

STUDY GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS

The Journeys of Paul

Week 7: Week of March 1, 2020

Sermon Title: God's Faithfulness in Corinth

Text: Acts 18:1-17

(For Facilitators mainly - optional for the group)

Background

Luke develops Paul's mission in 5 ways:

- 1) He shares details of how Paul sustained himself financially (2-3).
- 2) The regular pattern of initial preaching to Jews followed by opposition, is met by the 2nd denunciation of Jewish stubbornness and announcement that the gospel will be taken to the Gentiles (4-6)
- 3) A clearer picture is provided of the transition from a synagogue-centered ministry to a house church (7-8).
- 4) Corinth is singled out as a center in which Paul's mission became established over a lengthy period (9-11).
- 5) The Roman authorities give a judgment favorable to the legal status of the church by ruling that it still belongs within the sphere of Judaism. This allows for the spread of the Gospel throughout Europe.

The main objective of this section was to provide the transition to the next important center of the mission – Ephesus. This is done by relating Paul's brief visit to Ephesus on the way from Corinth (19-20), and the visit of Apollos (24-26), who became a counterpoise to Paul. Any challenge or threat he may have posed to the Pauline mission is defused by the report of his fervency in Spirit and instruction by Priscilla and Aquila.

The Establishment of Corinth

This half chapter, together with the two letters to the Corinthians give us the fullest and most detailed record of the establishment of a church and its early history. For Luke, it was the result of a wonderful combination of providential events and divine assurance. The foundation period was bracketed by two events involving the Roman authorities.

- The first was the beginning of one of the most fruitful partnerships in all Paul's career as a missionary, when the expulsion of Jews from Rome provided the occasion for Paul to meet up with Aquila and Priscilla. It is also important that so much of the detail can be corroborated within the wider history of the period. Expulsion of Jews from Rome is mentioned in the historic record by Suetonius. In *The Life of Claudius 25.4*, we find the statement, "As the Jews

were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome." This is plausibly a reference to the expulsion of Jewish Christians from Rome. Luke also mentions this same expulsion, which occurred in 49 CE according to the fifth century church father Orosius, in Acts 18:2. "There he [Paul] met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome." Aquila and Priscilla seem to have been converted to Christianity prior to meeting Paul. They were also tentmakers (leather-working) like Paul, which is how Paul make his living.

- Corinth did have a synagogue, unlike other places in Greece. Here Paul held discourse with the Jews and God-fearers, showing how Jesus had fulfilled the OT prophecies by inserting His name as an interpretative expansion in those passages which pointed forward to Him. (Isa 42:1 and 52:13 – Jesus of Nazareth)
- The second was the ruling of the proconsul Gallio in Corinth itself, which ensured that the manipulation of public sentiment against the missionaries could not happen in Corinth. Gallo's ruling must have served as a precedent for other Roman judges. His ruling would have affected the whole region. The Christian message could be proclaimed in the provinces of the empire without fear of coming into conflict with Roman law. Paul may have been thinking of this when he wrote 25:11.
- More important, was the vision of the Lord which gave Paul the initial confidence he needed to settle himself in Corinth for a long time. That God could be seen to be behind and directing Paul's mission was of first importance for both Paul and Luke.
- Silas and Tim probably brought funds so Paul could be freed up to preach and teach. But it was nice to hear of their news: I Thess 1:1 and I Thess 3:6ff.
- Shaking out his cloak (see 13:51), Paul expresses his resolve to have done with the building and those how slanders the reputation of Jesus. If they would not accept the news of salvation which he brought, he was now free from blame. **The guilt was not so much for Jewish complicity in the death of Jesus but for failure to accept Jesus as the hoped-for Messiah.**
- The vision was again the decisive role in shaping a policy and determining a course of action (9:10; 10:3; 11:5; 16:9-10). Here we see the assurance that the Lord would be with him to protect him and to add many to his church. This is heavenly approval. The Greek work "people" (laos) is that used especially of Israel as the people of God; here it is used of the new "chosen people" (cf. ch 15:14; Tit. 2:14; I Pet. 2:9f).

Discussion Questions

Opening Questions (optional – pick only the ones you want to choose).

1. What different ways have people you know have come to faith in Christ?
2. Who has been an important teacher for you in the Christian faith?

For reflection (not in any order – again, pick the ones you feel might be best for the group. Do not feel like you have to get through all the questions 😊)

1. *What encouragement and difficulties did Paul encounter in Corinth?*
2. *How have you experienced God's faithfulness through other people (like Aquila and Priscilla were an answer of God's faithfulness to Paul).*
3. *Why did the Lord speak to Paul in a vision about persevering in Corinth? How is this different from the other times Paul had visions?*
4. *When has the Lord given you confidence to stay even though it was difficult? How did you know it was from God?*
5. *What spiritual development occurred as soon as Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Corinth? How might this have informed Paul's thinking about the gifts of the Spirit in the body of Christ?*
6. *Have you ever experienced a time when God provided for you in unexpected ways? Describe.*
7. *When has someone come into your life to give you confidence and encouragement? What was that like for you and your faith?*
8. *Describe what happened when Paul spoke to the Gentiles in Corinth?*
9. *When did God show his faithfulness to you during times of struggle or opposition?*
10. *Who were Justus and Sosthenes, the two converts named in this section (see I Cor. 1:14)? Why do you think they are mentioned?*
11. *What happened when the Jews took Paul to court as the proclaimer of dangerous religious ideas? What accusations are brought up against Paul? What is the reaction of the proconsul, Gallio?*
12. *How did the result of Gallio further the purposes of God? When have you seen something that was "secular" be used to further God's mission?*