

Greek Superstition & Debauchery

by Steve Gallagher

Paul's mission to Athens was marked by his provocation at the city's idolatry, his message to the Athenians, and their rejection of his message.

Duration: 51:48

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 6:9

Topics: "Missionary Work", "Persevering Faith"

Description

This sermon delves into Paul's journey through Europe, particularly in Athens and Corinth, highlighting the clash of cultures as he brings the gospel to these influential cities. Despite facing rejection, strife, and cold receptions, Paul perseveres, establishing churches and spreading the message of Christ. The narrative underscores the importance of humility, perseverance, and trusting in God's greater plan, even when faced with challenges and unappreciation.

Transcript

Alright, last week we followed Paul into Europe where he began churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, basically was run out of Macedonia, mostly by the Jews, and now he's going to arrive in Athens, as we'll read about here in a minute, in the middle of Acts 17, if you want to open up there. Athens, when we think about it, well, even in modern times, we think of a huge city, which it is a huge city now, and it had been a huge city at one time before this, but in the first century, it was only about 10,000 people. I mean, that's like a town in America, 10,000 people, not very big at all, but it was an extremely important city in the Roman world.

Basically, Rome governed the world, but it was Athens that supplied the common language, and much more importantly, the culture that tied the whole world together in one mindset, and it was Alexander the Great that Hellenized the world, and those who followed him, those four generals, especially Antiochus Epiphanes, you know, those generals and the whole Greek culture that established a mindset that is very, I don't know, how would you say it, a picture of what's coming with the Antichrist, what's happening right now in the world, and the English language is like the Greek of that day. So, Athens was very important, even though it was just a tiny little city, and Paul is going to arrive there with the gospel, you know, and when you think about it from that perspective, it's like, and if you didn't know the story, you'd be like, oh man, what's going to happen? Talk about a clash in cultures. What's going to happen when the Apostle Paul brings the word of God into the stronghold of Greek mythology, of superstition, of just the entire

intellectualism of the world, of the seedbed of this one-world mindset? What's going to happen when the Apostle Paul, the greatest Christian who's ever lived, no doubt, comes into that city? You know, when you think about it from that perspective, it's like, yeah, what is going to happen here? So, we're going to read this story here, you'll know exactly what happens, but we're going to read it anyway, or there wouldn't be any reason for me to be here.

All right, verse 15 of Acts 17, now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left. Okay, so some brothers from Berea took Paul down to Athens, basically escorted him there for his safety, and Paul left Timothy and Silas up in Berea, and then they went back, and I think that probably Timothy went on to Philippi, and Silas stayed at Thessalonica, or vice versa. But anyway, they went up there for a time, and he told these Berean brothers, send them down to me at Athens, and I'll wait for them here, and then we'll go on from there to Corinth, or wherever.

So, that was what he's talking about here. Verse 16, now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. One man who lived during that time said it was easier to find a god in Athens than a man.

You know, there were so many idols just all over that city, up on the Acropolis, and just all over the city areas. There were all these statues, you know, and every one of them represented some different deity. And so, Paul goes in there, and it says that his spirit is provoked.

Now, the only other time that word is used in the Greek, or in the New Testament, is in 1 Corinthians 13, where it's the love chapter, and Paul is saying that love is not provoked. It's the same word. So, here's the two occasions.

He's being provoked here in Athens, but there it says, you know, if you're walking in perfect love, you're not going to be provoked. So, is he failing to live up to his, you know, his own words, or what exactly is this? Well, this really is a good example of what I was talking about meekness a couple of weeks ago, that meekness is all about timing. That there is a time that you take a stand, and then there is a time you let things go.

And it really is kind of like that. His spirit in him, and I think really, it should say, the Holy Spirit within him, is provoked by seeing all these gods. And, you know, meekness is that way.

That, yes, in day-to-day life with people, we don't allow ourselves to get provoked into arguments, and strife, and all of that sort of thing. That's what he was talking about later. But his spirit is provoked not at people, but at the spiritual realm that's behind those people who are creating all these idols and stuff.

Think about it. Athens was the seedbed of all the mythology. We call it mythology now, but that isn't how they would see it.

It was fact to them, just like Christianity is fact to most Americans. You know, that this is what you've been raised to believe, that there's this God named Zeus, and Mars, and all these different gods, and that's how we came into being. That was fact to them.

And it all centered, just like the Jewish faith, the Christian faith, all began in Jerusalem. That's where it was the cradle of Christianity, the cradle of Judaism. Well, that's how this was with Athens, that Athens was the place where all this was coming from.

And so, Paul comes into the city and he's provoked inside because he sees how it's contaminating the entire world with this garbage teaching that's going forth there. All right, so he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be present. And also, some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him.

Some were saying, what would this idle babbler wish to say? Others said, he seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. All right, now, I'm not going to get into these, I was going to call them idle babblers, the Stoics and Epicureans. But basically, what they were saying about him was that he was a spermologos, which, if you break it down, spermalogos, meaning literally a seed spreader.

And the idea then of that slang word was it was like a bird that would pick up seeds and spread it around. In other words, let me take it a step back. Athens was the place, if you were a philosopher or if you wanted to make a splash in the whole Roman world with your new idea, Athens is where you took it.

Because if you could win over the group there in Athens, you have won the world. You know, so there was all kinds of different quacks coming into Athens trying to propagate some idea that they came up with. Because who knows, you know, someone there might pick up on your idea and, you know, you end up becoming a champion and then you can go anywhere in the world, get paid for it, you know, and all of those kinds of things.

If you could win Athens, you won the world as far as being a philosopher or a teacher or whatever. So, they're seeing Paul as just another one of these guys, you know, here's another loser coming into town trying to push his teaching. And, you know, for the Greek in Athens, Jerusalem is a long ways away.

And they're like, this guy's nuts, you know. So, they're not really giving him much credibility here. Verse 19, and they took him and brought him to the Areopagus saying, may we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming, for you're bringing some strange things to our ears.

So, we want to know what these things mean. And then Luke kind of adds in this little parentheses, now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new. Well, it's kind of an exaggeration.

But anyway, you know, basically, Paul is brought in to prove his teaching. Because in Athens, you couldn't even be out teaching in the city without the approval of this group of philosophers. It was called the Areopagus.

And the Areopagus was actually a location on the side of the Acropolis. Let me back up here. Athens is in a large valley.

And then there's this mountain there. It's kind of like a squat mountain with a big flat area on top. And up on top, that's called the Acropolis, is the Parthenon and all these Greek buildings and so on.

They're still there. Most of those ruins are still there. I was walking around up in there.

But the Areopagus was on the side of the mountain there. And it was a place where these philosophers would meet together to discuss different things. But also, they were the ruling council of what was allowed in the city.

And so, you know, the Areopagus was kind of, it was a name for that location. But it's kind of like Wall Street to us. When we talk about Wall Street, we don't really think about the actual little street in Manhattan.

What we think about is what it represents. And that's what the Areopagus had become, was something that was bigger than that little area. It was a culture there, really, that was established by these people.

So they had to give approval to anyone who was teaching in that city. So that's why Paul is brought in there to share his ideas with these guys. And, you know, if he didn't win them over, then he was done for.

And the one thing I'll just mention is, surely, knowing the way Paul would speak to people, knowing how the Spirit of God possessed him, I'm sure when he went in there to speak, that he was just full of the fire of the Lord and earnest in what he shared. Just the complete opposite of the spirit that the Stoics and the Epicureans were in, because they were like real, you know, laid back and gentle in their talk, and no passion at all. You wouldn't even think they believed what they were saying, you know, because they were just so, I don't know, milk-toast in their presentation or whatever.

So anyway, that's what Paul's doing there. Verse 22, we see that he stands up to begin to speak to them, and I'm not going to get into what he shared with them. I'm going to read what Langenacker says, because he really kind of sums it up nicely.

Let me just read this. Paul knew it would be futile to refer to a history no one knew, meaning Jewish history, God's history with man, or argue from fulfillment of prophecy no one was interested in, or quote from a book no one read or accepted as authoritative. The substance of the Athenian address concerns the nature of God and the responsibility of man to God.

Contrary to all pantheistic and polytheistic notions, God is the one, Paul says, who has created the world and everything in it. He is the Lord of heaven and earth. He doesn't live in temples, quote, made by hands, nor is he dependent for his existence upon anything he has created.

Rather, he is the source of life and breath and everything else humanity possesses. So Paul brings in here a presentation of this unknown God, and you see the vastness of this God compared to these puny little characters, mythological characters that they had built up in their worshiping and so on. And, you know, even in that setting, Paul still brings the message down to repentance.

You know, it's amazing. Let me read what the pulpit commentary said. He bid them repent of their sins done in ignorance.

He told them of the coming of the day of judgment. He spoke to them of the terrifying judge and his unerring righteousness. There was no faltering in his speech, no watering down of the severity of the gospel, no wincing at the subtle wits or the pretentious wisdom of those who heard him.

He spoke as a man who knew that he had the truth of God and that that truth would prevail. You know, I mean, that alone must have affected these men. I think when Paul spoke, people had to be, you know, let me back that up and say it a little differently.

Paul spoke with such fire that it forced the listener to decide what they believed about what he said. Whereas other preachers or speakers, you know, would have such a milquetoast presentation that he just kind of goes in one ear and out the other, but not with Paul. He was in your face with what he had to say,

and you had to either reject him, and sometimes, especially like with the Jews, he was so provoking because his messages were so pointed and straightforward and penetrating, you either had to practically rise up in hostility or just, you know, crumble before God in his presence.

So, that's how it was. Anyway, verse 32, let's pick it up there. Now, when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, well, we shall hear you again concerning this.

So, Paul went out of their midst, but some men joined him and believed, among whom I named a couple of people there that ended up getting saved. So, there it was. Paul brought with all the force of the Holy Spirit in him the gospel message to this group, and they rejected him.

They rejected the message. They didn't want anything to do with it. How could it be? How could that philosophy went out over the Christian message, the gospel? You know, it's just that way sometimes in certain locations.

Like Jesus, when he preached in Nazareth, the unbelief was so strong there that he could hardly do anything. You know, they were so hung up on, this is Jesus the carpenter that we've known all his life, and it just stymied faiths, and there are things like that. There's locales like that in Japan or Tibet.

You know, the gospel just cannot get a strong presence in those cultures. Something to do with, I don't know what. But in this one, I understand it because this was the, these men represented a strong belief system, and they had invested their entire lives in this Athenian culture and all these, you know, the mythology and all that stuff.

They were it. They were at the top of the pinnacle in the world of philosophy. And when you have invested your whole life in some teaching, some belief system, you don't come off that easily.

And in our day and age, you see it with, well, I mean, at least in my mindset, what really stands out to me is Christian psychology. You know, this melding of two really opposing rival schools of thought, and these people have somehow found a way to, you know, get them to marry each other. But there's not many people who have been trained in psychology and have years of practicing it, making a living at it, who can be so affected by God and by the Word of God that they renounce it.

And I have met some who have done that, but there's not many that have the courage to do that. You know, and you see that with these Athenians and, you know, very comparable to the Sanhedrin when Paul spoke to them. Same thing with those Jewish leaders.

They had spent their lives teaching and preaching that and believing it, and their whole livelihood depended on them staying in that boat, as it were. But Paul is an example of someone who had the courage to come out and walked away from it, counted it all as done. Praise the Lord.

Okay, let's get into chapter 18, and Paul moves on here. After these things, he left Athens and went to Corinth. All right, now Corinth and Athens are only 50 miles apart, but there's really quite a difference in these two cities.

Athens is known for its culture, its learning centers, its schools, and, you know, like I said, the seedbed of all of the teaching of the day, the mindset of the day. Corinth was just crass commercialism and licentiousness and depravity. I mean, it was in your face, like Las Vegas or, I don't know, whatever cities are like that, that it was all about making money and living for the flesh, the things of the flesh.

Corinth was also 20 times the size of Athens, you know, a couple hundred thousand people, so it was a pretty good-sized city. It was right there in the isthmus down at the bottom of Greece, and the reason it was so prosperous is because it was a port city, and rather than have to go all the way around the tip of Greece there, out into the Mediterranean, the ships would port there at one side of this isthmus and just transfer their goods just a couple of miles over this little, I don't know what you call it, but anyway, they could get from one spot to the next without having to go all the way around, so that made Corinth very important in that realm. All right, now what do we know about Paul's arrival in Corinth? I'm going to go over a few things here.

First of all, we know that his heart was with those in Macedonia, you know, he shares his heart with the Thessalonians, as I talked about last week, and I won't get into it this week, but also with the Philippians. He loved the people in Philippi, and I was wondering, you know, why didn't he write a letter to the Philippians or even to the Bereans? Why just the Thessalonians? And he wrote them two letters. I wonder if he did write to these other congregations, but for whatever reason, the Lord didn't want it to remain in, you know, as part of the canon in Scripture, and so they got lost, those letters.

My guess is he did write to them, because I just can't understand why he would write to the Thessalonians but not to the Philippians. Of course, he did later write to the Philippians, a letter that we have, but I'm talking about right then, I don't know. But anyway, we know that his heart was still up in Macedonia, because he had gotten these churches established in revival.

And, you know, the thing is, the revival is still going, and he's forced out of town. He has to walk away from it. And by the way, if you've ever wondered about, man, how did this man have the courage to go out into the marketplace or go into these hostile synagogues and preach with all his heart, there's something that you and I haven't experienced, and that is what it's like to preach under a great anointing.

You know, when you preach, and the audience is, there's a receptivity in their hearts for the Holy Spirit to go in. When Paul preached, lives were changed, and that is enough to keep you going. But to go out and preach in the city streets of San Francisco, Boston, I've seen these street preachers out in these different cities, and people are so hardened to the gospel now, no one listens to them, or maybe occasionally someone will get out there and argue with them, but they don't really accomplish much.

I mean, I know the Lord can sometimes use them, and if you have that calling on your life, you know, you do it regardless of what the response is or how much fruit comes out of it, but when Paul did it, people's lives were impacted and changed. That's what kept him going, you know, not to take away at all what the things he did, but, you know, you can keep going when you're seeing that kind of fruit come out of your efforts. All right, so that was, anyway, I kind of got off track there, but, so what we're talking about, what was he going through when he arrived there, that was one thing, his heart was still up in Macedonia.

Another thing was he was apparently worn out and dejected, you know, he had been beaten and jailed in Philippi, he'd been run out of Thessalonica and Berea just as God began moving there, he was laughed at and ridiculed by the leading men of Athens, you know, these world-renowned men stopped at him, sneered at him, laughed at him, you know, even for the Apostle Paul that had to hurt, and then he shows up in Corinth by himself, you know, he didn't even wait for Timothy and Silas like he said he was going to do, he just, he must have been so dejected he just wanted to get out of that city, so he goes to Corinth by himself, and man, I tell you, ministry can be very disheartening at times, praise the Lord that he keeps us going. All right, another thing, he had become afraid, and we're going to read here in verses 9 and 10,

here in a minute, that, you know, the Lord has to come to him and encourage him, but when I think about this, it reminds me of a dog, if you've ever been around a dog and you go to pet it and it cringes, I don't know if you've ever seen a dog like that, you know that that dog has been beaten by its master, you know, you get around a dog that's been beaten, they just do that, it's a natural reaction, they just kind of cringe down, and I'm not going to say that Paul was in that, he wasn't that far, but there's kind of almost that sense that by the time he gets to Corinth, he's been beat up physically and emotionally, and, you know, you just kind of get that sense that he's just cringing, waiting for the next beating, and the Lord has to come to him and encourage him, as we'll read about here in a minute. Okay, another thing is that we know that his message and preaching were in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that's in 1 Corinthians 2, that's really what I was just talking about when he was out preaching, and also in 2 Corinthians 12, 12, he says, the signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance by signs and wonders and miracles.

So, you see what I'm saying is that he would be out preaching, things were happening, and that is largely, I'm convinced, what gave him the courage to just keep going on and doing what he was doing, preaching in those kind of situations. All right, number five, I'm going to call this the six knots, N-O-T-S, and they're all found in 1 Corinthians. Paul came not in cleverness of speech, 1 17, he came not in persuasive words of wisdom, 2 verse 4, he came not in the wisdom of this age, 2 verse 6, he came not in words of human wisdom, 2 verse 13, he came not with superiority of speech or wisdom, chapter 2 verse 1, and he came determined to know nothing, not a single thing, but Jesus, 1 Corinthians 2, 2. So, that's the negatives about the spirit that Paul came to Corinth in, you know, and that really says a lot to me.

All right, let's get into the story a little bit here. How are we doing? Verse 2, and he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And let me just mention this, a Roman historian named Suetonius later on, maybe 50 years later, wrote about this.

This had happened in 49 AD, so a couple of years before this, that basically the Jews had rioted regarding some man named Crestus, and it seems almost certain that what had happened was the Christians had come back from the Pentecostal revival in, you know, Jerusalem some years before, and had established a church there, and somehow they're out witnessing, and the Jews there, you know, get all riled up, and so there's a riot going on, and Claudius says, you know what, I am sick and tired of dealing with you Jews. You're out of here, and just expelled all the Jews out of Rome. So, that's what he's talking about.

So, Aquila and Priscilla were part of that. He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they were working, or by trade, they were tent makers. So, that's really interesting.

They were in the same line of work as he was in, and he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks, but when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the Word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. All right. Now, during this time is when Paul wrote the two letters to the Thessalonians.

After Timothy and Silas showed up and found him there in Corinth, then he, at that time, wrote to the Thessalonians, partially in response to the word that they brought to him. Longenecker does a really good job of concisely summing up the two letters to the Thessalonians. So, it's kind of lengthy, but I'm going to read it, because there it is, a nice, neat package for us to see how these two letters to the church in Thessalonica fit into his life and, you know, what was going on at the time.

So, let's read this. The coming of Silas and Timothy to Corinth altered the situation for Paul. They brought good news about the Christians at Thessalonica and a gift of money from the congregation at Philippi.

The news from Thessalonica was better than Paul dared expect, and it greatly comforted and encouraged him, though it also told of a slanderous campaign started against him outside the congregation and of some perplexity within it concerning the return of Christ. And you certainly see this in the two letters to the Thessalonians about how much the end times had played a part in his time of teaching them there, and so now he's kind of straightening up some misunderstandings. All right, let's continue here.

And it was in response to the report from Thessalonica that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, in which are interwoven, number one, commendation for growth, zeal, and fidelity. So, he's saying, man, you guys are doing great. Number two, encouragement in the face of local persecution.

You know, you're doing great. Keep up the battle. The Lord is winning.

Number three, defense of his motives against hostile attack. So, you know, he's having to explain himself because there's always the enemy's agents, one form or another, there to try to bring doubt upon Paul, his life, and his teaching. Number four, instruction regarding holiness of life.

Number five, instruction about the coming of the Lord. And number six, exhortation to steadfastness and patience. Some weeks later, on learning of continued confusion at Thessalonica regarding the return of Christ and the believer's relation to it, he wrote 2 Thessalonians.

In that second letter, while acknowledging that the church lives in eager expectation of the Lord's return, Paul insists that imminency must not be construed to mean immediacy, but is rather the basis for dogged persistence in doing right. So, in other words, they had gotten the idea that the Lord literally was about to show up. And so, the way that affected some of them is they quit working and just other things in life.

They just basically quit doing life thinking that the Lord was going to come within the next few weeks. And he's saying, no, we have to live our lives as if he could come at any time. But, you know, we're in for a long haul here.

You have to keep fighting the fight and doing life. All right, so then Paul goes into the synagogue and he shares with them and the same thing happens there. They largely reject him.

And then in verse 9, let's pick it up again. This is when the Lord came to Paul and said to him in the night by a vision, do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent for I am with you and no man will attack you in order to harm you. For I have many people in this city.

Okay, so we see here what I was talking about earlier, that cringing fear sort of thing of just waiting to get beaten again. But the Lord comes and reassures him, no, you're going to be here for a time and I'm with you. No one's going to attack you.

You know, God bless the Lord for that. Can I say that? God bless the Lord. You know, it's very kind of him to do that.

But look at this last phrase. I have many people in this city. Wow, what an interesting thing.

I have many people in this city and I'm going to read something Ironside says here. God speaks of the things that are not as though they are. When he said, I have many people in this city, he was referring to

hundreds of people who were living still in all the corruption of idolatry all the wickedness that pertained to the worship of the goddess of lust, who was the chief deity in the city of Corinth.

But God looked on that which he was about to do and he saw those people cleansed from their sins, made new creatures in Christ. And you know, I think about you guys, how five years ago, 10 years ago, 15 years ago, whatever for each of you, how the Lord could look at you while you're in the midst of your corruption. Some of you hadn't even begun to get into it yet.

And the Lord could say, I have many people in this city, you know, because he sees us the way we are going to be in Christ. And you wonder how he has such patience with us and how he can put up with so much from us because he sees the end product. He sees what his work in our lives is going to produce.

And it just, you know, it really affects the way the Lord deals with us. All right, so in the next couple of verses, we have the story, the Jews rise up against Paul, they drag him before this proconsul Gallio, who was the brother of Seneca, a very famous Roman at the time. And this is one of those dates because we know Gallio went there, began his governorship there in Corinth in July of 51.

We know that, that's an absolute date. And he left there a year and a half later. We know that.

So we know that Paul arrived there, that this incident happened during that time. And it would seem to suggest that it was probably right after Gallio arrived there because it's like the Jews thought, here's our chance to bring this troublemaker before this new governor, before he, you know, kind of gets himself established and he still wants to win everyone's favor. But Gallio didn't put up with it.

And actually the people around there beat the Jews who brought Paul in there. And you see the real antisemitism that was thriving in the Roman culture during that time. All right, so verse 18, Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea.

All right, so this is his year and a half in Corinth. He's wrapping it up now. I want to read this little thing that Ironside says.

When Paul entered Corinth, there was not a Christian in it, as far as we know. Moreover, it was one of the most debased of all the cities of the ancient Greek-speaking world. When he left it, there were literally hundreds of Christians.

Man, I'm telling you. You know, sometimes the smallest things that we're doing in our daily life, we have no idea the effects and how God has a way of compounding it and bringing fruit out of it. And, you know, before you know it, a year and a half later, and you look back and you see, wow, look at all that God did.

And I was just, you know, I was all caught up in the daily life and challenges and struggles and everything. And then you look back a year and a half later, it's like, man, look at what God has done. And that's the way it is in the kingdom of God.

It's just such a blessing. Now, what do we know about the Corinthians? Let me just go over a few things here real quick, because he leaves behind a church that's established. First of all, we know that basically the Corinthian people were very immoral.

I mean, they were about the most corrupt city in the empire. And, you know, in 1 Corinthians 6, 9 through 11, Paul said, do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be

deceived. Now, he's telling these Greek Christians, don't lie to yourselves and think you're going to somehow skirt these issues.

You know, that God's grace means that you can just live the way you want to live. Don't deceive yourselves. That's what he's saying to them.

Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers. In other words, the whole city of Corinth will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you.

And I have a feeling that such were some of them then, that they were still struggling with these issues, you know, in one level or another. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the spirit of our God. He's reminding them of the work that the Lord had done in their hearts, you know, and calling them back to that.

So, there was a lot of immorality, at least in the backgrounds of these people. Number two, the church was full of strife. You know, Paul leaves, and in comes all the debating, and the questioning, and the liars come in, and so on.

Over and over again, Paul had to confront them about strife in the church, and factions, and so on. And I didn't think to look it up. I can't remember who it was that wrote a letter about the turn of the century.

So, some, you know, 50 years later, one of the church leaders that may have been, no, I can't think of who it was right now, but wrote a letter and still had to confront them about strife in the church. But anyway, let me just share with you this. Chapter one talks about quarrels and the different factions.

This is in 1 Corinthians. Chapter two talks about jealousies. Chapter four talks about countless tutors they had brought in.

Chapter eleven talks about the strife that was going on in the Lord's Supper. Chapter twelve talks about strife over the gifts of the Spirit. So, we see that there was just a lot of strife in that immature body of believers.

And number three, and, you know, I'll just mention this as well, there was a lot of pride and arrogance there. And again, all these verses come out of 1 Corinthians. 318, some were wise in this age.

4-5, some were judging Paul. Chapter four, verse six, some were arrogant against each other. Chapter four, verse seven, some were acting superior and were boasting.

Chapter four, verse ten, he says this, you know, kind of sarcastically, we are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are distinguished, but we are without honor.

So, you can see how they had really risen up against Paul just by what he says there. And here we see chapter four, verse eighteen through twenty, some were arrogant against Paul's leadership. And chapter five, verse six, some were boasting.

And chapter twelve, verse five, many of them were arrogant regarding their spiritual gifts. So, we see, you know, this was the basis of a lot of that strife was just ugly pride. All right.

So, the story continues. He leaves there. He goes to Ephesus, stops off there, sails to Caesarea, goes up, visits the church there, a short little visit, it seems, and then ends up in Syrian Antioch, spends a little time there, and then makes his way across Galatia back to Ephesus.

All of that journey, some fifteen hundred miles, Luke sums up in five verses. So, who knows what kinds of things happened during that trip? You know, it's hard to tell. We read in some of Paul's writings, I think in 2 Corinthians, where all these different things, he'd been beaten a number of times, shipwrecked a number of times, a bunch of things that Luke doesn't include in the storyline, and some of that may have happened during that journey.

Back to, you know, the Eastern Empire, and then again over, all the way over to Ephesus, and so on. Who knows what all happened during that period? But, Farrar touches on this quick little visit to Jerusalem, and I want to wrap up today by reading what he said here, because it really brings out another one of the painful realities that the Apostle Paul had to deal with in his life, in his ministry, and so on. Three years had now elapsed, and he came once more, a weak and persecuted missionary, to seek the sympathy of the early converts, to confirm his faithful spirit of unity with them, to tell them the momentous tidings of the churches founded during this, his second journey, not only in Asia, but for the first time in Europe also, and even at places so important as Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth.

Had James and the circle of which he was the center only understood how vast for the future of Christianity would be the issues of these perilous and toilsome journeys? Had they but seen how insignificant, compared with the labors of Saint Paul, would be the part which they themselves were playing in furthering the universality of the church of Christ, with what affection and admiration they would have welcomed him? How would they have striven by every form of kindness, of encouragement, of honor, of heartfelt prayer, to arm and strengthen him, and to fire into yet brighter luster his grand enthusiasm, so as to prepare him in the future for sacrifices yet more heroic, for efforts yet more immense? Had anything of the kind occurred, Luke could hardly have failed to tell us about it. So far from this, Luke hurries over the brief visit in the three words that he saluted the church. There is too much reason to fear that his reception was cold and ungracious, that even if James received him with courtesy, the Judaic Christians who surrounded the Lord's brother did not, and even that a jealous dislike of that free position towards the law, which he established amongst his Gentile converts, led to that determination on the part of some of them to follow in his track and to undermine his influence, which to the intense embitterment of his latter days was so fatally successful.

It must have been with a sad heart, with something even of indignation at this unsympathetic coldness, that Saint Paul hurriedly terminated his visit. Man, you know, it is sad, it is so sad that this hero of the faith, who just constantly gave, gave, gave himself for nothing for himself, but everything for Christ and for, you know, the bigger goal of the church and so on, what Lord was doing through his life, and yet so unappreciated by the, quote, supposed leaders of the church, the disciples if they were still around, and the elders of the church certainly, you know, and just how little they appreciated him. And here again, like I mentioned last week, that man doesn't see things as heaven sees them, you know, it's so easy for us, I guess what came to me out of this story, this writing here, was how easy it is for us to exaggerate our own value in the grand scheme of things.

We tend to make our part very big, and we tend to minimize what other people are doing, you know, and that's what I see with the church in Jerusalem. Yes, that's where the church began, but, you know, they basically became obsolete, and within 20 years of this, they would be completely gone, you know, the

whole city would virtually be wiped off the map within 20 years of this. So, the church in Jerusalem was not that important in the grand scheme of things.

It was important for the founding of the church at large, you know, and it played an important role in those early days, but what Paul is doing out there and establishing all these bodies was much bigger in the grand scheme of Christianity and its future growth and all of that. You know, he hasn't even gotten to Ephesus yet, and we'll do that in the next talk, and Ephesus is really going to become the center very soon. He's going to spend three years there, as we'll get into, and he's going to establish something there, and then the Apostle John is going to follow him up later, and that's going to be the center of his activities.

Ephesus is going to be the center, not even Syrian Antioch is going to be the center of the church. It's going to be there, right there on the Adriatic Sea. So, I mean the Aegean Sea.

So, that's going to become the center, and then even after that, it's going to become Rome for some period of time. So, we see that things are not always quite like they seem, and that we have to just stay down, humble before the Lord, and just know that he's doing something vast, something so much greater than we can comprehend. We're blessed to have a small part in it, and just see it for what it is, and you know, thank the Lord that he's given us a part to play, but it's not by any means the big picture.

We're just playing our little role in what the Lord is doing. All right, so that's it for this week, and next time we'll get into his time there in Ephesus. God bless you.

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