

Acts - Commentaries by Paul Wilson

Vessels: December 2018, Vessel of Honor or Dishonor, A

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In the first verse of Acts 18, two cities of Greece are mentioned by name—Athens and Corinth. They were very different in character, although located within 100 miles of each other. Athens was the great center of learning and philosophy, far outdistancing any other city in the world. Corinth was a dissolute and licentious place—so much so, that if a Greek turned to lead a loose life, he was said to have gone to Corinth. Its inhabitants, although they sought after wisdom and gloried in erudition, generally wanted ease and fleshly indulgence.

The Apostle Paul visited and preached the gospel in both cities. At Athens he had to descend to the lowest point, and speak of the Creator's power and the evidences of His work, for, with all their striving after knowledge (Acts 17:21), they did not know the living God. (How often this has been true among the wise of this world.) Notwithstanding the earnest efforts of the greatest preacher of the cross of Christ, there was little fruit from his labors. Dionysius and Damaris, with a few others, believed on the Lord Jesus, but we never read of Paul's going there again, nor of an assembly being formed there. No apostolic letter addressed to saints at Athens has been left to us.

To Corinth, Paul went once and again. At first the opposition was strong, but he was encouraged by the Lord with these words: "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" (Acts 18:9-10). What? much people in the rich, profligate Corinth, and not in Athens? Yes, God has salvation for lost, ruined sinners, but the proud, philosophic reasoners against God knew no need. The Areopagites might speculate about the "new things" the "babbling" said, but they cared not for that which made nothing of man or his boasted wisdom. It was foolishness to them.

At Corinth a flourishing assembly was formed, and Paul addressed two long epistles to them. Various other brethren visited them, and the saints there came behind in no gift, so that they were inclined to glory in men and in the gifts which they possessed. They were carnal, however, walked as men and had to be reproved for it (1 Cor. 3:3), for party spirit and strife was the evidence of carnality.

Before they were saved some of them had been "fornicators...idolaters...thieves...drunkards... extortioners," etc., but they had been saved, washed, and justified (1 Cor. 6:9-11). What a wonderful change the gospel brings into the lives of people! "Moral rearmament" and social reforms might effect certain changes in people's conduct, but it cannot wash and justify sinners, and transform them from within.

Love of the Truth Lost

There was, however, a danger that when the love of the truth had lost its power over their souls, there might be some slipping back and occasional falling into old ways and habits. This happened at Corinth, and gave occasion to the Apostle to write to them to put out a man guilty of fornication. The assembly was responsible to judge them who were within their ranks, for they were unleavened; evil had no place there. To meet this ever-present danger, the Apostle reminded them that they had been purchased at a great price, and hence they were no longer their own; they belonged to another whom they were to please. They now were to glorify God in their bodies and not live like the careless heathen around them; the body was for the Lord, not for self and indulgence of fleshly lusts (1 Cor. 6:18-20).

These warnings in the Word of God are particularly salutary in the days in which we live. Morality is at an all-time low in so-called Christian countries. People are abandoning themselves to indulgence of the lusts of the flesh and of the mind. We are living in the last days, when Christendom, by and large, is loving pleasure rather than God (see 2 Tim. 3:1-5 JND). Our dear young people (even children in grade schools) are being brought up in an increasingly corrupt atmosphere in the world, and need to be instructed, like the Corinthians, that we who are joined to the Lord are one spirit with Him. Hence all we do and allow should bear the impress of our belonging to Him. "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

Vessels with Pure Minds

The Apostle Peter addressed the Christians, referring to their "pure minds." We need to guard our minds that they do not become defiled by the filthy conversation of the wicked, as poor Lot's was after he went to Sodom (2 Pet. 2:7, 8; 3:1). "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

How to Possess Your Vessel

Thessalonica was not far removed from Corinth, and the same general moral conditions prevailed in that vicinity. In fact it was widespread in the days of the old Roman Empire, so the Apostle exhorted them: "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more....For this is the will of God....that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor" (1 Thess. 4:1-4). Our bodies here are what Paul refers to as "his vessel," and elsewhere we read that our body is "the temple of the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. 6:19). How important that it be kept from anything that would dishonor the Lord, and His Holy Spirit who dwells there!

What we all need more and more is attachment of heart to the Lord Jesus, ardent affection in the soul, with the Word of God having power over our consciences. Thus we shall be able to "walk and to please God." Enoch "walked with God" and he "pleased God" (Gen. 5:22;

Heb. 11:5), although he lived amid surrounding corruption and moral depravity. The world was then heading for the flood, as now it is going on to the perils and destruction of the great tribulation and the subsequent judgment of “the great and terrible day of the Lord.” Enoch so walked “three hundred years,” but that was done just one day at a time. We need grace for each day as it comes—“Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” “He giveth more grace,” and we need not anticipate the difficulties or trials of tomorrow. We have only to “walk and to please God” today with the grace and strength supplied by Himself; it is available to all who wait upon Him.

Paul Wilson (adapted)

The Activity of Love: December 2015, Activity of Divine Love, The

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“Jesus of Nazareth ... who went about doing good” (Acts 10:38).

There is nothing negative about this verse; it does not say, “Who did no harm.” There was One who, in His pathway through this world of misery and need, was actively engaged in doing good. His love was unwearied and in spite of rebuffs and even hatred, He “went about doing good.” The ungrateful response of those to whom He came is told in the words of the Psalms: “For My love they are My adversaries. ... They have rewarded Me evil for good, and hatred for My love” (Psa. 109:4-5).

Still that blessed One went steadily forward “doing good,” and at last we read of Him weeping over (not the fact that He was rejected, but) those of that guilty city because of the terrible judgments that were soon to fall on them (Luke 19:41-44).

May we, His redeemed ones, who are left in this same world a little longer, be better transcripts of the One to whom we belong — that One who “went about doing good.” The needs are great and the “night is far spent.” A few verses from the epistles may remind us of our opportunities and privileges:

“Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work. ... For we ourselves also were sometime foolish, disobedient, deceived. ... But according to His mercy He saved us” (Titus 3:1-5).

“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).

We must not, however, disregard any direct word or any principle of Scripture in doing good. Here we need to keep a balance and remember that we must “strive lawfully.” Our enemy is very subtle and would entangle us with associations and unequal yokes in our seeking to do good. But, fellow-Christian, if we are really seeking to “redeem the time” (it is fast going) and look to Him for His guidance, we shall find abundant opportunities. Then, shall we not as a “royal priest” dispense royal bounty and “show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9)?

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