



Walking Through the Scripture Together

August 17 - 23, 2008

Acts 18:1-17

# Uncensored Grace

**Text** Acts 18:1-17 (TNIV)

**In Corinth**

**1** After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. **2** There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, **3** and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. **4** Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

**5** When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. **6** But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

**7** Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. **8** Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.

**9** One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. **10** For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." **11** So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

**12** While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment. **13** "This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law."

**14** Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to them, "If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. **15** But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things." **16** So he drove them off. **17** Then the crowd there turned on Sosthenes the synagogue leader and beat him in front of the proconsul; and Gallio showed no concern whatever.

**Thought**

Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. **1 Corinthians 6:9-11** NLT

What happened in Corinth during Paul's first visit there demonstrated what we might call "uncensored grace" on at least two levels.

First, the grace of God through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus was shown to be radical and uncensored in the very existence of such a ragamuffin church. They were a wild and wooly bunch — before and after they met Jesus through Paul's teaching and presence among them. They had doctrinal issues, personal issues, interpersonal issues, moral issues, worship issues, you name it. And Paul loved them. He affirmed God's grace to them — that the One who called them is faithful and would back them up and cause them to stand to the end.

Secondly, in what happened at Corinth it became clear, for the moment, at least in southern Greece, that Jesus was uncensored legally. You can't help but notice the "Pauline pattern" as you move through the text of Acts. He arrives in town, he preaches, he gets in trouble. With Roman authorities in Philippi it resulted in a summary public beating and jailing followed by a public apology. In Corinth it looks like déjà vu all over again. This time Paul is about to speak up before the beatings commence, but he doesn't have to. The Roman proconsul Gallio (younger brother of the famous philosopher Seneca who was a personal tutor to future emperor Nero) stops the complaint in its tracks. Was "Christianity" a rogue, illegal religion outside of acknowledged and protected Judaism, or was it merely another branch within the Jewish religion? Gallio ruled it was the latter, and that this was a family squabble. In an interesting mix of justice and injustice, Paul gets the green light and the new leader of the synagogue gets the beating.

But the bottom line was that Christianity was extended the protection of Rome — at least for the time being. It sets a trend in motion that will continue through the rest of Acts — Rome being the protector of Paul and the fledgling Jesus movement — until a decade and a half later when a new emperor would take a nasty turn in Rome.

## Small Group Discussion Guide

### Lean In

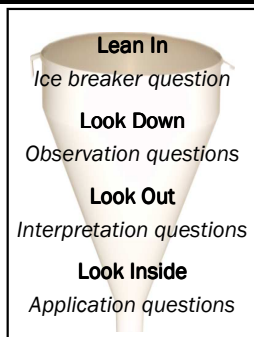
- When have you found yourself in a new city, new job, new school — and felt just a little out of place or even downright fearful?

### Look Down / Look Out

- What evidently was Paul's frame of mind when he arrived in Corinth? What new friends did he make? What factors were behind this connection?
- What effect did the coming of Timothy and Silas have upon Paul? What results did Paul have in the synagogue? How did he handle the rejection he experienced? How would you grade or rate his response?
- Despite rejection officially from the Jewish community, who does respond positively to Paul's teaching? What's significant about Crispus becoming a believer? Where does Paul relocate? How do you think the synagogue community liked having Paul as their "new neighbor"?
- What does the Lord tell Paul to do through that vision in the night? What three commands is Paul given? What two reasons is he provided for carrying out these instructions? What does Paul do in response to the Lord's instructions?
- What legal move is made against Paul when Gallio comes into office? What was the charge? How does this backfire? What reason did Gallio give for his decision? Why is this such a significant ruling for the young Christian church? Why does the crowd beat Sosthenes? Why doesn't Gallio intervene?

### Look Inside

- How do you know when it's time to "shake off the dust" and move on when a relationship "goes south"? How challenging do you find it to move on when you need to? Why?
- In what areas of your life do you see a need to find your voice? Where might you need to be silent for a season?



## Family Discussion Guide

### Day One Acts 18:1-6; 1 Corinthians 2:1-3

When have you found yourself in a new school or maybe a new neighborhood — and felt a bit lost and lonely? What can help us to deal with new places and new faces? How can finding and/or being a friend help?

### Day Two Acts 18:7-8 & 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

What's the point of believers being baptized? What was your experience in being baptized — or is baptism something you are still thinking about?

### Day Three Acts 18:9-11 & 1 Corinthians 1:26-28

Which comes more naturally to you — keeping quiet or speaking out? How can we know when it's best to speak up and when we really need to be silent?

### Day Four Acts 18:12-17

Gallio was caught in the middle of the Jews' arguments with Paul. What did he do? What do you usually do when people are arguing? Keep a safe distance? Get involved and try to bring peace? Join the fight? Or what? Why?

### Day Five 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

Does the life Paul describes here appeal to you or does it sound a bit "out there"? How would you describe the "Christian life" — both the way it is as you see it, and the way you think it should be?

## Corinthian Chronicles



Corinth was on a plateau overlooking the isthmus connecting central Greece to the north with the Peloponnese to the south. To the east was the port of Cenchrea leading out to the Aegean Sea, and to the west, the port of Lechaem opening to the Adriatic. Smaller ships were actually

dragged over wooden rollers across the isthmus for the three and one-half miles between Cenchrea and Lechaem in order to avoid the long and dangerous trip around the southern tip of the Peloponnese; cargoes of larger ships were carried overland from port to port.

Because of its strategic land and sea location, Corinth had become a prosperous city-state in the eighth century B.C., reaching its zenith during the seventh and sixth centuries with a population of approximately two hundred thousand free men and five hundred thousand slaves. In 196 B.C. Corinth was captured by the Romans and declared a free city. In 146 B.C., however, it was destroyed as retribution for the leading part it played in the revolt of the Achaian League against Rome. Julius Caesar decreed in 46 B.C. that it should be rebuilt; in 27 B.C. it became the capital of the Roman province of Achaia.

The population of Corinth in NT times was probably over two hundred thousand, made up of local Greeks, freedmen from Italy, Roman army veterans, businessmen and governmental officials. Thanks to its commercial advantages, the city greatly prospered. But along with its wealth and luxury, there was immorality of every kind. Beginning with the fifth century B.C., the verb "to corinthianize" meant to be sexually immoral. Corinth was also the center for the worship of the goddess Aphrodite, whose temple at one time boasted of a thousand sacred prostitutes.



Greek inscription mentioning Gallio from an arch dedicated in AD 52

## details, details...

### Claudius Caesar deported all Jews from Rome

Aquila and Priscilla had been forced to leave Rome because of the Edict of Claudius, an expulsion order proclaimed during the ninth year of Emperor Claudius's reign (i.e., January 25, A.D. 49 to January 24, 50). It was directed against the Jews in Rome to put down the riots arising within the Jewish community there "at the instigation of Chrestus" (according to the Roman historian Suetonius). Many take this to be a reference to Christ (Gk. *Christos*), where the dispute in the Jewish community was between those who accepted his messiahship and those didn't.

### Tentmakers by trade

Aquila was a native of Pontus, a region in northern Asia Minor on the south shore of the Black Sea. Priscilla is the endearing form of the more formal name Prisca. Since Priscilla is often listed before her husband (18:18-19, 26; Ro 16:3; 2Ti 4:19), we may conclude that she came from a higher social class than her husband or was in some way considered more important. Perhaps Aquila was a former Jewish slave who became a freedman in Rome and married a Jewess connected with the Roman family Prisca, which possessed citizenship rights. Together they owned a tentmaking and leather-working firm.

### When Gallio became governor of Achaia

Gallio was appointed proconsul of the Roman province of Achaia in AD 51. He only served for two years, resigning in AD 52 — evidently due to poor health. The Gallio inscription dating to AD 52 pinpoints the date of his proconsulship and gives us the most accurately dated event of Paul's life.