

PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL

Acts 18:18-28

After Paul's survey of the idolatrous city and his great sermon on Mar's Hill, the world's most distinguished missionary left Athens, the city of culture and philosophy, and went to Corinth, the capital of Achaia in southern Greece, the city of commerce, wealth, luxury and immorality. This city of some 400,000 people of many nationalities was a center of wealth, worldliness and wickedness; in fact, it was one of the most dissolute and profligate places of ancient times. All the vices of human nature were found in abounding measure in that pleasure-seeking and luxury-loving city. Its very name was a synonym for reckless debauchery.

Where was the welcoming committee when Paul arrived in Corinth? There wasn't any. No comfortable home was offered to him. His was the lot of the pioneer for Christ. Immediately Paul sought a home in which to reside and a job at which to work in order that he might earn his livelihood. Paul did not have any hesitancy whatever in doing manual labor in order to sustain himself in the Lord's service. He soon found an abiding-place with Aquila and Priscilla, who, like himself, were tentmakers. While abiding with them, Paul and they worked at their common vocation, tentmaking, a trade that he had learned when he was a lad. They wrought together effectively in the prosecution of their trade and in the fellowship of the gospel of Christ. What a delightful fellowship they must have had in the discussion of the things of their Lord!

Wherever he went Paul sought for opportunities to preach Christ. On the week days he labored at his trade, but on the Sabbath days it was his custom to enter the synagogue and try to win Jews and Gentiles to faith in Christ. He boldly declared to the Jews that Jesus of Nazareth was their Messiah. This declaration infuriated the Jews, who went so far in their opposition to Christ as to use abusive language in speaking evil of Him. When their opposition became vicious, Paul "shook his raiment" as one would have shaken the dust out of his garment, signifying that he was through with them and would not permit anything to cling to him which pertained to them.

Having told them that they alone were responsible for their spiritual ruin, Paul announced to the Jews that henceforth in Corinth he would go to the Gentiles. It is a solemn hour when any soul definitely turns a deaf ear to the Word of God, and God then directs that Word to another. But Paul did not desert the Jews entirely for he preached in the house of Justus, who was a worshiper of God, next door to the synagogue. There Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on Christ and was saved. He was one of the few persons whom Paul baptized (I Corinthians 1:14). The members of his household also accepted Christ as their Saviour. Many other Corinthians believed and were saved and baptized. This illustrates the fact that we never know how far-reaching our influence may be in the lives of others.

At Corinth Paul came to a dark hour in his experience. The bitter opposition of his enemies almost crushed him. Discouraged by the visible results of his work and the turn of events, he was on the verge of leaving Corinth. While he was ready to go to more fruitful fields, the all-wise Lord encouraged him to remain there. The Lord commanded him to stop being afraid; to keep on preaching the gospel of Christ. He assured Paul that, if he would continue to preach His gospel in a faithful and

courageous manner, no man would harm him. When one is sent by the Lord to do some work, he is immune from danger and harm until his work is done. When any Christian labors under the Lord's direction and according to His will, he is assured that the Lord will be with him and will protect him. Paul was not only promised the personal presence of the Lord, and protection from any injury, but also success in preaching the gospel at Corinth. This blessed assurance gave him comfort for his troubled spirit, a new courage, and a new enthusiasm for his work. Assured of the presence, protection and power of the Lord, Paul dismissed all thought of fleeing from duty and gladly remained in Corinth a year and six months, preaching the gospel with remarkable success, in spite of the fact that he had many bitter experiences in his encounters with Jewish prejudice, Roman indifference and Greek strategy. The Lord assured Paul that He would be with him in his trials and when his efforts seemed fruitless, this assurance made him rejoice. Such assurance will cause any man to rejoice.

As an expression of his gratitude to God, and as a sign to the public that he had made a vow before God to live a separated and dedicated life, Paul shaved his head. On his visit to Jerusalem, he reported to the church there how the Lord had blessed his labors and those of his partners in the gospel, to the end that numerous souls had been saved. His report encouraged them, enlarged their vision, and created new enthusiasm in their hearts. He also returned to the church in Antioch and shared with the members the story of what God had done for and through them, expressing his gratitude to God to Whom he had been so faithful in his service.

Paul took Aquila and Priscilla with him to Ephesus, the city to which he had longed to go, but the Holy Spirit had prevented him from doing so. There he entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews, availing himself of every opportunity to proclaim the gospel of Christ to them.

After Paul had left Ephesus, there came into the city a young preacher from Egypt, whose name was Apollos. He was a native of Alexandria, a city renowned for its wealth, learning and culture. Apollos had a lot of native ability. He had a striking personality. He was both learned and eloquent, but that was not sufficient to qualify him for the ministry. Satan frequently captures native ability and turns it into wrong channels. Apollos was talented, capable and enthusiastic, but he was immature. He was fervent in spirit, but he sorely needed much additional instruction. He lacked knowledge of the meaning of the cross, the power of the resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Recognizing his outstanding ability and tremendous possibilities, and admiring his fervency of spirit and fluency of speech, Aquila and Priscilla also detected a serious deficiency in him. Kindly and graciously they took Apollos into their home and carefully explained to him much of the background of Christianity and the content of the gospel with which he was not familiar. Unlike most people of his ability and popularity, Apollos was very teachable. He had the aptitude for mastering the Scriptures. When they had finished instructing him, Apollos was a different and better preacher. It is noteworthy that the Holy Spirit bestows His gifts upon those who are gifted by nature to receive them. Knowing Christ as his Saviour and possessing this invaluable instruction and additional knowledge, Apollos was doubtless greatly embarrassed by his former unqualified and immature preaching.

In response to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, Apollos decided to leave Ephesus and go to Corinth, whereupon Aquila and Priscilla gave him a letter of introduction and hearty recommendation to deliver to the Christian brethren there. After he had received a cordial welcome from them, Apollos wielded a great influence over them with the power of his eloquence and the content of his message. So forceful were his scriptural messages that the prejudiced Jews were not able to gainsay them. God used him mightily in His service. Just as He was then, God is looking for men and women whom He can use in His service. Will you be one through whom He can present His gospel to others?