

Bible e-Study on the book of Acts (18)

The separation of church and state

“I will not be a judge of such things.”

Acts 18: 15b

NUGGET – This nugget verse today is spoken by Gallio the Roman proconsul of Achaia, the region of what is now Greece, where Corinth is located. There are a couple things that make this section of chapter 18 of interest to us. The first is:

- Just as Gallio had no interest in the truth of the Gospel – so also in our day, the world still has no interest in being ‘bothered’ with the Gospel of God.

This proconsul made it clear that he wanted no part of any ecclesiastical Jewish disputes, that he would not be the judge of such things. Though the Jews tried to frame this in such a way as to incite Gallio against Paul and the others he, unlike Pilate, would not rise to the bait.

Now in all fairness to Pilate, he had a role to play that was necessary for the sake of the gospel to be carried out in terms of sending Jesus to the cross. But then again Gallio also has a role to play, but his role can help us to understand what the separation of church and state looked like back then. There isn’t just an ignorance of ‘words and names and your own law’ but also an outright indifference to the people who bring this before him. In verse 18 we’re told that there was a beating of the synagogue leader, Sosthenes, that Gallio ‘showed not concern whatever’ about.

Just as Gallio had no interest in the Gospel or concern for the people involved, so he serves to teach us what to expect from the secular rulers of the world. After all this is no different than what Jesus said, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.” [John 15:17-19](#) and “you will be hated by all nations because of me” [Matthew 24:9-10](#). We should take comfort, after a fashion, that Gallio simply proves what Jesus said to be true. And that we, while we enjoy the freedoms and license we do in this country, should be taking advantage of the circumstance we are in to share the Gospel with others as Paul, Silas, Timothy, Crispus ([1 Cor 1:14](#)), Aquila and Priscilla did.

Another thing this section teaches us is, in addition to indifference by the world to the gospel:

- Unfairness is something that we must be aware comes upon believers.

Why is it that Sosthenes is beaten and not Paul? Yes, he’s the synagogue ruler, but Paul is the one who had been preaching and teaching as we read in verses 5 and 11 previously in this chapter. And it was Paul that was about to speak when Gallio put an end to things with his indifference. It would seem that Paul had to endure watching a fellow believer ([1 Cor 1:1](#)) suffer for what Paul had taught him.

In this section we see some of what happens in our day and time play out in the early days of the Christian church. And for that we are grateful, grateful for their example or perseverance in the face of indifference and unfair treatment. May God remind us that such is our heritage when faced with similar circumstances.

APPLICATION -

1. How might we encourage those in our world who are suffering for the name of Jesus Christ?

PRAY – Dear Heavenly Father, grant us hearts that seek Your Gospel in the midst of the perversity and indifference we see around us. Grant that we employ the freedom we have where we are to both share Your Gospel and to strengthen with Your Word, those who suffer for that same Gospel. In Jesus name, Amen.