

Series: **The Original Church Planter**

Today's Title: **"Trusting God" part 2**

June 11, 2023 – Acts 18:12-23

Objective: To encourage Christians to put their trust God and His plan for the Church.

- 11:00 service: Family Worship during this month...welcome!!
- VBS this week – 120 kids!!!

Opening Prayer

Last week we looked at **18:1-11**.

In **vs. 1** Luke tells us that Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

Let me begin today by giving you some background about the city of Corinth.

Corinth was 10x the size of Athens.

Corinth was the political and economic power of Achaia (modern-day southern Greece).

Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaia.

(Acts Odyssey, On the Trail of the Apostles, by Rene Schlaepfer, p. 203)

Corinth was about 50 miles west of Athens.

Athens was an old city – dating back as far as settlements in 3,000 B.C.!!

However, Corinth was a new city, refounded by Caesar in 44 B.C.

When Paul arrived, there were no buildings over 100 years old, and the population was likely over 200,000.

(Acts, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, by Darrel L Bock, p. 577)

Corinth was strategically located – and its location was the reason for its tremendous wealth and reputation as the ancient world’s version of Las Vegas or Amsterdam.

The 1st century’s ‘sin city’.

The city was located on a narrow isthmus connecting what’s called the Peloponnese (the southern section of Greece) with the mainland of Greece.

This gave ancient Corinth very prosperous ports on 2 seas:

The Aegean Sea to the east... (Saronic gulf)

The Ionian Sea to the west. (Gulf of Corinth)

Cargo ships would come into port and have the cargo transported the 4 miles across the isthmus – to the opposite port onto another cargo ship – saving many days and hundreds of miles.

While the cargo was being transferred the sailors would go into town and live it up!!!

In the ancient world ‘Corinth’ became a verb and adjective – describing someone who was immoral and – to use more modern terms – was totally into the party scene.

“He’s like a Corinthian.”

“They live like a Corinthian.”

“It’s gonna be a Corinthian kind of night!”

It was a city known for its many vices.

In 67 A.D. Emperor Nero began construction on a canal which would cut through the isthmus – and allow ships to

travel through – instead of having to unload cargo and haul it 4 miles – and then load the cargo onto another ship.

Nero never completed the canal.

The canal was finally completed in 1893 (1,826 years!)

Another feature of Corinth was something akin to the Olympic games.

The Isthmian Games was a festival of athletic and musical competitions in honor of the sea god Poseidon, held in the spring of the second and fourth years of each Olympiad.

Since the games were in honor of Poseidon, celebration of the festival died out when Christianity became dominant in the 4th century A.D.

This is the city Paul went to after he was in Athens.

But Paul was not doing well when he arrived in Corinth.

He was at a low point in his ministry – and was struggling.

But God knew what was going on with Paul.

God's ongoing protection of Paul. vs. 12-17

Remember God's word to Paul in his vision (vs. 9-10).

Read vs. 9-10

This word from God to Paul was so encouraging to him. When Paul arrived in Corinth – he was already struggling. He was discouraged and distressed when he arrived in Corinth.

We know this because he wrote about it!

1 Corinthians 2:1,3

“And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom... I was with you *in weakness and in fear and much trembling...*”

1 Thessalonians 3:6-7 – *written when Paul was in Corinth...*

“But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news...

for this reason, brothers, *in all our distress and affliction* we have been comforted about you through your faith.”

Athens was not a glorious time for him.

His “spirit was provoked” by all he saw there.

I’m sure when he arrived in Corinth – he was even more shocked by the unbridled sexual sin and the fraternity atmosphere of Corinth.

Add to his spiritual distress the physical toll of being persecuted in the various cities and being alone most of the time in Athens and now in Corinth.

Paul was struggling.

He was ‘*out of gas*’ – worn out – dejected and likely frustrated by the lack of progress - *from his perspective.*

Why?

Because he keeps getting attacked and persecuted by his fellow Jews in each city.

He wrote to the **Thessalonians**, they “...are hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved...” (2:16).

This was frustrating.

And it happens again here in Corinth.

Read vs. 12-17

We see God encouraging and protecting Paul.

First, (vs. 2-3) by providing friends and ministry partners in Corinth: Aquila and Priscilla.

Second, through a Roman official who refuses to side with the Jewish contingent who is bringing an accusation against Paul before the court.

Gallio background...

Gallio was an important and well-connected guy in the Roman Empire.

Seneca, the famous stoic philosopher was Gallio's younger brother.

Seneca was the tutor for a young man named Nero, who would become an evil Roman Emperor.

Gallio was the “proconsul of Achaia” – which would be like a state governor to us.

He was an important and influential man.

As “proconsul” he would sit on the judgment seat – or Bema seat – and hear cases and render his decision / his verdict.

As “proconsul”, his legal decisions would be legal precedent that would be used by other Roman jurisdictions.

This is a real delicate point in the history of the church.

The Jews bring an accusation to Gallio against Paul. If they were to win this case, the precedent against Paul would limit his ability to share the gospel throughout the Roman world.

The “tribunal” or judgment seat – the ruins are still there today (pics).

Archeology has given us very firm dates for Paul’s time in Corinth.

We know that Claudius’s edit to expel the Jews from Rome was in ’49.

We know Gallio’s reign as “proconsul of Achaia” was from 51-52 A.D. He had to leave this position early due to illness. So, between emperor Claudius’ edict in 49 A.D. and the short duration of Gallio’s proconsul-ship, we know with high confidence that Paul was in Corinth around 50—52 A.D.

We don’t really know the specific charge against Paul due to the vagueness of the charge.

“This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.”

Luke tells us Paul “was about to open his mouth” but Gallio beats him to it - and dismissed the case because it was an issue of Jewish religious law – and Gallio didn’t want anything to do with it – or didn’t care about it.

“...see to it yourselves...” he tells them.

Then Luke tells us “And he drove them from the tribunal.”

It seems the Jews didn't accept Gallio's reply – and kept arguing their case – so he probably had the guards / soldiers kick them out of the judgement area.

It's great when God protects you.

It's even greater when He does it in such a blatant way!

Then...

They attack the new ruler of the synagogue.

vs. 17 – “And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.”

The Jews turn their anger on their own leader – probably because he failed to gain even a decent hearing from Gallio!

God gave His word to Paul that he would not be harmed in Corinth. There were many people in Corinth God had chosen for salvation – and He would use Paul's ministry to reach them with the gospel.

One cool detail about this guy – Sosthenes.

1 Corinthians 1:1-2a

“Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God that is in Corinth...”

Sometime after Sosthenes was beat up by the Jews – he becomes a believer in Jesus!!!

Amazing what God can do!!!

Church planting / ministry is a team effort. vs. 18-21

One of our greatest weaknesses is our pride / ego.

It's ironic – when we are prideful and ego-driven / ego-filled – we feel strong, needed, important, vital.

But in reality, pride and ego make us incredibly weak and ineffective in ministry.

The world values a person driven by their pride or ego.

The world elevates the individual – but God elevates the humble.

Paul would later write,

2 Corinthians 12:9b-10

“So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ.

For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

In ministry we need each other.

God has designed the Body of Christ – the local church – to work as a group – as a team.

No Lone Rangers.

No isolationists.

Read vs. 18-21

After the legal reprieve from Gallio – Paul “stayed many days longer”. He continued to minister.

Paul was in Corinth 18 months – and he not only shared the gospel and saw many people put their faith in Jesus, but he also raised up leaders for the church in Corinth.

This is why he is able to leave.

There were leaders – we’re not told who they are – but this was always important for Paul.

In other cities he had to leave quickly due to increasing violence.

But here in Corinth, he had God’s promise of protection – and he no doubt raised up leaders for the church.

He leaves for Syria (Antioch, Syria – his home church) – and takes Priscilla and Aquila with him.

He leaves Corinth – and Luke gives us this floating detail – “At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.”

Paul gets a haircut – “for he was under a vow.”

This was probably a Nazarite vow.

Even though Paul was a follower of Jesus – he was still a Pharisee – not in practice, but by education and many of the things he held near and dear.

The Nazarite vow was a special vow of commitment...

We don’t have any other detail here this vow, so let’s not make up stuff – let’s move on.

Read vs. 19-21

Isn't that cool!

These dear friends of Paul – were also vital ministry partners to the Apostle.

They were willing – for the sake of the Kingdom – to leave their home in Corinth – and relocate to Ephesus – and work to plant a church in Ephesus.

The point I think is important – and helpful for us is to realize even the great Apostle Paul – '*Mr. Super Christian*' – needed others to help do the work of ministry.

He relied on others!

Trip #1: He had Barnabas and John Mark – along with others.

Trip #2: He's had Silas, Timothy, Luke, and others – some of whom are listed in **20:4**.

Later he would write to the church in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 16:19

"The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord."

Paul couldn't fulfill the mission by himself.

He needed others – not just for relationship – but for the work of ministry!

God designed the church to work as a group – a community of believers working together – unified in the message and mission to reach people with the gospel

and to help them grow in the faith – so they could reach others – and help them grow, and on and on.

This is important for us to realize.

How are you helping / serving to help move the mission forward?

Are you intentional about praying for and engaging those in your circle of influence?

Are you serving in a ministry here at the church?

Are you prayerfully considering if God wants you to be part of the church plant?

Are you praying that God will make it clear how you can support the church plant – maybe by serving now – so our ministry teams will not suffer too much when some people go with the plant?

We are part of a *bigger picture*. vs. 22-23

It's really easy to become so occupied with what we're doing here at CDOBC – that we can forget that we're just 1 of many Christ-exalting, Bible believing / preaching churches.

We can easily forget that we are part of a larger association of churches – we have many blessings in those relationships. (Venture Church Network – venturechurches.org)

- *Paul never forgot* the Jerusalem church and its leaders.

- *Paul never forgot* about his home church – his sending church in Antioch, Syria.

- *He never forgot* about the many churches he planted.

He didn't live his faith – or minister in isolation or with a spirit of independence.

He was committed to – and highly valued the relationships he had with these other churches and other followers of Jesus.

22 “When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch.

23 After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.”

His ship arrives in the large port of Caesarea. (Pics).

“...he went up and greeted the church” – this means he went from Caesarea to Jerusalem – which is going from sea level to just over 2,500' above sea level.

He would have gone to the Jerusalem church – to give a report on his work and the churches that now existed in the Gentile world.

After this visit he “then went down to Antioch.”

After meeting with the church in Jerusalem – where some of the other Apostles were, Paul “went down” in elevation – and travels to Antioch, Syria – to report back to his home church – his sending church.

Luke condenses Paul's visits to just a few words – 1 verse really – so we don't know how much time he spent in Jerusalem and then Antioch, but it doesn't seem like it was an extended visit.

vs. 23 - “After spending some time there...” – in Antioch.

Then – in the rest of vs. 23 – **Paul begins his 3rd church planting trip.**

“...he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.”

(Map) – Asia – regions of Galatia and Phrygia.

He's going to the cities where he planted churches on his first 2 trips – and he's going there to “...strengthen^(ing) all the disciples.”

The mission Jesus gave us – is not only about sharing the gospel with people so they put their faith in Christ as their Savior.

It's not just about converts.

It's also about helping them grow in their faith.

It's helping them understand the teachings of Jesus – so they can live for Him – live according to God's Word – His design for human life in family, marriage, friendship, work, leisure.

He's called us to live a life marked by love – grace – and truth.

This is why Paul visits these places – and people again – to make sure they are growing in the faith.

Apply it...

Paul had to trust God for his safety.

He had to trust God for the ongoing growth and safety of the church in Corinth.

He had to trust Priscilla and Aquila in their ministry work in Ephesus.

He helped the churches grow stronger in the faith.

1. Trust God's plan for the Church.

His plan is many people doing the work of ministry.

His plan is the local church operates like a body – each part is vital and has a specific role and ability.

His plan is ministry is done together – with one another – not alone or in isolation.

2. Trust God can work through others too.

Nobody 'owns' the ministry.

It's God's ministry.

Trust that He cares enough to use others to impact the kingdom!

3. Be strengthened in the faith.

Grow your faith!! Develop a deeper understanding of God (theology) and why we believe what we do (doctrine).

Small groups: Sundays / during the week – on & off campus groups / new remote classes (Zoom) we will be offering in September (more on that in my videos the next few weeks).

Closing prayer