

Bi134 Acts

Lesson Bi134-34 Successful Ministry in Corinth

Have you ever become discouraged? Did your discouragement make you want to give up the work you were doing? One reason many pastors and church planters leave the ministry is that they become discouraged. In today's story from the Book of Acts, even the great apostle Paul becomes discouraged. However, the Lord helps him to overcome his discouragement and continue in the work.

Leaving Athens, Paul traveled westward to Corinth, the provincial capital of Achaia. Corinth was a large city of about 500,000 inhabitants. It was known for its gross immorality.

Every Sabbath day Paul went to the city's synagogue and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks to follow Christ. One Sabbath he met a Jewish man named Aquila and his wife Priscilla. They had recently come from Rome, after the emperor had ordered all Jews to leave. Since they were tentmakers like him, they invited him to stay and work with them. They ministered with Paul in planting the church in Corinth. Later Paul mentions that Priscilla and Aquila not only ministered with him, they risked their lives for him (Rom 16:3-4).

When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul spent all of his time preaching the gospel and testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. Some of the Jews began to openly oppose Paul, casting insults at him. Finally, he took his clothes, and in front of everyone, shook the dust from them. "Your blood be on your own heads," he said, "I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6). Paul then left the synagogue and went next door to the home of one Titius Justus, a God-fearing Gentile man. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, and his entire family believed in the Lord. Many other Corinthians also believed and were baptized.

Eventually things became so tense that Paul began to fear for his safety. One night the Lord Jesus appeared to him in a vision and said, "Do not be afraid, but keep on speaking. I am with you and I will not allow anyone to harm you. I have many people in this city." Paul then took heart and stayed in Corinth for another year and a half teaching the Word of God.

One day some rowdy Jews got together and seized Paul. They then hauled him before Gallio, the provincial governor, and accused him. They charged, "This fellow tries to persuade people to worship God in ways that are contrary to our law."

Just as Paul was about to answer their charges, Gallio butted in. Turning to the Jews, he said, "Look here! You men have no real case. This man has committed no crime. This is just another one of your religious disputes, an argument over names and words. I refuse to get involved in such matters. Take care of it yourselves."

This so angered the Jews that they turned on Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue. They grabbed the poor man and began to beat him right there in the courtroom. Gallio, however, turned away and paid no attention to what was happening. After that, Paul remained in Corinth

for quite a while. He then set sail for Syria with Priscilla and Aquila. He reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue in Ephesus, but could not stay (Acts 18:7-18).

So, Paul left Priscilla and Aquila to lead the church in Ephesus. He went on to Caesarea and Antioch. Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, Egypt, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He spoke with great boldness in the synagogue about the baptism of John for repentance and the coming Messiah. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home. They taught him that Jesus was the Christ and that he was the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit John had talked about. Later Apollos went to preach in Corinth. He vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. This was just as Priscilla and Aquila had taught him (Acts 18:19-28).

From the account of Priscilla and Aquila's ministry in Ephesus, we learn that God calls and uses women as well as men. This wife and husband team had witnessed in Rome and helped Paul plant the church in Corinth. Then, Paul left them, as teachers and preachers, to pastor the church in Ephesus.

From the story of Paul's missionary work in Corinth, we learn two important ministry lessons. First, we learn of the importance of a Spirit-empowered church planting strategy. When Paul arrived in Corinth, he came with such a plan. It involved two key elements: first, he would focus on proclaiming the message of the Cross, and second, he would minister in the power of the Spirit.

In Athens, Paul had tried to convince the residents to turn to Christ by using superior wisdom and philosophy. Yet, his results were small. In Corinth, however, he "devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying...that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:5). He talks more about this Corinthian strategy in a letter he later wrote to the church. In that letter, known as First Corinthians, Paul told them that, en route to their city, he had resolved to preach nothing except "Jesus Christ and him crucified." He further reminded them, "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (1Cor 2:2-4). We would be wise to do the same in our evangelism and church planting efforts today. We must be vigilant to preach Christ and Christ alone, and we must do all in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit.

We learn a second valuable lesson from the story of Paul's missionary work in Corinth. We learn how we can always trust the Lord to encourage us in our times of trial. In Corinth, Paul ministered in the face of threats and opposition. Because he knew that the Lord was with him, however, he was able to endure. When Jesus was commissioning his disciples, he promised them, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt 28:20). Paul knew that to be true. What's more, when things became particularly difficult for Paul, the Lord appeared to him in a night vision. Jesus himself encouraged Paul to continue with his ministry there.

We can expect the Lord to do the same for us today. When we go out to preach the gospel, we, like Paul, should go in the power of the Spirit. We should focus our preaching and teaching on "Christ and him crucified." Then, when difficult times come, we can trust that the

Lord will speak words of encouragement to us. Sometimes he may appear in a vision. At other times, he will speak directly by his Spirit to our spirits. Such times of encouragement most often come when we are seeking the Lord's face in prayer.

This lesson is **important** because we learn that we must proclaim Christ and Christ alone, and that we do this in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The **main truth** we learn from this lesson is that, if we will do these things, the Lord will be with us. His Spirit will come to encourage us in difficult times.

Let's **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. What do we learn from the story of Priscilla and Aquila teaching Apollos in Ephesus?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "God uses both women and men as preachers and teachers to lead his church," you are correct.
2. What was Paul's central message when he went to Corinth?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that Paul's central message in Corinth was "Jesus Christ and him crucified," you answered correctly.
3. How did Paul describe his ministry in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 2:4?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that Paul described his ministry in Corinth as "a demonstration of the Spirit's power," you are right.
4. How did the Lord encourage Paul during his time in Corinth?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, that the Lord encouraged Paul by coming to him in a night vision, you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it two or three more times until you can accurately tell the story of Paul's ministry in Corinth. You should also be able to explain the two ministry lessons learned from this story. Finally, you should take some time to examine your own ministry by asking these two questions: Is the cross of Christ at the center of all my preaching? Is my ministry a demonstration of the Spirit's power?