

Joel Breidenbaugh (Acts 18:1-21)

Intro. Two of the most important characteristics in long-lasting relationships are learning to trust others & obey them, if they serve in a higher function. In a family, children learn to trust & obey their parents, who have their best in mind. In a classroom, students learn to trust & obey teachers, who should have their best in mind. In society, citizens learn to trust & obey governing authorities, who have their best in mind. In the church, members learn to trust & obey pastors, who have their best in mind. And the most important relationship you could ever have is to learn to trust & obey the Lord Jesus Christ. As we look at Acts 18 today in our “Missions 401: To the End of the Earth” series, we deal with the need to “Trust & Obey.”

Theme: Divine sovereignty & human responsibility

Background: Luke covers the end of Paul’s 2nd missionary journey with most of his time spent in Corinth. This takes place during the early AD 50s (late 50-early 52?).

Overview of Narrative:

- When Paul traveled to Corinth, just over 40 miles west of Athens, he met Aquila & Priscilla, who had left Rome because of a decree to remove Jews from there over a dispute involving Chrestus, probably whether Jesus was the Christ or not (Suetonius, *Life of Claudius*). All scholars agree Corinth had nearly a quarter of a million residents at this time, & some believe it was as large as 650,000 people (400K slaves & 250K free). Either way, it was a major commercial center with a road running North-South & situated along a seaport which could serve East-West, the Aegean & Adriatic Seas. It was also known for sport, where the Isthmian Games occurred every 2 years. Moreover, while residents didn’t rival Athens, they claimed their own wisdom & had at least 12 temples, including the Temple of Apollo (show pic) and one to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Thousands of men & women slaves served these temples to help fulfill the sexual desires of their worshipers (the city was so immoral that the phrase “to Corinthianize” meant to practice sexual immorality)—Corinth was the Las Vegas of today & much of the message to 1 Corinthians deals with repenting from sexual immorality.
- Possibly to distinguish himself from the false religious promoters in Corinth, Paul began his ministry there by working with leather & making tents. Once Silas & Timothy arrived, he devoted himself full-time to the spread of the gospel. After leaving the Jews by shaking off the dust so as not to tarnish his ministry, Paul stayed next door to the synagogue. God-fearing Greeks, like Titius Justus, and certain Jews, like the synagogue ruler Crispus believed & were baptized—baptism in the NT is always preceded by belief (believer’s baptism) & “baptism” always means “immersion,” so they practiced believer’s baptism via immersion. The conversions of households doesn’t mean infants were baptized (contrary to our Presbyterian friends) because most households don’t include infants (even if they didn’t wean children until 4-5 years of age, most households don’t include young children)
- During this time, Paul received a vision from the Lord that encouraged him to remain in Corinth & preach the gospel, because the Lord was going to do a great work there. Thus, Paul remained there a year and a half
- These conversions & others must have upset the Jews, because they brought charges against Paul, but Gallio wouldn’t even allow Paul to defend himself, because he viewed it as a dispute among Jewish law (possibly about Christ fulfilling sacrificial laws)—Gallio would have made his judgment from the bema (show pic), the judgment seat in Corinth. Gallio’s decision established a legal precedent, permitting Christianity to spread freely throughout the Roman Empire for another dozen years, for they viewed it as a sect of Judaism, a religion they already allowed.
- Sosthenes, the synagogue ruler, who may have been sympathetic to the Christian faith (there is a Sosthenes listed with Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:1), was beaten out of Jewish frustration
- Luke notes how Paul ended his 2nd missionary journey, fulfilling a vow by cutting his hair, making his way through Ephesus & Caesarea, back to Jerusalem & Antioch, to prepare for his next trip—Paul did all of these things out of a desire to “Trust & Obey” Jesus.

➤ **I want to share with you 4 lessons to learn from this text on divine sovereignty & human responsibility to “Trust & Obey”:**

1. Be convinced of God’s sovereignty in electing many to be His people (18:10; cf. cf. Matthew 24:22, 31; Romans 8:28-33; 9:11; Colossians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; Revelation 17:14)

- Now I know some of you are squirming in your seats when you hear talk of God’s “election,” but it is a Bible term & that’s what Luke is referencing here when Jesus says, “I have many people”
- It means God is in charge & the rest of the NT speaks of God electing His people (see also Acts 13:48; 15:13-14)
- Romans 16 & 1 Corinthians 1; 16 mention several who became God’s people—Titius Justus, Crispus, Phoebe, Tertius, Erastus, Quartus, Sosthenes, Chloe, Gaius, Stephanus, Fortunatus, Achaicus

Illus: Even if you don’t agree with God’s sovereignty, take time to read these passages & wrestle with the Lord. No one comes to believe in God’s sovereignty easily, because we want to be in charge. Don’t get mad about it, just go to the Lord & seek His Word.

2. Be courageous in your responsibility in sharing the gospel with unbelievers, because God will save some (18:4-11, 18-19)

- The Lord told Paul not to be afraid (the most common command in all of Scripture, grounded in the Lord’s presence with His people) & that He had many in Corinth that would become His people—Paul’s response was to stay & faithfully share the gospel—when you believe that no harm can come to you except what God permits, you can be much more courageous in sharing the gospel

Illus: Yesterday I got the chance to talk to my hairstylist about the gospel—in your personal opinion, what do you understand it takes for a person to go to heaven? She mentioned good works, so I asked her if I could share what the Bible teaches & she was open to hear—God is real & holy & none of us do good because of our sins. God sent His Son Jesus to live a sinless life & give that life for sinners. He is Lord & if we will turn from our sins & trust in Him, God will declare us right with Him, we’ll have peace with Him & forgiveness of sins. She thanked me for sharing & one of the other hairstylists was listening & amen-ing what I said. I told her about our church, but she said she has a church home—I mention that not to pat myself on the back but to show you that it really isn’t hard if we will just take a little time with the people we converse with

3. Be careful & let others defend you when persecuted, when possible (18:12-17)

- Sometimes you have to defend yourself, but if someone else will come to your aid & speak of your character or your views, let them defend you

Illus: In my low-20s, I was nearly fired from a church because one deacon didn’t like me. He convinced most of the deacon body to vote against me, but when it came up in business meeting, I never had to defend myself, because other deacons & the youth did

4. Be committed to serving others, if the Lord’s sovereignty allows it (18:19-21)

- Paul was committed to serving others & when he couldn’t stay in Ephesus, he promised to return, if God permitted it
- Unless the Lord prevents you from serving, you should be committed to serve

Illus: We have numerous opportunities for you to serve—teacher, choir, orchestra, tech team, children’s leader or helper, youth leader, usher, greeter, welcome desk, various committees, outreach, pastor’s prayer partners & so much more—you shouldn’t be thinking, “I’ll serve if someone personally asks me,” but every Christian should be committed to serve others & do it unless the Lord prevents them from doing so

Conc. As I began this message, I talked about the importance of needing to “Trust & Obey” in certain relationships & none of these are more significant than trusting & obeying the Lord. For some of you, that means surrendering your life to Jesus for salvation & obeying Him in believer’s baptism. For others, it means joining with this church family so you can be held accountable in your faith & carry out your faith responsibly. For some, it may mean repenting & rededicating your life to Jesus. For others it could mean surrendering your life to the Lord in vocational ministry or missions. Whatever it means, make sure you “Trust & Obey,” for there’s no other way, to be happy in Jesus, than to “Trust & Obey.”