

Sharing Faith in a Confusing World

Thomas Robinson, February 6, 2011

Acts 18:1-11

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 people in this city.*”

¹¹ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Act 17:16-23

¹⁶ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “*What does this babbler wish to say?*” Others said, “*He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities*”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “*May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?*” ²⁰ For you bring some *strange things* to our ears. We wish to know therefore *what these things mean.*” ²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “*Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.*” ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘*To the unknown god.*’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

²⁴ *The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,* ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’”

“I Have Many People in This City.”

Acts describes the dramatic development of Paul’s mission. Often traveling, many dangers. When he came to Corinth, he had faced difficulties and success in other cities. Here was a large new city, Roman colony, center of trade, with mixed cultures: Greek, Roman, Jewish, traders from everywhere. Expensive to live. Paul needs work.

Paul comes with a new vision of the world, humanity, God seen through Jesus Messiah. Not another person in the city shares it. Prejudices against Paul as a Jew. He goes to the Jewish community and synagogue. Paul finds fellow Jews of the same trade – Aquila and Priscilla. He stays and works with them in the marketplace.

Paul dialogs in the synagogue, converses in the marketplace, talking to Jews and Greeks. In the synagogue, he shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of the ancient promises, not a new religion / break with the past. But the Messiah opens the promises to Gentiles.

Opposition develops among Jews just like Paul had been. New converts, new community. But the Lord calls Paul to stay in Corinth. God has been at work in Corinth long before Paul came. There are many whose lives are prepared to hear the message. Paul can be the one to touch those lives and change them. Don’t be afraid. Don’t be silent.

Many Levels of Conversation

When we watch Paul, we can be intimidated. We’re not apostles, commissioned by God to preach. Paul worked hard to start something. Others mostly unnamed carried on.

Paul worked in two settings: Places of worship and prayer. The marketplace of city life. In synagogues the conversation could begin with scripture, God, Messiah, promises – with people like Paul had been– good people who needed to be born again. So it was. In the agora/marketplace, finance, trade, theater, art, religion, government, all came together. In Corinth or Athens Paul interacted with all kinds of people. You could never know in advance who it was that God had prepared to hear the message. Paul talked with co-workers, customers, people with problems, people with strong views. Giving people the chance to respond positively to the Spirit of God working in them.

There are so many different ways/levels for us to interact with people in a way that opens a door for God’s work. 1 Start with simple identification: “Last Sunday, after church, I went to...” 2 Mention a positive way your church community has affected your life – friendship, conversation, support, etc. 3 How your faith or scripture has helped you with some issue: marriage, parenting, forgiving, suffering. 4 Ask questions about what your friend believes, what gives life meaning (listening, without arguing). 5 How Christ and faith have changed your life (brief testimony). 6 Give a person an article or book to read that you found helpful. 7 Invite the person to a faith event or worship service.

The progression continues all the way to discussing with philosophers on the Areopagus.

Making Connections

Like Paul we need the support of a faith community and relationships with non-Christians that go below the surface. Don’t have only Christian friends. Stay engaged.

Build real friendships. No manipulation. The Gospel is too good / too serious. God works.