

The Gospel which Paul preached in Corinth was tried by three standards. In verses 11-17 three races pass by to heap their insults on the preacher. The Jews represented the religionists of the world, the Romans represented the legalists of the world, and the Greeks represented the culturists of the world.

1. Jewish antagonism.

The Jews have been the most uncompromising antagonists Christianity has met. They were the ones who should have been the first to welcome Jesus at His birth, and should have been the most ardent advocates of His teachings, but instead they have been the bitter opponents of Christ and His teachings in all ages. It is easier to win a heathen than to win a Jew to Christ.

Theirs is a case of religious prejudice. If men think anything is disturbing their religious freedom or theories, they will die for their cause. The Jews regarded Christianity as a competitive religion; they failed to see in it the fulfillment of their hopes and dreams and prophecies.

Wherever Paul preached, he found the Jews to be the first to oppose him and the last to support him. What were the difficulties in their way?

(1) Misunderstanding.

They did not grasp the meaning and purpose of Christ and His cause.

(2) Prejudice.

Nothing so colors one's thinking and poisons one's judgment as prejudice.

(3) A false theory of religion.

They tried to localize God. They tried to reduce their worship to a set of rules, to a system of mechanics, to a ceremony. Real religion cannot be thus limited.

2. Roman indifference.

Corinth was a Roman province, and Gallio was a Roman ruler. He refused to be interested in the quarrel of the Jews against Paul. To him their contention was merely a matter of words, names, and theories. He had thought no deeper than this in his consideration of Paul's Gospel.

His attitude was worse than the antagonism of the Jews; his was a matter of cold indifference. He refused to face the issue. This is the most obstinate condition the Christian worker faces. So long as men regard the Gospel as a mere prattle of words, as empty and meaningless theories, they will never take their condition seriously. Sin will have no meaning for them, salvation will be a worthless theory, and heaven will be but a name.

Gallio thought he could dismiss the whole affair and be done with it. He thought his responsibility ended when he refused to be drawn into the quarrel. Many a man has had a similar thought. But to ignore Christ does not settle the account. One cannot be wholly neutral in religious matters. He is either openly for Christ or positively against Him.

3. Grecian strategy.

The Greeks cared nothing for the Jews, nor for the Christians, nor for the Romans. But, hearing the ruling of Gallio, they took the opportunity to avenge a personal grievance at a time when there would be no interference from the ruling powers, and violently attacked the keeper of the synagogue, who evidently was a hated Jew. They hid the crime under the cloak of Roman justice.

The grievance against the Jews was no free gesture toward the Christians. They had no greater love for the Christians than they did for Jews or Romans, but they had

an opportunity to do what they had wanted to do for a long time, but had not had a chance to carry out without Roman interference. There are many things done in the name of law and order that are unlawful and disorderly. There are many things done in the name of religion that are not religious. There are many things done in the name of decency that are not decent.

The Greeks were the embodiment of culture in their day, yet their morals and their wicked relations belied their cultural claims. Religion, law, and culture are more than names.

A year and a half spent in Corinth had proved a bitter experience to Paul. At last he departed that he might attend a Jewish feast in Jerusalem. Before he left he shaved his head as a sign that he had made a vow before God. This custom was long practiced among the Jews. They would not let their hair grow out until they had fulfilled their vow. Just what Paul's vow was we do not know, but doubtless he finally accomplished it.

Men of old were led by Divine instruction to make vows before God. They took solemn oaths before each other. They made sacred pledges to God concerning certain matters. They even staked their lives against their oaths.

A vow is a solemn resolution to accomplish a worthy goal. Without a definite purpose one is not likely to do much that is worth-while. It is profitable for one to make his vows public. When Paul shaved his head he thereby published to the world that he had made a vow. That shaved head was a constant reminder to him of his vow; he could not forget it or escape it.

A new convert needs to make a public confession of his faith without delay. To give publicity to it will confirm it in his own heart. It will give him new courage. It will reinforce him for his conflicts.

There are some interesting chapters in Paul's life. He often remained when they wanted him to go, but here he left when they wanted him to stay. At times he seemed wholly to disregard feasts, ceremonies, and ritualisms, but here he attached much importance to keeping the Jewish feast. It was the feast of the Passover. Among the many Jewish feasts this was the most meaningful. It commemorated their tragic experiences, yet it prophesied their glorious deliverance in Christ. While Paul turned from the mere historical fact of their deliverance from Egypt, yet he had always commemorated their real deliverance through Jesus Christ, who was the slain Lamb. This was his opportunity to let the world know that he accepted Christ as the Passover Lamb.

It was necessary for him to keep this feast because consistency demanded it. It was not a matter of convenience, nor of choice, nor of argument; but it was a matter of Christian consistency. Christians should be consistent in all things. Some things are not to be argued about--they are to be done without question.

The feast needed to be perpetuated. It contained the most vital Christian truth, and it was necessary that it be preserved. It could not be preserved unless those who believed in it kept it alive. Many times a church dies at the hands of its friends because the ones who believe in it let it alone; they do not fight it, but they ignore it. This will kill any church, or any other institution.

The keeping of this feast was so important that Paul went at great cost and at great inconvenience. Worshipping God is not conditioned on convenience, or on cost. One church member said, "I have been a member of the church for forty years, and it has never cost me but a dime." The church was not worth anything to him, and he was not worth anything to the church. Christianity cannot live by such church members.

Paul felt a responsibility in this matter. There were many valid reasons why he might

might have remained away from the feast, but none of them, nor all of them together, would satisfy his conscience, nor would they justify such neglect.

Keeping this feast was valuable to Paul. It was a spiritual feast for him. It is unfortunate if Christians perform their religious duties in a perfunctory way; they receive no spiritual blessing from them. Some go to church as a duty, nothing more.

Keeping this feast was valuable to other Christians. Paul's visit to Jerusalem brought great comfort to them. It carried new reports of how the Lord was blessing their labors, and how souls were being saved. It heartened them, enlarged their vision, and created new enthusiasm in their hearts. His coming doubtless meant more to other Christians than the coming of any other man.

Keeping this feast was valuable to coming generations. That visit still lives in its spiritual blessings to Christians. The story was written and has been preserved to this day. More are still reading it. It gives us a greater conception of Paul's loyalty to his Lord. It makes us more determined to do our duty even though it may be difficult and expensive.

Acts 18:24-28

This passage introduces a new name to us. A young preacher came out of Egypt and entered the city of Ephesus. His name was Apollos.

1. His Nativity. Verse 24.

Apollos was a Jew and was born in Alexandria in Egypt, a city renowned for its wealth, culture, and learning. Its schools of philosophy and eloquence were famous the world over. For centuries it had been noted for the number of Jews among its citizens, and for the honorable and influential place accorded to them. In Paul's day there were probably almost as many Jews in Alexandria as there were in Jerusalem. Many of them had been accustomed to attending the feasts in Jerusalem; and doubtless some of them had become disciples of John. And through some of them it seems likely that Apollos had come to look for the Messiah, of whose coming John's ministry had been the herald and forerunner.

2. His Qualities. Verses 24-25.

(1) He had much native ability.

He was a Greek by training, very probably being the produce of the best schools of the day. He was both learned and eloquent, and doubtless earned his living as an orator. Such a man is capable of doing much good or much harm. But natural ability alone is not enough to qualify one for the Lord's service. Satan seeks to capitalize natural ability and turn it into wrong channels.

(2) He knew only the baptism of John.

Wherein did the baptism of John differ from the baptism of Jesus? John came fearlessly preaching repentance for sin; many people were alarmed because of John's strong denunciation, and when he called men to be baptized as a proof of their willingness to repent, Apollos responded. He was a sincere soul. He heartily indorsed John's preaching. He was ready to make his convictions public by his baptism. He knew very little about Christ and His resurrection, and was wholly ignorant of the work of the Holy Spirit.

(3) It is possible for one to be nearly right and wholly wrong.

This was found to be true in the case of the rich young ruler. He lacked the one thing. He was very near the kingdom of God. A certain Roman ruler told Paul that he was almost persuaded to become a Christian, but he was never fully persuaded so far as history tells us. A sick man may almost recover, then die. A prisoner may almost escape but fail. Apollos was almost right, but he was wrong. He lacked but one thing, but that was a vital thing.

(4) A half truth may be worse than a whole lie.

A man may hear part of a sermon and be wholly misled. Fanatics are made by half truths.

(5) Whatever fault Apollos had, he had a great spirit.

We find him, a preacher, sitting at the feet of a tent maker to learn more perfectly what he knew only in part. It takes a great man to do this. A man of small caliber will not do it. He was not a self-appointed lord of the situation; he was humble and open-minded. There never could be any doubt about the rightness of his spirit.

Apollos was a striking personality. He was a man of ability, culture, and eloquence. He was learned, zealous, fervent, gifted, diligent, fearless, helpful, and convincing; but he was immature and knew but half the truth. Therefore, both he and those who heard him were in great danger.

3. His Friends. Verse 26.

This young preacher was fortunate in that he had friends who were close enough to him to deal with his faults in tenderness, yet in frankness. Aquila and his wife Priscilla took him into their home and explained to him the entire background of Christianity. Some of it he heard for the first time from their lips. They realized that he had learned only in the kindergarten of John, but had missed the major courses under Christ. They told him of the death of Jesus and what it meant. They told him of the resurrection of Jesus and what that meant. They told him of the baptism commanded by Jesus and what that meant. When they had finished with their young friend he was a new man. Unlike most people of his ability, Apollos was teachable.

It may be because he was ashamed to continue his work in Ephesus on account of having been so immature in his first preaching, but he felt led to leave. Again his friends helped him. He was worth helping. They gave him a good letter of recommendation to the people at Corinth where he was going. How well he did in Corinth is revealed in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Apollos was one of the men whom they wanted to be their pastor. He swept Corinth with his power of eloquence and argument. The Jews could not withstand him.

Paul followed Apollos and corrected some of the false teaching which he had formerly given, but Paul never upbraided him. He dealt with him in tenderness and thereby saved him for a greater work. Few men wielded a greater influence for Christ in his day than did Apollos.

4. The Dangers of Immaturity.

Apollos represents a host of immature teachers and ministers. He was talented, enthusiastic and capable; but he was immature. He substituted his zeal for truth. No fault could be found in the man, neither in his moral life, nor in his motives, nor in his sincerity, but he did not have the whole truth. He knew his lesson in part only. It has been well said that a half truth may be worse than a whole lie. There may be enough truth in it to attract, yet enough untruth in it to deceive and mislead.

(1) The reasons for such immaturity.

a. Honest ignorance.

It is possible for one to be perfectly honest in his misrepresentations of truth. He may think he is right, yet he may be wholly wrong. One may present a thing as he understands it, being perfectly sincere and conscientious, yet be wholly wrong, or but partially right. A zeal that is not well-grounded may prove hurtful and damaging.

b. Blind prejudice.

Some do not know the truth because they do not want to know it. The truth may contravene their personal views and wishes, and they are unwilling to give up these pet notions. Their minds are closed to truth. Such blindness is tragic. This was not the case with Apollos, but it is the case with many today.

c. Malicious deviltry.

Satan sows the seeds of wickedness in the minds and hearts of some men. He creates a wicked spirit within them. He is the originator of false teachings.

(2) The effects of such immaturity.

a. On the preacher.

The preacher is made stronger in his belief every time he proclaims it.

b. On the people.

There was a whole church who knew nothing but the baptism of John. They had been taught by Apollos. There was a generation who had the same weakness as their leader. This is a greater misfortune than the first. One may take a doctrine that is good within its limits and press it beyond its limits and make an evil thing of it. Apollos made the baptism of John a stumbling stone. One may make the Lord's Supper a stumbling stone. One may make the church a stumbling stone. Let us beware of half truths.

(3) The correction for such immaturity.

a. Truth.

Certainly truth is the correction for error as light is the correction for darkness and as courage is the correction for cowardice. But how can the truth be imposed on one? Men will not accept truth against their wills. And many men do not have open minds for truth. It is easy enough when the minds of men are open, but most difficult when they are closed. But if truth fails all things fail.

b. Patience.

This is the key in the hand of truth--the key that can unlock the closed minds of men. We do not know how long it took Aquila and Priscilla to teach Apollos the fuller view of his message, but it was probably not an easy thing to do. The many talks with him are not recorded. The long, patient waiting is not told. I do not imagine that Apollos gave up his views readily. The full work of this good man and his wife is not preserved. It might make interesting reading if it had been written.

c. Tactfulness.

We know of nothing apart from the Spirit of God that is more badly needed. Results do not depend entirely on what is said and done, but also on how one says and does it. Even the tone of one's voice may be the difference between success and failure.