**CORINTH-Paul goes to the Gentiles Acts 18: 1-17 & Jn. 10: 14-14**

1. Intro.   
   What comes into your mind when you hear the word “Corinth”? The Canal, perhaps, or the adjective’ Corinthian’-the columns with florid tops or-an amateur sportsman or-archaic-‘profligate or immoral’? The Corinthians were certainly that in Paul’s time & yet he chose their city as the hub for Christian ministry. Corinth was a famous city state till destroyed by the Romans in 146BC & rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44BC as a Roman colony. Thus, its outlook was Roman! It had two ports-one on each side of the Isthmus, was at a trading crossroads, rich, cosmopolitan & the capital of Achaia, the Roman province-a strategic hub-BUT its citizens were immoral, proud, pleasure loving, faction ridden & a mix of Greek, Roman & Near Eastern ideas about ecstatic cults. Paul had a hard task trying to keep the fellowship there on the rails-hence the two letters to the Corinthians-they gave him great anguish but, also, joy. We need to look at two aspects of his time in Corinth.
2. Firstly,
   1. Corinth saw a key moment in Paul’s life when in Acts 18; 6 after the Jews, to whom he had been explaining the Gospel for some time, became abusive, he said “I am clear of my responsibilities. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” He washed his hands of them. Whereas previously he had spoken to Jews & God fearing Gentiles, he would now, mostly, go to Gentiles whether God fearing or not.

This would be an explosive change 1. Pharisees, like Paul, had no contact with Gentiles, so he would be giving up the habits of a lifetime & face a very uncertain future. It is hard for us to appreciate how strongly the Pharisees feared any contact with Gentiles, who would contaminate or pollute them-it was like the first fears about the Covid 19 virus! The Gentiles were beyond the pale & interaction with them impossible. Without Paul’s change of heart we would never have heard the Gospel! If he had provoked some Jews up till now with the gospel, how much more so if he concentrated on the Gentiles-so his future was very uncertain.

* 1. What enabled him to face this change?

1. His call-in Acts 26 16-18 he told King Agrippa that on the Damascus Road the Lord Jesus told him “I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant & witness of what you have seen of Me…I will rescue you from your own people & from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes & turn them from darkness to light.” This call drove Paul on-thereafter he was constrained by the love of God-he could do no other.
2. Reassurance
3. His dream in Acts 18: 9-10 where the Lord Jesus said to him “Do not be afraid;” (that suggests Paul was fearful about the future!) “keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you & no one is going to attack & harm you, because I have many people in this city.” He was being encouraged to persist in speaking despite everything, for many needed to hear & would believe. He was promised only that there would be no attacks that would harm him, which was fulfilled, when Gallio throw out the Jews’ case against him.
4. Encouragement of the response to his speaking Acts 18: 7-8. Two prominent Corinthians became Christians, Titius Justus &, amazingly, the synagogue ruler, Crispus “& his entire household; many of the Corinthians who heard him believed & were baptised.” Thus, the Lord Jesus’ promise “ I have many people in this city.” was fulfilled!
5. The Lord’s will-in Jn. 10: 16 He explained that He had “other sheep that are not of this sheep pen” (the Gentiles). “I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, & there shall be one flock & one Shepherd.” So Paul was fulfilling not his own scheme but the Lord’s plan what an encouragement that must have been!  
   1. The cost to Paul-he longed to see his fellow Jews accept that Jesus was the Messiah, whom they would believe in & follow. Their intransigence caused him great sorrow besides abuse & opposition. In Rom. 9:1-4 “I speak the truth in Christ-I am not lying… I have great anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed & cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption of sons..the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship & the promises.” In Rom. 10: 1-2 he writes “Brothers, my heart’s desire & prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved…they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.” If the letter to the Romans was written in Corinth, as is likely, this heartfelt wish must reflect how grievous he found the Jews treatment there!

NB Is there any help for us in the explosive change for Paul in going to the Gentiles & his consequent uncertain future?

Our church family faces an uncertain future post pandemic & changes post Val, as we link up with North Buckingham. Like Paul our call is to let our light “so shine before men that they may see” our “good works & glorify” our “Father in Heaven.” Matt. 5: 16. We, too, have the reassurance “Lo, I am with you always till the end of the world.” Matt. 28: 20. Lastly, we know what the Good Shepherd wants “there shall be one flock & one Shepherd.” Jn. 10: 16.

1. Secondly,   
   Opposition both direct & indirect.
   1. Direct opposition-robust even violent from the Jews. Corinth was for the fourth time of asking! It followed a pattern of trumped up charges of disorderly Jewish agitation (with Christians implicated as a Jewish sect) linked to “advocating customs unlawful for Romans” as at Philippi Acts 16: 20-21. At Thessalonica it was trouble in “defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another King, one called Jesus.”Acts 17: 6-8. At Berea it was Thessalonians stirring up agitation! In Corinth the charge ran “This man…is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.” Acts 18: 13.

The governor, Gallio, saw through this deceit at once-the charge was not about a serious crime, but “involves words & names & your own law…I will not be a judge of such things. So he had them ejected from the court.” Acts 18: 15 He had saved Paul’s bacon, knowing that under an uneasy compromise the Jews had special rights within the law regarding their religion, though he showed a typical Roman disdain of the Jews. To him they were quarrelsome & prone to riots, while refusing to be assimilated into the Empire, whose legitimacy rested, partly, on the peace imposed by Augustus after the previous 100 years or so of civil strife. Indeed, Aquila & Priscilla were expelled with other Jews from Rome Acts 18: 2 in 49AD because, according to Suetonius, an unreliable witness, of the “constant rioting at the instigation of Chrestus”-probably disputes between orthodox & Christian Jews!

Gallio, brother to Seneca, a famous Stoic philosopher showed his disdain for the Jews, when scornfully addressing them as “You Jews..” Acts 18:14 & dismissing their laws as beneath his remit as judge. Like many educated Romans he thought their customs bizarre to the point of being bonkers-hence his refusal to get involved. The riot in v. 17 was probably pagans attacking Jews & Christians by beating up Sosthenes, another synagogue leader, which Gallio pointedly ignored-was this a hint of a low level anti-Semitism?

* 1. Indirect opposition-Gallio seems to have been totally indifferent to & uncomprehending of the issues addressed by the Gospel-sin, forgiveness & the love of God. These issues had led many thinking Gentiles to consider the moral ideals of Judaism & later to be attracted to the person of Christ.
  2. In Jn. 10: 19-20 the Lord Jesus had experienced the same sort of opposition-direct & indirect. “I have authority to lay (my life) down & to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.” This reference to the Cross, His Resurrection & my Father divided the Jews. Many said He was “raving mad.” Others disagreed-convinced by his sayings & the miracles. Paul, therefore, could be reassured that his Lord had experienced the same as him.

NB How can this all help us? As Christians we face opposition indirect & direct. We see a growing indifference to or incomprehension of what Jesus Christ & his followers stand for & why. Some parts of the media are ready to slag Christians off. There are trumped up charges of causing offence or inciting hate crimes, if Christians quote Scripture in public places or disagree with political correctness, cancel culture or Gender Identity. Some think Christian views are being eliminated from the public arena.

Like Paul we can pray for God’s will to be done & thank the Lord Jesus that He’s been through this, too & for his promise “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” Jn. 16: 33. Let us do just that.