

Gospel Triumph: Always Building – Acts 18:18-19:7

When you saw the title of this message you probably thought this was a presentation by the Michigan Department of Transportation about the plans for our roads every July and August from now until eternity. We have lived in several other states, and I occasionally remember road construction in those states, but not like this. I'm sure you have had the experience, like I have, of trying to avoid road construction on one route only to run into even worse construction on another route.

This isn't ultimately a talk about the status of our roads and the delights of construction season in Michigan. Obviously, we are talking about the ongoing building of the church, which began in Acts and has continued these 2000 years. The construction we experience on the roads is more of a maintenance situation. The current roads are fixed, made better, and preserved. The construction of Christ's Church is always about something new happening. Here's what I mean by that.

The building of Christ's Church presses into new areas in two ways. Clearly when people come to faith in Christ there's building by addition. But if you are a believer in Christ this morning you are being built as well. The direction of the building going on in your life is down, it's deeper in knowledge, faith, and practice, while the building in evangelism is outward.

Both are necessary and the building outward requires the building deeper of the church and won't take place without it. For outward expansion to occur, the foundation must go deeper. It's this process of building and advancement that we are going to explore this morning as Paul ends one missionary journey and begins another one in Acts 18 and 19. So, in Acts 18:18-19:7 we will see **4 Keys to the Ongoing Construction of the Church.**

1. Build by Confidence (vv. 18-23)

Last Sunday, in the first 17 verses of Acts 18 we saw the birth of the church in Corinth and Paul's extended ministry there. God told Paul to stay put and much fruit was born because of God's work through Paul. There were certainly

challenges and threats. Remember verse 12? This resulted in a severe beating for the head of the synagogue and almost certainly increased the tension with the church meeting next door. But notice how Paul responds in verse 18.

The specific confidence we are talking about in this first key is confidence in God's sovereignty. God had promised to keep Paul and Paul trusted God's providential plan for Him. But he didn't stay forever. He also trusted God to keep and protect him as he continued to fulfill ministry commitments. Keep reading in verse 18. His ultimate destination was Syria and as you will see, his sending church in Antioch. This whole journey that has ended with him in Corinth began in Antioch in Acts 15:36-41.

Paul takes Priscilla and Aquila with him as he leaves Corinth. Cenchreae was a port right next to Corinth, and we don't know anything about his vow. However, at some level this indicates he had committed himself to the Lord and trusted God with this vow. That continues. Look at verses 19-21. Paul follows his typical pattern of going into the synagogue, but even though he has growing interest from the Jews in Ephesus, he departs to continue his return. Notice what he says. "I will return if the Lord wills." This isn't just a cliché for Paul. He would love to do ministry here in Ephesus but he knows that ultimately this is up to God.

Now, here's the question for us. How would Paul know if it was God's will for Him to return to Ephesus? I submit to you that he wouldn't know ultimately until he returned to Ephesus. There's an old Puritan author named John Flavel who said this about God's providence. *"The providence of God is like Hebrew words – it can be read only backwards."* – John Flavel

One of the difficulties Seminary students have with Hebrew is that you don't read it left to right. Instead, it's written right to left and so you quite literally have to read backwards on the page from what you are used to. Flavel says that God's providence is best read backwards. It's only in hindsight that you can actually see what God had planned for you all along. No where does God instruct us to attempt to look into the future and discern a specific path for our lives called "God's Will". Instead, like Paul, we act on what we are called to do, and act based on wisdom and God's Word and then confidently trust that God will guide. And

then we have the glorious joy of looking backward and tracing the sovereign hand of God at work in our lives. And so, Paul leaves Ephesus with a confidence trust in God and continues on his way. Look at verses 22-23. This ends Paul's second missionary journey with his return to Antioch and begins his third as he departs and returns to strengthen churches he helped to plant. And part of Paul's confidence in God is the co-workers he leaves behind. This brings us to our second key.

2. Build through Collaboration (vv. 24-28)

Look at verses 24-25 as we are introduced to a new character in the story who will come into contact with some of Paul's co-workers. A lot is said about Apollos here. He's a learned man from Alexandria. Alexandria was known for a massive ancient library of around 400,000 volumes. Apollos was most likely professionally trained but was also competent or mighty in the Scriptures. He knew his OT. He was also a believer. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and this phrase fervent in spirit means he was passionate by the work of the Holy Spirit. Also notice that he taught the way of Jesus accurately, but he also was missing something. What exactly does it mean that he knew only the baptism of John?

At some point he had missed clear instruction regarding baptism. He was only offering the baptism of repentance that John gave in preparation for the Messiah. He wasn't teaching the full benefits of the work of Christ and the true meaning of Christian baptism. Look at the beginning of verse 26. It's always dangerous when you mix boldness with a lack of true knowledge. It's at this point that Priscilla and Aquila step in. Remember, Paul had left them in Ephesus. Look at the rest of verse 26.

They very graciously and kindly take him aside and correct his wrong or lacking teaching. The collaboration here is beautiful to watch. Notice the results in verses 27-28. They encouraged him and recommended him to the church in Corinth. They saw the gifting, Apollos responded with humility to their teaching, and the whole church was built up by the collaboration.

This is exactly how it's supposed to be, and this is necessary for the ongoing building of the church. Listen, as our church continues to grow deeper and numerically, we need this sort of mindset for working together. Recognize the gifting of others. Take opportunities to serve and disciple and speak. This is perfectly laid out in Ephesians 4:11-16. This is the model passage for how our church should function. We need each other. Each of us has blind spots. Collaboration is necessary, but its collaboration based on the truth.

3. Build with Correctness (vv. 24-28)

Same story and verses, but did you notice the word that was used twice in this story? Accurately. Apollos taught accurately but his teaching was lacking in something. Priscilla and Aquila come along, and they teach him more accurately. They provide what is lacking in his instruction. And the accuracy of his teaching leads to an amazing impact in Corinth. Look at verses 27-28. He strengthened believers and refuted unbelievers.

It can be tempting to think that biblical doctrine just isn't that important, but the entire testimony of the NT would argue otherwise. What you believe about the nature of God, the way of salvation, and biblical ethics matters and the NT authors repeatedly make this clear. Listen to a couple of passages. 2 Timothy 2:15; 4:1-4; Titus 2:1.

We live in a day when the possibility of knowing something with certainty is always in question. People are questioning all sorts of areas of knowledge. What people used to assume was true is now open to discussion for many people. I'm not going to give you any examples here because I don't want to distract from the point. It can be easy to throw our hands up and say, "well, we can't really know anything for sure." But this is exactly why we need Scripture more than ever. The Bible is the truth. It tells us the way things are.

If this is the case, how can we dismiss the truth of Scripture, centered on Jesus, because it doesn't seem relevant or applicable to our lives today? It's like watching a football game, expecting it to be played like baseball, and then complaining that this game doesn't make sense.

The church must always be built with the truth, taught accurately with precision and care. Paul told Timothy this in 1 Timothy 3:14-15. And this is why the church always has to be built on Christ.

4. Build on Christ (vv. 1-7)

Look at 19:1. Paul has traveled all the way to Antioch, back through Galatia and visited churches he planted before. Now he's passing through Asia, which the Lord kept Him from going into before. Remember Acts 16:6. Let me show you a map. He makes a straight shot across Asia and to its most important city, Ephesus. He promised them that if God willed it, he would return. He does. Look at verses 2-3.

Verse 1 tells us that he met some disciples, and we find out these are essentially disciples of John the Baptist. They were baptized into John's baptism but knew nothing of Jesus and the work that he had done. So, Paul proclaims Christ. Look at verse 4. They respond in repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Look at verse 5. And we know they are saved here because of what happens next. Look at verses 6-7.

The Spirit comes upon them, which is what happens in Acts because of salvation and the New Covenant. Here we have the difference between essentially Old Covenant believers and New Covenant believers and what makes them distinct? The person and work of Jesus Christ known and understood. This is why we must know the truth about Christ and speak it accurately.

Jesus is the truth, according to John 14:6. In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He's the path to salvation. But all of this only comes to people through clarity in the explanation of the person and work of Jesus. He must be proclaimed and believed and this is what builds the church.

So, we get the privilege, while we are on this earth, to be a part of God's work in building His church. Let me show you something we sort of skipped over as we walked through this passage. Go back to Apollos's ministry in Corinth and read again what it says in 18:27. "Those who through grace had believed". It's only by God's undeserved kindness that we have come to believe the truth and grow in the truth. Let that grace motivate you to be involved in the gift of grace of building the church together. Let's pray.