

Day 57, Acts 18:1-17

by David Servant

God's guidance and preparation of hearts are essential for effective ministry, as seen in Paul's experience in Corinth.

Scripture: Proverbs 9:10, Acts 10:22, Acts 16:14, Acts 17:4, Acts 17:17, Acts 18:9, Acts 18:12, 1 Thessalonians 2:9

Topics: "Early Church", "Gentile Conversion"

Description

David Servant preaches about the early Christian Church in Corinth, highlighting how the gospel spread from this strategic location to many other places. Despite the licentious reputation of Corinth, God worked on hearts, leading to the conversion of Gentiles like Titius Justus who feared God and were open to the gospel. Paul, guided by the Lord, found peace and success in Corinth, where he settled for 18 months, reaching those whom God foreknew would turn to Him.

Transcript

Corinth was the capital of the region of Achaia, today part of southern Greece. It was a strategic location, a commercial center through which people from many places in the ancient world passed. Once Jesus' church was established there, the gospel would spread to many other places.

By the time Paul brought the gospel to Corinth, 20 years had passed since the church was born in Jerusalem. After two decades, the New Testament consisted of only two letters, namely James and Galatians, and both were intended to have a limited circulation. It was from Corinth, however, that Paul wrote his two letters to the believers in Thessalonica, bringing the number of New Testament books to four. Again, however, those two letters were written for Christians in just one region.

These facts help us put the epistles in a proper perspective. Obviously, they were not the centerpiece of the early Christian Church. Nor were they dissected and debated so that they divided the early church. Rather, the early believers were simply focused on following Jesus by obeying His commandments.

Corinth had a reputation as being one of the most licentious cities in the ancient world, a seaman's paradise. As many as 1,000 temple prostitutes worked as an integral part of the Corinthian religious experience at the temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love. It was paganism at its worst, but the Lord knew there were hearts that would open to the gospel. So He sent Paul.

Before Paul ever arrived, however, God had already been working on hearts, and some had opened. We read today of a Gentile named Titius Justus who lived right next door to the synagogue in Corinth and whom Luke calls "a worshiper of God" (18:7). It would seem probable that Titius' living next to the synagogue was indicative of his spiritual hunger. He was a Gentile who had responded to his conscience, and he was drawn to the truth he found in Judaism. He is the second Gentile in the book of Acts whom Luke refers to as a "worshiper of God" (see 16:14). Moreover, on four other occasions, Luke refers to certain Gentiles as "God-fearing" (10:22; 13:43; 17:4, 17).

Keep in mind that fear of God is a prerequisite to salvation, as Scripture says that "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10). People who truly fear God are open to the gospel, and people who don't fear God are not, because they don't see themselves in need of being saved from God's wrath.

God, of course, knows who does and doesn't fear Him. He does not want His servants to waste their time on hardened hearts that have no fear of God. Rather, He will direct them to invest their time reaching out to those who are open. The Lord said to Paul when he was in Corinth, "Go on speaking and do not be silent...for I have many people in this city" (18:9-10). So Paul settled there for 18 months, reaching people whom God foreknew would turn to Him.

I'm sure Paul was relieved to know in advance, by the Lord's promise, that he would not be attacked or harmed while he remained in Corinth (18:10). Remember that not long before, he had been beaten with rods and imprisoned in Philippi (16:22-24), and had run for his life both in Thessalonica (17:10) and Berea (17:14). He had perfect peace, however, when he was brought before the judgment seat of Gallio, proconsul of Achaia.

Ancient writers such as the famous Seneca tell of Gallio's easygoing and careless personality. Too bad for him! He missed the chance of the lifetime to hear the gospel through the lips of Paul. Incidentally, an inscription found at Delphi, Greece dates Gallio's proconsulship from 51 to 52 A.D. So we easily date Acts 18 and the writing of 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Take note that Paul was the original "tent-making missionary," a modern phrase that refers to missionaries who live, not from offerings, but from their own labor. All true disciples, however, who earn their living by their labor are tent-making missionaries. They see their jobs as the means to support their ministries. We're all called!

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