

## ***The Church of the Servant King***

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### ***Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts***

(SB\_Acts 18A\_Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> Journey – Continued - Corinth)

#### **Paul Ministers in Corinth (18:1-17)**

##### *The Whereabouts of Paul's Party*

Based upon Luke's narrative in Acts 18, we get the impression that Silas and Timothy never joined Paul in Athens, but caught up with Paul when he arrived in Corinth. However, Paul's epistles fill in the blanks for us.

Silas and Timothy had rejoined Paul in Athens (1 Thess 3:1), but before Paul left Athens, he sent Timothy to Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:2) and Silas to an undisclosed location in Macedonia (Acts 18:5). It is possible that Silas had been sent by Paul to Philippi (cf. Phil 4:16) to encourage the believers in that city while Timothy was sent to Thessalonica. Regardless, Paul entered Corinth without these men, but they later joined him in Corinth (1 Thess 3:6).

Paul makes reference to his approach and state of mind and soul when he entered Corinth in his letter to the Corinthians which was written from Ephesus. Paul stayed in Ephesus for three years on his third missionary journey and he wrote 1 Corinthians sometime during the spring of A.D. 56, the third year of his stay there. (Second Corinthians was written shortly thereafter in the Fall of A.D. 56).

And when I came to you brethren, I did not come to you with superiority of speech or of wisdom proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom [*human strength*], but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power [*the divine power sphere*], so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. (1 Cor 2:1-5)

His acknowledged weakness, fear, and much trembling may have been due to several factors: (1) He came alone. (2) The difficulties he had faced since coming to Macedonia may have filled him with apprehension as to what would happen in Corinth (cf. Acts 18:9-10). (3) Even in a world hardened to profligacy (promiscuity, immorality), Corinth held a reputation for its sexual license. The fact that Paul came to Corinth alone *may* account for his having baptized some people in that city, a practice he normally delegated to others (cf. 1 Cor. 1:14-17).<sup>1</sup>

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. (1 Cor 1:14-17)

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983, 1985), 405.

The fact that Paul, a spiritually mature believer, admits to having arrived in Corinth “in weakness and in fear and in much trembling” is a fact that is often overlooked and seldom reconciled with Paul’s teaching elsewhere regarding the attitudes and the power sphere in which the believer is to reside (e.g. Eph 6:10-20; Phil 4:11-13 cf. 2 Cor 7:5-7). The night before our Lord’s crucifixion was one of agony to the point that Jesus sweated drops of blood (Matt 26:38; Mk 14:34; Lu 22:44).

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. (Eph 6:10-20)

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Phil 4:11-13)

For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless, God, who comforts the downcast comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more. (2 Cor 7:5-7)

Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.” (Matt 26:38)

And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Lk 22:44)

Some of the teaching on this point seems to leave the impression that if the believer struggles in the spiritual battle, he or she is a failure. This notion or perception couldn’t be further from the truth. It ignores the fact that the yielded believer must constantly battle the temptation to let fear, anxiety, and doubt (regarding decisions consistent with the spiritual life) become a modus Vivendi (a method or pattern of living) vs. temptation that is integral to the battle. Why do you think Scripture refers to this present life as a spiritual war?

We know that Jesus is our perfect Redeemer, Savior and example having never sinned. If we are honest with Scripture, we cannot dismiss such passages, but we must give due consideration to them in whatever Scriptural model we construct of the spiritual life. Is it possible to experience agony and not sin? Is it possible that the mature, spiritual believer can experience “weakness,” “fear,” and “trembling” and not sin – or even be a mature spiritual believer at all?

I cannot accept an answer that says that Jesus’ “agony” the night before His crucifixion was due to His disciples’ lack of understanding or the rejection by the Jewish nation. Certainly, those were factors in the broader sense, but to rely upon them exclusively as the explanation seems to ignore the true humanity of Jesus. Jesus was tempted like we are in all respects, yet without sin (Heb 4:15).

I do not believe that Paul had failed to rest in faith (i.e. faith-rest) when he arrived in Corinth in fear and much trembling. Rather, I think in both cases (Jesus and Paul), we see men

in their humanity facing incredible opposition and at a minimum, the potential for significant physical abuse. No one (not even the most mature spiritual believer who is trusting God the Father and who understands His plan and purpose for his life) would approach stoning, physical lashing, beating, verbal assaults, and torture without angst regarding the physical pain – much less in some light-hearted, frivolous manner. Even so, in such circumstances, the believer can be stabilized mentally and calmed in the soul by the assurance of his eternal destiny and in his knowledge of truth so that he thinks objectively and rationally. Unlike the unbeliever, he faces such circumstances knowing that his life has purpose, meaning and that his eternal destiny is secure. That understanding alone is enough to allow him to face physical suffering and death with courage – not oblivious to the pain, but courageous through it confident of what awaits him. This understanding makes me appreciate Paul and Jesus even more. I can relate to that model of the spiritual human – not a model that is so idealistic that it doesn't allow for Paul's and Jesus' real, human experience.

*Observation:* The believer can experience “fear,” “trembling,” and “weakness” as did Paul.

*Observation:* One believer can experience these emotions and not sin and another believer can experience these emotions and sin.

*Interpretation:* These emotions are temptations.

*Principle:* The believer who does not battle spiritually through the pain of these emotions will succumb to them as a pattern of thought and thereby sin.

*Principle:* The believer who battles spiritually through the pain of these emotions and overcomes them through the application of doctrinal rationales from Scripture is not sinning.

*Application:* We must distinguish between sin as a pattern of thought and sin as a singular action. The battle in the soul can only be won by adopting the correct thinking patterns based upon Scriptural principles and doctrines. The actions or activities of our lives (speech, deeds, etc.) manifest our thinking patterns. The believer can become “stressed-out” when there is: 1) no applicable Truth ready to apply; 2) not enough time to develop a doctrinal rationale between temptations; or 3) a combination of 1 and 2.

In order to appreciate our spiritual heritage and the depth of Scripture, we must understand the humanity of Jesus and Paul and others. Without this understanding and appreciation, we will always consider spiritual maturity to be something God intended for others, but certainly not us with all of our weaknesses. Yet, your weakness is just what God wants.

#### *Some Things to Note Regarding Corinth*

The difference between Athens and Corinth was dramatic. Athens, as we have seen, was a very intellectual city where philosophical debate carried over from the meeting places of the academics into the marketplace. On the other hand, Corinth was about 20 times larger than Athens at this time and had a population in excess of 200,000. Corinth was so infamous for its immoral culture that in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. the term *korinthiazesthai* (to Corinthianize) had been coined as a term that referred to anyone who practiced sexual immorality.

The city of Corinth was important politically and strategically. Politically, Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia and was a Roman colony. Corinth was strategically located about 50 miles southwest of Athens. The southern tip of Achaia is known as the Peloponnesus. A land bridge between northern Achaia and the Peloponnesus was located very near Corinth, so the trade route from north to south passed through Corinth. Commercial traffic also passed from east to west through Corinth since Corinth had two seaports - Lechaem two miles to the west on the Gulf of Corinth which opened to the Adriatic Sea, and Cencrea, seven

miles to the southeast which brought trade from the Aegean Sea. Since Corinth was located near this narrow land bridge or isthmus, stevedores would haul smaller ships overland using wooden rollers so they could avoid the treacherous Cape Malea at the tip of the Peloponnesus.

As anyone knows who has been in or around a port city that has a high volume of commercial traffic, the situation is fertile ground for all types of immoral activity. Corinth was no exception and the religious establishment encouraged and fed on the licentious and lascivious bent of its highly transient population. There were temples to various gods in Corinth including a temple to Melkart (the god of sailors), to Apollo (the god of music and poetry), and to Asclepius, the god of healing. However, the most prominent and popular temple was the temple to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love.

The temple of Aphrodite housed about 1,000 temple prostitutes who could service the sexual needs of sailors and transients – all in the name and under the legitimate auspices of “religion.” The temple was located atop a 1,857 foot hill or small flat-top mountain and was one of the most prominent structures in the city. It is no small wonder that Paul had to deal with so many problems in the Corinthian church.

#### *The Historical Backdrop for Aquilla and Priscilla (18:2)*

The expulsion order of the emperor Cladius (reigned from A.D. 41-54) probably occurred in A.D. 49-50 since the Roman writer Suetonius makes reference to it as having occurred during this period.<sup>2</sup> This date fits well with the chronology of Luke’s narrative.

It was commonly supposed that Suetonius was referring to riots in the Jewish community over the preaching of Christ, but that he has misspelled the name [as Crestus] and has perhaps erroneously thought that Christ was actually a rebel leader in Rome (Suetonius was born in A.D. 69, and wrote considerably after the event).<sup>3</sup>

#### *A Few Notes About Aquilla and Priscilla*

Luke notes that Aquilla was from Pontus. Pontus was located in northern present day Turkey. It was a Roman province that lay east of Bithynia on the Black Sea coast. In our passage, Aquilla is mentioned first. Normally, when this couple is mentioned, it is Priscilla who is mentioned first (e.g. Acts 18:18-19, 26; Rom 16:3; 2 Tim 4:19). Some have speculated that the reason for this may be due to Priscilla having been regarded as the more prominent of the two for some reason, e.g. higher social background, more prominent personality, etc. We don’t really know, but it is an interesting and unusual pattern to observe. Priscilla is also referred to by another name in Scripture. She is called by her more formal name, Prisca on several occasions (Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19).

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<sup>2</sup> F.F. Bruce, "Chronological Questions in the Acts of the Apostles" in *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 68:2 (Spring 1986): 280-282 quoted in Thomas Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts" at [www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com)

<sup>3</sup> Suetonius, "Claudius," XXV, *Twelve Caesars*, cited by Homer A. Kent, *Jerusalem to Rome*, New Testament Studies series, Brethren Missionary Herald, 1972; reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House and BMH Books, 1985), 141-142 cited by Thomas Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts" at [www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com) See also similar cites and information in Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 405. Suetonius (A.D. 69-140) was a biographer of Roman emperors and the fact that he lived so long after Jesus’ life and public ministry may have accounted for the reference to a “Chrestus” in place of “Christ.”

Aquila and Priscilla made tents for a living in Corinth and as a Rabbi, Paul had been required to learn a skill or trade in addition to the study of the Hebrew Scriptures. Actually, tent making was a common practice or trade in his home province of Cilicia; therefore, it is likely that Paul's "secular" skill set was the basis for his initial introduction to this couple. Actually, tent makers repaired all kinds of goods, not just tents. We find references to Paul's efforts to support himself financially in several passages (Acts 20:34; 1 Cor 4:12; 9:1-18; 2 Cor 11:9; 1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:7-10).

Personal Note: While not a requirement, I believe it is a very good thing for a man who is to be a pastor to have learned a "secular" trade and to have had to work in the marketplace for a while prior to devoting himself exclusively to the ministry. There are certainly great exceptions to this pattern; however, I find that until a man has faced the world (the cosmos) in the marketplace as have his congregants, he will inevitably lack very practical experience that serves to temper naiveté or in certain cases, arrogance.

#### *Paul's Experience in the Synagogue & Corinth (18:4-17)*

As was Paul's custom, he spoke in the synagogue every Sabbath to both Jews and Gentiles since the synagogue would have afforded Paul an immediate audience of people who were already familiar with Hebrew Scripture – a knowledge base that he could leverage. Paul always experienced some positive response to his preaching as well as some very strong opposition when he spoke in the synagogue. We don't know how long Paul was alone in Corinth, but it must have been for some period of weeks since Luke uses the phrase "every Sabbath" in verse 4. Also, since Paul had to support himself with a "secular" job of making tents, he evidently had no other source of financial support during this time – at least until Silas and Timothy arrived.

Luke notes in verse 5 that when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was "compelled by the Spirit" to proclaim or testify that Jesus was the Messiah or Christ. Of course, Paul immediately experienced opposition from the Jews to this message and one is forced to wonder exactly what Paul had been proclaiming in the synagogue since he evidently had experienced no such opposition up to that point (v. 4).

It is my opinion that until Silas and Timothy arrived, Paul reasoned from the Scriptures that the Messiah (without naming Jesus) would have to suffer and die first and then experience resurrection and ascension before He could return to establish His kingdom. Paul could have used this approach without making the connection to Jesus in order to: 1) dispel false notions or paradigms held by many that the Messiah would establish the kingdom and overthrow the Roman empire when He came the first time; and 2) establish credibility for his later claim that Jesus was the Messiah Who fulfilled all Scripture concerning the Messiah.

The arrival of Silas and Timothy would have no doubt encouraged Paul. First, they evidently brought financial aid from Macedonia (2 Cor 11:9; Phil 4:15) which would have allowed Paul to devote himself exclusively to the ministry. They also brought good news about the steadfastness of the church at Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:6-8) even though there were still some problems (1 Thess 2:3-6; 4:13-5:11). Finally, their companionship and support would have been an encouragement to Paul.<sup>4</sup> (Paul wrote 1 & 2 Thessalonians during his stay in Corinth in the early A.D. 50's since he was in Corinth for 18 months – verse 11).

So, when Silas and Timothy arrived, Paul had the appropriate support structure in place to assist him to deal with the opposition. The timing was right to now equate the "Messiah" prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures with the fact that Jesus was that Messiah or Christ – a fact that is highlighted by a more literal translation the phrase in verse 5 – "testified to the Jews Jesus the Christ."

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<sup>4</sup> Toussaint, "Acts" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 405.

The response of the “religious” Jews was similar to what Paul had faced in Philippi, Thessalonica and Athens. No man could face the continual opposition to a new message that Paul faced over the course of a period of years including three missionary journeys without having received some confirmation from God that he was on the right path. This is one of the reasons why Paul was the recipient of direct revelation and instruction and encouragement from the Lord as we see in verses 9-10. Of course, there are other reasons for these phenomena in Paul's life on numerous occasions and there are reasons why these phenomena are no longer valid today.

My point is to highlight what this passage reveals about the humanity of Paul so that we see him for who he really was – not some idealized figure who did not have the same apprehensions, doubts or concerns we might have. I have more admiration for a man who faces these things as I do, but who presses on through the spiritual struggle and battles. Such a believer demonstrates a courage and strength with which I can identify and to which I can aspire as I yield to the Spirit's ministry in my life, trust in Him for my every need and thereby tap into the omnipotent power of God. Apart from yieldedness to Him, I can do nothing for reliance upon my own strength and resolve alone is a position of weakness where my doubts, concerns and apprehensions paralyze and neutralize me spiritually.


We have already discussed whether apprehension, doubt, or concern is a sin. Yes, when the believer allows these temptations to provide direction to his or her decisions. No, if they are temptations which take a brief period of time for the believer to resolve through reaching doctrinal conclusions and application in his/her life as the faith/rest process is followed. The mature spiritual believer is a real human who demonstrates courage through the struggles.

Paul knew that he had fulfilled his responsibility to deliver the Gospel to the Jews and by doing so, they were without excuse (cf. Ezek 33:1-9). As he had done before and as he would do again, Paul turned his attention to the Gentiles (13:7-11, 46; 14:2-6; 17:5; 19:8-9; 28:23-28).

The name Titius Justus (v. 7) is a Roman name and he was probably one of the God-fearers who had met Paul in the synagogue. The names Titius Justus are given and family names and he may have been the person referred to by Paul as Gaius, a first name, elsewhere (Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14).

Crispus (v. 8), the ruler of the synagogue who became a believer was probably succeeded in that position by Sosthenes (v. 17), thus offering an explanation for the reference to two different rulers of the synagogue in Corinth. In spite of the opposition Paul faced, many Corinthians became believers (v. 8) and God in His omniscience knew that even more would believe (vv. 9-10). This vision would dispel any doubts or fears that Paul may have had and was a phenomenon that Paul experienced on several occasions when facing opposition and danger (cf. 23:11; 27:23-24).

The year and a half (v. 11) that Paul stayed in Corinth probably corresponds to a period of the Fall of A.D. 50 to the Spring of A.D. 52. The church that Paul planted there consisted of a various strata of society and culture, but mostly consisted of the “nobodies” of society (Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:4-8, 26-29; 7:18; 12:13). These “nobodies” of the world were certainly not “nobodies” to God (vv. 9-10).

*An interesting observation:* The Greek word used for “people” in verse 10 is  (laos) and it is often a reference to God's people Israel. Here, of course, it is a reference to believers of the new mystery age that consisted largely of Gentiles (in Corinth specifically in the context of this passage).

*An important interpretation:* Luke's use of this Greek word has caused some to see this as an indication of (or at least related to) the fact that the mystery age of the Body of Christ was intercalated and has resulted in the temporary setting aside of Israel (cf. Rom 11:11-21).<sup>5</sup>

Based upon an inscription found at Delphi in central Greece, we are able to date the beginning of Gallio's term to be July 1, A.D. 51.<sup>6</sup>

A proconsul was the governor of a Roman province, and his legal decisions set precedent for the other proconsuls throughout the empire. Consequently Gallio's decision in Paul's case affected the treatment that Christians would receive throughout the Roman world. This was the first time that Paul (or any other apostle as far as we know) stood trial before a Roman provincial governor.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, Gallio was the brother of the stoic philosopher, Seneca, who was Nero's tutor. Evidently, per the testimony of Seneca, Gallio had an extremely pleasant personality – especially for a Roman government official.<sup>8</sup> This is certainly consistent with his fair-minded approach to dealing with this situation as documented by Luke here in Acts 18:12ff. Perhaps Gallio had learned not to get involved in such matters involving the Jews based upon Pilate's experience with Jesus. At any rate, this episode demonstrates that the Gospel as taught by Paul was still being considered by Rome to be a sect within Judaism.

The "judgment seat" (βῆμα or *Bema* in the Greek) was a large, raised platform that stood in the Agora or marketplace and was placed in front of the residence of the proconsul in Corinth. (Pilate pronounced Jesus' fate from a similar "judgment seat" or βῆμα as documented in Matthew 27:19). This is the same Greek word that Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 5:10 to describe the judgment to be faced by believers of the present dispensation. Paul obviously drew from imagery that was familiar to his readers to describe the judgment seat of Christ.

The charge leveled against Paul in Corinth was the same charge that Paul had faced from the Philippian and Thessalonian Jews (16:21; 17:6-7, 13). However, as a proconsul, Gallio's decisions carried far more weight and affect upon precedence than the local magistrates in these earlier cities. The religious opposition in Corinth was hoping to twist Paul's proclamation that Jesus was the Messiah into something anti-Roman thus eliciting governmental sanction for their actions against Paul. Gallio would have nothing of it. Bringing Paul before the *Bema* seat of the proconsul was a very significant event in the history of early Christianity. If Gallio had ruled against Paul, then it would have set a precedent that Christianity was illegal and allowed for persecution against Christians to crescendo. Paul didn't even have to open his mouth in his own defense on this occasion for God had allowed Gallio to be placed in a position of authority and God knew that Gallio would make a decision that preserved freedom.

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<sup>5</sup> See Toussaint, "Acts" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 407 as one example.

<sup>6</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts – New International Commentary on the New Testament Series*, reprint edition, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 374 cited by Thomas Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts," [www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com)

<sup>7</sup> See Thomas Constable, *Notes on the Book of Acts*, [www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com)

<sup>8</sup> Toussaint, "Acts" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 407 and Thomas Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts," [www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com) See also Earl D. Radmacher, gen editor, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1854.

Gallio's decision resulted in the official toleration of Christianity that continued in the empire until A.D. 64 when Nero blamed the Christians for burning Rome. It may have encouraged Paul to appeal to Caesar when he felt the Jews in Palestine were influencing the Palestinian Roman officials against him too much (25:11).<sup>9</sup>

Evidently, Sosthenes had either succeeded Crispus as the ruler of the synagogue or he was a co-ruler with Crispus. Either way, he eventually became a believer since Paul mentions him as his amanuensis in 1 Corinthians 1:1. We might say that Sosthenes was beaten into the kingdom. Gallio chose to remain removed from these disruptions to the peace – probably because he hoped to discourage the Jews from bothering him with such theological issues again.

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<sup>9</sup> Constable, "Notes on Acts."