

## WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

Christ Church, Crouch End Hill

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No: 33

### Acts Chapters 15-18

#### THE GOSPEL ON THE MOVE

##### **The Team Breaks Up**

In discussing the idea of revisiting the churches with Barnabas, Paul disagrees with the suggestion that they take Barnabas's cousin Mark (Col. 4:10) along, "because he had deserted them in Pamphylia" (vv. 37—38). Though the word Luke uses for the resulting conflict is a strong one (paroxysmos), it does not give us a hint about who was right and who was wrong. That the team should have broken up because of this conflict is sad. Perhaps the pain of the public confrontation in Antioch after Barnabas went along with Peter (Gal. 2:13) had something to do with the severity of this conflict). There is a suggestion that Mark may have been 'in some way responsible for inciting the Judaizers to action," which would have made Paul all the more wary of taking him on. But this too is not stated.

Marshall says: "It is a classic example of the perpetual problem of whether to place the interests of the individual or of the work as a whole first." It is encouraging to find out that later Paul and Barnabas seem to have become colleagues again (1 Cor. 9:6; Col. 4:10) and that Paul had not only come to appreciate Mark but also to depend on him so much that he asked for him to come to him towards the end of his life (2 Tim. 4:11 cf. Col. 4:10; Philem. 24).

The sovereignty of God as He works out his purposes even through human weakness is revealed as two teams now set out, and the area of the first missionary journey is divided between Paul and Barnabas. The latter goes to his native Cyprus with Mark (15:39), while Paul takes Silas and travels via Syria and Cilicia to South Galatia (15:40—16:1).

##### **Read Acts 15:30-40**

- Role play how you would think Paul & Barnabas split up. With which one would you have sided ?

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- Given the decision to reject the teachings of those in 15:1, why did Paul circumcise Timothy?
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- How could this be justified? (see 1 Cor. 9: 19-23)
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## **Introduction to Acts 18**

This passage clearly illustrates the seriousness of one's personal responsibility to evangelism. Our look at the word translated "testify" (diamartyromai, v. 5) pointed to the personal responsibility of those who have found the truth to testify to it. This serious responsibility is illustrated in the Old Testament story of the four lepers outside the starving city of Samaria. (2 Kings 7: 3-9)

Paul arrived in Corinth as a discouraged man. The reaction of the Jews to his message did not help improve this situation (cf. v. 6). But in this passage we have four clear instances of God's encouragement, which did much to enable him to persevere with his ministry there for eighteen months.

We are not told from where Apollos first heard about Jesus. Apollos's effectiveness as a preacher is put down to three factors. (1) "He was a learned man with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures" (1 8:24b), having been well "instructed in the way of the Lord" (1 8:25a). (2) "He spoke with great fervor" (18:25b). (3) He "taught about Jesus accurately" (1 8:25c). He not only had a good knowledge of the Word, but he also knew how to communicate it accurately—that is, he had developed skills in Bible teaching.

Luke focuses on Apollos's ministry of apologetics among the unbelieving Jews (18:27—28). This has caused some to suggest that Apollos wrote the letter to the Hebrews; the Pauline elements in this letter are traced to the influence of Priscilla and Aquila and to the believers in Corinth. It seems apparent that the more wealthy and sophisticated members of the church were so impressed by Apollos's eloquence that they clung to him and depreciated the ministry of Paul, who spoke in such a way that the simplest people could understand (1 Cor. 1:12; 4:6).

## Read Acts 18

- It is during his time in Corinth that Silas and Timothy rejoin Paul with good news from Thessalonica. The encouragement that Paul receives from this news (see 1 Thess 3:6-10) seems to be the trigger for Paul to move to full-time gospel preaching. How do the Jews react to Paul's preaching? Why shouldn't this surprise us?
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- Why do you think the risen Christ chose this specific moment to comfort Paul with words of protection in vv. 9-10?
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- What do you think of Gallio's attitude towards the Jews' complaints about Paul?
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- What happened to Crispus's successor, Sothenes? (v.17; see 1 Cor. 1:1)
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- What effect would these two conversions have on the Jewish community?
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- Do you think God's promise to Paul in 18: 9-10 has any implications for us?
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## **Conclusion**

### **Evangelizing the Corinth of today.**

As we think of the challenge of evangelizing the Corinthians of today, we might be compelled to conclude that the whole world has become a Corinth. The rampant disregard for moral standards is no longer confined to a few cities. It is brought right into homes through television. The church is inevitably affected by it. Just as some Corinthian Christians succumbed to the temptations surrounding them, contemporary Christians also give in to the loose moral lifestyles portrayed in the media. Sadly, it seems that far too many have been doing this, so much so that in certain Western countries the percentage of Christians involved in extramarital sexual activity is not different from the percentage in the rest of society. Even Christian ministers and evangelists succumb to immorality. There is equal cause for concern in the church within the developing nations.

Some leaders think that they have no right to pry into the personal lives of other people, so they ignore what they hear about their members. Perhaps with the marketing orientation that has hit ecclesiastical thinking (large congregations being seen as a sign of success), preachers are afraid to condemn sin because they might lose some of their people to the church "down the road."