

## EXPOSITION OF ACTS

### Message #41

### Acts 18:1-18

My sister's daughters love to live and work in big mega cities. One of them, Amanda, worked a few years in downtown Chicago and now is in New York. She loves the hustle and bustle of big city life. She loves public transportation and she loves wall to wall people. When I talk to Amanda I tell her there is something wrong with her and she tells me there is something wrong with me. William Larkin said that there are 500 world class cities in existence now (1 million plus population) and 23 mega cities in the world (10 million plus population).

When the Apostle Paul was alive, he was drawn to the mega cities. They did not have the same population numbers that mega cities have now, but they had the same kind of things.

We may recall that last time we were together we saw Paul minister in the intellectual capital of the world, Athens. Now in this text, he will minister in the commercial capital of the world, Corinth.

Paul's move from Athens to Corinth would be comparable to a move from Boston to New York or San Francisco. Boston is supposedly known for its intellectual contributions to the world and New York and San Francisco are known for its commercial contributions to the world and its immorality.

Corinth was located about forty-five miles west of Athens. It became a central location of government and it was a city known for its opulence and immorality. Corinth was so famous for its immorality that for nearly 500 years, the Greek verb "to Corinthianize" referred to one given over to lustful sexual immorality. There was a temple of Aphrodite located in Corinth that featured 1000 prostitutes.

Kenneth Gangel, who has written a good commentary on the book of Acts, said that he visited the ruins of Corinth with a Greek official who showed him some of the tombs and it was obvious from diagrams of diseases that sexually transmitted diseases were rampant in Corinth (*Acts*, p. 302).

In fact, in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians he described the people as having been fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate and homosexuals. He said they were drunkards who were known for involving themselves with immoral harlots (I Cor. 6:9-19). Corinth was a wild dog city. It was a city filled with Greeks and Jews and people from all over the world. But God had a work for Paul to do in Corinth and it was in this very spot where Paul would spend eighteen months to minister the Word of God to a newly formed church (**Acts 18:11**).

Now remember, Paul never spent much time in Athens and he never again went back to Athens, but he did spend a great deal of time in Corinth. **What this tells us is that God's Word may have a greater impact on those living depraved, immoral lives than on the intellectuals of the world.** Corinth was a wild place. It was a place of debauchery and right here in this context is the very place where God would do a powerful work.

Corinth is a great story and it is one we all know. All of us could testify that we have known of people who were living depraved, immoral lives and then God's grace reached into their lives and saved them and turned them around for His glory.

Here is the God-inspired story of how God did an amazing sovereign work of grace in the business center of the world. What we see here is this:

**GOD DIRECTED PAUL TO GO TO CORINTH WHERE GOD ENCOURAGED HIM AND USED HIM TO CONTINUE TO TEACH HIS WORD.**

How do you reach great business cities of the world for Jesus Christ? That becomes the background of the text that lies before us. There is much action that takes place in Corinth. There are at least 14 actions we may observe from this text:

**CORINTH ACTION #1 – Paul leaves Athens and goes to Corinth . 18:1**

Now what is interesting about this is that when he first went to Athens, he was waiting there for his team to join him (17:16). So the logical thing for Paul to do would be to hang around Athens until they showed up. But apparently, he was so intent on getting out of Athens that he just took off for Corinth, which was about a 45 to 50 mile walk. After all, who wants to hang around a city where they are laughing at you and calling you some birdbrain? Paul had his sights fixed on Corinth.

Corinth was a city of 200,000 people when Paul arrived. It was a city that sat on a plateau above a 3 ½ mile isthmus, which is a narrow body of land that connected a peninsula to the main body of Greece. It was as one writer said, a “rip roaring town.”

**CORINTH ACTION #2 – Paul found a Jewish couple with whom he stayed and worked . 18:2-3**

By the time Paul got to Corinth he was out of money. In Corinth, Paul found a key couple who would be important to his ministry for the rest of his life. Claudius had expelled Jews from Rome in A.D. 49-50. According to Seutonius, who wrote about seventy years after this happened, the Jews were always causing disturbances with Christians to the point that Claudius ordered the Jews to leave Rome.

One Jewish couple named Aquila and Priscilla had moved to Corinth. They were tentmakers. They apparently owned and operated a tent-making business. It is possible they were already believers, or it is possible that Paul went to them because they were key Jewish business people and he needed a job; but regardless of this Aquila and Priscilla became very mature in their grasp of Pauline Grace Age truth and they became a key supporter of the Apostle Paul.

Now what is interesting is that Priscilla stands out as one of the great women of the New Testament and of the six times that this couple is named, four times Priscilla is named first.

Both were spiritually minded, but Priscilla seems to have been very well instructed in the Scriptures. She really understood the doctrines and theology taught by Paul. One possible evidence of this is later in this chapter in Acts 18:24-26. It is clear that Priscilla played a vital role in teaching Apollos key doctrine and theology.

Now Paul knew how to make tents and he was not afraid of work. In fact, there are times in Scripture when he reminded people there were times when he worked with his own hands to earn money (I Cor. 4:12; I Thess. 2:9; II Cor. 11:7). He worked in a field he knew.

Sometimes when entering a new area, getting a “tent-making” job is a good way to reach people. Many graduates of Bible schools, colleges and seminaries think they immediately have to be supported full-time. Paul did not see it that way. He found a good way to reach people was to do a job he knew how to do and use it as a springboard to witness and minister and earn money to support himself.

Before we move on I want to point out two things. **First**, Paul will eventually stop working and minister God’s Word full-time. In fact, you will see that here. **Second**, Priscilla and Aquila never did quit their job or give up their career to go into full time ministry.

They relocated their business to various places with Paul (Corinth, Ephesus and Rome), but they always kept working. In fact, as Gangel says, in three major cities Paul depended on them for support; they did not depend on him.

**You do not have to give up your career or job to be an effective and important man or woman of God.** People make a big mistake when they think they cannot be a great minister for God unless they quit their job and go into full-time ministry. Your job and skills have been given to you by God and God can use you on your job and use you to support those who are truly doing a work for God.

**CORINTH ACTION #3** – Paul reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath day. 28:4

Paul worked during the week and one day a week he went to the synagogue to teach. Paul’s habit was to go to synagogues and reason from Scriptures. He would carefully think through his presentation and would present truth. What is so ironic is that this is what would always seem to get him in trouble. He would go to the synagogue and preach the truth and Jewish leaders would get mad and want to silence him. But that is what Paul kept doing.

**CORINTH ACTION #4** – Paul quit his job and ministered the Word full -time when Silas and Timothy arrived. 28:5a

It is clear that when Silas and Timothy rejoined Paul, they brought two things with them: 1) News about the churches; 2) Money from the churches. Perhaps the churches of Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea and maybe a few from Athens took offerings for him, but undoubtedly the biggest contributor was the Philippian church.

Why did Paul quit his job when Silas and Timothy arrived? The answer to this question is probably found in the book of Philippians. Paul refers to the fact that the Philippians were very generous people more than once. It is probable that when Silas and Timothy got to Paul, they handed him quite a bit of money to the point that he no longer had to work but could devote himself to full-time ministry of the Word of God. In fact, he said there were times when he financially lived in prosperity and apparently this Philippian church was a big reason why he did (Philippians 4:10-18; II Corinthians 11:9). The money the church gave him made it possible for him to work hard at preaching and teaching God's Word. Paul would actually say that when we support a ministry that is accurately teaching the Word of God, we are actually offering up an acceptable sacrifice to God that is a fragrant aroma (Philippians 4:18).

To faithfully teach God's Word week in and week out is hard work. It takes careful, prayerful preparation. I believe there are some in ministry who should not be supported because they are not working hard to minister God's Word and feed their flocks. They should be forced to go out and get a job. There are ministers who know how to tug on the emotions of the people and hit them up for money and they are not working hard to feed them God's Word.

**CORINTH ACTION #5** – Paul specifically taught the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah .  
28:5b

We know that Paul taught Jews that Jesus was their Messiah and the proof of it was the resurrection. If we are witnessing to a Jew, this is exactly the message we need to communicate. Jesus Christ is Israel's Messiah and Savior and His resurrection proves it.

**CORINTH ACTION #6** – Paul took his ministry to the Gentiles in Corinth when the Jews rejected and blasphemed. 28:6

The Jewish symbol of shaking one's clothes is the same as shaking the dust off your feet (Acts 13:51). The idea is the people don't want you or your message so you leave them and move on.

**CORINTH ACTION #7** – Paul moved his ministry next door to the synagogue to a man named Titius Justus. **18:7**

Titius Justice is also called Gaius Titius Justus in I Corinthians 1:14 and simply Gaius in Romans 16:23. This man was one who feared God before Paul even came to Corinth. When Paul got to Corinth, he became a Christian.

Here is an amazing display of the sovereignty of God. Paul cannot go to the synagogue anymore so God provides him a place right next door to it. What are the chances of that?

**CORINTH ACTION #8** – Paul's message was believed by Crispus and by many Corinthians.  
**18:8**

Obviously one person this affected next door was Crispus, who was the leader of the synagogue. When he heard Paul, he trusted Christ as does everyone in his house.

This is amazing because Crispus had been the leading board member of the synagogue and he finally got saved and was converted. He is like John Wesley, who had been in ministry for years and had never been truly converted.

**CORINTH ACTION #9** – Paul received a direct vision from God to not be afraid but to go on speaking for He had many people in this city that He intended to save. **18:9-10**

It seems to me that Paul was somewhat getting discouraged. Every time he opened his mouth he was getting in trouble. He was ministering the Word of God full-time and he was always in a warfare. Everywhere he went he was hassled. I don't know if you have ever been that low, but I have. I have been so low in this world and so run down that I don't even feel like speaking anymore.

**First**, even Paul was human. He had his own flesh struggles and fears and pressures in this world and so do we. He is in a lust-crazed city like San Francisco or New Orleans and he was a normal flesh and blood man who at times struggled with being human, even calling himself a “wretched man.” **Second**, people were always against him and his teaching. He was always under some form of attack. His ministry was not neutral, it was explosive. When you find yourself continually under attack and criticism you reach a point where you just want to stop speaking and teaching. I understand exactly what Paul was thinking.

God knew Paul needed some extra encouragement. God tells him to stop being afraid and keep going. God gives Paul three reasons:

- 1) I am with you; **18:10a**. Have you ever been so low you wondered whether God was with you? **God will never leave His people** (Heb.13:5).
- 2) No one will harm you; **18:10b** God says I am protecting you.
- 3) I am going to use you to reach many people. **18:10c**

Now notice what God tells Paul; you keep preaching and teaching and speaking because “I have many people in this city” that I am going to save.

God knows when we need an extra boost to keep us going and apparently this was one of those times in the life of the Apostle Paul. God says you keep speaking because I am going to work in many people's lives. God knew who these people were and Paul didn't. His job was to teach and God was going to use his teaching to save many people.

You cannot get away from the sovereignty of God here. Through the preaching and teaching ministry of Paul, God was going to save people and establish His church. **God's sovereignty guarantees there will be fruit and it demands that Paul keep preaching and teaching.**

**CORINTH ACTION #10** – Paul settled in Corinth and ministered for eighteen months. **18:11**

Kent Hughes made an interesting observation when he said for Paul to stay eighteen months in one place was like him “putting down roots” (*Acts*, p. 243).

His ministry was about teaching the Word of God. It was not about programs or music, it was about teaching the Word of God. One commentator said God never sends his servants to “preach to the wind.” He uses them to preach His Word so that He can do a work in people’s hearts and minds.

**CORINTH ACTION #11** – The Jews hauled Paul to appear before Gallio at the judgment seat. **18:12-13**

Apparently Paul’s teaching ministry was having a real impact in Corinth because the Corinthian Jews decided to haul Paul into court before Gallio.

Gallio was the half-brother of the philosopher, politician and actor whose name was Seneca. Seneca was the tutor of Nero. Seneca said that Gallio was pleasant to all people. Gallio pursued a career in government. One of the ancient poets named Statius called Gallio “Sweet Gallio.” He was a sweet and kind man with a lovely disposition. In fact, Seneca said no other person he knew was as charming to all people as Gallio (William Larkin, *Acts*, p. 266).

Now the charge that the Jews make before Gallio is that Paul persuades people to worship God contrary to the Law. In some respects he did. He taught that one could not be justified by keeping the Law and that Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law and nailed it to His cross and that the only way any sinner could ever worship God was by faith in Jesus Christ. Those Jews did not like that message.

**CORINTH ACTION #12** – Gallio dismissed the case before Paul could even open his mouth. **18:14-16**

Now Paul went into this hearing ready to defend his message, but Gallio wasn’t interested in that at all. God stopped the case before it went anywhere. God was protecting Paul by turning the mind of Gallio to refuse to even hear the case. Gallio said if this is some religious matter then you judge it yourself, because I’ll have nothing to do with it. He takes the position of complete separation between church and state.

In some respects this is sad because Gallio is a nice man, but he is indifferent to the truth of God. He could have asked Paul to unravel the grace Gospel; instead he just dismissed the whole thing. He had position and reputation, but what does that matter if you do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

**CORINTH ACTION #13** – The Jews took Sosthenes and beat him up in front of the judgment seat. **18:17**

Well apparently the Jews were so mad that they took it out on Sosthenes, who was the leader of the synagogue, and beat him up in front of Gallio. Sosthenes had become the replacement for Crispus, who had stepped down. We know from I Corinthians 1:1 that Sosthenes had become a believer and probably the Jews were mad about that so they beat him up.

**CORINTH ACTION #14** – Paul leaves Corinth and goes to Ephesus. **18:18-19**

Notice Paul is heading back to Syria and his home church in Antioch and Aquilla and Priscilla go with him.

Now at this church we carefully preach and teach God's Word and God has you here today to hear it. No matter how rugged your life has been, no matter how moral or immoral your life has been, you may come to Christ and be saved from all of your sins. Believe on Him now. Receive His gift of grace and do not leave here today until you know your sins are forgiven.