

The Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. 'This man,' they charged, 'is persuading the people to worship God in way contrary to the law.' Acts 18.12-13.

And so Paul left Athens and made his way to the great commercial sea-port city of Corinth where he met Aquila and Priscilla, fellow tent-makers, who became life-long friends of his, vv1-3... As was his custom, Paul made straight for the local synagogue where he tried to shew from the OT that Jesus was the promised Messiah, vv4-5... As usual Paul got a rough reception, and then he decided he had had enough. Now he would concentrate on the Gentiles, v6... He moved next door, v7...

Paul's preaching efforts among the Jews were not entirely wasted. He did convert some of them, not least the synagogue president himself, a man called Crispus, v8...

But things must have become tough for Paul because from v9 we read that God had to speak in a vision to reassure him, vv9-10... From v12 we read that the attempt by the Jews to get Paul locked up failed because the Roman proconsul, Gallio, couldn't be bothered with their internal Jewish squabble, vv14-16... The crowd then turned on the Jews, v17...

Very interesting, but what has this passage of scripture to say to us today? Read scripture *slowly* and you will be surprised what God is saying to us. Corinth was a rich sea-port, five times the size of Athens. It was famous for superstition and sex. In fact the Gk verb κορινθιαζεσθαι, 'to corinthiasize' meant 'to fornicate'. Why am I mentioning this? Don't we today live in a sex-obsessed society? Don't we as Christians struggle to live out kingdom values day by day when all around us is corruption, filth and greed? And we are

laughed at as repressed, judgemental prigs for trying to live decent lives. Well, that's how the tiny Christian community in Corinth felt. Paul wrote two huge letters to these Corinthians as they struggled with the surrounding majority culture. Christianity is no longer the dominant culture in our society. We are the minority, like the Christians in degenerate Corinth.

From v9 we read that even the great St Paul needed encouragement to keep battling on for Christ. God spoke to him the word he needed to hear, vv9-10... God will speak to you also the word *you* need to hear. And Paul won support from the most unlikely of places, from the top man himself, the Roman Proconsul, Gallio. He was the brother of the famous Stoic philosopher, Seneca. Gallio was not a Christian, but God used him, though he didn't know it. God used him to protect Paul from the baying Jewish mob. There is a deep insight here. God is Lord of all. Scripture is full of accounts of the ways God works through people who are even his enemies.

In the OT we read that the Jews were defeated and taken into exile into Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. Years later the Babylonians were themselves defeated by the first king of the Iranians, King Cyrus. Cyrus issued a decree in the year 538BC allowing the Jews to return to Judaea. (Go to the British Museum to see the Cyrus Cylinder with this decree on). Cyrus didn't believe in Jehovah, the God of the Jews, but he was doing God's work without realising. Turn to p731, *Is* 45.1,4-5... Amazing! The pagan Cyrus is called '*God's Messiah*'!

God moves in mysterious ways. No person is off-limits to God. He can work through Pharaoh, through Cyrus, through

Gallio. God can even work through the terrible calamity of Christ's Cross. To us his death at Calvary looks like death, pain, failure, defeat. In fact God used it as an atoning sacrifice for the sin of the whole world. God is Lord of all, and nothing, and no person is off-limits to him.

The most bizarre example of modern times is probably Saddam Hussein. I carry no torch for him, I assure you, and I'm glad he's gone, but here's a strange fact. In 1980 there were 1.4m Christians in Iraq. Now there are about 400,000. This evil man actually protected Christians from Islamic militants. The Assyrian-Chaldean Church is no interloper. It is the oldest still existing church in the world. Now our Christians brothers and sisters are at the mercy of the Islamic militants who force the women to cover their heads or be killed. Christians are given the choice either to pay the humiliating *jizya* tax, or convert. Most have fled the country. Do you see how back in our text from Acts 18 Jews stirred up trouble for Christians? Well, they're still doing it 2,000 years later. Nothing has changed.

People say to me, 'How can there be a God when the world is so cruel and so corrupt?' My reply to that is, 'Read your Bible. That's exactly the world the Bible is describing, a sinful, fallen world, which desperately needs a Saviour to save it from the greed, violence and hatred we see all around us.'

Can you see how a *slow* reading of our Acts 18 passage perfectly describes our situation as Christians today? And there's one last thing which would make you think this was written yesterday. Look at v12 where the Jews bring Paul to court to shut him up about Jesus. Isn't that precisely what is

happening today? Not enough people realise that there is an ideological war going on in our society, and it is very, very anti-Christian. The weapon of choice is the law and the courts. Laws and the courts are being used to enshrine abortion and euthanasia. Under the apparently harmless banner of equality and diversity Christianity is being squeezed out. RC adoption agencies have shut rather than be forced to accept adoption by homosexuals. Under the present Equality Bill going through Parliament Christian businesses and charities which refuse to promote gay rights will not receive funding. The Government says it will force churches to accept practising homosexuals and transsexuals as youth workers. Gay lobbyists are boasting that this Equality Bill will entrench gay rights in all aspects of public life. And so children at Primary Schools are being forced to accept the rightness of homosexuality. Earlier in the year Muslim and Christian parents of children at an East London school face prosecution after keeping their children at home during controversial lessons promoting homosexuality.

Recently the courts declared *illegal* the Trinity Cross, established in 1969 by the Queen, our anointed Sovereign, to honour gallantry and distinguished service to Trinidad and Tobago. The Cross is offensive to Muslims and Hindus.

Our situation as Christians in GB today is not so different from that of Christians in Corinth 2,000 years ago. They mocked, threatened and used the courts against them. But Christ is the Truth, and his enemies didn't reckon that he could raise up a Gallio. So don't lose heart. Keep the faith, and leave the rest to God. He's in charge. Jesus is Lord.