

THAT WAS THEN, THIS IS NOW
Christianity In The Making: From Jerusalem To The South Bay
Acts 18

Digging deeper in personal study and reflection.

1. What part of today's message spoke to you most directly?
2. What is the view of God you most often encounter in your circle, the **pluralists'** "A just God is non-judgmental and grades on the curve—just try to live a good life" OR the **legalists'** view "A just God keeps a score card of all the rights and wrongs and will approve of me."
3. Why is the gospel hard for a pluralist to accept? For a legalist? What is/was the hardest thing for you in accepting the gospel?
4. Jesus is "God with us" (Emanuel) argument: Christianity is the only religion that has a God who has known and experienced human pain and which offers redemption when we acknowledge failure. Why might that be an appealing benefit for pluralists? For legalists?
5. In Roman rule, 'tolerance' was the highest virtue. No religion could claim to be the 'right' way. Do you hear that argument today? What is illogical about saying, "All religions only have a part of the truth"? Religious people who claim full knowledge of God or truth are "just arrogant."¹
6. Most religions exhort people to practice moral behavior, but Tim Keller points out that a Christian motivation is different. Rather than just telling people not to lie and if they do, to seek forgiveness,¹ Keller says, "Let me tell you why you're not going to be a truthful person. I lie most often to avoid others' disapproval. If I just try to stop lying, it won't work because my need for others' approval overwhelms my good intentions. I allow other people, instead of Jesus, to determine my worth. If you want to stop lying, you have to find what is motivating your sin—like my tendency to look to others for affirmation—and replace it with the security you can find in Jesus. The goal is *not reformation, but transformation.*" How is that a different message?

¹ The statement is not 'tolerant' – it judges all religions and demonstrates spiritual arrogance. The speaker assumes he/she somehow has a 'full' understanding of truth and what it is and is not!



For Further Study and Discussion.

1. **Read Acts 18:1-8** In Corinth, Paul engages in long and intense discussions about faith in Christ with Jews and Greeks— what makes him finally walk out of the synagogue? Is he ‘giving up’ on witnessing to Jews (see Acts 19:8)? What evidence is there that Paul’s arguments had a major impact?
2. **Read Acts 18: 10-17** In what areas of your life and faith do you need to hear, “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you...” What would you expect in terms of ministry if you had that same vision or word from Christ—smooth sailing or major problems? In light of the court case accusing Paul of violating the law, was the vision ‘accurate’? Why? Now contrast that Acts 18 vision with the visions Paul mentions in Acts 20:23.
3. **Read Romans 16:1-16** What do we learn about Priscilla and Aquila in this passage that shows their significance in Paul’s life? (1) Count up the number of people Paul honors in this section. (2) Make a separate tally of the number that are clearly women and note any reason Paul gives for why he appreciates them. Note that Phoebe (verse 1) is called a **deacon** (*Diakonos* is same word used both for male deacons and servants because deacons served the poor—but because her title is linked to a specific church, scholars think she held an official position as a deacon). In verse 7, a couple —Andronicus and Junia--are called ‘outstanding among the **apostles**’¹ Paul is often seen as being hard on women—or even a misogynist because he places limits on women in other passages. How does his recognizing these women’s work in church planting including recognizing Phoebe as a deacon and Junia as an apostle challenge that view?

¹ Apostles (from Greek ‘to send’) are not only the 12 disciples but also, like Paul, an authoritative group *sent* to go preach the gospel and witness. Traditionally, these were assumed to be only male so Junia, a female name, was changed to Junias in later manuscripts.