

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
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Acts 18:1-11¹ “Burdens and Responsibilities in the Christian Life”

Intro. I have never regretted becoming a Christian. There is no more happy and blessed state than being in God’s will and getting to know the Lord better. However, while we live as pilgrims in this world, we as Christians face many burdens and problems. Many Christian songs today sing of the good side of being a Christian; all the joy, peace, and love found in Christ are magnified. But little is said of the reality of the burdens of living for Christ. Perhaps since you became a Christian you found out that all your problems did not go away. Is being a Christian worth it?

In this passage I want us to recognize some of the burdens and responsibilities of being a Christian, and how the Lord will help us as we face these burdens. I will also point out some blessings of being a Christian as well. So let’s see what God has to say to us about facing and overcoming our burdens in life. After all, Psa. 55:22 says, “Cast your burden on the LORD, And He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.”

First of all, we have:

I. THE BURDEN OF MEETING PHYSICAL NEEDS

After Adam and Eve sinned, God said that Adam would have to work by the sweat of his brow, and throughout history, most people have had the burden having to work hard just to provide for the basic necessities of life. When God gave the Law, he said in Ex. 20:9, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work....”

The apostle Paul also had to work to provide for his needs and be an effective missionary. Notice that when Paul went to Corinth, v.3 indicates that he had to work as a tentmaker to support himself. He evidently did not have adequate support from his home church in Antioch, or other churches.

It is common for people to worry about whether their financial needs will be taken care of. That just makes the burden even greater. That’s why Jesus said in Mt. 6:25, “do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink....”

How do we deal with this burden of providing for our physical needs? We should not follow the Corinthian way. Some in Corinth would just steal (1 Cor. 5:11) what they needed and wanted. That is all too common in some parts of the world. So Paul said in Eph. 4:28, “Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.” When you gamble you are taking money from others, often from people who cannot afford to lose that money. That’s not the way to earn a living.

Paul gives an excellent example in v.3 of the Christian way of providing for our needs. After all, God is not going to feed you by giving manna from heaven. He’s not going to send you a check in the mail from the Bank of Heaven. So what should you do?

A. Get an Education - It was the custom in Jewish families for every Jewish boy to be taught a trade. Paul had been taught to make tents, and this came in very handy on the mission field as a means of support. So our youth and children really out to finish high school, and either get

¹ Regarding v.2, Roman Historian Suetonis says, "He banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus. -Christ." [*Lives of the Twelve Caesars* - Claudius 25].

vocational training, or go to college. Parents ought to see to it that you children get a proper education.

B. Work Hard – Notice in v.3 that Paul “worked” his tentmaking trade. I believe the Christian ought to be the best worker on the job. Paul said in 2 Th. 3:8, 10, “nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.... For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” Paul practiced what he preached. You can be sure that he worked hard with those animal hides, cutting and stitching them together. But Paul limited his work to 6 days at the most, for we see that on the Sabbath he was in the synagogue (v. 4). Work hard, yes. But don’t overwork, or neglect time for the Lord.

II. THE RESPONSIBILITY TO SERVE THE LORD

I am not going to call this a burden, for we are to serve the Lord with gladness (Ps. 100:2). Now notice from our text that:

A. How We Should Serve the Lord – We are not all called to focus on the same ministry, but we are all called to serve the Lord. Notice what Paul was called to do:

1. Witness of Christ - In v.4 we see that Paul tried to persuade the Jewish people to become Christians by reasoning, no doubt, from the Scriptures. And then in v.5 when Timothy and Silas joined him, we see that he witnessed, not only on the Sabbath, but probably every day. He testified that Jesus of Nazareth was their long-awaited Messiah, the Savior of the Jews. That is what we are called to do.

And notice his method. He witnessed from the Scriptures (implied in v.4; cf. 17:2) and then he witnessed with his personal testimony. No doubt he gave his own eye-witness testimony to the saving power of Jesus Christ.

I believe God has called us all to witness and pray for the salvation of the lost. Oh, that we would get burdened about the lost around us and be constrained to share the Word of God with them and give personal testimony to the saving power of Christ. We must keep on telling the same old gospel story. Christ is still changing men and women from sinners into saints. He is still giving life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. He is still bringing peace to troubled hearts. He is still releasing men from the bondage of sin.

Yet I read something troubling in Baptist Press this week. Among U.S. millennials who are practicing Christians, 47 percent agree "it is wrong to share one's personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith," according to research by the Barna Group released Feb. 5. The apostle Paul certainly did not agree, for he tried to convert Jews from Judaism to the Christian faith.

At first Paul concentrated on the call to witness to unbelievers. We see this confirmed in 1 Cor. 2:2, “I determined not to know anything among you, except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” Yet he did more than that once a group was won to the Lord. So based on the example of Paul, some of us are also called:

2. Teach Believers – This is a major aspect of discipleship. In v.11 we read, “And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” New Christians need to be taught and discipled. So Paul also devoted himself to the ministry of teaching. One of the great needs in the church today is the teaching of the Word of God. It is in the program of God that men preach the Gospel; but believers grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ only as they are taught. Jesus commissioned His disciples to go “into all the world, and

preach the Gospel...” (Mk. 16:15), but He also commissioned them to go and “make disciples... teaching them...” (Mt. 28:19, 20). The main ministry of some is to witness. The main ministry of some others is to teach. God, give us people like Paul who become controlled by a ministry of the Word! It is sad to see the local church today attempting to meet the need of the people mainly through social and recreational programs, fellowship suppers, and in many other ways. Some of these things are fine, but our priority must be upon the preaching of the pure Gospel of God’s saving grace, and teaching the Word of God.

Now if we are going to serve the Lord regularly and well:

B. Be Motivated to Serve the Lord -

1. By an Inward Compulsion - We read in v.5, “When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.” The word translated “compelled”² here means “to overpower, to be totally controlled” (as in 2 Cor. 5:14; Phil. 1:23). It may mean here “to be occupied with or absorbed in” (A & G). Haven’t you been so engrossed in some activity that you didn’t want to stop? Well, here we see that Paul now devoted himself completely to the task of preaching, teaching and witnessing. He had an inward compulsion. In 1 Cor. 9:16 Paul expressed it well when he said, “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” Jeremiah experienced something similar in Jer. 20:9 when he said, “Then I said, ‘I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.’ But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not.”

More of us need such an inward compulsion to serve the Lord. Ah, but what about the masses of so-called Christians who feel nothing of any such constraining force?

2. By an Outward Compulsion – After the Jews rejected the Gospel, Paul said to them in v.6, “...Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” The reference to “blood”, found here as well as Acts 20:26, is based on Ezekiel 3:17-19 where God compared the prophet to a watchman on the wall of a city, who is stationed there to watch for the approach of the enemy, and warn the city of the danger. If he sees the danger, but fails to warn the people, then their blood would be on his hands. Even so, God enabled the prophet Ezekiel to see that coming judgment of God upon the nation, and if he did not warn them, their blood would be on his hands. Paul believed that the principle found in the Ezekiel passage applied to him. Yet he affirms that he had discharged his duty, for he understood that truth that compelled him to witness of the Gospel.

We know that God is holy and righteous, and that He has warned of eternal judgment. So we are responsible to warn people of God’s judgment, and tell them the Good News. If we don’t, their blood is on our hands. It is for this reason that Paul later wrote in Romans 1:14 that he is a debtor to all men, both Jew and Greek.

But notice we are not to feel responsible for how people *respond* to the Good News. That is not a burden that we are called upon to bear. Our responsibility is to share the Gospel. And in this text we see that Paul had indeed shared the Gospel (cf. v.5). But most of the Jews rejected the Gospel. So Paul turned to the Gentiles. Paul did what Jesus commanded in Mt. 10:14, 15. When they do not receive our message, we are to “shake the dust off of your feet.” Something similar is found in Hosea 4:17, “Ephraim is joined to idols: Let Him Alone!” (Cf. also Gen. 6:3).

Finally, we should also be motivated:

² Imperf. mid. ind. of *sunecho*, literally “to press in, to hold together,” but this meaning is not found in the New Testament.

3. By the Outcome of Our Service – If you will serve the Lord by sharing Christ with unbelievers, you will likely experience the same kind of blessing that Paul experienced. When the Jews rejected the Gospel, Paul left the Jewish synagogue, but he didn't go far. We read in v.7, "And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue." A Gentile convert opened his home, and the Church of Corinth was started there, right next to the synagogue! As Paul was faithful to his calling, and as he devoted himself full-time to the work of witnessing and teaching, the church grew greatly. We read in v.8, "Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized." The chief ruler of the synagogue was converted, which was a great victory. And many others followed his example. And the words "believed" and "baptized" are in the imperfect tense, which indicates a continuous process; a continuous harvest of souls. There was a great, spiritual awakening in that city! And we can tell from Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church that not only did the God-fearing, devout Gentiles get saved, but then many who were living in sin were converted by the Gospel message. In I Cor. 6:9-11 we see that at one time some in the congregation were fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners. But Christ changed their lives! There is always some fruit when the incorruptible seed, the Word of God, is faithfully given out. If Paul had not accepted the burden of responsibility to tell the people of Corinth about Christ, he would have never had the blessing of seeing so many people saved!

The same gospel that wrought such miracles in Corinth long ago is the gospel that works today (cf. Rom. 1:16). If we will just share the gospel often enough, we can have the joy of seeing similar results. Tomorrow Drew and I will go to the "Bless Every Home" training, so we can be better equipped to share this evangelism and ministry tool with you.

Finally, Paul also faced:

III. THE BURDEN OF DISCOURAGEMENT

This can cause us to stop serving the Lord, so it is important that I address this problem. I believe there are some evidences in our text that Paul became discouraged, perhaps from the moment he arrived in Corinth. And from the words of v.9 we can see that Paul must have gotten discouraged. Otherwise, God would not have needed to encourage him with a night vision. So why had Paul become discouraged? 1) He had arrived from Athens, where he had meager results (17:32-34), and in the first few weeks in Corinth, he probably had meager results. 2) At first he did not have his missionary partners with him, and he was somewhat lonely, missing Christian fellowship. 3) He had to spend too much time working just to support himself. From the change we read about in v.5 we can suppose that Paul was somewhat half-hearted about his missionary work while he had to work so much as a tentmaker. 4) He had faced so much opposition in the cities of Macedonia, and now in Corinth he faced more opposition, as we see in v.6. Paul knew only too well what Jewish hatred could do as he had also learned it in Damascus, Jerusalem, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Those fanatical Jews were even out to kill him. And then in v.9 God told Paul "Do not be afraid." He wouldn't be afraid unless he was facing strong and hostile opposition. 5) He could have also easily become discouraged by the greatness of the task, for Corinth was a large and very immoral city.

Do you ever get discouraged in the work of the Lord? Well if it can happen to Paul, it can certainly happen to us. I must admit that I have become discouraged from time to time in the ministry, especially the latter years of my ministry.

So let me show you last of all God's Solution to discouragement, so you don't drop out of the Lord's work:

A. Seek the Support of Other Believers - I believe that Paul was discouraged in v.4. But in v.5, when his two friends came, a cloud was lifted off his spirit, and he sprang back again to his old form and to his old work. And I believe that it was also the support of Aquila and Priscilla, in v.2, that helped to keep him going as well as he did.

Listen, we need to support one another in the work of the Lord. If you see someone working alone without any help, jump in there and help out! You need to support your Sunday School teacher or group leader with your faithful presence. When you see someone who seems to be discouraged in the work of the Lord, encourage them. Invite them for coffee or a meal. Pray with and for them.

B. Heed God's Commands - Even if we have to stand alone, or only with a few, we must obey God's commands anyway. Only through right action will our feelings of discouragement be overcome. It is amazing how much better you will feel if you just go ahead and do what the Lord wants you to do.

Now in v.9 we see that God gave Paul two commands:

1. Do Not Be Afraid - Evidently there were signs of a gathering storm of Jewish opposition. But I do not believe that Paul was showing cowardice, or that he was fearful for his physical safety. Such would be contrary to his character. He had boldly retraced his steps on other missionary journeys, going back into towns where he had been forbidden to preach, even into Lystra where he had been stoned. It just might have occurred to him to wonder if his success in Corinth would bring down upon him the wrath of the Jews and cause them to drive him from the city, as they had done on several previous occasions. If Paul was fearful, (and the Greek implies that he was), I am sure he was fearful more for the Gospel than for his own safety. If he had to leave, would the work continue in such a wicked city?

We should not let fear keep us from witnessing.

2. Keep Speaking Out – God also told Paul in v.9, “speak, and do not keep silent.” “Speak” is a present tense, “keep on speaking.” God's ambassador must not faint through discouragement or feel himself led to move elsewhere. We must not let the world or Satan intimidate us into silence. We are called and compelled to share the gospel.

C. Claim God's Assurances - In vv.9 & 10 we not only see God's commands but also two corresponding assurances which begin with the word “for”.

1. Of His Presence – God said in v.10, “for I am with you.” This is the same promise Jesus gave in His great commission (Mt. 28:20). Note the emphatic “I.” God will not just send an angel, or a fellow Christian to be with you. No one less than God Himself will be with you. Do you want to experience the presence of God in your life? You may never sense the presence of God any more than when you are serving Him, or when you are threatened or going through a difficulty.

2. Of His Protection – God also said in v.10, “no one will attack you to hurt you.” The consequence of Christ's presence is not exemption from attacks, but preservation in them (cf. 2 Tim. 4:17). Often it is God's purpose to protect His faithful witnesses from harm, especially from death. There were many plots against Paul's life, and yet none succeeded.

Illustration: [Tell of the man who stopped by the church with a knife].

Finally, God also gave assurances:

3. Of His People Who Are Ready to Believe – God assured Paul, “for I have many people in this city.”³ Yes, even in wicked Corinth. Elijah also became discouraged. It seemed that the whole nation had forsaken the Lord, and he was the only prophet of God left. He did not realize what God knew and revealed to him, that seven thousand men in Israel had not bowed to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). God had possibly more than that in Corinth ready to believe in Jesus, especially since it had a population of over 200,000. 2 Tim. 2:19 says, “The Lord knows those who are His.” Many are ripe unto harvest (Lk. 10:2), only waiting for the reaper. They are not yet saved, but they will be if Paul remains faithful to the task.

C.H. Spurgeon wrote: “This should be a great encouragement...since God has among the vilest of the vile...an elect people who must be saved. ...Tens of thousands of redeemed ones are not regenerated yet, but regenerated they must be; and this is our comfort, when we go forth to them with the quickening Word of God...”

So let us have the same perspective. God has a people who are yet to be saved, right here in our community. They are just waiting for someone to share the gospel with them, or to invite them to church. Will you be God’s instrument in their salvation?

Now notice what happened in v.11 after Paul was encouraged. Instead of quitting, we read, “And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” Paul stayed in Corinth much longer than many other cities to date.

Invitation:

A. To the Lost - I wish you would notice the divine order in the last of v.8, because it is just the same today wherever God’s Word is literally carried out. “Many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed, and were baptized.” They heard the message of the gospel. When Paul preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified, they listened earnestly. They believed the Word; they received it in their hearts; and then they said, “Now, Paul, we are ready to confess Christ openly in baptism.” They were not baptized in order that they might become Christians; but having become Christians, they were baptized to confess their allegiance to the Savior in whom they had put their trust.

B. To the Saved: Accept the responsibility of becoming a witness.

Sources: F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954); Oliver B. Greene, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 3 (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1968); Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975); H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Acts* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1943); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931); W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Outline Studies in Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956); Curtis Vaughan, *Acts: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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³ Literally, it is, “There is to me much people,” a dative of personal interest (Robertson).