

Midweek Study



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The Power of Encouragement

Acts 18:1-28

"By perseverance, the snail reached the ark." - Charles Spurgeon

"It's always too soon to quit!" - Dr. V. Raymond Edman

Paul departed from Athens (a place of at least partial failure) and went to Corinth alone. The going was tough, but the apostle did not give up. Corinth had 200,000 free citizens and up to 400,000 slaves. It was the leading political and commercial center in Greece, located at a strategic point on the isthmus of Corinth. Virtually all traffic between northern and southern Greece had to pass through the city. Because Corinth was a trade center and host to all sorts of travelers, it had a transient population that was extremely debauched. It housed the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. 1,000 temple priestesses, who were ritual prostitutes, came each evening into the city to practice their trade. "To corinthinize" meant to commit immorality. Corinth's reputation for wickedness was known all over the Roman Empire. (Rom. 1:18-32 was written in Corinth!)

For a monotheistic Jew and temple-trained Pharisee, Paul may not have been ready for what he would encounter. Even so, he was in it for the long haul. As long as there were ears to hear, Paul would preach and teach. Christians today are faced with our own version of culture shock and morality shock. Here are **5 sources of encouragement** for the Apostle Paul that can be for us today:

I. HIS FRIENDS (v. 1-3, 18-19, 24-26)

- Acts 18:1-2 - ...he found a certain Jew named Aquila... with his wife Priscilla... and he came to them.
- Acts 18:24-26 - Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus... When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

II. HIS FINANCES (v. 3-5)

- Acts 18:3 - Paul worked with his hands. Jewish boys were taught trades even if they planned to become rabbis, so they wouldn't be destitute. Paul's tent-making business initially financed his ministry in Corinth.
- Acts 18:4 - "And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks." The tent-making was his platform - paying his bills while he preached the gospel on the Sabbath.
- Acts 18:5 - "When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, **Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.**"
 - NASB - "Paul began devoting himself **completely** to the word"
 - ESV - "Paul was **occupied** with the Word"
 - TLB - "Paul **spent his entire time preaching** and testifying"
 - NIV - "Paul devoted himself **exclusively** to preaching"
- **What Changed?** The Philippians church had sent financial support through Silas and Timothy (2 Corinthians 11:8; Philippians 4:15), enabling Paul to transition from bi-vocational ministry to full-time preaching.

III. HIS FOCUS (v.6-7)

- The shaking of his clothing was an expressive act, signifying his dissociation from them. However, this did not prevent him from going to the synagogue in another city, such as Ephesus (19:8).

IV. HIS FRUIT (v.7-8, 12-17, 27-28)

- From the reference to Gallio we can pinpoint Paul's stay in Corinth as being between the fall of a.d. 50 and the spring of a.d. 52 (When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia - From July, A.D. 51 to June, A.D. 52). Some notable conversions include:
 - a) **Justus** (v.7) - When Paul was rejected by the Jews, Justus opened his home to become Paul's base of operations, positioned strategically next door to the very synagogue that had rejected the gospel.
 - b) **Crispus and his household** (v.8) - As the ruler of the synagogue, he held the highest position of Jewish religious authority in Corinth. His conversion, along with his entire household, would have sent shockwaves through the Jewish community. Paul later mentions baptizing Crispus personally (1 Cor. 1:14).
 - c) **Many Corinthians** (v.8) "many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized" This represents a substantial harvest of souls from among the Gentile population of this debauched city. See 1 Cor. 6:9-11.
 - d) **Likely Sosthenes** (v.17) - While his conversion is not recorded in **Acts 18**, Sosthenes appears to have replaced Crispus as ruler of the synagogue after Crispus's conversion. Paul later identifies "Sosthenes our brother" as co-sender of 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:1).

V. HIS FAITH (v.9-11, 20-23)

- **Acts 18:9-11** - Wuest translates "Stop being afraid, but continue to be speaking and do not begin to be silent."
- Reflecting on his state of mind when he first arrived in their city, Paul later wrote to the Corinthians, "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3).

Applications for Today:

1) Find and Value Christian Friendships - When you are in the middle of a pagan society where your Christian convictions are challenged, you need to pray and lean on the Christian friends that God has given you. When facing persecution in **Acts 4:23**, they went back to "their own company" to pray together.

2) Trust God's Provision - Whether through working with your hands or through the gifts of other believers, God will provide what you need to accomplish His work.

3) Seek Fresh Words from Heaven - Promises of God are not always for every situation. God here promises to keep Paul from harm, yet elsewhere Paul will be beaten and injured. Has God lied to Paul? No, the promise is simply for this situation. God may promise something to you as His child that is for that specific moment. Claim it and appropriate it, but do not live on the Manna of yesterday. Seek a fresh Word from heaven.