



## PART 2

# PAUL IN CORINTH: LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE

## Chapter Five

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### HOW PAUL BROUGHT THE GOSPEL TO CORINTH

From the most ancient times, Corinth was a busy trading center, boasting the best harbor in the Corinthian Gulf. But in 146 BC, the Roman army under Mummius destroyed the city and left it completely empty, selling all the surviving inhabitants into slavery. Corinth lay utterly desolate for a full century. A hundred years later, however, Julius Caesar rebuilt the city, populating it mainly with freed slaves. Thus Corinth in Paul's time was completely Roman in culture. It became a resort town, always crowded, always busy, and always filled with travelers. It developed a reputation for debauchery.

The chief attractions in Corinth were pagan temples served by prostitutes. The pagan religions of the Greek and Roman world had made fornication into a religious sacrament, and Corinth became the focal point for that kind of profane **"worship."** The entire city was filled with brothels. Row after row of them are still visible today in the ruins of Corinth. Ritual fornication had become so deeply ingrained in the Corinthian culture that in the first century, **"to Corinthianize"** was a synonym for sexual immorality, and "a Corinthian girl" was a euphemism for a prostitute. Everyone knew that Corinth was a city of unbridled vice. It was analogous to modern Las Vegas, except that its chief attractions were temples rather than casinos.

This was, perhaps, not an auspicious place to found a church. But Corinth also had a large community of Jews and an active and centrally located synagogue. There Paul found an open door for the gospel. **"Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more"** ([Romans 5:20](#)).

**Romans 5:20 (NASB)**

<sup>20</sup> **"The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."**



**Acts 18** tells the story of how the church at Corinth was founded. When Paul came to Corinth, he met Priscilla and Aquila, who happened to be skilled in the same craft as the apostle Paul: tent making (**Acts 18:2–3**).

**Acts 18:2-3 (NASB)**

<sup>2</sup>“And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them,  
<sup>3</sup>and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers.”

Paul stayed in their home, worked alongside them during the week, and then, every Sabbath, he would go with them to the synagogue and preach the gospel (**v. 4**).

**Acts 18:4 (NASB)**

<sup>4</sup>“And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.”

They became devoted, lifelong friends of Paul, fellow Christians, and co-laborers with him in his ministry (cf. **Acts 18:18**; **Romans 16:3**; **1 Corinthians 16:19**; **2 Timothy 4:19**).

**Acts 18:18 (NASB)**

<sup>18</sup>“Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.”

**Romans 16:3 (NASB)**

<sup>3</sup>“Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.”

**1 Corinthians 16:19 (NASB)**

<sup>19</sup>“The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.”

**2 Timothy 4:19 (NASB)**

<sup>19</sup>“Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.”

Silas and Timothy soon joined Paul in the missionary work at Corinth (**Acts 18:5**).

**Acts 18:5 (NASB)**

<sup>5</sup>“But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul *began* devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.”

A turning point in Corinth came when most of the Jews in the synagogue refused Paul’s teaching. “He shook his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles’” (**Acts 18:6**).

**Acts 18:6 (NASB)**

<sup>6</sup>“But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood *be* on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”



He moved in with a Gentile named Justus (who happened to live immediately adjacent to the synagogue). Of course, Paul kept preaching the gospel, but now the focus of his ministry was the marketplace and the Gentile communities.

Some Jews did respond, including “Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue.”

**Acts 18:8 (NASB)**

<sup>8</sup>“Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the [Gentile] Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.”

That is why the majority in the Corinthian church were Gentiles from pagan backgrounds (cf. **1 Corinthians 12:2**).

**1 Corinthians 12:2 (NASB)**

<sup>2</sup>“You know that when you were pagans, *you were* led astray to the mute idols, however you were led.”

Corinth was one of the most fruitful mission fields the apostle Paul ever visited. As the church there was beginning to grow, Luke said, <sup>9</sup>“And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid *any longer*, but go on speaking and do not be silent; <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.” (**Acts 18:9–10 NASB**). Paul’s evangelistic ministry continued for a year and a half before he met any serious resistance.

Then, around July of the year 51, a man named Gallio became the new Roman proconsul of Achaia (the southern half of Greece). The Jewish community in Corinth tried to seize the opportunity to make trouble for Paul. They probably thought they could exploit Gallio’s inexperience and convince him to imprison Paul or drive him from Corinth.

**Acts 18:12-13 (NASB)**

<sup>12</sup>“But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews **with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat,**

<sup>13</sup> saying, “This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.”

“With one accord [they] rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat [a place called the *bema* in the center of the Corinthian *agora*, or marketplace], saying, ‘This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law’” (**vv. 12–13**).

Gallio wisely dismissed their charges, saying he had no desire to intervene in an intramural squabble over the nuances of the Jewish religion (**vv. 14–15**).

**Acts 18:14-15 (NASB)**

<sup>14</sup>“But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you;

<sup>15</sup> but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters.”

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**Lecture # 18**



**Acts 18:16 (NASB)**

**<sup>16</sup>“And he drove them away from the judgment seat.”**