

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

Frank E. Allen

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CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

PAUL AT CORINTH

(Acts 18:1-17)

OUTLINE

Key verse - 28

A review of the paragraph.

The location of Corinth - an important city - full of vice - remember because of the church - Paul began alone - found fellow-tradesmen - encouraged by Silas and Timothy - left the synagogue - preached in the house of Justus - strengthened by a vision - ignored by Gallio.

1. A sign of consecration (3). Paul supported himself.
2. The testimony of a Christian home (2, 3). Aquila and Priscilla.
3. Christian energy stirs up opposition (5, 6).
4. Christian friends an aid to the Gospel messenger (5).
5. Strength from on High needed to face an opposing world (9, 10).
6. Different ways of viewing a wicked city (9, 10). Man's and God's view.
7. Christian workers deserve protection (12-17).
8. No message so important as the Gospel (5).
9. No community too wicked to be Christianized.

From Athens Paul went to Corinth. In the days of Paul it was the capital of Achaia. The peninsula which formed the southern part of Greece was at that time known as the province of Achaia. There was a rocky neck of land, about eight miles long and from three to seven wide, known as the Isthmus which connected Achaia with the continent. The city of Corinth was located near the southern portion of the Isthmus between the Aegean and the Atlantic. It had a harbor on each of these seas.

AN IMPORTANT CITY

Corinth was therefore an important city both as a fortress and as a commercial center. Most of the commerce passed through it from the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire. Ship owners preferred to transport their cargo across the narrow isthmus rather than make the dangerous voyage around Malea, the southern promontory of the Grecian peninsula.

Engineers had invented a device by which small vessels could be taken across the isthmus on rollers without unloading. Corinth occupied a place, in the early centuries, similar to the Panama canal today. Such a city naturally attracted men from all parts of the empire and became one of the wealthiest cities of the ancient world.

FULL OF VICE

As usual, riches drew with them luxury and vice. The very name of the city had become a proverb for immorality. The worship of the city was that of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Back of the city stood a rock rising almost perpendicularly to the height of more than a thousand feet. Along the one steep path men climbed to the wall which surrounded the citadel at the top. On the summit of the hill stood the beautiful temple of Aphrodite. To this goddess there ministered a thousand priestesses, who, though dressed in white robes were living lives which were unclean and black with sin, and ministered to the vice of all the city below. Later, when Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth, he reminded them of the terrible sins of the city, of which some of them had been guilty, but rejoiced with them that they had been washed, sanctified and justified **“in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God”** (I Corinthians 6:11).

CITIES DECAY, Christ REMAINS

With all the greatness of ancient Corinth it would be scarcely known today were it not for its connection with the apostle Paul and the church of Christ. Seven Doric columns, the remains of an ancient temple, and a few masses of Roman masonry, it is said, are all that are left of the great city where Paul preached. The great rock still throws its morning shadow over the bare site of the departed city, and in the evening back across the Isthmus, but there are none to climb its height to offer worship or to rejoice in its shelter. The fortress is deserted and the platform at its foot, which has been the site of a great city, has but a few scattered houses upon it. Aphrodite with her temples and her priestesses has long since disappeared, but the knowledge of Christ of whom Paul testified and the religion which he proclaimed has spread throughout the world and is still mighty to save every one that believeth.

BEGINNING ALONE

When Paul came to Corinth from Athens he was apparently alone. Silas and Timothy had not yet come from Macedonia. Therefore, Paul, as at Athens, had no human support when he first began to preach in that great wicked city. After a few weeks Silas and Timothy came to him and greatly encouraged and strengthened him in the work.

FELLOW TRADESMEN

Paul found a lodging with Aquilla and Priscilla, who, like him were tentmakers. They possibly were sympathetic with Paul because they too had been driven from the city where they had recently labored. Claudius Caesar had ordered all Jews out of Rome.

From a statement by the historian, Suetonius, it is believed that Claudius had banished all Jews because of disturbances which had arisen among them concerning Christ. It is probable that Aquilla and Priscilla were believers before they met Paul in Corinth. They were originally from Pontus, and they may have been at Pentecost, for it is distinctly stated that there were those from Pontus at Jerusalem during Pentecost. We know definitely that they were Christians after they became acquainted with Paul, that they continued to remain friends of the apostle and that they were earnest workers in the church of Christ. They became so well instructed while with Paul that, later, they were able to instruct Apollos who was a teacher at Ephesus.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Paul became more than usually earnest after the arrival of Silas and Timothy. As he thus testified that Jesus was the Christ the Jews began to oppose and blaspheme. Paul then **“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”** (Acts 18:6).

IN THE HOUSE OF JUSTUS

Then Paul began to preach in the house of Titus Justus who lived near the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, together with many of the Corinthians, believed and were baptized. God appeared to Paul in a vision and told him not to be afraid but to speak boldly for He would be with him. He remained at Corinth and taught the Word of God for a year and a half.

GALLIO

When Gallio had been appointed proconsul of the province the Jews attempted to take advantage of his nature and tried to condemn Paul. Gallio was a brother of the famous philosopher, Seneca, and seems to have been of a philosophical nature himself. When the Jews dragged Paul before the marble dais, upon which Gallio sat to exercise justice, the proconsul would have nothing to do with their disputes but drove them away. The Greeks then seized Sosthenes, their leader, and beat him before the judgment-seat, but Gallio made no effort to interfere. He was determined to let them fight it out among themselves. Perhaps he thought that a little touch of mob violence against the Jews would make them think more seriously before they attempted so to deal with others. Paul was apparently allowed to teach thereafter in Corinth in peace.

A SIGN OF CONSECRATION

One of the practical observations which is emphasized in the work of Paul, as recorded here and elsewhere, is his willingness to engage in his own trade in order to sustain himself while preaching the Gospel. He worked with Aquila and Priscilla at the trade of tentmaking. Paul, like his Master, was not too proud or too indolent to work. It is one of the signs of deep consecration on the part of the apostle. It would not be easier then than today for a man to work for a living while engaged in the preaching of the Gospel.

There is nothing of which to be ashamed in honest toil. Labor with the hands in a productive employment is just as honorable as work with the brain. The man who will, like Paul, turn his workshop into a Christian sanctuary or training school may win many men to follow Christ and train them in the doctrines of the Lord. The mother working in the home, the father in the field or shop, the girl at her machine or in her office, can each be a missionary in his or her daily duties. There is a vast work to be done by the carpenter, the mason, the mechanic and other tradesmen, not only in living according to the golden rule, but in speaking a good word for Jesus Christ.

A CHRISTIAN HOME

The home of Aquila and Priscilla was one which we delight to remember. They were not only hospitable but they were winsome Christians. They made a home for Paul in Corinth. They accompanied him when he went on to Ephesus, and after Paul had left Ephesus they remained and taught. They taught Apollos the way of God more accurately and, thus had a part in making that eloquent preacher the important Bible teacher that he after was. When they were in Rome at a later time they were still active Christians. From what Paul says about them laying down their necks for his sake we infer that they risked their lives to assist him.

In these days of so much domestic unhappiness we turn with refreshment to a worthy couple like Aquila and Priscilla. When men and women attempt to live together as husband and wife with a selfish aim and frivolous ideals they are apt to desire, ere long, to separate. It is not poverty, it is not hard work, that is the cause of domestic trouble and divorce. Aquila and Priscilla were poor; they worked hard, but they were happy together in the Lord's service. In their home we find the secret of domestic happiness and of profitable living. When we have Christ in our hearts we have comfort, and when we open the blessing of Christ to others we have joy. When men and women are encouraging one another to live the Christian life in the home, and when they are making known the love of Christ in their community they do not allow their minds to dwell on the petty things which breed trouble and result in domestic estrangement. By serving Christ we bring blessing into our homes as well as into our own individual lives.

ENERGY AND OPPOSITION

The more energetic the Gospel messenger the more quickly opposition arises. This was true in the case of Paul before he came to Corinth; it was also true there. When he became very earnest and testified that Jesus was the Christ they began to oppose him and blasphemed. Paul said to them, as we learn from the letter which he wrote to the Corinthians later, that **“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation”** (II Corinthians 5:19). The Jews, who had desired a king who was to place them first, did not like this universal application of the Gospel. The Greeks ridiculed the idea that one who had been crucified could bring salvation to them. Paul's message of the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. The more earnest he became in proclaiming the Gospel the more angry they became, and when argument would not silence him they determined to use force.

The Christian should not be discouraged or silenced because of opposition. As it was in Paul's day, so today when the Gospel is being felt in a community there will be opposition from the world. If we make no impression upon the world, it will not be concerned and the devil will let us alone. An evangelist of considerable experience once said to me, "you cannot do much in a community in an evangelistic campaign until you have aroused opposition." He did not mean that opposition was helpful, but that where the world was being attacked and its sins exposed there would be opposition. We do not have to face exactly the same opposing forces as did Calvin and Luther and Tyndale, but there are forces of organized evil which do not want to be disturbed today and which will strike back if opposed.

"The East India Trading Company tried to blacken the name of Adoniram Judson in India. The dishonest traders and corrupt politicians tried to ruin the name of Sheldon Jackson when he went with the Gospel into Alaska. The man of God remembers the great cloud of witnesses who have run with patience the Christian race and have come off victorious. He is led to turn again to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of their faith, and he likewise is encouraged to press forward until victory is his.

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS AN AID

Christian friends are a great aid to the Gospel messenger: "**And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ**" (Acts 18:5). When Silas and Timothy came to Paul they brought good news of the steadfastness of the Christians and of the enlargement of the church in the places where they had been. Paul was reminded that the Gospel which had been so violently opposed had not been preached in vain. He was encouraged to press forward even in corrupt Corinth.

We turn back to the Old Testament and think of the lion-like figure of Elijah who bravely faced four hundred false prophets alone. And we note, that courageous as he was, he became discouraged when he felt that he was alone in the midst of a degenerate world to testify for God. Though he had great faith he desired human support. It is always so; even Jesus, in His human nature, longed for human sympathy and prayer.

When He went into the Garden of Gethsemane He took with Him three of His closest and most trusted friends and asked them to watch and pray with Him. He was disappointed and His burden was made heavier because they did not watch and did not pray for Him in that awful testing hour.

Jesus knew how dependent one man is upon another, therefore He sent out His disciples two by two to preach the Gospel in a hostile world. We are apt to forget the importance of upholding the hands of one another. It is said of John Knox that he never feared the face of man, but we forget that he fled more than once from his own country because he feared for his life if he remained. It was perhaps the part of wisdom for him to flee. It is, however, an indication that there is fear in the heart of the bravest of men. We, therefore, need brotherly encouragement and human support.

STRENGTH FROM ON HIGH

We have spoken of the human side, but human help is not enough. Every man needs strength from on high to face an opposing world: **“Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city”** (Acts 18:9-10). Paul was encouraged by Silas and Timothy, but even with their support he began to weaken in his determination to continue to preach in that terribly wicked city, so the Lord spake to Paul in a vision and gave him His blessed **“Be not afraid.”** That alone was better than all human promises. Paul believed God. He continued to remain there and teach for a year and a half.

When the first party of the China Inland mission workers was preparing to sail many of their friends were very anxious. You will be forgotten, was the expression of some. With no committee to represent you at home you will be lost sight of in that distant land; claims are many nowadays. Before long you may find yourselves without the necessities of life. “I am taking my children with me,” was Hudson Taylor’s reply, “and I notice that it is not difficult for me to remember that the little ones need breakfast in the morning, dinner at midday and something before they go to bed at night. And I find it impossible to suppose that our Heavenly FATHER is less tender or mindful than I.”

Some years ago “in a great steamship disaster a father was seen carrying a sleeping six-year-old child in his arms to a life boat. The boy was awakened by the commotion and fear about him; he opened his eyes to look up into his father’s face and then snuggled a bit more closely into his father’s arms and closed his eyes again in sleep.” This which concerned him was to know that he was in the protecting arms of his father. When we are brought face to face with the storms of life, it is not the consternation and danger about us that matters, it is the assurance of the protecting arms of Almighty God about us that gives us peace.

MAN’S VIEW AND GOD’S VIEW

There are different ways of viewing a wicked city (Acts 18:9-10). As Paul saw Corinth it was full of wickedness of all kinds. Idolatry and vice abounded. Blasphemous opponents were organizing. Would it be possible to remain for any length of time to preach? Could any be saved from the midst of all that corruption?

God could see beneath the surface. At the very moment the opposition was organizing God told Paul that He had much people in the city. They were not on the Lord’s side at the moment, but they would soon profess to love the Lord. God knew His own and He could see them beneath all their corruption. It is encouraging today to know that when we go into a community, or when missionaries go out into a land of darkness and heathenism, God looks down in the midst of the wickedness that abounds and sees and knows His own.

With the assurance that there are many of God’s people in every city we can labor on with confidence.

CHRISTIAN WORKERS PROTECTED

Christian workers should be protected in their work.

“And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. 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: 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. And he drave them from the judgment seat. 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” (Acts 18:12-17)

When the Jews dragged Paul before the judgment seat of Gallio he drove them away. When the Greeks beat Sosthenes he simply winked at them and said nothing. This was an exception in the case of Paul. As a rule he was the one who suffered at the hands of the mob. Mob action should not be permitted in any case. When it is our enemies who suffer we should not be satisfied to let it pass with silent approval: **“Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth. Lest the Lord see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him”** (Proverbs 24:17-18).

Gallio had been appointed proconsul of Corinth which was at this time a Roman colony. He knew that the Emperor had driven the Jews from Rome and he had seemingly resolved that he would have nothing to do with their disputes. They could fight it out among themselves for all he cared. Gallio was right in that he would not put Paul to silence by force, but he was wrong in allowing Sosthenes to be beaten. Civil rulers should take measures to cause their subjects to keep the peace while men within their domains preach the Gospel or worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences. Civil rulers, said Paul as he wrote to the Romans, are the ministers of God for good, but he also adds: **“if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain”** (Romans 13:4). The ruler has not only the right, but the duty, to suppress and punish disturbers of the peace. Even if it costs the state something to do it, it ought to protect the Christian missionary and the Christian worshippers from every encroachment of wicked men.

THE GOSPEL FIRST

There is no message so important for any community as the Gospel of Christ (5). Paul testified that Jesus was the Christ. He said, when writing his first letter to the Christians at Corinth and recounting some of the facts concerning his work among them: **“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified”** (I Corinth. 2:2).

There are those who think that Paul decided to use a different method in Corinth than he had used in Athens. There is no sufficient proof for such an assertion. He adapted his message to the people in both instances.

He did not make a failure at Athens. He spoke there in a different and more hardened atmosphere. No doubt Paul learned by experience, as other men do, but there is nothing to indicate that Paul changed his ideals or that he failed to make Christ the center of his preaching wherever he went.

The Gospel of Christ is more important than any other message because it brings to men the most important appeal that man knows, namely, to accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and it offers to do more for them than any other proposition that any one can bring, to save them from eternal woe. The message of Christ is a message of good tidings of great joy. It has more of blessing and more of happiness than any other offer that has ever come to man. Jesus promises us that if we seek first the kingdom of God all the necessary things of the world shall be added. If you want a message that will bring about social, or economic, or civil reforms, bring to men the Gospel of Christ. It does more to introduce honesty, combat impurity, promote peace, encourage charity, counteract profanity, stabilize the family and safe-guard life than any other message which the world has ever known.

In an address before a ministerial association, of which I was then a member, I heard Dr. R.A. Torrey say that when he was a pastor in Minneapolis he had just come back from Germany. As that was then considered a very important asset for a minister he was asked to act on a great many boards and committees. He was on seven different committees and at the head of some of them. A great deal of his time was taken up with these various organizations and he had little time left for the study and the ministry of the Gospel.

One day as he sat in his office and looked at the different pigeon holes where papers and mail were kept for these different organizations, he asked himself, "What is your business?" He said, the answer came back, "To preach the Gospel." He sat down and wrote out seven resignations in order that he might give himself wholly to the preaching of the Gospel. He looked back on that as the best thing he ever did. Since that, he said, he had various offers to induce him to turn aside from the Gospel. Some years ago they tried to persuade him to run for the office of the senate in Illinois, and endeavored to show him that he could do more good in politics than he could in the ministry. He had an offer of \$100,000 to begin with, and more as time went on, if he would accept the presidency of a college.

Recently, he added, he was asked to serve on the board of a four million dollar corporation that was being organized in California. In determining to decline these offers he didn't take two minutes to decide. He wouldn't take millions of dollars for the thousands of souls whom God had enabled him to win for Christ during his ministry, and all the gold in the world would not bring the happiness that that has brought to him. There is nothing, he urged, that can equal the service of God in the Christian ministry.

Paul could have had all the earthly honors that it was in the power of the Jewish nation to heap upon him, but he determined "**not to know anything . . . save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.**" He did not regret his choice in after life, and as he sits at the right hand of God in glory do you suppose he regrets it today?

Paul said, when writing to the church where he had been only a short time before this and where he had suffered beating and imprisonment: **“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”** (Philippians 1:21). Human imagination cannot anticipate, much less describe, the glory that is Paul’s today, because he determined not to know anything but Christ while on the earth.

NO CITY TOO HARD

There is no community too wicked to be Christianized. It is difficult to imagine a place where Paul might have gone where luxury and vice would have been worse. The luxury of a rich eastern city rendered conditions bad enough, but when this was schooled in the lap of the lustful Aphrodite it was unspeakable.

Paul did not stop to philosophize over questions which he could not answer, he had faith in One who was equal to the greatest tasks. He had faith that would remove mountains, for everywhere that he went there were mountains of difficulty in the way. He knew that in a great commercial city where he had been not long before, when they were attempting to mob him they accused him of having turned the world upside down. So he had evidence that even great, wicked, rich, vile Corinth might be turned upside down by the Gospel. Nothing was too hard for God. He would preach with all his might and trust to God to turn the hearts of men as rivers of water.

Sosthenes, who was the chief ruler of the synagogue, was an opponent of the Gospel for a time while Paul was in Corinth, and yet when Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians Sosthenes joined in the salutation as a brother in Christ. It is possible that this is not the same man, but it is likely that it refers to the same person. He was likely named in this passage so that men may know, when he is named again, the power of Christ to change the most bitter opponents.

A missionary was once asked to give proof that the Cross of Christ would eventually triumph. This is what he said: “When I arrived at the Fifi group, my first duty was to bury the hands, arms, feet, and heads of eighty victims whose bodies had been roasted and eaten in a cannibal feast. I lived to see those very cannibals who had taken part in that inhuman devilish feast gather about the Lord’s Table.”

According to a prominent Christian worker in the following facts testify to the power of the Gospel in China. A Buddhist temple in Yunnan was handed over to the Christians who ground the idols therein to powder to make brick for patching the walls. The temple is now a Y.M.C.A building. In Foochow the walls of the American Board hospital are constructed of mortar made from grinding up the idols of a former Buddhist temple. In Tai-yuan-fu in Shansi, the Y.M.C.A. secretary lives in a deserted Buddhist temple. The American Board has several village schools supported by endowments formerly used for the upkeep of Buddhist temples. In the province of Pechili four thousand public schools have been established, mostly in former Buddhist temples. In one city the idols were thrown into the river while the people lined the bank cheering as their gods floated seaward (Record of Christian Work).

The memorial tablet erected in remembrance of Dr. Geddie in Aneitus, in the New Hebrides, has this inscription: “When he landed, in 1848, there were no Christians here. When he left in 1872 there were no heathen.”

When we think of the places where Paul preached and the difficulties he had to overcome; when we think of the difficulties that missionaries in foreign lands and in the slums of our great cities have had to overcome, and by God's grace have overcome, shall we dare to say that anything is too hard for God? In one of the Messianic Psalms we have the assurance of the Psalmist:

**“All the ends of the world shall
remember and turn unto the Lord:
and all the kindreds of the
nations shall worship before thee.”**

(Psalm 22:27)

QUESTIONS (Acts 18:1-17)

1. Where was Corinth located?
2. Why was it an important city?
3. Why was it so full of vice?
4. Why is Corinth remembered today?
5. What did Aquila and Priscilla do for Paul?
6. What did Paul do for them?
7. How did the arrival of Silas and Timothy affect Paul?
8. Who opened his house as a place of preaching?
9. Who was Gallio?
10. How did he look upon the dispute about Paul?
11. What effect does Christian energy have upon wicked men?
12. How did God encourage Paul?
13. How does He encourage us?
14. How does God's view of a wicked city differ from man's?
15. What is the most important message given to men?
16. Is any community too wicked to be reached with the Gospel?
17. Does the state have any duty in protecting Christian workers?
18. Did Paul change his method as he went from Athens to Corinth?
19. Show how the Gospel has changed some heathen communities?
20. Of what value is faith to a minister or missionary?

~ end of chapter 32 ~

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