

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS LESSON 19 THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES CHAPTER 18

INTRODUCTION

Since entering Europe in response to a vision he had in Troas (16:8,9), Paul had encountered many oppositions and tribulations. In Philippi, he suffered beating and was thrown into jail; in Thessalonica, the unbelieving Jews not only rejected his teachings concerning Jesus of Nazareth but got the civil authorities to ban him from returning; in Berea, he experienced the same Jewish opposition and could not stay there; and in Athens, both Jews and Gentiles were somewhat indifferent to his gospel message. He was alone in Athens waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him but before they arrived, he had left Athens and moved on to Corinth. He probably walked the distance of about 50 miles to the city from Athens. When he came to Corinth, Paul shared that he felt a sense of inadequacy, fear and trepidation.¹ God knew of his thoughts and feelings, and it was recorded that the Lord personally and directly encouraged him. At the same

¹ 1 Corinthians 2:1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.

time, God provided another couple, namely Aquila and Priscilla, to be his evangelising companions. Corinth was a very important and large city of the province of Achaia. It was a thriving seaport, which served two seas—the Aegean and the Adriatic. Corinth was renowned as a great cosmopolitan and commercial centre, but it was also famous for its corruption and immorality.

In Corinth, Paul stayed for one and a half years, the longest time in his missionary career thus far. After he departed from Corinth and on his way to Syria, he stopped at Ephesus. There, he preached and taught for a while in the synagogue. Then he left Ephesus, leaving behind Aquila and Priscilla. From there, he went to Caesarea by boat, visited Jerusalem and greeted the church there before finally returning to his home church in Antioch, Syria. After recuperating for a while in Antioch, Paul took off on his third missionary journey.

We observe God's providence over Paul in this final part of his second missionary journey, which took him to Corinth. Indeed our study of his work and experiences in this great metropolis should encourage us and move us to emulate him in serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

COMMENTARY

Paul in Corinth

Paul left Athens and came to Corinth. He was alone and must have made the journey on foot. As he later shared with the Corinthian church in his first epistle to them, his experience in Athens had somewhat discouraged him. God was aware of this and thus it was not mere coincidence that Paul met with Aquila and Priscilla who were already in

Corinth at that time. The inspired writer specially mentioned that Aquila and Priscilla were Jews. Paul always looked for Jews in a synagogue whenever he entered into a new city. Surely, it was God's providence that he found two devout Jews in Aquila and Priscilla, a husband and wife team, who like him were also tent-makers. Aquila and Priscilla would not have come to Corinth if not for the Emperor Claudius' decree to expel all the Jews from Rome (A.D. 49). Having been banned by the Romans, they looked for a suitable place to carry on their tent-making business. They chose Corinth. Paul was delighted to meet them. He could be short of funds. Since their business was tent-making, he could earn his keep by working for them. Moreover, they could also provide him board and lodging. Thus Paul's basic needs were taken care of before the arrival of Silas and Timothy, his travelling missionary co-labourers.

Corinth was an important place. This passage records the beginning of the church in the city. It had a great mix of people because it was a seaport and attracted a lot of traders and others who were engaged in commerce. At the same time, Corinth was the centre of the cult of love goddess Aphrodite (Greek name) also known as Venus (Roman name). The temple of Aphrodite in Corinth was one of the architectural wonders of the ancient world, and at one time, there were ten thousand temple prostitutes. They did their business with the sailors and other commercial people who came or passed through the city.²

² James. M. Boice, *Acts*, 303.

Paul Reasoned with the Jews

There was a synagogue and this evidenced that the city had many Jews. As his custom, Paul joined the Jews in the synagogue and reasoned with them every Sabbath. He taught them from the Scriptures (Old Testament) that Jesus was the Messiah or the Christ. This was Paul's main message to the Jews in all the cities that he visited. The Jews, being the chosen people of God and with whom God had made a covenant, needed someone to show them that the prophecy concerning the Messiah had been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, and that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus. With the coming of Silas and Timothy to Corinth, Paul became more intent in persuading the Jews but they "opposed" him and even blasphemed the name of Christ. Their opposition was militantly systematic and collaborative. Paul shook his robe, a Jewish way of showing his abhorrence and displeasure. He told them that their "blood be upon your own heads" and absolved himself of any guilt. He also told them that he would go to the Gentiles who were willing to hear the gospel message.

Paul Went to Justus' Home

Paul went to the home of Justus, a Gentile believer, who opened his house for the worship of God. Interestingly, his house was next to the synagogue. That says a lot about the synagogue Jews who did not wish to have any fellowship with the believing Gentiles.

It was encouraging to Paul that Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, "believed on the Lord with all his house" (v.8). Here is another evidence of household conversion, which would naturally include children.

And many of the Corinthians who heard the gospel message of Christ believed and were baptised!

Such happenings, especially when it took place next to the synagogue where Paul was earlier rejected, created a tense situation that could lead to hostile rivalries and conflicts. A storm was gathering and Paul must have seen evidences of coming trouble. The Lord knew the situation and therefore, directly and personally spoke to Paul at night in a vision (v.9). "Be not afraid" said the Lord, who urged him to continue to speak up and not to keep silent. The Lord promised that He would be with him. If God is for him, who can prevail against him? The Lord assured him that no one would be able to hurt him. The Lord also said: "for I have much people in this city" (v.10). The phrase "much people" means "groups of people" that is, Gentiles and Jews. The Lord had many believing Gentiles and also believing Jews. Paul was indeed encouraged. He stayed in Corinth for one and a half years preaching and teaching the converts the Word of God.

Rebellion by the Jews

A new man called Gallio succeeded the Roman proconsul or governor. Corinth was an important commercial and political city of Rome for it was the capital of southern Greece and Achaia. The residence of the Roman proconsul was seated in Corinth. The Greeks loved sports and held frequent games in the city. These games drew huge crowds from all parts of Greece. It was no wonder that Paul in his epistles to the Corinthians

illustrated his exhortations of Christian life from those games.³

The rebellious Jews charged Paul for breaking the Mosaic Law. They brought Paul before Gallio at his "judgment seat" which was located in the middle of the *agora*, the market place, in plain view of the passing crowd. Gallio perceived that the matter was about Jewish religious laws. Thus just as Paul was about to make his defence, Gallio questioned Paul's accusers to ascertain the nature of their accusations. Gallio asked whether the charges were crimes, which concerned his jurisdiction. If the charges pertained to Jewish religious laws, then the Jews themselves would have to resolve them according to Roman law. The answer being in the affirmative, Gallio ordered the Jews to disperse. The text strongly suggests that the rebellious Jews acted together with the unbelieving Greeks. The Greeks beat up Sosthenes, who was the chief of the synagogue and who had succeeded Crispus. Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians mentioned Sosthenes in affectionate terms.⁴ Gallio was aware of what happened but he did not care.

³ 1 Corinthians 9:24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. 25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. 26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 27 But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:1 Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes *our* brother,

Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Paul continued to stay “a good while” in Corinth strengthening the faith of the house church in the home of Justus. It was a thriving church considering that Crispus, a former chief of the synagogue and the present chief, Sosthenes were converted to Christianity. Paul then took leave of the brethren of the church and sailed into Syria. Priscilla and Aquila accompanied him together with Silas and Timothy. They sailed from Cenchrea, which was the eastern seaport of Corinth. In Cenchrea, Paul had his hair cut because he had made a vow. Making vows was a common practice in the Jewish culture. Paul's act was probably in thankfulness for the success at Corinth and for his deliverance from danger. From Cenchrea, they arrived at Ephesus. While in Ephesus, Paul went to the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When the Jews requested that he stayed longer with them, Paul explained that he wanted to go to Jerusalem to “keep this feast”. It was probably the feast of Pentecost. But he promised to return to Ephesus, God willing. He then sailed from Ephesus and arrived at Caesarea and from there “gone up, and saluted the church”. Jerusalem is situated about two thousand feet above sea level, and so those who made their trip to Jerusalem were described as “going up”. After the feast, Paul returned to Antioch, Syria, his home (base) church.

Paul spent some time in Antioch. He must have shared with the church, like the first missionary journey, the blessings he received from the Lord. He then departed from Antioch and went all over Galatia and Phrygia revisiting the churches, which he had established, strengthening all the disciples. This

marked Paul's Third Missionary Journey.

A Certain Jew Named Apollos

Meanwhile in Ephesus, a distinguished man made his appearance. He was Apollos, a Jew who was born and raised in Alexandria, the literary centre of higher learning in Egypt. Alexandria equalled its rival Athens as a centre of great learning and knowledge. Apollos was an eloquent orator; one who was also well versed in the Scriptures (Old Testament). He knew about Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah insofar as he had learned from John the Baptist. He was “fervent in the spirit” – his heart was on fire whenever he spoke and taught about the things concerning the Lord Jesus. As a Jew, he went to the synagogue and spoke boldly. It was customary for the Jews to invite strangers who worshipped with them to expound a passage from Scriptures. Aquila and Priscilla were present when Apollos spoke in the synagogue. They realised that his knowledge of the Lord Jesus was deficient. They invited him and taught him more thoroughly the way of God. Apollos then left Ephesus and went to Achaia. Aquila and Priscilla wrote to the church in Corinth to welcome him. Apollos then laboured in Corinth where the brethren acknowledged him as having equal authority with Paul.⁵ Apollos worked well with the Corinthian Christians for he had helped them much. He expounded the Scriptures and convinced the Jews that Jesus of

⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:12 Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I *am* of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

Nazareth was the Messiah or the Christ. The Corinthians were very much blessed by the coming of Apollos.

PRACTICAL VALUE

This whole chapter focuses mainly on the church in Corinth. It was greatly blessed and its beginning was very successful. But later we learned through Paul's two epistles that the church was ridden with internal strife, sexual immorality, and abusive use of spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit. We learn that God was gracious and merciful to Paul, His faithful servant. God knew of Paul's apprehension in going to the great city of Corinth alone. We see God's providence in His encouragement of Paul and His provision for all his needs physically, emotionally and even socially. Our God is a living and true God who loves and cares for His people. Let us draw closer to Him in our daily living, trust Him in all things, and always love and worship only Him. God who blessed Paul will also bless us. Indeed, if God be for us who can be against us? So says Paul from his own experience.⁶

The importance of the study and knowledge of the Scriptures can never be over-emphasised. Paul had been teaching and preaching to his converts the Word of God and the knowledge concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. It is sad that many Christians, young and old, do not think it is necessary to understand the Scriptures. Paul's work among the Christians - teaching the

Word and strengthening their faith - should be impressed upon us.

Aquila and Priscilla made an exemplary husband-and-wife team. Apparently they had no children and were both zealous in the work of the Lord. We observe that they did not amass any wealth, or live in luxury, or carve a name for themselves. They are a good example for today's Christians, particularly those who have retired with sufficient funds to keep their body and soul together, to offer their time and services to the Lord. They should spend more time studying the Word, teaching the Word, strengthening the faith of younger Christians, and generally supporting and strengthening the church where they worship.

Apollos could have made a name for himself. He was a very intelligent man, blessed with the gift of speaking and persuasion. Instead of wanting to be somebody in the world, he gave his life to the Lord for His use. We also must commend him for his humility when he submitted to the corrective theological teachings of Aquila and Priscilla. He served the Corinthian church well. If only there are more of such humble, able and willing men in our local churches! Could this be one of the main reasons why local churches today are weak in meeting the needs of their members?

Finally, every Christian should be evangelistic. Paul planted churches and revisited them to strengthen the faith of the believers. Let each Christian equip himself or herself to share the gospel with others and lead them to salvation. Nothing else matters more than such acquisitions. In addition, let us encourage and counsel one another in

⁶ Romans 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If **God be for us**, who *can be against us*?

our daily Christian living.
AMEN

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

Monday: Acts 18:1-7; 1 Corinthians 2:1-8.

Tuesday: Acts 18:8-11; Matthew 28:18-20.

Wednesday: Acts 18:12-17; Romans 8:31-33.

Thursday: Acts 18:18-23; 2 Timothy 4:1-4.

Friday: Acts 18:24-28; 1 Timothy 4:9-12.

Discussion Questions

1. What difficulties did Paul face as he entered Corinth?

2. What action did Paul take when the Jews resisted his message?

3. Trace the distinct stages in Paul's work in Corinth. What encouragements came to him, and what hindrances did he encounter?

4. Illustrate with a map the journeys that Paul took in verses 8-23. What various ministries did Paul undertake during this time, and what purposes did they serve?

5. What was Apollos' life story as indicated here? What are some of his characteristics that you find exemplary?

6. How did Aquila and Priscilla help Apollos? What can we learn from their action and attitude towards those who are earnest but may not have the full knowledge of the gospel?

7. What do we learn about God concerning the events which took place in verses 1-17?
