

# Church Live Re-Visited: Session One - Part 2

by Ron Bailey

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*The sermon explores the beginnings of the Church in Corinth, highlighting the natural growth and key figures involved in its establishment.*

**Duration:** 26:10

**Scripture:** Acts 18:1

**Topics:** "Early Church", "Corinthian Letters"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the beginnings of the Church of God in Corinth, exploring the early challenges, the natural growth of the church without grand organizations, and the significant individuals like Paul, Priscilla, Aquila, Silas, and Timothy who played key roles in establishing the church. It highlights the opposition faced in the synagogue, the conversion of key figures like Crispus and Sosthenes, and the impact of influential preachers like Apollos. The sermon also touches on the letters to the Corinthians, suggesting the possibility of additional letters beyond 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians.

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## Transcript

And what I want to do now is to look at the beginnings of the Church of God in Corinth. I think I've said this to you before, that in the end of the first century, around about AD 96 or something like that, there was a church in Rome and there was a church in Corinth, and the church in Corinth was going through difficult times, there'd been kind of splits and different things that happened, and a letter went from the church in Rome to the church at Corinth. It's usually called the First Epistle of St Clement, although it just actually goes from a church at Rome.

But I love the way it starts up, because it starts up like this, and it says, from the Church of God that sojourns in Rome to the Church of God sojourning in Corinth. Now, sojourning is a very old-fashioned word now, but it really means not staying there for long. You can actually, if you notice it, you can see the French word for day in the middle of it.

This is someone who isn't staying there for long. So in other words, this is a pilgrim church, and when they wrote from the Church in Rome, they wrote from the Church of God that is a pilgrim in Rome to the Church of God that is a pilgrim in Corinth. To me, it's a fascinating picture of the way the early Christians regarded themselves, because you know that they didn't have any church buildings for over 300 years, and there were no church buildings.

We'll touch upon that in just a moment or two, just exactly what church means. So how did all this begin? Well, we've seen the first reference to it in Acts chapter 18, when it says that Paul left Athens, verse 1, and went to Corinth. And it says that when he was there, he met these people, and again, I think these are wonderful little insights into the way, into the informal way in which the church grew in these early days.

They didn't grow with enormous organizations and great strategists. They didn't grow because they had wonderful missionary societies and people who could organize things and send them in the right way. It was wonderfully kind of natural how they moved from one thing to another.

So you'll see here, Paul, for example, it says in chapter 18, verse 2 and 3, he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus. Can you see how people moved about so much? I think Pontus, where's Pontus? I think that's in Turkey, isn't it? Well, yes, I think it is. People, there was tremendous mobility among some people in the Roman Empire.

The Romans had got rid of piracy from the Mediterranean, which meant that transport was much, much easier. And generally speaking, it was fairly safe to travel on the road. So it was an amazing provision.

There's a verse in Galatians which says, when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his son. And historically, it was a unique period of time, this particular time, when you had what was called the Pax Romanum, the Roman peace. It was very harsh, but it meant that people could move about, that people were relatively safe.

There were tens of thousands of miles of road. You could actually get from here to Rome in less than about 10 days from the roads that were provided. In fact, there were better roads in England in this part of kind of the Roman era than there were kind of the Middle Ages and actually probably even into the time of Viciant and this kind of thing.

There were brilliant transportation systems. So people are moving about. Achille has come from Pontus.

He's there with his wife, Priscilla. So it's interesting to see these two are always Priscilla and Achille, or Achille and Priscilla. The two were switched around.

But this is an amazing husband and wife team. And I think this is a wonderful insight again into the way that the church functions. And it says here that they'd left Rome because of this edict of Claudius, that all the Jews should depart from Rome.

And then it says in verse 3, so because he was from the same trade, he stayed with them and worked, for by occupation they were tent makers. It's just possible they may have been tent cloth weavers, but they were in the tent making trade of some kind. And just see how natural this is.

Here's Paul. He arrives at Corinth. Paul is going to earn his own living at Corinth.

And his trade is that he can weave cloth and he can make tents of some sort. And the natural thing is that he lodges with this couple who are in this business. I have no doubt that he made tents and they sold them on their market stall or something like that.

It's all very, there's nothing complicated or high-tech about the way the gospel spread. It really spread very, very naturally and very easily in this way. And this couple were part, as I say, of the early expansion.

And then if we read on, it says this in verse 4, and he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded Jews and Greeks. And again this isn't just academic. If there are those here that God kind of calls from amidst and to other parts of the world, you really need to think and read the Acts of the Apostles.

Because there's a pattern that emerges. I'm not saying it's a blueprint. I'm not saying you must take the Acts of the Apostles and say they did it like this.

We must do it like this. I'm just saying that there are principles that emerge here which are relevant in every culture, in every era. They've always been relevant.

And this is Paul. He goes as a tent maker. He moves to this place.

One of the things that they say now about people going to other countries as missionaries is they often encourage them to actually go with the train, because it gives them an automatic link with the culture that they join with. It gives them automatic colleagues, people who work at the same office or at the same oil refinery or whatever it is. They mix in together.

It's a much more natural way of things kind of working other than by trying to produce a carbon copy of ECF, the Early Christian Fellowship, in a particular place in that way. We've got brothers who've done this from here anyway. And look at this.

Paul goes in verse 4 every Sabbath to the synagogue. And look at the language that's used. He reasoned in the synagogue and he persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

That's to say Paul is engaged in very energetic discussions. You mustn't think that Paul just kind of has a pulpit and he just kind of stands there and everyone is very respectful. This is Paul really in the thick of it.

This is a really aggressively intellectual context and he's reasoning, he's persuading, he's drawing all kinds of arguments to these people and he's trying to prove who Jesus Christ is and how the scriptures have been fulfilled. There's an earlier reference in, earlier on in the Acts of the Apostles, and you've actually got Paul, can't just see what it is, I'll find it for you, where you've actually got Paul in a synagogue and you've got a sort of, you've got Luke's sermon notes, if you like, of what Paul preached in this synagogue. And you'll see the way in which Paul began.

There's something that some people call the Korugma, that actually means the proclamation, the gospel. And it has these kind of ingredients that God had promised something in the scripture that was going to happen, that Jesus Christ has fulfilled these predictions, that he was put to death, that he has been raised from the dead and has been seen by witnesses, that Jesus Christ will return to fulfill the remaining promises of the Old Testament, and that in the interim there is a time of, there's a time of, what do they call it, when you can hand in your weapons? There's an amnesty, there's a time of amnesty when people can respond to God, they can lay down their weapons before he comes back as the one who will judge. And that's basically the gospel that they preach, that they no doubt develop different parts of it at different times, but those are the basic ingredients of it.

And here Paul is in the synagogue, he's reasoning, he's persuading, they would say something, this word reasoning is our word dialogued. A dialogue, it doesn't actually mean two, that would be a duologue, a dialogue means through, it means you're going backwards and forwards, but you're pursuing ideas. It's talking about someone doing something rationally, he's working from point A to B to C to D, he isn't just

quoting bible verses from the Old Testament, he's actually explaining the significance and showing what happened, and this is Paul at work in this kind of context, week by week in the synagogues on the Sabbath day.

And then look at verse 5, it says when Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia. Now Silas and Timothy are again an amazing couple of people, we know from other parts of the scriptures, and he's one that for example, if we're in the Acts of the Apostles, if you look at Acts chapter 15 and verse 22, Acts 15 and 22, it says this, this is when they decided what they're going to do about circumcision in Gentiles, it says in verse 22, that it pleased the apostles and elders with the whole church, this is a miracle of unanimity, they had been in opposite camps when this started, was the result of a word of wisdom coming that everyone was able to receive, everybody came to one opinion, so it says now that it pleased the apostles and the elders with the whole church to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely Judas, who was also named Barcibus, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. That's to say that Silas was already someone of some stature in the Christian church, he was known to people and people would have known that he was acting as a truthful and honest representative of the church of Jerusalem.

If you look at verse 32 in the same chapter, you'll see what happened when they begin their circuit of taking these letters to different Gentile churches, in verse 32 it says, now Judas and Silas themselves being prophets also exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words, so Silas is not only a man of reputation who can be trusted, and that one of the leaders amongst the Christians, he's actually also a man who is a gifted prophet, so we find out that this is the kind of people who were, who joined Paul and Priscilla and Aquila at Corinth, and then we have Timothy, and from other parts in the scripture, I won't go through all of them, but we know that Timothy also had gifts of God given to him, remember on a certain occasion Paul speaks to Timothy and says, stir up the gift of God that was given to you, by the leg of my hands, and so Timothy was a man with gifts too, and when Paul writes to Timothy, he tells him to do the work of an evangelist, and some people regard Timothy as a kind of pastor, not the kind of pastor we're familiar with now, kind of a senior minister in the local church, there were none of those in the Acts of the Apostles, but a man who had a pastoral care, a care of a shepherd, in different ways, so what I want, this is the point I want to make, that look at the personnel, look at the team that God is assembling in Corinth, you've got Paul, you've got Priscilla and Aquila, who have a Jewish background, and who are wide open to what's being said, you've got Silas, who is a man of reputation and stature, he also has gifts of prophecy, and he's a man who's able to exalt and strengthen the brethren, you have Timothy, who also has spiritual gifts, a man who can be instructed to do the work of an evangelist, this is an amazing team that you're gathering here, this is actually very different to the way that we do mission now, these are the best and the most powerfully gifted men that are available to God, that God is actually using to establish these places, now I'm not criticizing mission, I'm not criticizing someone who says, anybody in the church now who says we feel we ought to go, if the elders feel right, it's right, we should pray with them and support them, the point I'm making is that in the establishing of somewhere like the Church of Corinth, there were some big hitters that God had put together to do something here, this is an amazing combination of people in Corinth that God is going to do something with, and what happens?

Well, while we're in Acts chapter 18, we see that, and this is part of the pattern too, that there's opposition in the synagogue, and things kind of cut up, just as a lighter kind of a diversion, many years ago I trained as a school teacher, and I was supposed to be teaching religion, and one of the classes that I had to teach was a class that was known as 3C, and 3C means that they're kind of 14, 15 year olds, and they're not the

top of the pack, they're not the sharpest knives in the drawer as they say, and they generally are a bit of a struggle, and they've given me the job of doing the acts of apostles, and that was the curriculum at that time, and we got to this particular part, and it was in, I think it's in Ephesus actually, when you get to, and you've got the same pattern, Paul

begins to speak in the synagogues, there's lots of discussion, dialogue goes backwards and forwards, and then as people begin to respond, as people begin to believe, what happens is the authorities kind of cut up the rough when you get different things happening, and in Ephesians there's a situation where it says that Paul actually separated the brothers from the church, so this is a, this is a key point in the history of the development of local churches, and I asked the kids to just write one or two sentences as to why Paul separated the Christians from the Jewish synagogue, and this is, this is honest truth I'm telling you now, and there was a fair selection of reasons that these kids had put together, and there was one kid who wrote, he left because he was afraid of catching

contagious diseases from the fishermen, and I thought now what in the world is he talking about, so I went back and I looked, and of course in the good old authorised version, it says when Paul saw that divers were hardened, and spoke evil of that way, he separated the brethren, so I think he ought to have got some good points for ingenuity, and it shows you why you can't always use the King James Version, for settings either, but this is a kind of a pattern that seems to go from one place to another, that, and then, and then the opposition, the vocal opposition becomes more violent, and you find this happening here, but you'll see the personality involved here as well, it's fascinating, look at verse 8, well at verse 7, I'm in chapter 5, 18 and verse 7, I'm sorry, let's go back to verse

6, so you can get the whole sense out of it, but when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, your blood be upon your own heads, I'm clean, from now on I'll go to the Gentiles, and he departed from there, and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshipped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue, it's a semi-detached synagogue here, and Justus lives next door, it looks as though Justus wasn't a Jew by race, but he was a God worshipper, and then you've got this in verse 8, then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household, and many of Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptised, and you've got this wonderful thing where God speaks to Paul in a vision, and tells him that he has many people

in Corinth, and that Paul is not to be afraid, but you can see what's happening here, you've got people who are responding, and you can see the effect that it will have, when people see their key personnel being converted like this, you can expect them to become defensive, and that's what happened, and we know that he was here for 18 months, if we look at verse 11, he continued there a year and six months teaching the word of God among them, so you might almost say that this is a kind of an 18-month teaching program, not these evenings you would like to know, I mean Paul engages on an 18-month teaching program, and for 18 months he teaches, he reasons, they've also got Silas there with prophetic gifts, you've got Timothy there, you've got Priscilla and the killer, and you've actually got

somebody else who will join them later on, so then it says in verse 12, when Galio, that's this man who was the pro-consul, he was pro-consul of Achaia, Achaia is kind of the southern half of Greece, when he was the pro-consul, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, that's Abema for those of you who are interested in those kind of things, and saying this fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law, and just look at how vivid this is, and when Paul was about to open his mouth, Galio said to the Jews, can you see, can you imagine this, here there's this kind of this

tremendous tumult, all this noise that's going on, and they accuse Paul of this and this and this, and Paul takes a breath, but before he has opportunity to do anything,

Galio says stop, he's a pro-consul, and this is what he says, he said to the Jews, if it were a matter of wrongdoing or wickedness of Jews, there would be reason what I should bear with you, but if it's a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves, for I do not want to be a judge of some matters, and he drove them from the judgment seat, and then it says all the Greeks took Sosthenes the ruler of the synagogue, they've obviously had a new election and Sosthenes is now the ruler of the synagogue, they took Sosthenes the ruler of the synagogue and beat him before the judgment seat, but Galio took no notice of these things, that classically in the King James Version, it says Galio cared for none of these things, and he's come down in kind of Christian tradition as

careless Galio, it just simply means he didn't, he wasn't interested, he didn't want to be involved with any of these things, he turns a blind eye to what may be actually some anti-Semitism that's going on here, that this Jewish leader is actually being beaten by the Greeks, now why should they mention that little bit there, well it might just be, don't lose that, listen to how first Corinthians begins, first Corinthians in chapter one, Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes, now our version probably says our brother, but actually it says Sosthenes the brother, and what kind of hypothesis can we put together for this, I don't know, I don't think anybody really knows, but Sosthenes is not a common name, so it's really quite unusual that this

name should crop up twice in connection with Corinth, it may be that at some point Sosthenes moved from Corinth, met up again with Paul, and came to the Lord, and now Paul as he writes back to Corinth, he says he's a little tidbit of information from you, this letter is actually coming not just from Paul, it's coming from Paul the Apostle, and Sosthenes, the brother, he's one of us now, so I don't know, but it's, I think it's almost certainly the same person, now there's one other little bit I want to kind of point you to here, before we kind of leave this bit, and that's in verse 24 of chapter 18, where it says, a certain Junean Apollos, born in Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus, now we didn't read all that, because it's moved on in the story, but

it tells you about Apollos, and how Apollos was taken by Priscilla MacKiller, and they inscribed more perfectly in the truth about Christ, and what Christ had done, and Apollos became a very powerful creature, very powerful apologist, you might say, that means someone who uses reasons and arguments to prove his point, and you've got that in verse 28, he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the scriptures that Jesus is the Christ, and then it says, running on to chapter 19, and it happened while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus, so Apollos went to Corinth, so now they've got Apollos as well, and that will be key, because a little bit later on in the story of the Corinthians, we'll find that some people prefer the

Apollos' preaching to Paul's preaching, and some, no doubt, Apollos seems to have a reputation for eloquence, and for knowing the scriptures, and maybe stylistically, his preaching was a lot better than Paul's, and that would appeal, no doubt, to some people.

Let me tell you one more thing before I take a pause, and that's this, that in our Bible, we have two letters, known as first Corinthians, and second Corinthians, it's really quite likely that there were four letters to the Corinthians, there was letter A, because in what we call first Corinthians, which is really letter B, Paul refers to a previous letter, so we know there must have been at least one letter before us, so our first

Corinthians is letter B, then if we regard our second Corinthians, there's a reference in there where Paul refers to a letter that caused much sorrow and many tears, and that could have been our first Corinthians, but it might have been another one, so there could have been four, so there's Corinthians A, B, C, and D, and possibly our first Corinthians is B, and our second Corinthians is D, but God has preserved for us just what we need to know, and we'll see the significance of that. There's one other thing I want to do, but I think I'll try and join it into the next session, I'll take it, we'll pause,

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