

November 29

Acts 18-19

2 Thessalonians

Gallio himself was a very important man in his own right, well known in the Roman Empire - and well liked. Many politicians, in that day and in our own, were not upright and honest men, but it appears that Gallio, at least in this instance, was fair man. His judgment was that Paul was not propagating a religion that violated Roman law. His decision meant that for the next ten years or more, the Christian religion was generally tolerated throughout the Roman Empire by the authorities, and the Gospel could be openly proclaimed without being seen in any way to be an enemy of Rome.

The last significant person that we meet in Acts 18 is Apollos. Apparently, he had great speaking and leadership gifts, but Aquila and Priscilla first had to teach him about baptism and other Christian truths.

Paul saw fit to give the largest single piece of his life to the church in Ephesus. Paul spent just about the same amount of time in Ephesus that Jesus did on His entire public ministry, but all we know about that three-year period is found in two to three pages of the book of Acts.

The first snapshot - When Paul asked them if they received the Holy Spirit when they believed, their reply was that they had never heard of the Holy Spirit. They had been baptized with John's baptism. They were his followers, at least, but how much they knew about Jesus is an open question. When Paul explained the Gospel to them, and baptized them in the name of Jesus, they received the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues, and prophesied. If these were believers in Jesus Christ, who knew Christ as Savior, but did not have the Holy Spirit, we are presented with a theological problem that must be solved. More than that, the fact that when they received the Holy Spirit they evidenced that fact by speaking in tongues, like the 120 on the day of Pentecost, is often urged by charismatic believers to be a solid bit of evidence proving that the gift of tongues is the proof of the filling of the Spirit. There are even those who urge that, because in this instance Paul laid hands on them at the time of their "filling," it therefore follows that the Holy Spirit can only be conferred by the laying on of hands.

Snapshot #2 relates for us the expulsion of the Apostle Paul from the synagogue after about three months of teaching. The synagogue authorities in Ephesus were apparently more generous than those in most other cities Paul visited. Due to growing opposition, Paul was forced to remove his growing group of followers from the synagogue to the lecture hall of a local philosopher named Tyrannus. In the Ephesian culture, there was, as in some of our hotter climates today, a practice of taking a daily siesta during the hot time of the day between late morning and mid-afternoon. While the rest of society rested, Paul taught on a daily basis. If you spent more than two years listening to the Apostle Paul teach for up to five hours every day, you might learn some rather significant things and grow quickly to maturity in Christ. It would appear that that is exactly what was happening!

The third snapshot has to do with the power encounters that were evoked between Paul and a society that was riddled with occult and magical practices. Ephesus had a reputation as a center for the learning and practice of magic. In the ancient world, Corinth was well known for its lack of moral discipline, Ephesus for its occult practices. To "corinthianize" was to commit fornication. Documents containing spells, incantations, and magical formulas, however, were called "Ephesian letters." Many magicians converted to Christianity and gave practical proof of the change in their lives by publicly divulging their secret spells (thus robbing them of any potency and by burning their 'Ephesian letters' which had a value of 50,000 drachmae).