



Acts of the Apostles: Acts 18
Lesson 30 by Faber McMullen, Union
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Releasing the Outcome to God -
Trusting His Plan for Your Life

I want to start off by saying Chapter 18 is difficult to pin to one overall topic for this sermon. If there is a main idea it is that when we are walking in the Spirit we release the outcome to God, trusting that He has a plan for our lives. Much of the Christian life is just to “keep on keeping on”.

Last week we left Paul in Athens. There he spoke of the glories and the majesty of the “unknown God” that the Athenians had been worshipping. He introduced them to Yahweh, the God who is, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He explained how in the fullness of time, this one true God came in the likeness of men and humbled Himself to go to the cross for each one of us, and on the third day He rose from the dead. When they heard of the resurrection, they scoffed at Paul, and they mocked him. Paul was just ready to get out of Athens and the text tells of his departure. Begin with me now at Acts 18, verse 1.

“After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. ⁴ Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.” (Acts 18:1-4, NIV).

About Corinth – A Place of Sin & Sensuality



Corinth was the opposite of Athens. It was a big party town, known for its sexual deviancy. A common insult in that day was to call someone a “Corinthian.” To say someone lived like a Corinthian was to say that they were all about pleasure, perversion, and sensual living. When Sandy and I visited Corinth a couple of years ago, the museum in Corinth was shockingly full of models of sexual organs made out of stone and clay that were used in the practice of sex cults for worship, and experts surmise that perhaps they were also used in seeking healings for sexual maladies etc. This was a place devoted to sensuality. It was a place built upon feelings. When we visited, we climbed to the top of ancient Corinth where there were ruins of the temple of Aphrodite that had housed 1,000 temple prostitutes. It should be no surprise to any of us that God purposely sent Paul & Silas into such a place of darkness. Paul

was always willing to go exactly where God told him to go. And when he didn't have a clear direction, he just kept moving to the next logical place to spread the gospel.

Light is Always Present in Darkness

God sent Paul specifically there, and he ended up staying there for more than 18 months. It is a comfort to me to know that the darker the world gets, the brighter the gospel will shine. Scripture tells us *"²⁰... But where sin abounds, grace abounds much more," (Romans 5:20b, my paraphrase).* Wherever sin sinks the lowest, there is often some powerful work of the Holy Spirit that occurs. I've just finished a two volume book on miracles, and miracles are almost always present in places of great spiritual darkness. It should comfort us to know that as we see our society become more and more evil we can count on God's grace to shine brighter and brighter. God's goodness intensifies in the face of such horrific evil. As evil abounds in America, I believe we will see the powerful hand of God at work.

Extra-Biblical Evidence of Jesus & the Concept of Tent Making

The Roman historian, Suetonius, tells us that the Emperor Claudius had expelled all the Jews from Rome sometime around 49AD due to great disputes among the Jews concerning someone named "Chresto." I believe that this is an extra-biblical reference to Jesus. When Paul reached Corinth he met a couple name Priscilla and Aquilla who were Jewish believers. They had been expelled from Rome and ended up in Corinth. They are mentioned six times in scripture, sometimes as Priscilla and Aquilla and sometimes as Aquilla and Priscilla. They were a godly couple who shared much in common with Paul. They were Jewish and they were also tent makers. A quick look at this couple shows us how God can use couples in ministry together. This pair were "tent makers" and they gave Paul a place to live and work. Paul was willing to work with his own hands to support the call of God upon his heart, and here in Corinth we see him doing just that. Each of us is called to do things in our walk with Christ. Be open to God making the way for those things to be supported by the very gifts and talents He has given you.

Ideal Look at a Couple in Ministry

God worked gloriously THROUGH this couple. One of things Satan loves to do is to get a couple to focus on what's going on **between** them instead of focusing on what needs to be done **through** them. Bickering, infighting, and tension are often the norm between couples, and nothing spiritually positive can happen through many couples because of the problems going on between them. Priscilla and Aquilla had the pattern down right because God used them and worked through them mightily.

Being a Companion & Aid to Others in Ministry

The Bible speaks of Priscilla and Aquilla's ministry to Paul, and not Paul's ministry to them. That is really super interesting. They befriended Paul, they gave him work, and they gave him a place to stay. They were there to support all of the ministry of Paul. This support that they gave reminds me of how God uses some of you to encourage us as we minister to this congregation. You are a support to us in companionship, and you strengthen and encourage us in how to better serve the congregation at Union Grove. Our fruit here is YOUR fruit. Be a Priscilla and Aquilla to someone in ministry! They eventually moved back to Rome and Paul wrote the church in Rome saying,

³ Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. ⁴ They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. ⁵ Greet also the church that meets at their house. (Romans 16:3-5a, NIV). Let's continue with verse 5 in our text.

⁵ When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁶ But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." (Acts 18:5-6, NIV).

Limits of our Duty in Sharing the Gospel

Here we see Silas and Timothy coming from Philippi and they brought an offering with them. Paul was now able to set aside his "tent making" and he was able to focus totally on sharing the gospel. The text tells us that the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive. Then we see that Paul shook out his garment. It was a way of telling them "I'm done with you!" He is telling them that their rejection of the gospel had reached the point where Paul is done sharing the gospel with them. It is important for us to realize that our duty is to share the gospel. It is not our duty to see that all respond positively to the gospel. It is our responsibility to give our testimony faithfully, and to invite others to accept Jesus. There is a point at which our further sharing becomes unfruitful or even harmful. At that point our main work is to be faithful in praying for the lost.¹ Let's pick up now at verse 7.

⁷ Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. ⁸ Crispus, the synagogue leader (caretaker of the synagogue)², and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized. (Acts 18:7-8, NIV).

Promises of God Concerning God's Presence Our Lives

Every time Paul has fruit in his ministry, the persecution starts. I am sure it caused him to be filled with fear, and he faced the temptation to just be quiet. God knew this was going to happen and He spoke to Paul in a vision. Look at verse 9.

⁹ One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ **For I am with you**, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." ¹¹ So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God. (Acts 18:9-11, NIV).

I think that if this chapter is in the Bible for no other reason, it is to remind us that when we are faced with doubt, uncertainty, and fear, God says to us, "I am with you." God is with us in our struggles. He is with YOU in your struggles. He is with ME in my struggles. He has promised to never leave us or forsake us (see Hebrews 13:5 and Deuteronomy 31:6). Keep talking. Keep going about your business. Keep on ministering, even though fear might come up. We know we have struggles and we know we have hardships, but if we can just know that He is there, it is usually all that we need. And the beautiful thing is that in faith you and I CAN

¹ Matthew 7:6 "don't throw your pearls before swine"

² Parenthetical added for clarification of his role in the synagogue.

KNOW THIS. You can trust that He is there. Paul will write this same Corinthian church later, as seen in the verses below.

Explanation of Suffering in Our Lives

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. ⁵ For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. ⁶ If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. ⁷ And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort. (2 Corinthians 1:3-7, NIV).

If you've ever wondered why you go through some of the stuff you do, here's the answer. He has comforted you so that you can comfort others. He didn't comfort us just to give you and me a life of smooth sailing. Some of you were raised in great affliction and difficulty. Everyone in this room has a story. The difficulties of your life could be a life-saver for someone else. The comfort you received from the Lord is able to be extended to others with sympathy and empathy. And because of the hardships that we each have endured and the comfort that we have found in the Lord, we can comfort others in their Christian walk. Think on the marvelous ways God has ministered to you in your affliction and share that comfort with others. Let's now turn to verse 12.

¹² While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment. ¹³ "This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law." (Acts 18:12-13, NIV).

These Jews were telling Gallio a big lie. By the text we can easily see that Gallio saw through what was going on.

¹⁴ Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to them, "If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. ¹⁵ But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things." ¹⁶ So he drove them off. ¹⁷ Then the crowd there turned on Sosthenes the synagogue leader and beat him in front of the proconsul; and Gallio showed no concern whatever. (Acts 18:14-17, NIV).

What in the world is going on here? Wasn't Crispus the head of the synagogue? Well, we saw where he came to the Lord so he apparently had been given the boot and this guy Sosthenes is now the leader. So when the crowd doesn't get their satisfaction with Paul, they just turn on their own and take it out on Sosthenes. This caused Sosthenes to see what was going on and HE TOO CAME TO JESUS. Look how Paul mentioned him in his later letter to the Corinthian church.

¹ Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, **and our brother Sosthenes**, ² To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be

his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours”.(1 Corinthians 1:1-2, NIV). Let’s now return to our text and take a look at verse 18.

A Word about Vows to the Lord

¹⁸ Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken. (Acts 18:18, NIV).

What sort of vow had Paul taken? I believe it was a Nazarite vow. At the end of the vow he cut his hair. This is one of those verses that is easy to just pass over, but I think there is a bit of spiritual truth in this. Paul knew that this had nothing to do with his salvation, rather this vow was a way to show God of his personal devotion. Why did he do this Jewish vow? He did it because he was Jewish. Some Christians get off into the weeds thinking that they need to somehow do these things that are important to Jews, but I don’t think that’s the lesson at all. We have our own types of vows through prayer, fasting, submitting to baptism, etc. that can draw us closer to the Lord.

Being Led by Self or by the Spirit of God

¹⁹ They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. ²¹ But as he left, he promised, “I will come back if it is God’s will.” Then he set sail from Ephesus. ²² When he landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch. (Acts 18:19-22, NIV).

This is sort of a difficult chapter to draw a large overall theme from, but I believe the chapter gives us these insights into just living out a day by day Christian life. It is telling us to keep on keeping on in the face of whatever hardships come our way. Paul just kept doing what he knew to do. Sometimes God spoke to him in dreams, and sometimes Paul just headed in the direction he felt he was supposed to go. He just kept on keeping on. A couple of weeks ago I mentioned a quote by A.W. Tozer. It had to do with whether our lives belong to Him or to us. Tozer said in essence that if we are not willing to put our wants and desires on the cross then we have put ourselves on the throne. Each of us is either being directed by the Holy Spirit or we’re being directed by ourselves. I don’t know about each of you, but this chapter causes me to pause and say again, “Lord Jesus, forgive me for trying to figure out the best for my life. Show me Your best for my life and help me to be willing to accept it. God, today I commit to release the outcome of my life to You, and I choose to trust Your plan for my days here on earth.”

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.