

PAUL IN CORINTH

Acts 18:1-23 / Early summer 51 A.D. – mid Sept. 52 A.D.

As we've followed Paul on his first, and now, his second missionary journey we've learned that the Apostle Paul is one tough man. Yell at him, threaten him, falsely accuse, beat him up, put him in prison, stone him to death; he just keeps coming. There was no quit in Paul. Tough people often have hard hearts. That could have been the case with Paul, but as we rejoin Paul on his second missionary journey, we're going to see another side of Paul; a heartwarming side which I believe was a work of the Holy Spirit conforming Paul to the likeness of Jesus.

Let's pick up our study in Acts 18:1.

18:1 Corinth was a prosperous city; it lay astride the trade route connecting Achaia in the south with Greece to the north. It also controlled shipping from the Ionian Sea to the west with shipping from the Aegean Sea to the east. For a longtime Corinth was a political, commercial, and naval rival of Athens. In 146 B.C., Corinth was leveled to the ground by the Romans for their part in a revolt. It was not until 44 B.C., a hundred years later, that the city was rebuilt by Julius Caesar. By the time Paul arrived in 51 A.D., Corinth was once again thriving.

18:2-3 In Judaism it was not considered proper for a rabbi like Paul to receive payment for his teaching. Many rabbis practiced a trade in addition to their study and teaching of the law. Paul was trained as a tentmaker, or, more accurately, a leather worker. His home province of Cilicia was known for a cloth called *cilicium* made from goats' hair. It was used for cloaks, curtains and other fabrics designed to give protection against moisture. It may have been their common trade that brought Paul, Aquila and Priscilla together. Whatever the case, they became lifelong friends and partners in the ministry.

Luke tells us Aquila and Priscilla were in Corinth because they had been driven out of the city of Rome by Emperor Claudius along with all the Jews living in the city. One Roman historian wrote that the Emperor Claudius did this because the Jews were "...in constant riots at the instigation of Chrestus." This probably refers to the opposition of unbelieving Jews to the preaching of the Gospel in their synagogues by believing Jews.

It seems Aquila and Priscilla were already believers at the time they met Paul.

18:4-5 Timothy and Silas had stayed behind in Berea (17:14). In that time, they went up and visited the church in Thessalonica. When they joined Paul in Corinth, Timothy brought news about the Thessalonian church: in spite of the fierce opposition at the beginning, they were thriving! Paul was elated and put quill to parchment, writing the first of two letters to the Thessalonian believers while he was in Corinth (1 Thess. 2:17-3:13).

The news the of the well-being of the Thessalonian believers comforted Paul who found himself once again embroiled in conflict in Corinth.

18:5-11 With God's protection Paul was finally able to stay in a city long enough to really disciple the new believers. In verses 12 through 17, Luke gives an example of God's protection of Paul.

18:12-17 Gallio refused to get involved in what he considered an inter-Jewish squabble. After driving Paul's accusers away, it appears that some of the gentile citizens caught Sosthenes and emboldened by Gallio's dismissal of the Jews, they beat Sosthenes in a display of anti-Semitism. Gallio's disinterest in Sosthenes' beating indicates an anti-Jewish sentiment existed in Corinth.

18:18-23 God protected Paul and Paul was faithful to preach the Gospel and to teach the Word. We don't know what prompted Paul to leave after 18 months. Before setting sail, Paul had his hair cut in the port city of Cenchreae. He had allowed it to grow long for the duration of a vow which he had undertaken. It is very possible this vow was with regard to God's promise given in verse 10. Cutting his hair concluded the vow and was probably an act of thanksgiving for God fulfilling His promise.

Aquila and Priscilla stayed in Ephesus; Paul, Silas and Timothy sailed on to Caesarea. From Caesarea we believe Paul “went up” to greet the church in Jerusalem and from there “went down” to Antioch, his home church. After time in Antioch, verse 23 indicates Paul went back on the road for his third missionary journey in the spring of 53 A.D.

In Paul we see a healthy balance between his toughness on one hand and his loving heart on the other. Paul understood that love must be the motivating factor in all our service for the Lord and to one another. Paul would eventually write two letters to the Corinthian church. Chapter 13 in 1 Corinthians is probably one of the most well-known passages of the Bible; it’s known as the love chapter. But 1 Corinthians 13 is part of a larger section of chapters 12 through 14 in which Paul is teaching on spiritual gifts. Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 13 is that whatever your gift, it is to be exercised in love for your church family. Your spiritual gift is not to be exercised to show off your spirituality or ability to do the supernatural such as speak or interpret tongues or heal. Your spiritual gift is not to be exercised out of cold duty only because you “ought to do it”. Your spiritual gift should be exercised out of a loving commitment and desire to be a blessing and to build up your brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Corinthians 13).

There is great joy and challenge in serving the church family with our spiritual gifts. There is another blessing that comes to those who love and spiritually build up others and that is comfort in times of discouragement. What encouraged Paul when he was embroiled in conflict in Corinth? Was it not the news that the Thessalonians were spiritually thriving?

...for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.

The fruit of our labors will be the comfort of our souls.

Voice of the Martyrs Needs for November: bath towels, wash cloths, disposable antiseptic wipes.

Pam Bueno Memorial, Saturday, November 19th, 11AM, Grace Church.