

Lesson 6 - 2 September 2012

Paul at Corinth

Lesson Scope: Acts 18:1-22

Lesson Focus

As he continued his second missionary journey, the apostle Paul left cultured Athens and headed fifty miles west to commercial Corinth. This city, located just south of a narrow isthmus, was a crossroads for land trade moving north and south and sea trade going east and west.

The constant swirl of trade and travelers made Corinth a wealthy and wicked place. The city worshiped Aphrodite, the goddess of love. This religious system promoted immorality in the name of religion. The expression "to live as a Corinthian" symbolized sensual living. Paul likely wrote the Epistle to the Romans while in this city, and the first chapter well describes the moral condition of the Corinthians.

But God told Paul, "I have much people in this city," and Paul spent one and one-half years preaching Christ to them. In daily life he practiced the faith he preached.

Christianity is not only a system of belief but also a way of life. The harmony of a sound profession and a consistent practice produces a powerful witness for truth.

There is a human tendency to separate theory and practice. People appreciate truth in theory and understand how it should apply to others, but they balk at making the personal sacrifices truth requires. That is why we see so many "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Timothy 3:5).

We will be judged by truth, and if we want to avoid the ultimate tragedy of disappointment on the Judgment Day, we must practice truth, not just preach it.

Lesson Aim: To portray practical expressions of Christianity from Paul's life.

Theme Verse: [1 Corinthians 11:1](#). Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

Lesson Text:

Productive

[Acts 18:1-3](#) ¹ After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; ² And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. ³ And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

Patient

[Acts 18:4-11](#) ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. ⁵ And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus was Christ*. ⁶ And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook *his* raiment, and said unto them, Your blood *be* upon your own heads; I *am* clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. ⁷ And he departed thence, and entered into a certain *man's* house, named Justus, *one* that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. ⁸ And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. ⁹ Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: ¹⁰ For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. ¹¹ And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Persistent

[Acts 18:12-22](#) ¹² And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, ¹³ Saying, This *fellow* persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. ¹⁴ And when Paul was now 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: ¹⁵ But if it be a question of words and names, and *of your law*, look ye *to it*; for I will be no judge of such *matters*. ¹⁶ And he drave them from the judgment seat. ¹⁷ Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things. ¹⁸ And Paul *after this* tarried *there* yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn *his* head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow. ¹⁹ And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they desired *him* to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; ²¹ But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. ²² And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.

Questions for Study

Productive

1. How might Aquila and Priscilla's homelife have helped Paul?
2. Compare the occupations of Paul (tentmaker) and Jesus (carpenter).
3. What service and outreach opportunities might our daily work produce?

Patient

4. How was being "pressed in the spirit" essential to Paul's ministry?
5. How do we discern if closed doors are the Lord's leading or the devil's opposition?
6. Why must we teach not only conversion but also discipleship?

Persistent

7. How did God use Gallio's ruling to help Paul's ministry?

8. Why does God value faithfulness more than success?

Analyzing the Passage

"Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome" (Acts 18:2). The Jews were blamed for constant riots in Rome. So, in A.D. 49, the emperor banished them from the capital.

The tents Paul made were likely multiroom structures woven from goat's hair, for which Paul's home province of Cilicia was well-known. Typically, a workman's shop was downstairs and his living quarters upstairs.

The arrival of Silas and Timotheus likely invigorated Paul for several reasons. Apparently they brought financial aid from Macedonia (2 Corinthians 11:9), good news of the steadfastness of the Thessalonian church (1 Thessalonians 3:6-8), and of course, their own companionship.

Gallio was the Roman governor of Achaia, and his judgment would establish legal precedent. Rome did not permit the propagation of new religions, and these accusing Jews were claiming that Christianity was a new cult, distinct from the established religion of Judaism. But Gallio lumped them together and said, "I will be no judge of such matters" (Acts 18:15). God directed this crucial decision to the furtherance of the Gospel. The spontaneous outburst of violence toward Sosthenes may have revealed the anti-Semitism of the Greeks or the disgust of Gentile Corinth at the contentions of the Jews. This man may be the Sosthenes referred to as brother in I Corinthians 1:1.

Principles and Applications

Productive

1. The godly home provides a haven of refuge in a corrupt society (Acts 18:2). After his daily exposure to the wicked world, the apostle Paul could escape into the haven of holiness in Aquila and Priscilla's home and be refreshed. Our homes should provide shelter from sinful influences and loving support in a cold, cruel world.

2. Kingdom interests are enhanced by honorable labor and self-support (Acts 18:3). Hard work helps to maintain our self-discipline and reminds us that nothing worthwhile is free. "Professional" ministers or missionaries may develop an entitlement mentality or form an elite class of thinkers. It has been said that "idleness is the devil's workshop," and the Bible commands, "If any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

3. The choice of occupation should always complement our godly profession (Acts 18:3). If we follow Paul as he followed Christ, we will choose lowly vocations fit for strangers and pilgrims and beneficial to our fellow men. We will avoid luxury products and services and unequal business yokes. We will always remember "that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."

Patient

4. Witnessing for Christ overshadows all other interests (Acts 18:4). To Jesus, people were always much more important than things. Thus Paul's passion was winning souls; he made tents to pay his way in life.

Present followers of Christ will also put witnessing ahead of business interests. They will be glad to interrupt their work to "give an answer to every man that asketh [them] a reason of the hope that is in [them]."

5. A burden for the lost motivates an untiring testimony (Acts 18:5-8). We are moved by the masses of humanity facing the eternal horrors of hell. The compassion of Christ moves us to take the truth and keep "Sowing it here, sowing it there, / Knowing not which will grow."

6. The Lord brings opportunities and reveals open doors (Acts 18:9-11). We do not expect special visions like Paul received, but if we long to help needy souls, God will lead us to them. We seek divine direction with much fasting and prayer and by consulting our Scriptural brethren. If we are "faithful in that which is least," God will lead us through more open doors into greater service.

Persistent

7. Opposition does not silence the testimony of the faithful witness (Acts 18:12-17). Witnesses for Christ know that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). They know that the devil and his men seek to devour them as a roaring lion or an angel of light.

But faithful witnesses remember that "if we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Timothy 2:12). They continually live by the motto, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

8. Christian service requires a strong personal devotion to the Lord (Acts 18:18-22). If our love for the Lord cools, our love for the world will grow. We will become fair-weather Christians who are easily intimidated into compromise. But as we maintain our personal devotion, nothing will be able to separate us from the love of Christ and His service.

Important Teachings

1. The godly home provides a haven of refuge in a corrupt society (Acts 18:2).
2. Kingdom interests are enhanced by honorable labor and self-support (Acts 18:3).
3. The choice of occupation should always complement our godly profession (Acts 18:3).
4. Witnessing for Christ overshadows all other interests (Acts 18:4).
5. A burden for the lost motivates an untiring testimony (Acts 18:5-8).
6. The Lord brings opportunities and reveals open doors (Acts 18:9-11).
7. Opposition does not silence the testimony of the faithful witness (Acts 18:12-17).
8. Christian service requires a strong personal devotion to the Lord (Acts 18:18-22).

Answers to Questions

1. How might Aquila and Priscilla's homelife have helped Paul?

No doubt, the apostle Paul, like Lot, was "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked." But at the end of the day he could escape into the haven of holiness in Aquila and Priscilla's home and be refreshed. Their joy and hope in Christ would have been a constant encouragement to keep preaching such Good News. Priscilla and Aquila, who, Paul said, "have for my life laid down their own necks," (Romans 16:4) likely ministered to his spirit by providing for his physical needs.

2. Compare the occupations of Paul (tentmaker) and Jesus (carpenter).

Both Paul and Jesus had humble occupations that fit those who seek for a heavenly country. They both worked with their hands to serve their fellow men. Both jobs provided contact with the public and an opportunity to witness of eternal things.

3. What service and outreach opportunities might our daily work produce?

We can go the extra mile in service jobs or turn the other cheek when others take advantage of us. Customers can observe our cheerful attitude and the Scripture verses or tracts displayed at our places of business. We can turn business conversations into spiritual discussions and offer Bible answers and hope to those we deal with.

4. How was being "Pressed in the spirit" essential to Paul's ministry?

He faced tremendous opposition and the temptation to slow down and cool off. But when he remembered Christ's work for him and saw the great needs around him, he was inspired to fight the good fight to the end.

5. How do we discern if closed doors are the Lord's leading or the devil's opposition?

We should spend much time in prayer and fasting and make sure we are completely surrendered to the Lord's will. Then we

should ask counsel of spiritual brethren.

Usually when the Lord closes one door He directs us through another. If we really want to build His kingdom, He will prosper our work.

6. Why must we teach not only conversion but also discipleship?

The prize comes not at the beginning or the middle of the race, but at the end. If we sow the seed but fail to nurture it, who is to blame when it springs up but withers away before bearing fruit? Jesus said we should go to all nations, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

7. How did God use Gallio's ruling to help Paul's ministry?

Rome did not permit the propagation of new religions, and these accusing Jews were claiming that Christianity was a new cult, distinct from the established religion of Judaism. But Gallio lumped them together and said, "I will be no judge of such matters." God directed this crucial decision to the furtherance of the Gospel.

8. Why does God value faithfulness more than success?

He has chosen men to build His kingdom by prayer, preaching, and example. If they faithfully do their best, He can multiply their efforts, and His strength will be made perfect in their weakness. God can continue to bless the efforts of a faithful man even long after his death.

Summarizing the Lesson

By nature, people divide their lives into compartments and give some of them to God and keep some for themselves. Thus we may try to be "Sunday Christians" or "convenience Christians" or "public Christians."

But Christ cannot be divided, and He rejects a divided loyalty. They that are Christ's are Christian to the core. "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment" (Mark 12:30)

Research Guide

1. Study the practical Book of James, especially James 2:14-26, and note the unbreakable connection between faith and works.
2. Read in the Martyrs Mirror, and note the practical expressions of Christianity in the lives and deaths of the martyrs.