
“And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.”	“And <i>entering into</i> the synagogue each Sabbath day, he held a discussion, <i>inserting the name of the Lord Jesus</i> , and persuaded <i>not only Jews but also</i> Greeks.”

In commenting on this textual change, Bruce Metzger noted the Western addition implies that in his expounding of the Old Testament scriptures, “Paul would ‘insert the name of the Lord Jesus’ where, according to Christian theology, it was appropriate.”¹⁵ This is a good representation of how Paul might continue teaching

¹² For example, the “Neutral Text” is found in the Codexes Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus.

¹³ The most notable Western Text is Codex Bezae.

¹⁴ Bruce, *Acts* at 343 quoting Lake and Cadbury.

¹⁵ Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, (United Bible Societies 1971) at 461.

as a rabbi, taking the Old Testament readings and inserting or explaining how Jesus was the fulfillment of what was being read.¹⁶

Luke related that at some point in time, Timothy and Silas arrived in Corinth from Macedonia joining Paul in his efforts and freeing Paul up to preach more and make tents less! Some Jews were getting more and more vocal in their opposition to Paul causing Paul to shake out his garments and declare,

Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles (Acts 18:6).

Paul went next door to the house of Titius Justus to continue his teaching. Many scholars identify Titius Justus as the “Gaius” Paul writes of in Romans 16:23¹⁷ and 1 Corinthians 1:14-15. “Titius Justus” are second and third Roman names, while “Gaius” is a typical first name. His full name would have been Gaius Titius Justus. From the Corinthians passage, we learn that he was one of two that Paul himself baptized (“I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that none of you may say that you were baptized in my name”).

The second person Paul baptized was Crispus. We read of him in Acts 18 also. Luke tells us that Crispus was the ruler of the synagogue and that he put his faith in Christ along with his family. They were among many in Corinth who heard Paul, believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8-9).

While in Corinth, one night Paul had a vision from God where God told Paul not to fear, for in Corinth he would neither be attacked nor harmed. God was true to his word, and Paul stayed in Corinth for a full year and a half, longer than any city up to that point on his missionary trips.

While Paul was not attacked, there was an unusual flip of circumstances Luke gives us. Gallio became “proconsul of Achaia” and was approached by a group of Jews who sought to make a united attack on Paul. Before considering the attack, we should note who Gallio was. When Luke notes Gallio was “Proconsul of Achaia,” we should think of him as Achaia’s ruling governor. He was the high man for Rome and the Emperor in all of Achaia (Achaia was the ancient name for

¹⁶ Shulam, Joseph, *The Jewish Roots of Acts 16-28*, (Netivyah Bible Instruction Ministry 2012), at 993.

¹⁷ In the Romans passage Paul also mentions “Erastus, the city treasurer.” Archaeologists have discovered a paving stone dating from Paul’s era in Corinth that has an engraving that it was “laid by Erastus at his own expense as City Treasurer (*aedile*). See John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Baker 1991) at 331ff.

what we today consider Greece). We read a great deal of Gallio in contemporary writings of various sources.

Gallio's younger brother was a philosopher named Seneca ("Seneca the Younger"). Their father was also named Seneca (called now "Seneca the Elder"). Bruce cited a Delphian inscription that showed that Gallio was likely appointed to the Proconsul position in July 51.¹⁸ Seneca added that Gallio left his post because of a "fever" needing a cruise to help his healing.¹⁹ Dio Cassius, a Roman writer of history born around 150 A.D. would offer comment on Gallio's penchant for witty one-liners.²⁰

When the Jews tried to get Paul in trouble with Gallio, they brought a charge that Paul was "persuading people to worship God contrary to the law" (Acts 18:13). Roman law allowed certain religions to exist, but others were deemed illegal ("*religio illicita*"). It seems the Jews were trying to persuade Gallio that Paul's teaching was of an unrecognized faith.

Paul, of course, would have seen his teaching as the fruition and fulfillment of Judaism. Judaism was an accepted Roman religion, so it is not entirely surprising that Gallio made quick disposal of the complaining Jews. Gallio explained:

If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things (Acts 18:14-15).

So, Gallio sent them all from his presence and Paul left. Meanwhile, certain Roman soldiers grabbed the chief complaining Jew (Sosthenes), ruler of the synagogue and beat him!²¹ Instead of Sosthenes getting Paul in trouble, Sosthenes²² himself took a beating.

¹⁸ There is not scholastic consensus on Bruce's interpretation of the timing of the inscription, but the variances are *deminimis* on the issue. Under most any scenario, Paul was likely appearing before Gallio sometime between 1 July 51 and 30 June 52. See Reisner at 202ff.

¹⁹ Seneca letter 104.2, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard 1925) translated by Richard Gummere.

²⁰ Dio Cassius, *Roman History* Book 61 at 35.3-4, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard 1925) translated by Earnest Cary.

²¹ Some believe Crispus was replaced after coming to faith, although there is no reason not to suspect either joint rulers of the synagogues or perhaps even multiple synagogues.

²² Paul later wrote to the Corinthians and referenced "our brother Sosthenes" in 1 Corinthians 1:1. If it is the same Sosthenes, then he subsequently came to faith as well!

Paul had more adventures and there is more we learn of Corinth when we study Paul's writings. We pause here, however, in anticipation of our study next week from Paul's letters to the Thessalonian church that Paul wrote while in Corinth.

CONCLUSION

As we discussed last week, Berea, Athens, and Corinth were likely diversions for Paul. His plans look like he was heading to Rome, but the Thessalonian persecution altered his plans. With Claudius expelling the Jews, it was likely a good thing. Moreover, it was this diversion that put Paul in Corinth, a place where he stayed for about 1-½ years. This community was starving for the purity and holy truth of God's reality.

Paul's length of stay was unusually long considering his missionary efforts to that point. They needed it. We can see in the correspondence he sent them later, they struggled with many issues and problems. His letters to them are very different than his correspondence to the Philippian church, for example. But Paul's stay was not just for them. It was for Paul too. It was a time where God ministered to him, delivering him, confirming him, and working through him. It was a time for growth in Paul's life as well as the church's.

This is a marvelous example of God meeting needs, for the individual, as well as for his people and kingdom at large.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. "...*they were tentmakers by trade*" (Acts 18:3).

Paul was quick to become what was needed to win people for the gospel, but never at the expense of godliness. For Paul, there was an importance to putting one's time to work in honest labor. Christian behavior and holiness is never simply about doing "church things," it is about doing everything with an eye toward bringing glory to the Lord. There is Christian virtue in productive labor and work. Whether at home or in the marketplace, part of a life lived to God's glory is a life of constructive use of one's time and energies. The early preacher John Chrysostom (344/354-407AD) commented on this verse,

Let no one who is a craftsman be ashamed, but rather those who are reared for no purpose and do nothing, the ones who employ many

servants and enjoy an immense court. For being raised as an unceasing worker is the nature of philosophy. The minds of such people are purer, more vigorous. The one who does nothing is really one who does much in vain and. Full of indolence, in an entire day accomplishes nothing.²³

My sister Kathryn said it this way,

The goal in life is not to retire and walk the beach looking at seashells. There is work to do... do it!

Paul would add, “And do it to the glory of God!” Amen!

2. *“Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people” (Acts 18:9-10).*

This passage speaks to me – profoundly. Paul had been through a lot. He had been beaten, arrested, stoned, and more. Luke has given that history before writing this section of his work. Through all that, Paul had endured everything, singing hymns, getting up, and moving on with God’s mission. Yet for some reason, at this point, Paul was concerned. More than that, Paul was afraid. The man who would later write to the Philippians, “Be worried in nothing” was human after all! Paul needed a boost from the Lord.

The Lord did not leave Paul afraid and alone. He spoke to Paul words of encouragement and faith. He affirmed that he was present, and that Paul would be okay. Paul just needed to stay on mission.

We all need encouragement from God. It is never enough to make it through the toils of life as simply by our own strength. We have a Lord who is at work, and we are his hands and feet. We need to remember that and seek to walk in his strength rather than our own. He will be faithful to his mission and to us.

3. *“...they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal” (Acts 18:17).*

What an interesting turn of events. The opponents of Paul and God got the end of punishment instead of Paul. There is always a reckoning. IT is an affirmation of faith, that there is a reckoning.

²³ Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, 18:3-5.

To a believer, it should seem incredibly clear – what some term a “no brainer.” Why would we ever choose to fight against God and his will? Why would we ever choose a course of life void of his will and mission? We might not get the initial beating, but the assurance of the course of human history is that a day of reckoning will come. My prayer is to serve the Father in life rather than oppose him. It makes no real sense to do otherwise.