

## ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

### XLVI. Relying On God's Sovereignty To Minister

(Acts 18:12-18)

#### I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 351. We can thus learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the book of Acts.
- B. Acts 18:12-18 records how God's sovereign control of people and events allowed Paul to keep ministering at Corinth though he faced great opposition there from Hebrews. We view the passage for our edification:

#### II. Relying On God's Sovereignty To Minister, Acts 18:12-18.

- A. Upon first facing opposition from Hebrew unbelievers at Corinth to where he had to leave ministering in the synagogue to move his outreach quarters next door to Jason's house, Paul received a vision from the Lord encouraging him to continue to minister, promising that no man would attack to harm him, for God had many people there that He wanted Paul to disciple, Acts 18:5-10.
- B. Paul had then continued to minister at Corinth for another eighteen months, Acts 18:11.
- C. Yet, regardless of God's edifying promise, the opposition to Paul's ministry greatly increased, Acts 18:12-13:
  1. Paul's Hebrew opponents made a "united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal" of Gallio, the Roman proconsul of Achaia at the time, Acts 18:12 ESV; *Ibid.*, p. 407.
  2. This was a strategic move by Paul's opponents for two very strong reasons:
    - a. Any decision pronounced by a proconsul "would establish legal precedent," so Paul's foes were trying to get Gallio to rule against him and thus outlaw Christianity in the entire region of Achaia! (*Ibid.*)
    - b. Also, Gallio "was a brother of Seneca (4 B. C.-A. D. 65), a philosopher of great influence in Rome," so a decision by him could possibly sway the entire Roman Empire's view of the Christian faith! (*Ibid.*)
  3. The charge by Paul's opponents was meant to get the proconsul Gallio to outlaw Christianity, Acts 18:13:
    - a. Paul's foes charged him with persuading men to worship God contrary to the Jewish law.
    - b. In effect, "(t)hese Jews were saying . . . that Christianity was a new and different cult, distinct from Judaism," and Judaism was an accepted, protected religion by the Romans. Thus, ruling Christianity to be a cult separate from Judaism would leave Christianity an outlawed cult according to the Romans, *Ibid.*
- D. Regardless of such formidable opposition, God sovereignly worked not only to protect Paul from harm, but to enable him to continue to minister at Corinth with even greater protection and religious liberty, Acts 18:14-18:
  1. Gallio served as proconsul of Achaia **only** in A. D. 51. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Acts 18:12)
  2. Furthermore, he was "characterized by contemporaries as an amiable, witty, and lovable person," *Ibid.*
  3. Then, just as Paul was about to open his mouth to defend himself, Gallio told Paul's Hebrew foes that if their charge had dealt with a civil "matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime" he would make a ruling, but since their case involved questions about words and names and their own religious law, it was an internal religious matter over which he had no jurisdiction since Judaism was a protected religion by Rome, that they should handle the matter themselves, Acts 18:14-15a ESV. Gallio thus refused to rule in the matter, and he drove the Hebrews from his judgment seat, refusing to make a ruling in their favor, Acts 18:15b-16.
  4. Gallio's driving the Hebrews away gave opportunity for anti-Semitic Greeks to take Sosthenes, ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of Gallio, but Gallio ignored it, "unconcerned about religious matters," Acts 18:17; *Ibid.*, Bible Know. Com., N. T. (If this is the Sosthenes of 1 Corinthians 1:1, the beating possibly got him to leave the Hebrew synagogue and instead trust in Christ and join with the Christians!)
  5. Accordingly, due to God's sovereign involvement in all of this, Paul was left with the influential proconsul Gallio's ruling precedent that protected Christianity in the region of Achaia as viewed by Rome to be part of the legally protected religion of Judaism, so he kept ministering at Corinth for a great while, Acts 18:18.

***Lesson:*** *When God told Paul that he would not be harmed so that he should keep on ministering at Corinth, and Paul then faced greater hostility, God arranged for an influential proconsul to come to power that year and make a precedent-setting ruling that Christianity was protected by Rome for Paul to minister there for a much longer time.*

***Application:*** *If God leads us to serve Him in a ministry where we face strong opposition, but He signals His will that we keep on serving Him in that work, may we continue to serve Him as He leads, leaving ongoing, even more intense opposition that we face for Him to handle in His infinite sovereignty and grace.*