

Monday - Week Thirty-seven

Acts Eighteen: Paul in Corinth

Summary: Paul was able to stay for a year and a half in Corinth. This church would become an important one in the history of the church.

Background and Comments

- Crispus, the Jewish synagogue ruler, became a Christian! To have a noteworthy leader like Crispus become a Christian must have been a real boost for the church.
- Paul also had much success with the Gentiles in Corinth. Later in the book of Corinthians we read that this congregation had many talented and gifted people. What a tremendous time Paul must have had in Corinth!
- Apollos became an even more powerful preacher after Priscilla and Aquila taught him. Pastors also need to continue to grow in the Word of God.

Lessons for Today

- When Paul came to Corinth he was at the end of his rope. In the previous cities he had visited he had been stoned, thrown in jail, beaten and forced out of town after only short visits. In Athens (the city he had just been in) he was laughed out of town by the philosophers of the city. In the book of Corinthians Paul tells us that as he approached Corinth he resolved to preach Christ and Him crucified. Jesus richly blessed Paul in Corinth by keeping him out of harm's way, by encouraging him in a vision and by allowing him to stay in one place for over a year. In addition to that, God gave Paul lifelong friends named Priscilla and Aquila. Later in life Paul must have thought back to those early days in Corinth with a smile on his face and in his heart. What are the special, God-given times in your life that you can look back to with appreciation?
- We might have expected Corinth to quickly become a model congregation since it had so much going for it. Yet when we read Paul's letters to this congregation (1 and 2 Corinthians) we see that they were deeply divided and mixed up about most everything. What happened??? They took their eyes off of Jesus and concentrated on themselves. This sinful tendency is in every believer's heart and in the midst of every congregation. How can we guard ourselves against these tendencies?

Read: Psalm 10; Revelation 16.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, give me a stronger faith. Just as Paul came to Corinth resolving to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified, let my focus rest securely on my Savior. It's in His name that I pray; Amen.

Tuesday - Week Thirty-seven

Acts Nineteen: Paul in Ephesus

Summary: In Ephesus the forces of good and evil violently collided. God gave great power to Paul to perform miracles.

Background and Comments

- The first 7 verses can be a bit difficult to understand. When the disciples said that they had not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit they were probably talking about the gifts of the Holy Spirit (speaking in tongues, healing, etc.). Also, the quotation marks at the end of verse 5 should go at the end of verse 6 (in other words, verse 6 should be part of the quotation). John's baptism was certainly a valid baptism. John had not told them about the gifts of the Holy Spirit though.
- The devil used a silversmith named Demetrius to stir up trouble for St. Paul. At the same time God was working very visibly in Ephesus. Verse 12 tells us that even handkerchiefs and napkins that had touched Paul could be used to perform miracles! The whole episode with the seven sons of Sceva also shows God's power in action. God wanted to get everyone's attention in Ephesus - He certainly did!
- Notice that several influential people in Ephesus gave Paul advice in the crisis. Paul had also made an impact on the upper echelon in Ephesus.

Lessons for Today

- God used a city clerk to save the day for Paul and his companions. God has everything at His disposal when it comes to solving problems. Think back in your life to some unusual solutions that God has given to you.
- Paul wasn't afraid of anything it seems. Even in the middle of the riot he was ready to preach! His friends had other ideas though. Listening to Christian friends is important. Certainly they might be wrong ... but more often than not they have solid advice for us. Do you have a group of friends you can go to for advice?
- Those who practice sorcery not only confessed their sin they burned their sorcery scrolls. Are there sins in your life that need to be physically put away? Is there something that does nothing but tempt you to sin? Get rid of it!

Read: Psalm 11; Revelation 17.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, guide me to put away sin in my life. If there are things that consistently tempt me to sin give me the discipline to get rid of them or avoid them. In Jesus' name I pray; Amen.

Wednesday - Week Thirty-seven

Catechism Review

Read Questions 290-292.

1. Why are the blessings of the Lord's Supper roughly the same blessings of baptism and of Bible study?

2. Explain: The Lord's Supper is a blessing to us because in it we receive what Jesus sacrificed to make us children of God.

3. How would you explain the blessings of the Lord's Supper to a new Christian? Think through your answer as well as possible.

4. If the Lord's Supper is so comforting how often will a Christian receive it?

5. How is the Lord's Supper "absolute proof" of our forgiveness?

Read: Psalm 12; Revelation 18.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, never let me take the Lord's Supper for granted. When I receive Jesus' body and blood remind me of what an honor it is to be Your child. Thank You for using the Supper to strengthen my faith. I ask these things in Jesus' name; Amen.

Thursday - Week Thirty-seven

Acts Twenty: The Trip Home to Jerusalem

Summary: Paul's trip home to Jerusalem was a sad one because everyone knew that Paul would be arrested once he arrived.

Background and Comments

- Paul had to adjust his travel plans because of a plot against him. This could have become a huge distraction to Paul; yet he used it as evidence that God was at work (the devil was fighting against him).
- Have you ever nodded off during a sermon? A young man named Eutychus fell asleep during Paul's sermon (we can understand why because Paul preached for hours and hours!). Eutychus fell asleep and fell out of the window. This wonderful farewell could have turned into a terrible tragedy. God turned everything around when He used Paul to raise him back to life. What an exclamation point that must have put on Paul's sermon!

Lessons for Today

- Verse 20 is a good one for church leaders to read. Paul shared the Word of God publicly (in church, etc.) and in people's homes. Do the leaders of your congregation make it a point to visit people in their homes? This is the lifeblood of ministry ... meeting people where they live.
- Verse 24 tells us that Paul had his priorities in remarkable order. There was one goal in his life: to preach the Gospel. How can your life become more focused on what is really important?
- God told the leaders of the Ephesians congregation to be shepherds of God's flock. There are two important truths here. First of all the church is God's flock. Leaders are supposed to lead ... while understanding that the real Leader is God. The other truth is that God has placed church leaders into oversight positions. We have a responsibility to listen to and obey them. How obedient, encouraging and prayerful are you toward your congregation's leaders?

Read: Psalm 13; Revelation 19.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, today I pray for the president of my congregation. Give him wisdom as He works with the other leaders in the church to make God-pleasing decisions. Keep him strong in the faith. Make him quick to study the Word of God. Help him and our pastor(s) work well together. In Jesus' name I pray; Amen.

Friday - Week Thirty-seven

John - Lesson Eight: John's Testimony (3:22-36)

1. Jesus was fond of time away with His disciples. What are the benefits of time away with friends for spiritual recharging?

2. Obviously John's disciples had not listened to John's main message. Explain.

Can you think of an example of people following one of Christ's messengers instead of Christ Himself?

3. What did John mean in verse 27?

Obviously there is no room in Christianity for pride - everything we have comes from above. A spiritually mature Christian can rejoice in the gifts of other Christians. What does that tell us about that person?

4. Verse 28 was a rebuke for John's disciples. These disciples themselves had heard John tell them to follow Jesus. There was absolutely no excuse for their mistake. Why, do you suppose, hadn't these disciples followed Jesus?

5. Luther applied verse 31 to our whole lives when he wrote, "Now we must learn to believe what we have heard, not what our five senses can comprehend; for such is our Christian faith." (LW, vol.22, pg.455) When are some times when we must listen to God's Word instead of our five senses?

6. Verse 36 is packed with truth. John said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life." Why does John use the present tense? (Hint: What is "life" in this passage. Look also at the second half of the verse)

Read: Psalm 14; Revelation 20.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, forgive me for all the times I want to be the center of attention. I want to make You the center of attention. Amen.