

Commentary on Acts chapter 18 by Chuck Smith 5.14.23

Pastor John Donovan, cell phone 508-380-0471
Pastor Terry Gerlarneau, cell phone 603-455-4399
Web site todbc.org email us at opendoorbiblechurch@todbc.org

May memory verse Psalm 119:105 (KJV) Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

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Let's turn now to the eighteenth chapter of Acts as we continue our study through the Bible. At the end of the study last week, the end of chapter seventeen, we found Paul speaking to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers there on Mars Hills proclaiming to them the glory and the marvels of the unknown God whom they worshipped ignorantly. And we found that again Paul's message left them with sort of divided feelings, some believing, and some remaining with Paul, and others sort of scoffing and going their way.

Now after these things, Paul departed from Athens, and he came to Corinth ([Act 18:1](#));

Now, why Paul departed early is not stated. He was actually waiting for Timothy and Silas to join him, but from the account we find that Timothy and Silas didn't join him until he was at Corinth. He had sent for them to come quickly. Paul just evidently did not care that much for Athens. And so he went on down to Corinth which was the capital of vice in the ancient world. Whenever in the Greek plays they would depict a Corinthian, they would usually have them drunken in the plays. It became sort of a byword to say, "Well, he lives like a Corinthian." Which means a person was living a very sensuous kind of a lifestyle.

The city of Corinth was a Roman city under direct Roman rule, although it was, of course, in Greece. And was sort of a center of commerce, for the nation of Greece. It's almost like a waistline there at Corinth, in that there is only about five miles at the most, maybe two miles from the one sea to the other. Greece is very narrow. It comes to a very narrow point there at the area of Corinth, so that the ships coming from the east would usually come deposit their cargo and then it would be taken over land and then again by sea to Rome. And it saved them going around the cape at the lower end of Greece, which was very treacherous sailing. So the common passage of the goods from the east to Rome, and vice versa, was through Corinth. As they would bring it across land at this narrow portion of Greece.

A very wicked city indeed. At the top of the acropolis above Corinth was the temple of Aphrodite, which remains do exist in ruins at the present time. The temple of Aphrodite had one thousand priestesses who were nothing more than public prostitutes, who in

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the evening would come down into the city of Corinth and the revenue from these prostitutes went to maintain the temple of Aphrodite there at the top of the hill.

So Paul came to this city known for its sexual indulgences, for the lustful living of the people.

And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, who was born in Pontus, but had recently come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla, (because Claudius had commanded all of the Jews to depart from Rome,) ([Act 18:2](#))

Now this command of Claudius was given in 49 A.D., so how long he had been here in Corinth is not stated, but had lately come from Italy as the result of this decree to get the Jews out of Rome. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them and he wrought for by their occupation they were tent makers. Now Paul was a Jewish rabbi, and it was said that every man should have a trade. This was the common feeling among the Jews. They taught their sons a trade so that always, if things went bad, you could fall back on your trade. Paul, by trade, was a tent maker. And wherever Paul went, if he was going to be there any length of time, he usually got a job as a tentmaker.

He was willing to work with his own hands in order to support the call of God upon his heart to minister the Word of God. I do not see anything inconsistent with that. I believe that it is good for a minister of the Gospel to, if necessary, work with his own hands to provide for his needs, this was the case with Paul. He didn't want to be chargeable to the Greek. So Paul worked there with Aquila and Priscilla, who also were tentmakers. He probably got a job from them, went to work for them, as he was providing for his own needs. He often would not provide just for his own needs, but for the needs of those who journeyed with him, as was the case in Ephesus. Paul continued to work as a tentmaker until Silas and Timothy joined him. When Silas and Timothy came, they brought an offering from the church in Philippi, where the Philippian jailer was converted. They took up an offering and sent it to Paul, and when they came with this offering for Paul, then it was no longer necessary for him to work, and so he gave full time to the ministry there in Corinth. So Paul was the kind of a fellow if he needed money he was willing to go out and work with his hands to provide. If the Lord would provide, such as He did with the Philippian's offering, then he was wanting and willing to give himself full-time to the work of the Lord.

You remember that Paul in writing to the Philippians made mention of the offering thanking them for sending the offering to him. He said, "Not that I particularly had a need, but I desire that fruit might abound to your account" ([Philippians 4:17](#)). And I think that that is an important thing to think about and to remember when you are giving to the work of the Lord. Whatever fruit comes from the lives of those that are being supported in that ministry that you have sent to, whatever fruit comes from that, goes to your account. Paul said, "I thank you for the offering that you sent, not that I had a special need, but I desire that fruit might about your account."

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As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he reminded them that he had labored among them, that he was not chargeable unto any of them.

Now he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and he persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timothy were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and he testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah ([Act 18:4-5](#)).

So this is interesting, in that it would seem that Paul was just teaching concerning God's promise of the Messiah and all until Timothy and Silas came. Then he was moved in the Spirit to go ahead and to declare unto them, having laid a foundation that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

And when they [that is the Jews] opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment and he said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles ([Act 18:6](#)).

Now Paul felt a responsibility to share Christ with these people, to share Jesus as the Messiah. We have a responsibility of witnessing; we don't have a responsibility of converting people. In fact, we have an inability to convert people. But our responsibility is to witness. Paul fulfilled his responsibility, and in so doing, he felt freed then from the blood of these people. In other words then, he felt such a heavy obligation to witness for the Lord that he felt that he was sort of responsible for their salvation if he failed to witness.

You remember that God gave to Ezekiel a special challenge, "And when I say unto the wicked they shall perish, and if you warn not the wicked, they will perish in their sins, but their blood will I require at your hands" ([Ezekiel 3:18](#)). Now Paul felt that very same kind of a challenge in his ministry to the Jews. But having witnessed to them now as they are blaspheming and rejecting, Paul says, "Alright, that's it." Not going on and arguing and trying to press them to make a change, but just, "Hey, I've delivered my soul. I am free and innocent of your blood." And he felt that his obligation was complete when he had witnessed to them. Which indeed is so.

And so he departed from the synagogue, and he entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house was joined hard to the synagogue [or probably shared a common wall with the synagogue]. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all of his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized ([Act 18:7-8](#)).

Now you remember when Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians, and you "A" students did read that epistle, I trust. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he said unto them who were in the little factious groups, because Apollos later went and preached to Corinth and many people were enamored of Apollos. Peter had evidently been there and some were saying, "Well, I am of Peter." Others were saying, "I am of Paul." And others were saying, "I am of Apollos." And he said, "That is a mark of carnality. You haven't grown

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up. You're dividing yourselves into these little factious groups." And he said, "I thank God I didn't baptize any of you but Crispus and Gaius, and if there is any other, I don't remember it because God didn't send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel."

So this Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, was one of those that Paul baptized. The other was Gaius, who was Paul's host, as Paul writing his Roman epistle declares that "he greets those in Rome from Gaius, who is my host." So, again, remembering that the Roman epistle was written from Corinth, a city that was given over to all of this lustful, licentious kind of living. We remember the first chapter of Romans as Paul describes men of reprobate minds who had been given over to the lusts of their own minds and were doing all of the evil, vile things. He was only describing the way people were living around him there in the city of Corinth. So, if you want a good view of what the Corinthian lifestyle was like, read the later half of the first chapter of the book of Romans, and Paul is describing the life around him there in the city of Corinth as he was writing from the house of Gaius.

And the two men that he baptized were Crispus and Gaius. And he couldn't remember if there were any others. For he said, "God did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel." A difficult scripture for those persons from the Church of Christ who come up and wonder why we do not instantly baptize the believers, take them immediately down to the beach and baptize them. Because they believe in baptismal regeneration--you are not really saved until you're baptized. Well, if their doctrine is correct, then Paul is utterly blasphemous in the fact that he thanked God he didn't baptize any but Crispus and Gaius and if there be any others, he said, "I don't remember them. For God didn't send me to baptize, just to preach the gospel." So there were many people converted in Corinth during Paul's ministry there. And yet, Paul was not really engaged much in baptizing the believers.

And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all of his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized ([Act 18:8](#)).

However, not by Paul.

Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, and he said, Be not afraid ([Act 18:9](#)),

Now whenever God says, "Be not afraid," it usually means that you are afraid. And Paul had reason to be afraid. Just about everywhere he preached it ended in a riot. And he had been in prison. He had been beaten. He had been stoned. And now the Jews are getting stirred up here in Corinth. They had created problems wherever he had preached, and he is probably fearful of what might happen. And so the Lord said,

Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not your peace ([Act 18:9](#)).

"Be not afraid." And what is the cure or the answer for fear?

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For I am with thee ([Act 18:10](#)),

Oh, how the presence of the Lord and that consciousness of the presence of the Lord dispels fear. If ever I get afraid, all I have to do is remember, *ah, the Lord is with me*, and fear is dispelled. Fear only comes when I lose the consciousness of the presence of the Lord. "Be not afraid," the Lord said. "I am with thee,

and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee ([Act 18:10](#)):

I am going to protect you, Paul. Now you wonder why the Lord didn't protect him in the other places. Why didn't the Lord protect him at Lystra? Why didn't He protect him in some of these other places where he was beaten and imprisoned and all? I don't know. But here in Corinth, the Lord is saying, "Okay Paul, now don't be afraid. I am with you and no man will be able to lay his hand on you to hurt you,"

for I have much people in this city ([Act 18:10](#)).

Whoo, one of the most wicked cities in the world, and there is where God has a big harvest. "Where sin abounds," Paul wrote to the Romans (there from Corinth), "where sin abounds, grace does much more abound" ([Romans 5:20](#)). And he says that over-abounding grace of God in the city of Corinth as the Lord testified, "I have many people in this city."

Now looking at the people and the way they lived, you wouldn't guess it, I'm sure. But yet, God is able to work in those cases that we are so often prone to classify as hopeless. And God has saved so many people that I have given up on. So many people that I have declared, "There's no way that they could ever be saved." And yet God saved them anyhow in spite of my judgment. So the Lord said, "Go ahead, speak out, Paul. Don't be afraid. I've got a lot of people in this city. No one is going to be able to hurt you."

And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them ([Act 18:11](#)).

So he probably spent close to two years total time in Corinth. He spent another eighteen months teaching the Word of God among them. One of the greatest needs for the believers are to be taught in the Word of God. And I think that it is relevant that it doesn't say he spent eighteen months preaching to them, but he spent eighteen months teaching them. And that is the great need in the church, at all times, is to be taught in the Word of God.

And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat ([Act 18:12](#)),

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That judgment seat is still there in the city of Corinth. If you go to Corinth today, they'll take you to the middle of the town and they'll show you this one flat area, and it is the judgment seat, the very seat where Gallio was, and where Paul was brought to trial by the Jews. Gallio is a man that has received a lot of unwarranted abuse because of his response and his reaction here. But Gallio was the brother of Seneca, of Roman fame. And Seneca said of his brother, Gallio, "There was never a kinder, more loving person who ever lived, than my brother, Gallio."

Now Gallio is sitting there in the judgment seat in Corinth. And the Jews brought Paul in.

And they said, This fellow is persuading men to worship God contrary to the law ([Act 18:13](#)).

That was their accusation. That would be contrary to the Jewish law, and that was their interpretation of what Paul was teaching. But I am certain that Paul, when he attempted to give his answer, would have disputed that claim.

And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: but if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, [then take care of it yourselves;] for I will not be a judge in such matters. And he drove them from the judgment seat [these Jews who were trying to accuse Paul]. And all of the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue [and probably the chief accuser of Paul], and they beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things ([Act 18:14-17](#)).

That is, he did not stop them from beating Sosthenes, and that is why Gallio is brought into ill-repute in so many commentaries. But if you go to the secular history, you will find that he was a very fair, honest and a loving person.

And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then he took his leave of the brethren, and sailed ([Act 18:18](#))

His intention was to return back to Syria. Antioch was in Syria, and his intention was to sail back to the church in Antioch.

and he took with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow ([Act 18:18](#)).

Now the shaving of your head was really the Nazarite vow. And you would take the Nazarite vow when you wanted to consecrate yourself unto God for a period of time. Usually the time of the Nazarite vow was for thirty days. So at the beginning of the Nazarite vow, you would shave your head and then you wouldn't take a razor to your head for that thirty days, nor would you eat any meat, nor would you drink any wine during the period of the thirty days in which had this vow of consecration to God. Then

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at the end of the thirty days, you would shave your head again, whatever hair had grown during that period of time, and you would burn it as an offering unto the Lord.

So, Paul took this Nazarite vow, shaved his head to begin this Nazarite vow; probably to sort of prepare himself to go to the temple and to worship at the feast that he was endeavoring to get back to Jerusalem in time for one of the three feasts. So, on his way, they came first to Ephesus, and there he left Priscilla and Aquila. But he, himself, entered into the synagogue and he reasoned with the Jews. Paul just can't stop himself.

When they desired him to tarry longer with them, he consented not; but bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that is coming up in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God wills ([Act 18:20-21](#)).

You remember James said, "Go to now ye who say, 'Tomorrow we will do this and that.' You would be better to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will do this and that,' for you really don't know what a day is going to bring forth" ([James 4:13-15](#)).

So, here is Paul saying, "If God wills, I'll return again. I don't know what God wills at this point. I don't know what the Lord has in mind, but if the Lord's willing, that's a part of God's will, I will return again." But you notice his desire, "I want to get to Jerusalem for this feast."

And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Caesarea [which of course, was the major port closest to Jerusalem at that particular time, the Roman port of Caesarea], and had gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch ([Act 18:21-22](#)).

Now he just greeted the church. Evidently he wasn't warmly welcomed by the church. Paul didn't really get along too well with the church fathers in Jerusalem. And so Luke passes off Paul's visit to Jerusalem. He tells us nothing about his attendance at the feast, tells us nothing about his time there, except that he just greeted the brethren there and then came on back to Antioch from which he had begun his journey years earlier.

And after he had spent some time there [and again, Luke is indefinite as far as how long he stayed in Antioch], he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples ([Act 18:23](#)).

Now, in verses 18-23, Luke, in five verses, covers a journey of Paul of some fifteen hundred miles; walking, by ship, perhaps some of it by horseback. Fifteen hundred miles passed off in just five little verses. All of the things that were accomplished in that length of time and through those journeys are something that were not recorded. There's just a portion here, the record that is left blank.

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And a certain Jew, named Apollos, born at Alexandria, who was an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus ([Act 18:24](#)).

Now, Paul was only in the synagogue there reasoning with them. They requested that he stay longer, but he was desirous to get to Jerusalem. So, as Paul is on his way to Jerusalem and now making his rounds through Phrygia and Galatia, coming back towards Ephesus, prior to his arriving, another Jew arrived; an eloquent man, a brilliant man. He was from Alexandria and he was mighty in the scriptures. And that word means, "not only had a good knowledge, but was able to explain carefully the scriptures."

This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John ([Act 18:25](#)).

Now, he was, no doubt, a disciple of John. He knew the baptism of John. What do we know about John's preaching? John said, "I am not the Messiah. There is One who is coming after me who is mightier than I am. The latchet of whose shoes I am unworthy to unloose. And He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." So, he knew that John was telling that the coming of the Messiah was at hand and that the Messiah would be baptizing them in the Holy Spirit. But his basic forte was in the scriptures and explaining the scriptures, and no doubt, showing that the time of the Messiah's coming was at hand.

And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more [completely] perfectly ([Act 18:26](#)).

At this point, I have to have great admiration for Apollos. He is a man who is mighty in the scriptures. He is a man who is fervent in Spirit. He's eloquent; he's brilliant, and yet two of the people who were there listening to him understood more fully the things of which he spake than he did himself. For through Paul, they had come to know that Jesus was the Messiah, and the empowering of the Holy Spirit in their lives. And so, I admire Apollos that he was willing to listen to a couple of the congregation who understood more completely than did he the ways of the Lord. I also admire Aquila and Priscilla for taking this eloquent man and sharing the way of the Lord with him. Notice that it does say that Aquila and Priscilla, both of them, were used as instruments of God in explaining to Apollos the way of the Lord more completely. There are some who would try to exclude women from any place of teaching or instructing, but God obviously used Priscilla for that purpose and with this man Apollos.

And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, that brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him ([Act 18:27](#)):

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Now, of course, Priscilla and Aquila had come from Corinth. And so, when Apollos now is ready to go to Corinth, they wrote letters to the disciples to receive him:

who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah ([Act 18:27-28](#)).

So this man, Apollos, had a powerful ministry, a good knowledge of the Word, and ability to prove that Jesus indeed was the Messiah from the scriptures and that publicly when he came to Corinth. And that is why, no doubt, the Corinthian church began to have their favorites. Some said, "Well, I am of Paul." And others were saying, "Well, we're of Apollos." And God, nor did Paul or Apollos, ever intend that the people should take sides like this. Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the increase. Now he who plants is nothing. He who waters is nothing. It is God."

In other words, "Don't get your eyes on me, you that are saying, 'I am of Paul.' Nor should you get your eyes on Apollos. You should have your eyes upon the Lord. He is the One that's really done the work in your heart." But man, it seems, looks to the human instrument. But Paul is trying to point them away from him and point them to the Lord. "He that plants is nothing. I planted; I am nothing. He that waters is nothing. Apollos watered, but he's really nothing. It is the Lord, that's the One you want to get your eyes on."

Here again is something interesting. Paul's ministry in Corinth was that of planting. Apollos came along and watered that which Paul had planted. Apollos had planted in Ephesus. Now, Paul is coming to Ephesus as we get into chapter 19, and he is going to water what Apollos planted.

So the glorious way by which God works in the ministry. At one place He may have you planting and another place He may have you watering what someone else planted. But again, we must keep our eyes on the Lord, because if there is to be any increase, that's His work. All I can do is plant seed; all I can do is water seed that is planted, but any increase is the work of the Lord and is to His glory.

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