



Acts – Can I get a Witness?
Wk. 63 “Partisans for Advancement” (Pt. 3 Answers for Difficult Min.)
By Pastor Jody May 01/21/2024

Acts 18:5-17 ESV

Paul in Corinth

⁵When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. ⁶**And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”** ⁷And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. ⁹And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰**for I am with you**, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” ¹¹And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

¹²But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, ¹³saying, “This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.” ¹⁴But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. ¹⁵But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things.” ¹⁶And he drove them from the tribunal. ¹⁷And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.

[READ THE TEXT]

Pastor – “People of God, this is the Word of God.”
People – “Thanks be to God.”

[PRAY]

[ILLUSTRATION]

On the front porch of his little country store in Illinois, Abraham Lincoln and Berry, his partner, stood. Business was all gone, and Berry asked, “How much



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longer can we keep this going?” Lincoln answered, “It looks as if our business has just about winked out.” Then he continued, “You know, I wouldn’t mind so much if I could just do what I want to do. I want to study law. I wouldn’t mind so much if we could sell everything we’ve got and pay all our bills and have just enough left over to buy one book—*Blackstone’s Commentary on English Law*, but I guess I can’t.”

A strange-looking wagon was coming up the road. The driver angled it up close to the store porch, then looked at Lincoln and said, “I’m trying to move my family out west, and I’m out of money. I’ve got a good barrel here that I could sell for fifty cents.” Abraham Lincoln’s eyes went along the wagon and came to the wife looking at him pleadingly, face thin and emaciated. Lincoln ran his hand into his pocket and took out, according to him, “the last fifty cents I had” and said, “I reckon I could use a good barrel.” All day long the barrel sat on the porch of that store. Berry kept chiding Lincoln about it. Late in the evening Lincoln walked out and looked down into the barrel. He saw something in the bottom of it, papers that he hadn’t noticed before. His long arms went down into the barrel and, as he fumbled around, he hit something solid. He pulled out a book and stood petrified: it was *Blackstone’s Commentary on English Law*.

Lincoln later wrote, “I stood there holding the book and looking up toward the heavens. There came a deep impression on me that God had something for me to do and He was showing me now that I had to get ready for it. Why this miracle otherwise?”¹

That is what we call Providence:

Providence - *Divine providence is the governance of God by which He, with wisdom and love, cares for and directs all things in the universe.*²

[INTRO]

¹ <https://bible.org/illustration/abraham-lincoln-1>

² <https://www.gotquestions.org/divine-providence.html>



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At HCC we too believe in **providence**, we believe that by the culmination of each one of our lives, at this time, in this community, in this place, that we have work to do this year. There are people we are to be looking for in 2024 that need hope for their lives, and we were told last week when we venture forth in Jesus’ name, that we have it in writing; He is with us, He guides us, and He’s constantly calling all men to Himself, so **it is the honor of HCC to convey the hope of His gospel!** (According to Phil 2:1-4) So, all of these particular verses in 18:1-17 contain three different answers to help the spread of the Gospel, but all of them deal with God’s Providence in a different way. Here’s what Paul’s adventures in Corinth are showing us.

- Partners for Ministry (vs.1-4) – God provides the friends we need to get through.
- Providence for Evangelism (vs.5-11) – God provides the plan, election, for the souls that need saving.
- Partisans for Advancement (vs.12-17) – God provides antagonists that will work against you but will be used by God to further His agenda.

LBCF 1689 Chp 5.4³

4. The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God are so thoroughly demonstrated in his providence, that his sovereign plan includes even the first fall and every other sinful action both of angels and humans.¹ God’s providence over sinful actions does not occur by simple permission. Instead, God most wisely and powerfully limits and in other ways arranges and governs sinful actions.² Through a complex arrangement of methods he governs sinful actions to accomplish his perfectly holy purposes.³ Yet he does this in such a way that the sinfulness of their acts arises only from the creatures and not from God. Because God is altogether holy and righteous, he can neither originate nor approve of sin.⁴

¹Romans 11:32–34; ²Samuel 24:1, 1 Chronicles 21:1. ²2 Kings 19:28; Psalms 76:10. ³Genesis 50:20; Isaiah 10:6, 7, 12. ⁴Psalms 50:21; 1 John 2:16.

³ <https://founders.org/library/chapter-5-divine-providence/>



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You may be sitting here today and be wondering PJ, just where did you get the crazy notion that God does what He wants through people who may not want to do it? I mean how does this man-made Creed come up with what can seem like a crazy idea? **The Bible!**

Isaiah 46:8-10 ESV

“Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, **declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done**, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’”

It is God who will win in the end, *not because He is reacting to every little thing we do*, NO, because He has already decreed it, governing over sinful actions while not be culpable for them, to reach the end where He is waiting for us all to catch up. There are many examples in scripture where God manages the intent and actions of evil for the good of those He loves but let me just start with one.

Genesis 50:18-20 ESV

¹⁸ His (Joseph) brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

So here is what you will see throughout scripture and through the finishing of Paul’s time here in Corinth today.

MP:

All people and plans are managed by God, even the ones we don’t like.

Paul was promised by God back in verses 9-10 that God was with him, don’t be afraid and to keep on speaking, but that did not mean he wasn’t going to face opposition from people who wanted nothing to do with Christianity. As a



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matter of fact, what you will see today, is that God uses the plans of those that oppose Him, and I am calling them Partisans, (a supporter of a cause with strong emotional convictions) He uses their plans for His purposes. Proving the point that although we may not like what is being done around us, we may not like what is being done to us, by people who don't like us, God is ordaining all of it.

So, we are breaking up our scripture this morning into three different sections: the problem with the Religious Partisan types, the problem with the Political Partisan types, and the Providence that the Partisan types can't escape.

1. The Problem with the Religious Partisan types. (vs.12-13)

¹²But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a **united attack** on Paul and brought him before the tribunal,

They'll attack those that love God.

Just because someone says the love God does not mean they accept you if you say, 'you love God'. For some religious types if you think differently than they do then you become a threat to what they believe. We see this all the time in our current world portrayed in our politics. Politicians on both sides of the aisles say they love America, they love democracy, and yet that love does not unite them. In fact, it seems to infuriate them all the more, to the point no one, at least at the national level, can't work in a bi-partisan way. When the love of a Partisan person doesn't fall in line with Partisan ideas, that love is rejected, because of the fear of losing what they love more, the ideals they have built their identity around.

This was something that our Lord Jesus encountered at every turn in His ministry. The Pharisees said they loved God and liked to show it by their ability to follow the code of law, Jesus loved God and showed it by abolishing their code by living out the original commandments. The Pharisees and Sadducees were all for adding more code to make the system stronger and more constricting, Jesus was for removing regulations to free people up to



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love their God better, and their neighbor as self. The equivalent is like doing away with the IRS and every man reinvests his money the best way he sees fit.

Partisan aggression happens in our current churches as well. Even in the reformed camp, we have those that say they love Jesus but can't agree on eschatology, Christian Nationalism, and whether the gifts of the Spirit still exist. But is that worth attacking each other every time we turn around? You see, we can't forget the of Law of Christ.

John 13:24 ESV

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

1 John 4: 20-21 ESV

²⁰ If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

RC Sproul and John MacArthur had a great relationship even though they had different opinions on eschatology and ecclesiology. They worked together to defend the Gospel during what was known as the ECT (Evangelical and Catholics Together) debates of the late 1990s. Both men refused to sign a document that would **not proclaim that justification comes from Faith Alone** and led the rest of the reformed world to reject partnering with the Catholic Church. Their love for the Gospel of Christ united them, that was the Partisan group they recognized and felt called too, the group of “saved by Grace through faith”. This is what we have to get back to.

They'll falsely accuse those that don't believe what they do about God.

¹³ saying, “This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.”

Religious Partisan types when they can't have their way tend to take things public, they tend to make broad statements, and they tend to blow things out of proportion. These Jews instead of handling their religious disputes in



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house, since the occupation of foreign powers in the Holy Land, they began to take their disputes outside the confines of their religious institutions and began to bring them to the doorstep of those in power.

Again, Jesus dealt with this as well as the Sanhedrin looked to Pilate for an execution order. The Sanhedrin looked not to the scriptures for unity, nor did they look to debate and sound witnesses for a solution but paid a bribe to Judas, false witnesses, and rebel rousers to take Jesus out. They forced the hand of Pilate by threatening civil unrest, everything they did broke both their own law, and the law of Rome, and it was all done for Partisan party lines over fear of losing their place in society.

Paul having gone through it himself, and hearing how it is still happening writes in his letter to the Corinthians about a year later.

1 Corinthians 6:3-5 ESV

³Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! ⁴So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? ⁵I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers,

The lure is to use the public square and worldly courts and lawyers to get what you want, if what you want goes against the will of God. It happens when people, for example, in the SBC take accusations outside the church to the press. It happens when the leaders of the ERLC (Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission) take their disappointments to government officials and outside publications. It happens when women teachers change their minds and want to be pastors and appeal to other religious and social groups outside of their home churches for support. It happens when church planters work coercive plans with church planting organizations and seminaries to adopt secular ideas like CRT using money given for church planting to fly in delegates to vote at conventions to see that it happens. You see the problem is that Partisan Religious types will allow the love of their preferences to override their love of Christ, and they will use worldly techniques to get what they want.



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BUT in all of that, and there is SO much more I could say about these things, we have to remember **all people & plans are managed by God, even when we don't like it**, even we think someone is playing dirty. SO why we may not like some of the underhandedness we see happening in big church world today, what I can tell you is God will use every bit of it to bring His plans to fruition.

2. The Problem with the Political Partisan types (v.14-15)

¹⁴ But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. ¹⁵ But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves.

They think they know what the problem is without consulting the Word.

Well, this is no new position for Paul, he has been hauled in front of the courts before but what transpires has not happened yet. Paul is about to open his mouth to give his defense and all of the sudden that chance is taken away by this man named Gallio. Now because the Jews have taken Paul to court, they got a man that was not going to consult their traditions, their beliefs, and their faith. No instead they got a man, that was under the influence of Rome and was raised by a politician himself, so he gave a very politician like answer. *Since your debate is about your religion it doesn't belong here, see to it yourselves.* The Jews went looking for solutions, but instead they shot themselves in the foot, but I will get there in a few minutes.

The reason we keep things in house, is because politicians and judges were trained to use the law for civil obedience not religious regulation. Our forefathers had the wisdom and sense in the birth our our country to separate these two things, because they had seen the church mixed with political powers over past centuries and instead of the church purifying the courts of men, the church was corrupted by the governmental power they could obtain. It's not that the courts shouldn't be governed by God's Law, as well they should, but we should not use them to decipher God's law and pass judgement



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on church affairs. I'll just point to the issues of Europe over the last 2,000 years.

They believe they are above the commands of the Word.

I refuse to be a judge of these things.”

Now while I believe Gallio was doing the right thing, he was doing it with the wrong intent it seems. Gallio was trying to separate himself from this argument because he refused to recognize the authority of God's Word over His life, he looked at it as an issue that did not concern him, for he was a Roman citizen, I know that because Gallio is an historical figure that died outside the grace of God. When political leaders believe they are above God's law it creates a huge problem for the church today because make no mistake the **WHOLE WORLD is under the authority of God's Law.**

Jesus said these very words to the man who was operating in the same type of position, the prefect, or governor of Judea, Pilate himself.

John 19:11 ESV

¹¹ Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”

No one is out from under the authority of God's Word, and therefore will be held liable to God one day for how they governed. That is why we are instructed in Romans 13 to obey the government because it was God that put them in power.

Romans 13:1-4 ESV

¹³ Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴ for he is



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God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

That brings us back to the statement of the day, **all people & plans are managed by God even the ones we don't like**, even the ones managed by the most arduous partisan types that can't see past their affiliations, their loyalties, and their own narcissism. So, I am not saying there is never a time when one should rebel, as we see Peter in Acts 5:29 **we must obey God rather than man**, but when that time comes, we better be fairly certain and prayed up as to what we think is the right course of action to take, for again God's providence works through even the most stringent partisan types.

3. The Providence that the Partisan Types can't escape (v.16-17)

¹⁶And he drove them from the tribunal. ¹⁷And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.

Well, we saw this coming, it seems that the Jews no matter where they were living in the world, that they had Partisan types that when they did not get what they wanted **they resorted to violence**. Here we also see Gallio kind of react the same way Pilate did, he did nothing to quell the uproar and let the Jews have their scapegoat. And if you didn't venture out of this chapter you would think this is the end of the story. The partisan types got their way, they bullied Paul and won. But you see Luke is writing this years after the event (20 or more) so that He could show Christians their history, God's history, and how it shows that all things happen according to the will of God by Providence.

First off, Gallio I told you was a historical figure, he is written of in the history books, as a matter of fact his life is what accurately helps us date Paul's missionary travels and the writing of his letters. It is recorded outside of scripture that he was the proconsul in Corinth between 50-52 AD. The reason his name is picked up though in the history books is because of the reputation of his family. Seneca the rhetorician was his father and Seneca the



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philosopher and teacher of Nero was his brother. Gallio was loved by all and in Rome ran their top police force (praetor), like the FBI, and had the power to raise up an army at a whim to protect her. He was awarded the proconsulship it seems as a vacation off the Greek coast because he was suffering from TB. He had the best governorship with all the perks. As well, Corinth being the capital of Achaia, and outside of Rome, had the equivalent to a federal Supreme Court, and so with Gallio’s speech at Paul’s hearing he set precedent for all of Rome.

By him declaring it was just a problem of words Gallio made the statement that Christianity and Judaism are of the same tree, it’s all the same religion, therefore as far as Rome is concerned Christians are to be treated like Jews, and should be given the freedom to practice their religion without hinderance from the Jews, and therefore inherited the religious freedoms the Jews already had. Then for the next 12+ years, until Nero went crazy, Christianity spread like wildfire through the empire undeterred by the Roman government, gaining the favor of God and man. All governmental authority comes from God, and God will even use the ones we don’t like to accomplish His will.

Secondly, we have this poor man Sosthenes (soce-then'-ace) who became the scapegoat, the outlet for violence, when he may have even been the one to lead the Jews to the tribunal!? Can you imagine the surprise on Sosthenes face when the Jews turn on him for his failed plan at getting the government involved in their affairs. But many believe this is not the last time we see him:

1 Corinthians 1:1-2 ESV

Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, ²To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

Many good theologians believe that is the same guy (who name means “Savior of his nation”), and we see he is a Christian, that is writing the letter of Corinthians back home to those of his family, who now calls Jesus Lord. The beauty of the Gospel is even if you are one of those that prefers party lines,



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that you reject the Word of God, even when you choose ignorance, when it is God’s plan to save you, He uses your dilemma’s to call you home. **God WORKS against your free will...** And you better thanks Him for it!

[CHALLENGE]

You like Sosthenes, perhaps you were at one time on the wrong side of partisan belief, perhaps you were a zealot for doing things your way. Just because you had the means to live life as you wanted, you thought that was even God giving you the thumbs up to do things like you wanted to do. That’s what happens to people who have money, power, and favor when the fall they fall hard.

For many of us, as we built our lives around our religious practices and this thought crept into our heads, *if I but live this certain way then God will give me what I want*, only to find out that we were wrong. We have gone through things lately that we have felt like in our spirit we have been dragged out turned on by a mob and beat senseless in our souls. Now we are trying to make sense of what happened to my life. That’s where I want you to grasp on to what we have learned today, **God uses all plans and people to accomplish His will, even the ones we don’t like**, because He loves His people, He wants to make you like Christ, He is allowing you to associate with His Son by suffering, so that you may be reunited with Him one day.

God uses the Partisan types to change us, he uses them to break our bad habits, he uses them to bring attention to our sin and pain, He uses them to put humility in you, He uses them to give you a platform to share your story. He uses them so you would know a little of what His Son endured, to build your love for Him, to separate you from the world, ALL because He is loving you. He is seeing the end from the beginning, and you were in that plan. Your hard times are not to drive you away they are given so you won’t be lost to this world, BUT to bring you to him.

How do you know this is happening right now in your life. Because wounded people try to wound others, whether directly or indirectly.



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Families that are in hard times, I usually find that spouses attack one another. The enemy wants to use hard times to drive wedges and destroy but fear not God wants to use your hard times to change courses and mend lives.

The times in my life when I have felt beat up by the world, by God’s grace, He showed me that instead of taking it out on those around me that there is so much more I can constructively do by choosing to love my people.

So, what do we do today, ***“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”***

[PRAYER]

[COMMUNION]

[BENEDICTION]

Go in the name of the Father, that has seen the end from the beginning, and uses the Partisan types, to ensure His glory will be revealed.

Go in the name of the Son, that allowed the Partisan types to have their way with Him, to make a way home for you.

Go in the name and power of the Holy Spirit, that opens your eyes to how God is using all things to make you like Jesus, now go and share your story with those that need to hear it.