

1. A New Team: The Necessity of Community

a. Community of Shared Experience

- i. Aquila (A-kwee-la) and his wife, Priscilla (also called Prisca)
- ii. They shared in the grief of expulsion because emperor Claudius expelled all Jews due to some Jews causing social trouble and unrest in Rome
 1. This accusation may have been just (Suetonius mentions the name of a Chrestus as the point of contention between differing parties of Jews)
 2. This accusation may have been unjust (Paul himself was falsely accused of such a thing for merely proclaiming a different worldview in regard to idols)

b. Paul “discovered” them

- i. This word indicates that he found them after searching
- ii. He most likely was searching for either a Jewish believer in Jesus, or for a “man of peace” – a Jew who was looking for the Messiah
 1. I think that it is the first option, that Aquila and Prisca were already believers in Jesus because there is no mention of their conversion or baptism
 2. They also become major partners with Paul, not only in Corinth, but in Ephesus, and later in Rome

c. Paul, then was looking for a new team, since Luke, Silas, and Timothy had not yet arrived

- i. Paul recognizes that he shouldn’t work alone, even though he was an apostle, sent and gifted by the Lord to proclaim the gospel
- ii. What this implicitly tells us is that Paul, like most of us, got lonely

d. In fact, there is a tone of discouragement in this passage, and even a vision from the Lord necessary to encourage him

i. Consider why:

1. Though there had been great work of the Spirit at every stop, there was also great suffering and rejection
2. Being a very learned and well-read man, who “excelled his peers” at his studies, he was largely panned and laughed at when he had the opportunity to address the most learned and well-read men of the Greco-Roman world in Athens
 - a. When we are crushed at what we love to do and enjoy, it is disheartening
 - b. Note that Paul left Athens quickly, even though there were believers there who trusted in the Lord through his message (Demetrius and Damaris, both *archons*, learned lawyers)
 - c. But Paul didn’t wait for Silas and Timothy, which was the plan, but moved on – why? I think that he was discouraged.

ii. He needed a job!

1. Note that what drew him to Aquila and Priscilla was their shared trade and the opportunity to work with them
2. This is very practical: he had to eat, have a place to stay, and support himself so that he could continue
3. This is the first time that such self-support is mentioned in the ministry of Paul
 - a. Usually he is supported by outside churches
 - i. In fact, when Silas and Timothy arrive, they seem to bring a gift from the Macedonian church (Philippi)
 - ii. 2 Cor 8:1-5; 11:7-9; Phil 4:15
 - b. Or he works to support himself
 - i. As shown here and in 1 Thess 2:9 and 2 Thess 3:8 as the pattern
 - c. But he is never supported by the local church to whom he is ministering

- i. He clearly explains to the Corinthians that it is right for a local assembly to support their teachers (1 Cor 9), yet he never used that right, but laid it down (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8)
 - ii. Why not?
 - iii. Paul was a church planter – which means that he didn't stay long
 - iv. So accountability would be questioned and his motives of taking resources and leaving town (and any messiness) behind him
 - v. He didn't want such accusations of him to stick
 - vi. So, he distinguishes his rather brief church-planting from long-term shepherding by doing so
 - iii. He was ministering in the mixture again of grateful people and growling people
 - 1. This work is the most difficult
 - a. If everyone was grateful, it is a joy to labor
 - b. If everyone growls, it is clear to move on
 - c. But when there is a mixture, you must endure the growling with grace and perseverance and work with joy to edify the grateful without treating them like the growlers
 - 2. Thus, Paul's ministry alone was wearing on him – he needed a team, a vision, and God's providence of protection
 - iv. He was again insulted and abused by his kinsman
 - 1. This type of suffering tends to 'pile up' on our souls
 - 2. You could see why Paul would be tempted, being a man like us, to quit
 - a. I'm sure that Antioch was an appealing memory
 - 3. It's one thing to be rejected, it's another to be "slandered" and "opposed"
 - a. This word "opposed" means "to range in battle" or "to line up against"
 - b. It is a military word of forming up lines in order to go to battle
 - i. How do you feel when your family whom you love, line up against you with gritted teeth and growling voices?
- e. All of this shows us that the threat of discouragement was knocking on Paul's door – and he sought out a team for help
 - i. "When I am in the cellar of affliction, I look around for the Lord's choicest wines." – attributed to Samuel Rutherford
- f. All of this, of course has been ordained providentially by God, as Luke is very clear
 - i. How a Jew born in Pontus heard the gospel (there were Pontians at Pentecost in Jerusalem – was Aquila one of them, or possibly heard the gospel from one of them?)
 - ii. Then that Pontian married a wealthy family from Rome (Prisca is a family name of a wealthy and powerful Roman family)
 - iii. Then they were expelled by the racial prejudice of the powerful Roman government
 - iv. Then they ended up in the booming metropolis of Corinth sitting in the synagogue next to a scarred little Jew who had just had a run-in with the philosophers of Athens and was also a tent-maker like himself
 - v. This is all providential working of God to put these two together at this very point in time
 - 1. Consider and hope: God did not bring Paul and Aquila and Prisca together through a vision (like Peter and Cornelius) or through a mysterious compulsion of the Spirit to travel (like Philip and the Ethiopian), but through very normal everyday means, some of which were evil
 - a. Some rabbleroising Jews in Rome had causes conflict and trouble and discord
 - b. The prejudice and racism of Claudius
 - c. The sneering condescension and close-mindedness of Athenians
 - d. The isolation and loneliness of Paul

2. A New Work: The Dignity of Labor

- a. Paul returned to his original profession from Tarsus: leather-working
 - i. Tarsus was known for a special black goat leather
- b. Luke actually states that the reason that “he lived with them” and “he worked with them” was because “they were tent-makers by trade”
 - i. In other words, Paul’s gift of leather-working, a specialty of Tarsus, was perfectly suited to their tent-making trade
 - ii. Thus, they found that they could collaborate together in business, too
- c. The Biblical worldview is that work, labor, has dignity and sanctity as the design of God
 - i. This is in opposition to the Greek mindset, which was that contemplation was the true purpose of life
 - ii. Remember how the Athenians used to “spend their time in nothing but talking about what was new”?
 1. Being unemployed, or having means so that you didn’t have to work, was the prerequisite for a genuinely worthwhile life, according to Aristotle.
 - iii. But for the Christian, work has an intrinsic value as human good
- d. We were made for work:
 - i. There is something cathartic in creatively and productively working with your hands
 - ii. Laboring in thought and wrestling with affections of the soul is actually strengthened not by sitting still, but by being active
 - iii. There is a type of rest for the soil of the mind in letting the fields of your thoughts be sown with a different crop, from worldviews and values and universalities to the particulars of needle and thread, of ratchet and wrench, of designing a door flap for a new type of tent
 - iv. We know this, intrinsically, and we feel it because we feel it when we are not productive
 1. To feel useful is a universal condition because work began in the garden before sin entered, not as a result of sin
- e. The purpose of work is the greatest commandment, the purpose of humanity: to love God and love one’s neighbor (Luke 10:27)
 - i. In Creation, only Humans are set apart and given a job description, an office to fill: “exercise dominion” over Creation as God’s image-bearers – Steward My Stuff
 1. Thus, while the Greeks saw work as barbaric because the physical body was evil and the immaterial was good, the Bible sees work as dignified and glorious because the body and soul are dignified and glorious
 2. Because all of Creation has value as belonging to God, then taking care of it, “exercising dominion” over it so that it flourishes, is a great work of worship
 - ii. Thus, we cannot minimize the significance of our work in such things, as if there is “Bible study” and “Work” and they are opposite poles on the great magnet of worship, constantly repelling each other
 - iii. No, they are both worship, and they are correlative in that worship
 1. Whatever we do, we are called to work for the Lord, not to earn something from Him, but because we have been given an inheritance with Him
 - a. Col 3:23-24
 - b. Cutting the grass, managing Creation, or gardening, or changing the oil in your car, or feeding and mucking the stalls, or bussing tables or waxing floors – these are all glorious
 2. Worship is whatever we do heartily to the Lord and for the sake of others, in that order
 - a. “The prince should think: Christ has served me and made everything to follow him; therefore, I should also serve my neighbor, protect him and everything that belongs to him. That is why God has given me this office, and I have it that I might serve him. That would be a good prince and ruler. When a prince sees

his neighbor oppressed, he should think: That concerns me! I must protect and shield my neighbor....The same is true for the shoemaker, tailor, scribe, or reader. If he is a Christian tailor, he will say: I make these clothes because God has bidden me do so, so that I can earn a living, so that I can help and serve my neighbor.” – Luther, *sermon from 1522*

- iv. This gives all of our work a sanctity, an act of service to both God AND to neighbor, and enables us to labor with great purpose in all things
 1. Not just ‘churchy’ things or “big ideas”, but the “menial” things like cleaning out gutters, and delivering pizzas
 2. Our work is do whatever we do for the glory of God and for the service and flourishing of our neighbor
 - a. We are to make every widget for the sake of our neighbor’s good
 - b. We are to serve every customer for their flourishing and betterment
 - c. Our goal is not merely the financial benefit, but the benefit to the lives of others who purchase our product or service
 3. Recognize also that the Biblical story shows us not only the dignity of work, but the effect of the Fall – not all work will be fruitful, so frustration will be a part
- v. Therefore, put down the cell phone and be creative, be productive, strive to make and do something which will benefit those around you and honor the God who is Himself creative, productive, and generous

3. How Can We Do This?

- a. Community: We do it together to battle discouragement with the promises of Christ
- b. Remember Jesus as your Deep Soul Rest – Hebrews 4:9-10
- c. Much of our work is assumed to be the means by which we gain some benefit in the world
 - i. We “have to” work, or be honored for being a good worker, or paid great wealth because we think that we *have to have* honor, prestige, wealth, or comfort
 - ii. These are the idols of our hearts and work is the sacrifice that we make to them in order to gain their blessings
 1. There is an “incessant inner turmoil” as we labor restlessly
- d. But when I rest in the reality that Jesus has completed EVERYTHING that I need to be fully accepted, fully honored, and to receive a full inheritance from God, then I can rest from the striving for success, for honor, and for money
 - i. He is my deep soul rest, my true Sabbath from my works
 - ii. And then, when I am resting in His provision, I can labor and work hard for the sake of God and for the sake of others without the fear of losing any of those things
- e. When I look at the Cross of Christ, where the supremely powerful One with the riches of Heaven, laid down his life to purchase a sinner like me, who hated him and despised him and ignored him, I find it very hard to work for myself
 - i. The Cross shows me the God who worked on my behalf, even when I was opposed to him and wanted him killed
 1. This mercy slays my pride in work and my demeaning self-centeredness
 - ii. The Cross also shows me the God who has secured all the mercy and blessing that I need at His own expense
 1. This providence shows me that I can labor for the sake of others even when I am unappreciated and uncomfortable
 - iii. The resurrection of Jesus shows me that I have a future grace, and that any life or dream or comfort that I lay down to die on this earth for the sake of others will be taken up again, so I can live for the sake of others today with the labor of my hands
- f. To be a Christian is not to try harder to prove how good our works are, but to rest completely upon the works of Jesus. God accepts me because of Jesus’ works, not mine, so I can labor with joy!

4. How Was it That This New Community Could Labor with Hope, in Spite of Being Expelled?
 - a. They all knew the grief of being Expelled – just like their Master
 - i. A & P expelled from Rome
 - ii. Paul expelled from Athens, most recently
 - b. There is a shared experience of grief and loss which binds these three together as well, which would be an encouragement to Paul in his loneliness
 - i. Are there places where your heart has been wounded, your soul discouraged, your spirit grieved?
 - ii. Have you sought out those who have also experienced such recent loss, for the purpose of encouraging one another in the promises of Christ?
 1. The comforts of Rome cannot compare to the comfort of God's presence, who will wipe every tear from our eye and say, "Enter into the joy of your Master."
 2. The praise of Athens cannot compare to the praise of God, who will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"
 3. It is easy, in the throes of grief, to lose sight of the reality and certainty of the faithfulness of God to His promises
 - c. Hebrews 13:12 – "So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood."
 - i. They could unite in their suffering and use their current condition for the sake of others because they entrusted themselves to the one who suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the community.

5. A New Courage (5-8)

- a. Reasoning with the religious of common background
 - i. He continued to debate that Jesus is the Messiah, but was meeting some fierce opposition from his fellow Jews
 - ii. He was following his pattern of preaching to the Jews in the synagogue first, seeking to demonstrate from the Hebrew Scriptures (the OT) that Jesus is the promised Messiah
 - iii. He appears to be perseverant, but not very courageous, standing strong, but with some kind of fear
- b. New courage comes when his friends arrive
 - i. He was freed from the fear of the synagogue's response
 - ii. It was when the familiar camaraderie of Silas and Timothy arrived that Paul gained the courage to boldly divide from the synagogue!
 1. In fact, in describing the connection between the arrival of S & T and Paul's renewed vigor to preach the Word, he uses a verb form called an "iterative imperfect", which the NASB translates better as "he *began* devoting himself"
 - a. Literally the word means "gripped by" or "held in custody"
 2. In other words, when his team arrived, he gained courage in the Word itself, he became compelled by the gospel again, and was urged forward in boldness as one who cannot do anything else
 - a. Rather than merely reason, he made explicit what had been implicit: to reject God's proclamation of salvation is to be doomed
 - iii. He announces judgment upon them as a prophet whose message of salvation was rejected
 1. The courage that he gained is demonstrative: he pronounced judgment upon those who opposed him and the gospel like a prophet
 - a. To shake out one's garments is a sign of protest
 - i. Nehemiah 5:13
 - b. To have blood upon one's own head was an announcement of guilt
 - i. 2 Samuel 1:16
 1. The young man was guilty of "killing the messiah of YHWH"
 2. This is the reason that David said, "Your blood is on your own head"
 3. That is, he was guilty and his life was forfeit
 - ii. So what Paul is announcing is that those who rejected Jesus as the Messiah are guilty of his blood, and their guilt is before God
 1. Paul did not have the right to execute the judgment (as David did), but he announced the guilt with the same words, implying that they were worthy of death
 - c. To be innocent of one's blood is an announcement faithfully announcing a message
 - i. Ezekiel 33:1-9
 - ii. Paul is claiming the role of the prophet here, bringing the message from the LORD, and he has faithfully delivered it
 - iii. The rejection of the message is not his guilt – he has done what God has commanded him faithfully
 1. This is evangelistically important
 2. Our role is to communicate the message, striving to persuade, but our role is not to "win decisions"

- a. Decisions are the work of a heart regenerated by the Spirit of God and are not in our purview or our responsibility
 - b. All we are called to do is be faithful to deliver the message
 - c. A New Church
 - i. Reasoning with the irreligious
 - 1. This new courage compelled him then to set up the new church's meeting place in the house of Titius Justus *right next door to the synagogue!*
 - a. That is bold!
 - ii. A New Church of both religious and irreligious
 - 1. Crispus, the synagogue president, and his family
 - 2. Many Corinthians
 - 3. Both hearing, believing, and being baptized
- 6. How Did Paul Gain Courage?
 - a. He sought out fellow Christians with whom he could labor and rest
 - b. He persevered in the work, even when he was discouraged
 - c. He listened to the word of the LORD and His promises
 - i. What greater promise do we have than the presence of the Spirit?
 - ii. What greater hope do we have than the promise of resurrection?
 - iii. We need one another to remind us these two great promises when we are discouraged
 - 1. To patiently labor together in the smaller things
 - d. To bind ourselves to our discouraged brothers and sisters while they struggle