

Acts 18:18-23 [50]-PAUL NOT a LEGALIST?

PRELIMS. Last week's subject, Church & State, was a large subject!! The main point (which is not realised enough today) was the **accountability** of Statesmen to the Lord, not only to the people! Our **obedience** to the State, as to any superior, is **always** subject to **their commands** complying with **God's laws**! We obey them **only** if their laws do **not** conflict with God's laws!

So when there is **conflict** between these two Institutions appointed by God (Church & State), we "*obey God rather than men*" as we noted in our study on [5:29]! Example - **Hebrew midwives** did not obey the State order to kill Hebrew children at birth **APP** abortion!

Another point is that each Institution, while **not** interfering with each other, **should**, if possible, **help each other**. The State, as indeed it did, (re Con of Faith) ask the Church, 'What should we do here?' And the Church might ask the State 'Could you please legislate against...it is ruining the social life of so many?'

We also saw last week Gallio did nothing about Sosthenes being physically beaten before his very eyes – we **don't practise** what we **preach!** **APP** As Government make laws but don't keep these laws themselves! Eg, Council Tax rises and Inflation rates!

PAUL & his FRIENDS on the MOVE

So Paul "*stayed many days longer*" [18] in Corinth but Luke, gives us no details of what happened there! So Paul moved on to report to the Church at Antioch in Syria, who had sent him out – almost **2yrs ago** now! Paul took Priscilla and Aquila with him!!

Are you ever **surprised** at **learning** of some Xns who lived near you and yet you **never heard** about them before? They were there all the time, **doing good**, but you **didn't know** about them? Well, there's something like that here – for right beside Corinth is a town **Cenchreae**, and Paul stopped there. And he met a very godly person there – but Luke doesn't tell us a thing about this! But Paul tells us later about "*Phebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae*"

[Rom 16:1] Paul **commends** her when writing to Rom church for she has been “*a **patron** of many and of myself as well*”[Rom 16:2] **APP** There are **many** other Xns in the work beside ourselves who we **never hear** of! Elijah never met the 7,000 who refused to bow the knee to Baal! He couldn’t believe they were there **beside** him! National Christian Outreach Centre opened in Perth on Thurs with State-of-the-art Conference suite, 200 pastors there! I didn’t know! The Church of Jesus Christ is **far bigger** than we **think** it is!

Similarly little is said about Priscilla/Aquila! No details here of what they did for him during this time but later on “*Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who **risked** their **necks** for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but **all** the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well*”[Rm16:4] **APP** The Church is not in the business of ‘advertising’ the good deeds of its members. We only come to hear about them by **default**!

IS PAUL BECOMING a LEGALIST?

Paul (a) “*cut his hair*”[18], (b) “*he was under a vow*”[18], (c) as soon as he goes to Ephesus he ‘dumps’ his Xn friends and “*he himself went into the synagogue*”[19], (d) and in [21:26] he “*purifies himself...goes into the temple*”! Is he returning to Judaism? What does he mean, for all these things are **not** at all now **necessary** – the Jerusalem Council clarified that!

But that is just the point – it is not **necessary** but it may be **appropriate** or even **advisable** where there are **weak** brethren who could be **confused** by our neglect of former practices that belonged to a Church ‘under-age’ [Gal 4:3 until the “*fullness of time*”]. Just as when we have **children** we are **careful** to be good examples in their presence, until they **mature** and **develop** and **understand**!

Paul, as we already noted had a real concern for **souls**! Nothing, but nothing, came between him and **winning** people to God. Toward that **end**, Paul would do almost **anything** to bring them in! He wrote later “*To the Jews I **became** as a Jew in order to **win** Jews...to those outside the law I **became** as one outside the law...*

*that I might **win** those outside the law...To the weak **I became** weak that I might **win** the weak. **I have become all things to all people** that by **all means** I might save some”[1 Cor 9:20cf]!*

Paul **himself** was prepared to **change** his behavior (although he knew he would be criticized) in order to win. He said “ ‘*All things are lawful*’, but **not** all things are **helpful**. “ ‘*All things are lawful*’, but **not** all things **build up**”[1 Cor 10:23] **APP** There **are** times when it is right for **us** to **deny** ourselves Xn liberty!

So often **we Xns expect** the ‘world’ to change (its dress, hairstyles, etc), **before** they become Xns or even before they come to church! The main reason for this is that **we Xns** feel embarrassed about them not being dressed properly! So different from Paul **He** changed so that his **new** hearers would **not** feel **embarrassed!** No, Paul was not becoming a legalist! Rather, his heart was **warming** towards his brethren and he **longed** to see them ‘in Christ’!

This visit, as I understand it, is Paul’s **first** visit to **Ephesus**. Again we are not told a single thing about his ministry there at that time yet... there **must** have been **fruit** from that visit for in the next few verses when Apollos comes to minister there are “*brothers*” there! **APP** God works **undramatically** sometimes! We don’t know when He is working in someone’s heart – not even in our own hearts!!

VOW-MAKING

It is **only faithful** and **conscientious** Xns who will make vows! Vows **are** a NT practise – our Confession talks of it approvingly! It takes **grace** and **discipline** as well as **humility** to make a vow! It is **only** a person who **believes** that God is **overall** events and circumstances and is **directing** all affairs for His own glory, that will make a vow! If you are an **unbeliever** in God’s **total control** of all that goes on in the world, you will **never make** a vow!

Two types of vow? **(a)** To express **thankfulness** for some mercy in **recognition** that it was **God** who orchestrated it! Or, **(b)** to **appeal** to God to **do** something for us, according to **His** will, after which we **bind** ourselves to perform some legitimate service. ***The

under-lying principle is to strengthen and renew our **confidence** and **love** toward the Lord. To **establish** our faith in God's good **Providence!** **Hannah** wanted a child – not until she was prepared to **give him back** to the Lord did she get him! *“if you will...give Your servant a son, **then** I will given him to the Lord **all** the days of his life, and **no razor shall touch his head**”*[1 Sm 1:10,11] **APP** Do you **thank** God so? Do you **trust** God so?

OFF AGAIN – ACCORDING to GOD'S WILL!

They **wanted** Paul “to **stay** for a **longer** period”[20a]! So he must have been ‘making ground’! But “**he declined**”!![20b] Maybe he promised to be back within two years and needed to report back to the Church. But we can be sure he prayed about it and it **was** in **accordance** with **God's** will for “*taking leave of them he said, ‘I will return to you **if God wills**’ and he set sail from Ephesus*”[21]

APP We do not hear much these days even in Xn circles of people submitting and committing their future into God's hand. Paul did it a lot! “*asking that somehow **by God's will** I may now at last succeed in coming to you*”[Rom 1:10] + “*so that **by God's will** I may come to you with joy*”[Rom 15:32] + “*But I will come to you soon **if God wills***”[1Cor4:19] + Heb “*And this we will do **if God permits***”[Heb 6:3] + **James=** “*you **ought** to say **if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that***”[Jam 4:15]

Paul did go straight up “*and greeted the Church*” as soon as he landed at Caesarea![22] “*and then went down to Antioch*” to report to the church there where they **had been** “*commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord*” two years earlier [15:40]!

Paul believed strongly in **meeting brethren** – everywhere he went, if there was a believer anywhere, he went to see them. He couldn't pass a new town/city without finding out was there believers there!

Paul **knew the importance** of **building up believers** in the Lord. He wasn't long in Antioch when he “*departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia **strengthening all** the disciples*”[23] His Third Missionary journey!