

Sunday, March 22, 2026 | Missio Dei

Week 15 | Acts 18:1-17 | "A Discouraged Apostle"

READ: Acts 18:1-17 (ESV)

¹ After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³ and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

⁵ When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. ⁶ And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." ⁷ And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸ Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. ⁹ And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." ¹¹ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

¹² But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, ¹³ saying, "This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law." ¹⁴ But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. ¹⁵ But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things." ¹⁶ And he drove them from the tribunal. 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.

Even the strongest servants of God can collapse under the weight of discouragement. Being gifted spiritually doesn't exempt one from struggles.

Elijah's life is the story of a prophet fiercely devoted to the Lord in a time of deep spiritual decline in Israel. He appears suddenly during the reign of Ahab, confronting the king and announcing a drought as judgment for idolatry. Amazingly, no rain fell for about three and a half years, only returning after Elijah's dramatic confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (cf. 1 Ki. 18).

Yet despite this victory, Elijah flees for his life into the wilderness. There he prays, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers" (1 Ki. 19:4). The great man of God who had called down fire from heaven now finds himself in the depths of despair, longing to die.

But it is at the lowest point of his life that God meets him. A wind, an earthquake, and a fire pass by—but the Lord is in none of them. Instead, God's presence is revealed in a gentle whisper that renews, recommissions, and reassures the world-weary prophet. Spiritually, Elijah was not alone—he had God. But neither was he alone physically: thousands in Israel have not bowed the knee to Baal. He had more allies than he realized.

In today's passage, Paul finds himself discouraged. But just as God ministered to Elijah, the Lord brings a word to the apostle that lifts his spirits. And we would do well to pay attention. For if a prophet and an apostle can become discouraged, who are we to think we will avoid it?

I want you to notice three things:

i. Vs. 1-4 – God's Provision for Paul

Vs. 1 – After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth

Paul likely arrived in Corinth around AD 49 and wouldn't leave until sometime in AD 51.¹ This roughly **18-month stay** (vs. 11) will mark Paul's longest to date.² All told, it is second only to his stay in Ephesus (3 years).³

Quick facts about Corinth:

- Capital of the **Achaian** province.

¹ Lambrecht, Jan, *Second Corinthians*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 8:5.

² Bandy, Alan, *An Illustrated Guide to the Apostle Paul: His Life, Ministry, and Missionary Journeys*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2021), 109.

³ Barclay, William, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 5.

- “In the apostolic period the city was a bustling commercial and industrial center boasting a population of almost 700,000.”⁴
- “It became a cosmopolitan city attracting tradespeople from all over the world, though its reputation grew simultaneously as a center of luxury, indulgence, and vice.”⁵ Its most prized trade was bronze.⁶
- Corinth was the home of the Isthmian Games. Not to be confused with the Olympic Games, which occurred every four years, the Isthmian Games were a biannual competition. The Olympics were considered more prestigious, but the Isthmian Games were still quite popular and highly competitive. The Isthmian Games included six events: wrestling, jumping, javelin, discus throwing, racing, and boxing.⁷ “The prize for winning the games was a wreath made of myrtle, olive, or pine branches, plus additional benefits: a stipend from the state; remission of taxes; and special benefits for the champion’s children. Winners were national heroes.”⁸
- Though not to the degree of Athens, Corinth was still a significant religious center, housing temples dedicated to Hera, Apollo, and Poseidon. The city was particularly known for its veneration of Aphrodite, the ‘goddess of love.’ Her temple was situated atop the Acrocorinth, a prominent hill that dominated the local landscape. According to Strabo (*Geography* 8.6.20), this site was served by more than a thousand temple slaves. This specific cultural and religious environment explains why the Corinthian letters address sexual immorality more frequently and urgently than any of Paul’s other epistles. Elwell says, “Corinthian morals were notoriously corrupt, even when compared with pagan Rome.”⁹

In sum, Corinth was a politically prominent city, a thriving business hub, a sports town, and a metropolis of immorality. If Athens was like Cambridge, Corinth was like New York City.

Vs. 2-3 – While in Corinth, Paul met a Jewish couple: Aquila and Priscilla. Aquila was “a native of Pontus.” Pontus was a Roman province in northeastern Asia Minor, bordering the Black Sea. The couple had, up until recently, lived in Rome, Italy. The reason they were no longer there was “because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.”

⁴ Elwell, Walter A., and Barry J. Beitzel, “Corinth,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 514.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Bandy (2021), 109.

⁷ Williams, David J., *Paul’s Metaphors: Their Context and Character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 266.

⁸ Elwell (1988), 514.

⁹ Ibid.

Christianity had already reached Rome by the time Paul reached Corinth. We know this because the reason Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome was over riots which had been caused by a key figure: “Chrestus.”¹⁰ This is almost certainly a reference to Christ. We have already seen in the life of Paul that the unbelieving Jews cause quite the uproar when the gospel takes root (cf. Ac. 14:8-23; 16:16-24; 17:1-9). The same has occurred worldwide, including in Rome. Paul wasn’t the troublemaker; Christ was.

Now, to an outsider, Christianity and Judaism were indistinguishable at this time. So, when Luke says “all the Jews” left Rome, he means that both Christian and non-Christian Jews alike were expelled. As such, Aquila and Priscilla were likely believers when Paul met them.

This is supported by several factors:

- Their authoritative roles in the Church are assumed in 8:26.
- Though the conversion stories of some Corinthians are mentioned (vs. 8), theirs are not given, likely because they were already Christians.
- Most telling is that Paul “stayed with them and worked” alongside them. Granted, they shared the same trade (“tentmakers”), but nowhere do we see Paul being housed or helped by unbelievers. Rather, Christian hospitality has been the norm in Acts (cf. 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 9:43; 12:12; 16:14-15, 33-34; 17:5-9). One thing is clear about the Christian community: believers helped one another. Aquila and Priscilla provided employment for an apostle!

Vs. 4 – When Paul wasn’t working, “he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.” As was his habit, the gospel had to first come to the Jews before it went to the Gentiles. Given that it comes in connection with “the synagogue” and “Sabbath,” the phrase “Jews and Greeks” is likely a reference to full-blown Hebraic Jews and Hellenized Jews or Greek proselytes to the Jewish faith.

Takeaway: A profession is God’s ordinary means of provision.

Work isn’t a punishment; it’s our purpose. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were instructed to tend the garden.

Proverbs 10:4, “A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.”

Paul, writing to the church in Thessalonica, says,

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1980), 297.

“⁶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we **were not idle** when we were with you,⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread **without paying for it**, but with **toil** and **labor** we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: **if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.** ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in **idleness**, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.”

Paul says in Eph. 4:28, “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.” Welfare fraud is theft.

Paul tells Timothy, “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is **worse** than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8).

ii. **Vs. 5-11 – God's Promise to Paul**

Vs. 5 – Luke says, “When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia.” If you'll recall, Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke were separated in Berea due to Jewish opposition. Paul and Luke went on to Athens (cf. 1 Thess. 3:1-3) while Silas and Timothy stayed behind. Now, however, they were reunited. And Paul became “**occupied with the word.**” The term “**occupied**” meant that Paul was entirely absorbed in ministering the word. This is in contrast to vs. 3, where he had to devote some of his time to tentmaking to provide for his needs.¹¹ Paul no longer had to fend for himself. This was likely because Silas and Timothy brought with them funds they had collected from the churches in Macedonia (cf. 2 Cor. 11:9).¹² The Philippians were particularly generous in their financial support (cf. Phil. 4:15-16).

Now that Paul wasn't a full-time tentmaker, he not only had time to preach in Corinth, “**testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus,**” he also wrote 1 & 2 Thessalonians, the first and second of thirteen Pauline epistles.

¹¹ DBAG (2000), 971.

¹² A collection from the Macedonians is mentioned in 2 Co. 8:1-5. Though it is unlikely the one that Timothy/Silas brought with them in Ac. 18.

Vs. 6 – Just as it was Paul's habit to go to the Jews, it seems it was the habit of those Jews who persisted in their unbelief to actively oppose and revile him. And so, in light of the opposition and total mockery of Jesus Christ, Paul did two things:

Paul “**shook out his garments.**” To his Jewish audience, the meaning of this act would’ve been obvious (cf. Neh. 5:13); it was a gesture of dissociation, a way of severing ties with another person or group.¹³ **This wasn’t an amicable break. It was “tantamount to calling a man a heathen.”**¹⁴ Unlike spreading garments before someone (which conveyed respect and honor), this action expressed complete rejection and the termination of the relationship. Paul was effectively declaring them outside the covenant community or beyond the bounds of acceptable association. **It was a nonverbal declaration of rupture, far more emphatic than words alone could convey.**

And he said, “**Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.**”

The gospel will not stay where it is not wanted.

Vs. 7 – Now, in the past, Paul would either leave the city or be run out of it. But Paul does something new. He leaves the synagogue, but he doesn’t go very far. Luke says, “**And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God.**” Luke called Lydia a “**worshiper of God**” as well. Like the term “God-fearer” (cf. Ac 10:2, 22; 13:16, 26), those who were said to worship God were followers of the Jewish faith without becoming full proselytes, likely coming from a polytheistic background.¹⁵

But while his faith in God is important, Luke says something far more interesting, at least from a narrative standpoint: TJ’s “**house was next door to the synagogue.**” Was Paul tired of traveling? No. As we’ll see, the Lord wanted Paul in Corinth.

Vs. 8 – Moving from the synagogue next door would prove to be a brilliant move since “**Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household.**” And not only this most important family, but also “**many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.**”

¹³ W. Andrew Smith, “[Clothing](#),” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Running L. G., “[X. Gestures and Figurative Uses](#),” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*, ed. Geoffrey W Bromiley (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), [2:407](#), who is quoting from F. F. Bruce, comm. on Acts [NICNT, 1954], p. 284 n 74.

¹⁵ Bock, Darrell L., *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 207), 534.

The nucleus of the Corinthian church is as follows:

Paul the apostle,
Aquila and Pricilla (Jewish Christians from Rome),
presumably Luke,
Silas,
Timothy,
Titius Justus (a local Corinthian and a Gentile),
Crispus (ruler of the synagogue) and his household,
and several unnamed Corinthians.

Vs. 9-11 – “And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.’”

Jesus' words are broken up into **two sections**. The first section has **three** commandments followed by an explanatory statement. The second section has a promise followed by an explanatory statement. And through this message, we can surmise a number of things about Paul's emotional and mental state.

Section 1: The Lord addressed Paul's **emotional concerns**.

Paul was anxious; otherwise, why did the Lord say, "Do not be afraid"?

Paul was apprehensive about speaking; otherwise, why did the Lord say, "Go on speaking and do not be silent"?

And what was the solution to Paul's emotional concerns? Jesus says, "For I am with you." **His presence.**

Section 2: The Lord addressed Paul's **physical concerns**.

Paul felt like he was in mortal danger; otherwise, why did the Lord say, "No one will attack you to harm you"?

And what was the solution to Paul's physical concerns? The Lord said, "For I have many in this city who are my people." **Other Christians, both current and forthcoming.**

Sadly, this passage has sparked debate over election and predestination. But at its heart, all this passage says is that the Lord knows who is his own and who will be saved. No matter one's position, be it Calvinist or Arminian, all can agree with that statement. And for Paul, such truth, while it could have theological implications, had a far more immediate and practical purpose: **encouragement**. Paul was surrounded by enemies; to be reminded that there were "many" in Corinth who were Christ's "people" would've emboldened him to weather the opposition. It was a spring to a parched soul.

And how did Paul react to Jesus's words? Luke said, "he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them."

Takeaway: When we're ready to give up, it's the **presence** of God and the **people** of God that keep us going.

READ: 1 John 4:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.

In other words, God's presence is manifested wherever love is to be found. Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). Brotherly love is a lantern that shines with divine light. **The more that we love one another, the more visible we make the invisible God.**

God's presence is found amidst God's people, and that, for a weary soul, is the difference maker; such truths keep someone from throwing in the towel and lay the groundwork for longevity in the Christian life. **There's an old African proverb that says, "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together."** Want to go far in the Christian life? Commune with God through the fellowship of the saints.

iii. Vs. 12-17 – God's Protection of Paul

Vs. 12-13 – Luke mentioned that when a man called "Gallio" became the "proconsul of Achaia," the unbelieving Jews saw an opportunity. New leadership meant a renewed opportunity to silence Paul. So, "the Jews made a **united** attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, saying, 'This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.'" This was, of course, a lie. But Paul's opponents would say anything to get rid of him.

Vs. 14-16 – Luke says that before Paul could even "open his mouth," to defend himself, "Gallio said to the Jews, 'If it were a matter of **wrongdoing** or **vicious crime**, O Jews, I would have

reason to accept your complaint. But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and **your own law**, see to it yourselves. I **refuse** to be a judge of these things.’ And he drove them from the tribunal.”

Vs. 17 – Luke then relays something rather strange. He says, “They all seized **Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue**, and beat him in front of the tribunal.”

As the ruler of the synagogue, “Sosthenes” must have been the one who replaced Crispus, the other ruler of the synagogue, after he and his household became believers.

But who does “they” refer to, and why did they beat Sosthenes? Some readings use “they” to refer to the Greeks. But most manuscripts aren't that specific. As it is, the closest referent of “they” is the “them” in the previous sentence, which itself refers to “the Jews.” Hence, it was the Jews who beat up Sosthenes. The fact that “Gallio paid **no attention to any of this**” supports this reading, since he had already stated that he would not adjudicate matters about Jewish law. Admittedly, this doesn't paint Gallio in a good light. This beating was the very thing that qualifies as “a matter of **wrongdoing or vicious crime**.” Even though the proconsul wouldn't move against Paul, he was still an unprincipled man. Like Pilate, he didn't want to be embroiled in Jewish matters.

Interestingly, the name “Sosthenes” appears only once elsewhere in the NT. In a letter written to the church in Corinth, Paul begins by saying, “Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes” (1 Co. 1:1). Admittedly, the name is common. But it's just as likely that the “Sosthenes” of Ac. 18:17 and 1 Co. 1:1 are one and the same. And if so, then the man became a believer sometime after this beating. I cannot help but recall Paul's instructions to Timothy,

“And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

How remarkable that a man who had one led a legal attack against Paul, became such a close companion of Paul that he'd mention him by name in an official correspondence with the church. **The gospel turns enemies into friends.**

All told, who beat Sosthenes and why they did so is far from clear. Good arguments can be made to say that it was the Jews who beat Sosthenes or the Greeks. If it were the Jews, one must explain why they beat up one of their own, especially one who was the ruler of the

synagogue. If it were the Greeks, one must demonstrate why a mob would be so enraged by a matter that was seen by the lead Greek, Gallio, as inconsequential.

Luke's desire, however, is merely to note not only Gallio's malpractice but also to point out how **the tables had turned on the Jews**. They wanted legal action brought against Paul, but it was they who suffered pain and major embarrassment.

Takeaway: In God's providence, the **schemes** of evil become the **means** of their own defeat.

READ: Psalm 7:14-16 (ESV)

“Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief and gives birth to lies. He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made. His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own skull his violence descends.”

The reversal motif is a major theme throughout the pages of the Scriptures. The Lord's providential hand takes the plans of the enemy and returns upon their heads.

In the story of Joseph, God used the evil plans of his brothers to save many from starvation.

In the book of Esther, Haman is hanged on the very gallows he had built for Mordecai.

As we saw earlier in Acts, persecution, far from suppressing Christianity, caused it to spread!

But the best example of his is the cross. Satan thought he had defeated Christ, but it was through his devilish plans that the plan of redemption was fulfilled. Paul even says that had the powers known the consequences of their actions at the time, they wouldn't have gone through with it (cf. 1 Cor. 2:7-8).

Soli Deo Gloria

Video Description:

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