

Paul in Corinth

1 and 2 Corinthians Part 1



T. M. AND SUSIE MOORE

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

Paul in Corinth
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Introduction to *Paul in Corinth*

Paul spent a little more than 18 months in Corinth, doing the work which resulted in “many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized” (v. 8). A church took root; rather (as we shall see), a series of house churches, probably spread around the city, began to meet, worship, and learn what it means to be the Body of Christ. The several house churches were one church in Corinth, and for the time Paul was with them, everything seemed to go well.

But when Paul went to Ephesus, troubles began. He wrote 1 Corinthians to address certain issues, difficulties, and questions that were brought to him by visitors from Corinth. The tone of 1 Corinthians, with its focus on division, immaturity, immorality, neglect, and other matters, is stern and demanding. Paul expected better from these people he had served for a year and a half, and he let them know he was disappointed.

But like a loving shepherd, he also walked them through their difficulties, reminded them of the grace of God, pointed them toward the Lord’s return, and urged them to stand firm in the faith.

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We hope you find this study instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

1 God's Work

Pray Psalm 147.15-20.

He sends out His command *to the* earth;
His word runs very swiftly.
He gives snow like wool;
He scatters the frost like ashes;
He casts out His hail like morsels;
Who can stand before His cold?
He sends out His word and melts them;
He causes His wind to blow, *and* the waters flow.
He declares His word to Jacob,
His statutes and His judgments to Israel.
He has not dealt thus with any nation;
And *as for His* judgments, they have not known them.
Praise the LORD!

Sing Psalm 147.15-20.

(St. Anne: *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*)

His Word to earth runs to and fro to carry out His will;
He brings the rain, He sends the snow, and none can keep Him still.

His Word He to His Church bestows—His promises and Law.
No other nation God thus knows: Praise Him with songs of awe!

Read and meditate on Acts 18.1-4.

Preparation

1. Whom did Paul meet in Corinth?
2. Why did he stay with them?

Meditation

These four verses remind us that God is at work in many ways to accomplish His purposes. We begin with the work of Paul. Coming from Macedonia (Philippi and Thessalonica), Paul stopped briefly in Athens, where he continued his work of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus (Acts 17). He came to Corinth probably for two reasons. First, it was a bustling commercial center, so he could expect many opportunities to talk with people about Jesus. Also, it was a seaport, and Paul was thinking about getting to Jerusalem by the feast. Corinth would be a good place to find passage.

Second, we see the work of God in history, as He sovereignly moved Priscilla and Aquila from Rome to Corinth in advance of Paul's arrival (v. 2). The king's heart, Solomon reminds us, is in the Lord's hands; He turns it as He will (Prov. 21.1), and He willed to have this couple in Corinth before Paul arrived. Not only were they a most hospitable couple, but God had given them a work Paul knew well, so he could join them, thus supporting himself and bolstering their revenue (v. 3), and they could join him in his work of furthering the Gospel. These three together demonstrate the truth that the work we've been given to do is greater than the job at which we work.

Finally, we circle back to Paul and his work of talking about Jesus (v. 4). He went to the synagogue every Sabbath, where he taught and answered questions; and, Luke tells us, he managed to persuade "both Jews and Greeks" to believe in Jesus. Here is the beginning of the Church in Corinth, and the work of God is over, under, and through it all.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

All God's people have work to do in His Kingdom, work that far outweighs the job we do to put food on our tables. In fact, to God, the job, although beneficial for us and for our families and communities, is practically irrelevant. Aquila, Priscilla, and Paul were all tentmakers by trade, but were followers of God supremely.

In Paul's writings, he reminded his readers that they were precious in God's sight and were bought at a price—Jesus left His heavenly home to live on earth for thirty-three years, loving others, suffering persecution, experiencing a heinous death, and separated from God while carrying all the sins of mankind into hell—that costly price.

He also encouraged them to “remain with God in that state in which [they were] called” (1 Cor. 7.23, 24). In other words, it is not necessary for any person to change their gainful employment upon becoming Christians (the exception being careers breaking the Law of God in any way, shape, or form).

And if God wants us to pursue new careers that He chooses for us, then He is quite capable of making that clear. For example, God changed Paul from his work of being a perpetually mean and haughty religious zealot tentmaker, to His humble and loving servant. Or Moses and David were called out of being herdsmen to being a deliverer and king. God has His reasons and His plans for each of us. As He said to Samuel during the calling of David: “For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16.7). And He liked David's heart. Ours must be as pleasing.

It is good for us to remember that Paul, the greatest theologian of all time, was a tentmaker by trade. Although honorable work, it lacked in the glitz and riches department, yet he gobsmacked all with his genius. And he was such an authentic follower of The Way, that he was able to write, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11.1).

God's work is the most important work we will ever do. And daily, to be ready for it, we must be in His Word and prayer. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2.10), while also being doctors, trash collectors, lawyers, cleaners, teachers, tentmakers, housewives, pastors, landscapers, writers, chefs, soldiers, fire and police persons, theologians, government workers, musicians, artists, and a zillion other necessary works.

Always remembering: “The work we've been given to do is greater than the job at which we work.”

For reflection

1. How would you sum-up the work God has given you to do? What does it include?
2. How do you seek the Kingdom and righteousness of God in all your work?
3. How has God used your work to encourage other believers in theirs?

Paul, after countless journeys, despite such great wonders, stayed with a tentmaker and sewed skins. Angels honored him and demons trembled at him, and still he was not ashamed to say, “These same hands served my needs and those who were with me.”
John Chrysostom (344-407), *Catena on the Acts of the Apostles 18.3-5*

Pray Psalm 147.1-11.

Give thanks and praise to God for all who do His work. Pray that He will use you in your work today to advance His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Sing Psalm 147.1-11.

(St. Anne: *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*)

Praise God, for it is good to sing loud praises to the LORD!
With joy our songs of praise we bring to God and to His Word.

The LORD builds up His Church and He His people gathers in.
The broken hearts He tenderly repairs and heals their sin.

He counts the stars, He knows the name of every chosen soul;
His pow'r is great, and great His fame Who understands us whole.

The humble God exalts above; the wicked He casts down.
Sing thanks to this great God of love; let songs of praise abound.

He brings refreshing rain to earth and feeds the beasts so dear.
He puts in man's strength naught of worth, but loves those who God fear.

2 Working the Angles

Pray Psalm 110.1, 2.

The LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”
The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion.
Rule in the midst of Your enemies!

Sing Psalm 110.1, 2.

(Aurelia: *The Church's One Foundation*)

“Sit by Me at My right hand,” the LORD says to my Lord,
“until I make Your foot stand on all who hate Your Word.”
The LORD sends strength from Zion: “Rule all Your enemies.”
While those who Him rely on go forth their LORD to please.

Read Acts 18.1-8; meditate on verses 5-8.

Preparation

1. Why did Paul turn to the Gentiles?
2. What happened when he did?

Meditation

The work of God goes forward despite human opposition. First, God sent Paul two of his prized teammates. Silas and Timothy, their follow-up work in Macedonia complete, arrived to join Paul in His work (v. 5). Their report encouraged him and made him more sensitive to the Spirit (cf. 1 Thess. 3.6-10), Who “compelled” Paul to ratchet-up his testimony to the Jews.

But the Jews opposed Paul and his message, going so far as to blaspheme the Name of the Lord (v. 6). Paul wasn't going to argue with them or give them a platform for their blasphemy. He “shook *his* garments” and left them to their own bad decisions. Sometimes doing so will open a way for the God to work in the hearts of some who may have formerly been blasphemers. No sooner did Paul begin winning converts among the Gentiles than the leader of the synagogue, where Paul was opposed, converted to the Lord, together with his whole household and many others (v. 8).

Meanwhile, Paul moved his work next door to the synagogue, to the home of a Gentile God-fearer, Justus. He was part of the synagogue in Corinth and sympathetic to Paul's preaching. He opened his home to the Gospel, and God opened his network of family, friends, and associates to the Good News of Jesus (vv. 7, 8).

The Lord works all the angles to keep the Gospel going forward. He brings friends and co-workers to help us in working our Personal Mission Field. He may close a door here and there, but not without opening another. He'll even work in people who have previously rejected our witness, but in whom the seed of the Word has begun to take root. We can't figure out all the best ways to advance the rule of King Jesus, but He can. Our calling is to be faithful in every opportunity before us. The Lord will work the angles as He sees fit.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Back in the fifties and sixties, the dastardlier the salvation story, the grander (e.g., the man who sold his baby's shoes to buy liquor and then found Jesus, or the guy saved out of the dumpster). Much was made of the multitudes reached for the Gospel from such testimonies. And they were amazing stories with good consequences; but they are not the norm.

So, we needn't spend any time worrying that our own Personal Mission Fields seem lacking or small in comparison. They are not. They are where we have been put to be faithful to God's call on our own lives in our sphere. Our faithfulness may result in nothing that we ever see; but it has results. Because as God said: "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please. And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Is. 55.11).

The Bible is full of stories of people we briefly meet, who do their work for the Kingdom, yet whom we do not read of again. But they are our examples in the work; and we will meet again in glory!

In 2 Kings 5.2-4 we read of a nameless young girl from the land of Israel who was taken captive by the Syrians. She was a servant to Naaman's wife. Naaman was a commander of the army, and he had a serious problem; he was a leper. And this brave, nameless servant said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy." Naaman took her words to heart, managed a trip to Samaria, was sent by Elisha to go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and was healed of his disease. His testimony was, "Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel..." (2 Kgs. 5.15). And he carried his newfound faith back to Syria.

Jeremiah faithfully worked his Personal Mission Field; but as the NKJV preface to his book states: "A heartbroken prophet with a heartbreaking message...labors for more than forty years proclaiming a message of doom to the stiff-necked people of Judah. Despised and persecuted by his countrymen, Jeremiah bathes his harsh prophecies in tears of compassion." The usual, but perhaps ungodly, signs of success were not in evidence in his lifetime. And yet, his written words are still teaching, convicting, guiding, comforting, and spurring on believers, as he faithfully declared that "surrender to God's will is the only way to escape calamity" (NKJV notes).

God is Sovereign. He is working all the angles on everyone's life. We can trust Him fully. He has got this. Furthermore, we are blessed and called to participate with Him in this work (Eph. 2.10). What we do is important to God. It may not be grandiose; it may seem small and inconsequential. We may not see the results in our lifetime. But most assuredly, there will be some. And that is all we need to know.

Let us be this generation's nameless servant girl and despised prophet, obediently speaking words of truth into a world that desperately needs to hear them.

Like Jesus' Words and His angle:

"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (Jn. 10.10).

For reflection

1. Think of as many people as you can in your Personal Mission Field. Name their names aloud. If you don't reach them with the grace of God, who will?
2. How are you asking God to flow His grace through you today? How will you be an ambassador of Christ's Kingdom in your Personal Mission Field?
3. Whom will you encourage today to see their Personal Mission Field as an arena in which God's grace can flow?

The Lord knows those that are his, yea, and those that shall be his; for it is by his work upon them that they become his. Let us not despair concerning any place, when even in wicked Corinth Christ had much people. He will gather in his chosen flock from the places where they are scattered. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 18.7-11

Pray Psalm 110.3-7.

Pray for the progress of the Gospel over all the earth. Call on God to revive His churches, renew His people, and bring a great awakening of faith to multitudes. Be ready to be part of that great work today.

Sing Psalm 110.3-7.

(Aurelia: *The Church's One Foundation*)

Your people in Your power, arrayed in holiness,
like dew of morning's hour shall serve like youth refreshed.
The LORD has sworn and never will He His promise check:
"You are a priest forever after Melchizedek."

The Lord is at Your right hand to execute His wrath,
and judge all kings and all lands—doomed sinners in His path.
Then, all His foes defeated, He takes His hard-won rest,
in glorious triumph seated with us, redeemed and blessed.

3 Word of Comfort

Pray Psalm 119.25-27.

My soul clings to the dust;
Revive me according to Your word.
I have declared my ways, and You answered me;
Teach me Your statutes.
Make me understand the way of Your precepts;
So shall I meditate on Your wonderful works.

Sing Psalm 119.25-27.

(Festal Song: *Rise Up, O Men of God*)

My soul clings to the dust; revive me by Your Word!
My ways I have declared to You; teach me Your statutes, LORD!

Make me to understand Your precepts and Your ways,
as on Your works I meditate with wonder and with praise!

Read Acts 18.1-11; meditate on verses 9-11.

Preparation

1. *What do you suppose Paul's state of mind was at this time?*
2. *How did Jesus encourage him?*

Meditation

I can imagine that Paul was experiencing some mixed emotions. Perhaps he thought that he should move on from Corinth, away from the blaspheming opponents of the Gospel. But then, could all these “many” Corinthians expect to make a good start in the faith apart from someone to shepherd them?

Jesus came to Paul in a vision to encourage him in his work. There were still many souls to save and bring into the Savior's fold. Paul would stay on in Corinth for year a half, bringing in the sheaves he himself would sow.

Don't we all wish Jesus would do that with us? Show up in a vision by night to speak a Word of encouragement and direction?

But wait. That's exactly what Jesus *does* as we look to His Word! The words Jesus speaks to us from Scripture are Spirit and life (Jn. 6.63). And while we may not have the privilege Paul had, of seeing the Lord in a vision, we can certainly see Him everywhere in His Word (Jn. 5.39) and be encouraged by His Spirit to continue in the calling He has appointed for us.

Jesus has, from time to time, appeared to saints in visions. I'm sure He continues to do so today. But as He Himself implied, visions and other wondrous things will be of no value to those who will not seek Him in His Word (Lk. 16.27-31). And Jesus does nothing superfluous. He says His Word is sufficient to sanctify and equip us for every good work (Jn. 17.17; 2 Tim. 3.15-17). Paul did not have the advantage of the full and complete Word of God. We do. Make the most of it.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me” (Jon. 1.2). After Jonah's escapade to another town by way of being swallowed by a large fish, God gave him another message for Nineveh: “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell

you” (Jon. 3.2).

And here’s what Jonah preached:

“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (Jon. 3.4).

(For those of us troubled that we might not know exactly what to say, or how to say it, or that we are not eloquent, Jonah’s message should calm our concerns.)

Our job is to be available and to be obedient to our calling. As agreed, Jonah’s message was not remarkable, and yet, participating in God’s work brought about these results: “So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them” (Jon. 3.5).

However, Jonah was not happy with the outcome. He expected that his less than stimulating sermon would have zero results: he didn’t really like the Ninevites. But God’s angle differed greatly from Jonah’s. God cared about the Ninevites. As per Jonah: “for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness. One who relents from doing harm” (Jon. 4.2). Hmmm.

He knew God wanted the people to repent from their sins, and to have new life in Him. Nothing that Jonah did or didn’t do, could change the outcome of what God wanted for those people. As He asked: “should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?” (Jonah 4.11). God cared about the people, the children, and the animals of that great city.

We can channel God’s night vision to Paul, and His words for our own, as we seek to obediently fulfill our work—with a little more enthusiasm and concern than Jonah could muster. God has His ways of getting our attention (like the big fish in Jonah’s journey). Much better to take His words to heart and live accordingly. God encouraged Paul in his work in Corinth, by saying (Acts 18.9, 10):

1. Do not be afraid.
2. Speak about Me.
3. Do not keep silent.
4. I AM with you.
5. No one will attack you to hurt you.
6. I have many people for whom I AM concerned, in this city.

God comforts all His people with all His Word all the time.

Nothing about God’s Word ever changes. It was true then; it is true now.

“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13.5, 8).

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn. 1.1)

We have been given a Bible full of words of comfort—for us to cherish and to share with others.

And we have been given Jonah as an example of a useful servant of God: Recalcitrant spirit and uninspiring preaching notwithstanding.

“For with God nothing will be impossible” (Lk. 1.37).

For reflection

1. Do you feel at times that your work in your Personal Mission Field isn’t bearing much fruit? What should you do at such times?
2. Other Christians probably feel that way as well. Whom will you encourage today to stay the course in working their Personal Mission Field?

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3. It's not our job to bring fruit to our labors. Our job is to labor. Who brings the fruit? How should knowing this encourage us in our work?

Let us not despair concerning any place, when even in wicked Corinth Christ had much people. He will gather in his chosen flock from the places where they are scattered. Thus encouraged, the apostle continued at Corinth, and a numerous and flourishing church grew up. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 18.7-11*

Pray Psalm 119.28-32.

How are you feeling about your work in your Personal Mission Field? Talk with the Lord about it, about every person He sends you to each week. Listen as His Spirit encourages you to press on.

Sing Psalm 119.28-32.

(Festal Song: *Rise Up, O Men of God*)

My soul weighs down with woe, I need Your strength, O LORD!
Remove from me all lying ways; grant me Your holy Word!

I choose the way of truth; Your judgments I proclaim.
Your testimonies I embrace, LORD, put me not to shame!

Command my course, O LORD; Your gracious truth impart.
I cling to You and know You will enlarge my seeking heart.

4 Uproar

Pray Psalm 52.1-4.

Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?
The goodness of God *endures* continually.
Your tongue devises destruction,
Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.
You love evil more than good,
Lying rather than speaking righteousness.
Selah
You love all devouring words,
You deceitful tongue.

Sing Psalm 52.1-4.

(Warrington: *Give to Our God Immortal Praise*)

Why do the mighty boast in sin? God's love endures, it knows no end!
They with their tongues vain boasts repeat, and like a razor, work deceit.

Men more than good in evil delight, and lies prefer to what is right.
They utter words both harsh and strong with their devouring, deceitful tongue.

Read Acts 18.1-18; meditate on verses 12-18.

Preparation

1. What did the Jews try to do?
2. What happened to Sosthenes as a result?

Meditation

Too often, when debate and persuasion fail, people turn to violence. The Jewish religious leaders could not withstand Paul's proclamation of Jesus and the Kingdom. He was far too Biblical; they could not rebut his preaching (v. 5). So they blasphemed (v. 6). Did they suspect that would cause Paul to remove himself from the synagogue (v. 7)?

Their blaspheming seems to have contributed to driving the ruler of their synagogue into the arms of Jesus (v. 8). No problem. They'd just appoint another, Sosthenes (v. 17). But Sosthenes, who would come to believe in Jesus and become Paul's companion in ministry (1 Cor. 1.1), was probably already leaning toward conversion. He may have been trying to calm his fellow religious leaders, encouraging them to be more open to Paul. Which might explain why "they all" (v. 17) turned to beat him when the proconsul would not judge their case against Paul (vv. 12-15).

The NKJV translates verse 17, "Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment seat." The editors correctly note that "the Greeks" is an interpretation; the phrase does not appear in the Greek New Testament. What I think happened here is that the Jews themselves turned on Sosthenes, whom they may have suspected was open to Paul, if not already a believer. If they could not beat Paul, they'd make a punching-bag out of one his sympathizers.

With the same result as occurred with Crispus (v. 8). What about us? When others sneer at our faith or try to shout us down, do we slink away and sulk? Or are we driven ever more deeply into the arms of Jesus? God is at work for the Gospel, even amid opposition, uproar, and persecution.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Persecution is a promise from God. It is the way things roll in the Kingdom; and our job, as believers, is to pray for others and ourselves for strength to bear up under it. As God said to Ezekiel: “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. For you are not sent to a people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, but to the house of Israel, not to many people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you. But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted” (Ezek. 3.4-7). Ezekiel’s people didn’t like God or him.

And as Jesus taught us: “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me” (Jn. 15.18-21). Many people in Jesus’ day did not like Him or His followers. They will also not like us.

The upside? “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning. These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble” (Jn. 15.26-16.1).

The Helper, the Holy Spirit, dwells in all those who ask the Father for Him (Lk. 11.13). He will keep us from stumbling. “But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Is. 40.31).

When the uproars come, and they will, we know that we are merely facing the same things that our forebears in the faith did; and we have the same Father in heaven who knows our travails, who cares, and who will strengthen us to endure...to glorify Him and praise Him forever. “The eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms...” (Deut. 33.27). This Triune God loves us in, during, and through the uproar. “Happy are you...” For “who is like you, a people saved by the LORD” (Deut. 33.29)!

For reflection

1. How should you prepare each day for the possibility of “uproar”?
2. “Uproar” offers an opportunity to grow in the Lord and for the Kingdom to make progress. Explain.
3. Whom will you encourage today to be firm in the face of “uproar”?

And those who see and hear of the sufferings of God’s people, and have no feeling with them, or care for them, who do not pity and pray for them, are of the same spirit as Gallio, who cared for none of these things. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 18.12-18

Pray Psalm 52.5-9.

Thank the Lord for His sovereign, protecting grace. Ask Him to give you boldness in the face of opposition to the Gospel. Pray for Christians the world over who are experiencing persecution.

Sing Psalm 52.5-9.

(Warrington: *Give to Our God Immortal Praise*)

God will forever break them down, uproot, and cast them to the ground!
He from their safety tears them away, no more to know the light of day.

The righteous see and laugh and fear, and say, “Behold, what have we here?”

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Such are all who at God conspire, and wealth and evil ways desire.”

But as for me may I be seen in God an olive ever green!
Ever in God, most kind and just, shall I with joy and gladness trust!

Thanks evermore to our Savior be raised! His faithfulness be ever praised!
Here with Your people, loving God, I wait upon Your Name, so good!

5 Looking Ahead

Pray Psalm 125.4, 5.

Do good, O LORD, to *those who are* good,
And to *those who are* upright in their hearts.
As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways,
The LORD shall lead them away
With the workers of iniquity.
Peace *be* upon Israel!

Sing Psalm 125.4, 5, 1.

(St. Gertrude: *Onward, Christian Soldiers*)

LORD, do good and care for those upright in heart.
Those who turn to evil shall from You depart.
Sinful men may increase on their way to hell!
Save Your people, let your peace abound in Israel!
Refrain, v. 1
All who trust in Jesus, strong as Zion stand!
Naught shall ever move them from their promised land!

Review Romans 15.22-33; meditate on Romans 15.30-33.

Preparation

1. Where was Paul planning to go?
2. What did he ask the Romans to pray?

Meditation

Paul's initial ministry in Corinth ended at Acts 18.18. Many had come to faith in Jesus, including Jews and Gentiles, as well as leaders—like Crispus and Sosthenes—who understood how to oversee a body of God's people. Paul would return to Corinth later to collect a gift they were preparing for the churches in Judea (1 Cor. 16.1-3). Having arrived there, he was looking forward to his trip to Jerusalem and, beyond that, to Rome and Spain.

In preparation for that longer term plan, Paul wrote to the Romans from Corinth, to let them know he was on the way (Rom. 15.22-25). Here's the evidence of the Corinthian provenance of Romans, as provided by E. A. Judge in *The New Bible Dictionary*: “[T]here are certain indications in [Romans 16] which point to Corinth as the place of dispatch. . . . [I]t is significant that Phebe is commended, and she was a deaconess at Cenchrea, one of the two ports of Corinth. There is also a passing reference to Gaius who was Paul's host at the time of writing [cf. 1 Cor. 1.14].”

Paul was forward-thinking. He never rested on laurels, never felt that his work was over, never looked ahead to retiring from his ministry, and never stopped seeking the Lord for ways to expand his Personal Mission Field and reach more people with the grace of God (2 Cor. 4.15). But in all his planning, Paul entrusted himself completely to the Lord, enlisting others to pray with and for him and for all the Church of Jesus (Rom. 15.30-33). He came to Corinth without a single convert in sight. Years later, he departed from there to Judea and Rome having been used of the Lord to establish many house churches, sound leaders, new mission partners, and a Corinthian church fully ingrafted to the worldwide Body of Christ.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Paul was a creative, courageous, and uncorrupted servant of God. He was chosen by God to do the work he was doing; and yet, his dependence upon God for each next step is evident. He did not just go hither and yon

because he felt like it; no, he was explicitly led to each person and place. His time and ministry were valuable to him, and he made the most of every minute of each day.

And how did he do this? Through seeking God's guidance, wisdom, and leadership in prayer.

He prayed for himself, and he sought the prayers of others for his work.

"Now I beg you, brethren" was not a casual toss-off of "pray for me".

He was begging them to pray with him for very specific things, and by particular means:

-Through the Lord Jesus Christ

-Through the love of the Spirit

-Strive together with me in prayers to God for me (Rom. 15.30).

And why?

-That I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe

-That my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints

-That I may come to you with joy by the will of God

-That I may be refreshed together with you (Rom. 15.31, 32).

Jesus, the very Son of God, also spent hours alone in prayer with God.

The gospels are full of those examples.

So it follows that: the work that we have been called to do must be bathed in "a prayer to the God of my life" (Ps 42.8). And the prayers offered from a righteous and Law-following life are "His delight" (Prov. 15.8; 28.9).

Amid persecution our first response should be prayer. As Nehemiah's was, when his enemies "conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion", he said, "Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God..." (Neh. 4.8, 9).

In all our circumstances God hears us: "He shall regard the prayer of the destitute, and shall not despise their prayer" (Ps. 102.17).

And our brother Paul, wrote these additional words of encouragement and guidance about prayer:

"...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer..." (Rom. 12.12).

"...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me..." (Eph. 6.18, 19).

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4.6, 7).

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5.16-18).

Look ahead. This might not have been our previous *modus operandi*; but it can certainly be the way forward, defining how we conduct our lives and ministries henceforth. Every day is a new day with God: full of His faithfulness, compassions, and hope (Lam. 3.21-24). Beg your brothers and sisters in Christ to pray for you; and pray for them, as well.

It is the strength we all need (Ps. 18.1): to be delivered from unbelievers, serve the saints with acceptable work, refresh one another, and be full of God's joy serving within His will!

For reflection

1. How's your prayer life? Can you see any ways to improve it?

2. Do you have prayer partners, people who pray for you as you work your Personal Mission Field? Do you

pray for them?

3. What does it mean for you to “look ahead” at the work God has appointed for you?

Those who cleave to the ways of God, though they may have trouble in their way, their end shall be peace. The pleading of their Savior for them, secures to them the upholding power and preserving grace of their God. Lord, number us with them, in time, and to eternity. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Psalm 125.4, 5*

Pray Psalm 125.1-4.

Pray that God will protect His people from trial and persecution, that He will strengthen them in every situation to live for Him, and that He will do good for them and grant them rest.

Sing Psalm 125.1-4.

(St. Gertrude: *Onward, Christian Soldiers*)

All who trust in Jesus, strong as Zion stand!
Naught shall ever move them from their promised land!
Like the hills surrounding safe Jerusalem,
Christ surrounds His Church and holds her in His mighty Hand!

Refrain, v. 1

All who trust in Jesus, strong as Zion stand!
Naught shall ever move them from their promised land!

Wickedness shall rest not on this holy land.
Sinfulness shall never come forth from their hand.
Trusting in the Savior, firm in His caress,
ever shall His favor on this holy city rest.
Refrain

6 Apollos

Pray Psalm 85.4-6.

Restore us, O God of our salvation,
And cause Your anger toward us to cease.
Will You be angry with us forever?
Will You prolong Your anger to all generations?
Will You not revive us again,
That Your people may rejoice in You?

Sing Psalm 85.4-6.

(Lyons: *O Worship the King*)

Restore us, O God, renew us in peace,
and cause all Your wrath against us to cease.
Will You evermore all Your wrath to us show?
Revive us that we may Your joy again know.

Read Acts 18.24-28.

Prepare

1. How was Apollos described?
2. What did he begin to do in Corinth?

Meditation

By the time Paul left Corinth, the groundwork was laid for a healthy, growing church. Many had come to faith. Jews and Gentiles were worshipping together. Many small house churches had sprung up under the competent leadership of men like Crispus and Sosthenes.

Apollos came to Ephesus, where Paul had left Aquila and Priscilla to help with the church there (v. 19). Though deeply embedded in the Old Testament, his theology was not complete. So Aquila and Priscilla “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” Then they gave him a letter of recommendation and he passed over to Achaia, or southern Greece, ending up in Corinth (Acts 19.1).

Apollos was, except for his depth in the Word, the exact opposite of Paul. He was eloquent, vigorous in public debate (remember, Paul withdrew from that), and—since he was from Alexandria, the center of Hellenistic culture—undoubtedly steeped in classical culture. He must have been a Wow!

The believers in Corinth began to think of themselves as followers of Apollos. Not all, though. Some insisted Paul’s simplicity and plainness was to be preferred. Others, having tasted a teacher other than Paul, wondered about wasn’t there a guy named Cephas? Shouldn’t we find out about him? While others still simply said, “Well, Jesus is all I need.”

Through no fault of his own, Apollos became a lightning rod of schism, and with schism, a whole raft of other problems settled into the Church at Corinth. And it is these problems that occasioned Paul’s two epistles to this struggling church.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

Apollos had a lot going for him. Let’s look at the qualifications Luke lists:

1. Eloquent
2. Jewish

3. Born at Alexandria
4. Mighty in the Scriptures
5. Carefully instructed in the way of the Lord
6. Fervent in spirit
7. Spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord (Acts 18.24, 25).

His only knowledge defect was in understanding the Old Testament, and the good news up to the baptism of John (Acts 18.25). Nothing further.

But God provided gracious teachers to show him The Way of God more accurately (Acts 18.26). To which, I'm sure, he quickly acquiesced and altered his message to comply.

The little, tiny glitch I see here is that he turned around and "vigorously refuted the Jews publicly..." (Acts 18.28). Lacking the grace shown to him by Aquila and Priscilla. Our Bible mentor of old, Pat Hunter, used to say, "If you have the wit to say it, have the grace not to."

There is a beauty to be found in gentleness and quiet. Sure, we can no doubt refute all the crazies out there that don't make any sense; but the warmth of Jesus constrains us.

The fable told by Aesop says it best: The wind and the sun were arguing about who was the strongest. They agreed to see who could "strip the Traveler of his cloak." The wind howled and blew which only caused the man to hold his cloak tighter. Then the sun began to shine its rays upon the man and the warmth eventually caused him to willingly remove his cloak. The moral of the story? "Gentleness and kind persuasion win where force and bluster fail."

Just wondering if the lightning rod of schism which accompanied Apollos could have been avoided, at least within the church, had he been a bit more gracious in his manner?

"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption...be kind to one another, tenderhearted..." (Eph. 4.30, 32).

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Gal. 5.22, 23).

Knowing and sharing the Way, Truth, and Life is a gift of grace (Jn. 14.6).

Hearts are much more eager to hear when taken aside privately, than blasted publicly.

The sun will always win this battle. Eloquence notwithstanding.

For reflection

1. What does it mean to speak the truth in love (Eph 4.15)?
2. Why is love more important than vigor in sharing the Good News of Jesus?
3. How can you prepare yourself each day to speak the truth in love?

Those who do believe through grace, yet still need help. As long as they are in this world, there are remainders of unbelief, and something lacking in their faith to be perfected, and the work of faith to be fulfilled. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 18.24-28*

Pray Psalm 85.7-13.

Pray that God will continue to grow you and His Church in grace and knowledge of the Lord. Ask Him to show you areas of your own life where you need to improve in Christlikeness.

Sing Psalm 85.7-13.

(Lyons: *O Worship the King*)

LORD, show us Your love; restore us, we pray!
And help us to hear the words that You say.
Speak peace to Your people; in truth let us stand.
We fear You; let glory and grace fill our land.

In Jesus God's grace and truth are combined;
both goodness and peace in Him do we find.
Truth springs from the earth as He walks in our midst,
and righteousness flows from the heav'ns as a gift.

The LORD by His grace will give what is good;
our land will produce abundance of food.
And righteousness will go before the LORD's face,
and make of His footsteps a way in this place.

7 1 and 2 Corinthians

Pray Psalm 51.10-13.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.

Sing Psalm 51.10-13.

(Passion Chorale: *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*)

Create in me a clean heart, renew me from within!
Take not Your Spirit from me because of all my sin.
Salvation's joy restore, LORD, and keep me in Your hand;
thus shall I tell Your strong Word to sinners in the land.

Review Acts 18.1-18, 24-28; meditate on verses 9 and 10.

Preparation

1. How long was Paul in Corinth?
2. Why did he stay there so long?

Meditation

Paul spent a little more than 18 months in Corinth, doing the work which resulted in “many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized” (v. 8). A church took root; rather (as we shall see), a series of house churches, probably spread around the city, began to meet, worship, and learn what it means to be the Body of Christ. The several house churches were one church in Corinth, and for the time Paul was with them, everything seemed to go well.

But when Paul went to Ephesus, troubles began. He wrote 1 Corinthians to address certain issues, difficulties, and questions that were brought to him by visitors from Corinth. The tone of 1 Corinthians, with its focus on division, immaturity, immorality, neglect, and other matters, is stern and demanding. Paul expected better from these people he had served for a year and a half, and he let them know he was disappointed.

But like a loving shepherd, he also walked them through their difficulties, reminded them of the grace of God, pointed them toward the Lord's return, and urged them to stand firm in the faith.

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians for two reasons. First, he had told the Corinthians he would come to visit them, but he was unable to do so. They deserved an explanation. Second, he rejoiced in the Lord at how they had received his first epistle and took the occasion of 2 Corinthians to focus on their growth in the Lord and participation in the worldwide Body of Christ.

We'll be looking carefully at each of these beautiful epistles. Let's ask the Lord to speak as clearly and powerfully to us through Paul's words as he did to those first believers in Corinth.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

It is good for us to understand the man behind this mission to begin the churches in Corinth. This is a man with whom the Lord spoke, saying to him: “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent, for I AM

with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city” (Acts 18.9, 10).

Later in Acts 23.11 God said to him, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.” God was mindful of the hardships Paul had already faced, and would continue to face for his witness and faith. And He was ready to remind him of His Presence with him, to encourage him.

Paul was not trapped by his past—the past that was so full of hatred and cruelty toward the church. He felt God’s forgiveness and was able to move forward to do the good work God had prepared for him to do (Eph. 2.10). So much so, that he was able to say about himself, “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23.1).

Paul’s love for God, his love for others, and his courage to do the work to prove it, is a life and attitude to be imitated (1 Cor. 11.1). He was aware of the potential earthly consequences that might befall him, and yet he said, “And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20.22-24).

That attitude is the key to peace with God. Period.

When we stay always within the boundaries where God’s love can reach and bless us, waiting patiently for the eternal life that our Lord Jesus Christ in His mercy is going to give us (Jude 21 TLB), and serving Him in our Kingdom work, daily following Him, we have nothing to fear.

As we set out to learn and live the truths of 1 and 2 Corinthians, we know that we are filled with the same Holy Spirit that filled Paul; and we serve the same God. We are loved and cared for by the same Savior (Heb. 13.5, 8); and we are given the same work instructions that every believer in eternity past, present, and future has received—believing this promise, prompting us to finish our race with joy.

The eternal God is our refuge, and underneath us are His everlasting arms (Deut. 33.27).

For reflection

1. Later in our study, Paul will instruct us to “imitate” him. What do you see thus far in Paul that is worthy of imitation?
2. Paul was not trapped in his past. Why do we want to be free of our past as well? How can we do that?
3. It’s clear Paul cared about the Corinthians. How do you show the people in your Personal Mission Field that you care for them?

The Lord knows those that are his, yea, and those that shall be his; for it is by his work upon them that they become his.
Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Acts 18.7-11*

Pray Psalm 51.14-19.

Pray that God will move all His people to repent of the sins of complacency, self-centeredness, division, and more. Call on Him to cause His Spirit to stir within for revival, renewal, and a great worldwide awakening of faith in Jesus.

Paul in Corinth

Sing Psalm 51.14-19.

(Aughton: *He Leadeth Me*)

Deliver us, from guilt, O LORD, You Who have saved us by Your Word;
and let our tongues Your mercy bless, and sing of Your great righteousness!

Refrain v. 15, 18

LORD, open now our lips to raise to You sweet songs of joyous praise!

Thus let Your favor on us fall, and build and strengthen Zion's wall!

No sacrifice, no offering would You have us, Your people, bring;
but broken spirits, cleansed of lies, and pure hearts You will not despise.

Refrain

Now build Your Church, raise high the wall of those who on Your mercy call.

And take our lives and let them be sweet sacrifices, LORD, to Thee!

Refrain

Paul in Corinth

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. How did God work in preparation for Paul's arrival in Corinth?
2. How did the Lord encourage Paul in his work? How does He encourage you?
3. Why did an uproar break out against Paul and the Gospel? What do we learn from this situation?
4. How would you summarize the results of Paul's ministry in Corinth?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this part of our study of 1 and 2 Corinthians?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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