



And the LIGHT drove out the darkness...

*6 And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.*

Acts 18:6

The life of the Apostle Paul casts a long shadow of contradiction in the sense of human reason, and of grace in the eyes of God and the Church. Who would ever have believed that this man who had savagely persecuted the Church would become one of its most prodigious ministers and defenders. His calling was one of extraordinary wonder having been struck down on the Road to Damascus while enroute to cause much pain and suffering to the Church there. It was the Lord Jesus Christ in His first post Ascension appearance that apprehended and brought Saul (Paul) to his knees in desperation. Paul is a highly educated member of the Jewish tradition, having been under the tutelage of the wise Gamaliel. Though responsible for the deaths of many Christians, he yet believes himself to be doing God a service. But that line of thought perished in an instant when Paul was blinded by the Light of Christ.

Many who first come as catechists, or new converts, are blinded at the first moment they suddenly realize the depth of their salvation in Christ. They will need to be led by more mature Christians in the Way, the Truth, and the Life since no beginner is fully aware of the fullness of the Gospel at first light. Paul preaches first to the Jews with only marginal success. He is rejected by them just as was our Lord. So he is compelled to follow precisely God's plan for him from the same event of the experience on that Road to Damascus. How often do new Christians begin with fire and bluster in the wrong direction, and are set anew on the road that God had intended all along. The One who officiates over the affairs of men KNOWS all. So Paul will now concentrate on the greater Gentile Church. Perhaps even Paul did not know that he was simply being directed by that Providential and unseen Hand from on High. It will happen again to Paul after he has preached far and wide to the Gentile churches and is then forced to go to Rome as a prisoner. Why? I believe that once Paul has planted the Gospel Seed so prolifically and widely, God now desires Paul to be still in a prisoner role and write those wonderful and inspired Epistles to the churches so that we, too, could benefit in our own day. So as a prisoner later at Rome, Paul was led by the Holy Spirit to become the Lord's Scribe. Let us observe the moment of Paul's change in emphasis:

*1 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; 2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that*

Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. <sup>3</sup> And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. <sup>4</sup> And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. <sup>5</sup> And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. <sup>6</sup> And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. <sup>7</sup> And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. <sup>8</sup> And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. <sup>9</sup> Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, *Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:* <sup>10</sup> *For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.* <sup>11</sup> And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. (Acts 18:1-11)

After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth. The greatest obstacle to Paul's teaching thus far has been the very people who should have been the most receptive – the Jews. Having received the Law and the Prophets from old times, instead of having a greater propensity for Light, they were jaded and intolerant of truth. They rejected the Gospel and attempted to prevent others from receiving it. If one class will not hear and receive, we must go to others who will and, so, Paul will go to the Gentiles almost exclusively.

And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. Those Jews who did receive the Gospel had a fuller understanding of the fullness thereof. Such is the case with Aquila and Priscilla. They had left Rome at the order of Claudius Caesar. It seems that the Jews had been only a burden to Rome as well as to the Gospel. Even Caesar expels them!

Paul took particular care not to give any reason for offense to those who would receive the Gospel. He worked at his trade as a tentmaker to defray his expenses as well as charges that he was after filthy lucre. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. There is never dishonor in honest labor. When circumstances permit, the minister of God must take as little of the church treasure as possible to live. Work is honorable.

And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. It seems that the Gentiles, generally speaking, were always more receptive to Paul's preaching than the Jewish populations; however, his use of the synagogue suggests that these Corinthian Jews were far less opposed to it than others.

And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. These two had come from Thessalonica to assist and encourage Paul in the work. Being rejected by both Jew and Gentile at Athens, Paul is heavily burdened in his heart to speak out boldly to the Jews regarding Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah (Christ).

And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. Anyone who fails to accept the Gospel when it is preached is in open opposition of his own soul. Those who have vacant hearts enough to reject the Gospel will neither suffer any compunction at blaspheming its Author. The Word of God is a two-edged Sword. It cuts in both directions. It may either convict the sinner's heart, or it may finally condemn him to an eternity of separation from God. The minister's role is to preach the fullness of the Gospel. We are not to dwell on the failure

of all hearers to openly receive it. We sow the seed, and the Holy Spirit will nurture the seed in the darkness of the heart (soil). If we do our full duty as ministers of Christ, no sinner will have the benefit of claiming to have never heard the Gospel preached. Once having heard the Gospel, the sinner is now responsible for his response to it. *Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.* (Ezek 33:4, 9) So Paul leaves off centering his preaching of the Jews and now focuses his greatest effort on the Gentiles.

*And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.* Paul did not depart, as may be presumed, from the house of Aquila and Priscilla, but, instead, removed his preaching from the synagogue to the house of Justus. This house was conveniently positioned next to the synagogue which would afford further opportunity to those who were inclined of the synagogue to attend his preaching. Though the Jews and strangers may reject the Gospel, it may nonetheless be made available for their hearing if the Holy Spirit so draws them.

*And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.* It was not the custom of Paul to engage in many baptisms but apparently left this function to the ministers arising in the congregations, however, the conversion of Crispus was of such import that Paul made an exception and did, indeed, baptize this chief ruler of the synagogue. Again, we find a suggestion of the covenantal nature of baptism in that Crispus and his whole house believed and was baptized. As oft as this is mentioned in the New Testament, it is obvious that, at some, point, the whole household must necessarily include the very young.

For a man whose career of persecution of the Church had ended on a stony road to Damascus, Paul has moved a great distance into the particular favor of the Lord. His appearance to him on that road, as well as the other appearances or counsels, demonstrate that we may all be called and chosen of God from diverse backgrounds that may even include the darkest of sins. *Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.* The Hand of God is not excluded from any conditions of man. Here, the Lord counsels Paul to speak with great courage and fear not to speak the whole Gospel with boldness for He is with him and will protect him. The Lord, as a good shepherd, knows His Sheep. He has many of whom Paul may not be aware in Corinth. As a matter of fact, there are many today who have yet to become aware of their calling and election in Christ. It is for this reason that we must not lose heart or confidence in the salvation of any child of Adam. God knows His chosen from those who will perish, and He has a time and a place for them on the Damascus Road. Those *much people in this city* were likely unaware of their calling in God at the moment, but God knew of it!

*And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.* Such a sojourn was no doubt necessary to insure that all of the elect of God of the city would hear and know the Gospel. Though there were doubtless daily threats against Paul in Corinth from the Jews, he nevertheless had faith in the counsel of the Lord and took no care for his safety. We may also learn a lesson in our ministries from Paul. Even though the whole church may seemingly try to close our mouths from speaking exceptional features of the Gospel, we must preach with courage and cast all caution to the wind. *Let God be true and every man a liar!* (Romans 3:4)