

Acts 18:1-11 NIV

"The city where God had many people"

"After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

"⁴ Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. ⁵ When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁶ But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.'

"⁷ Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titus Justus, a worshiper of God ⁸ Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized. ⁹ One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: 'Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in

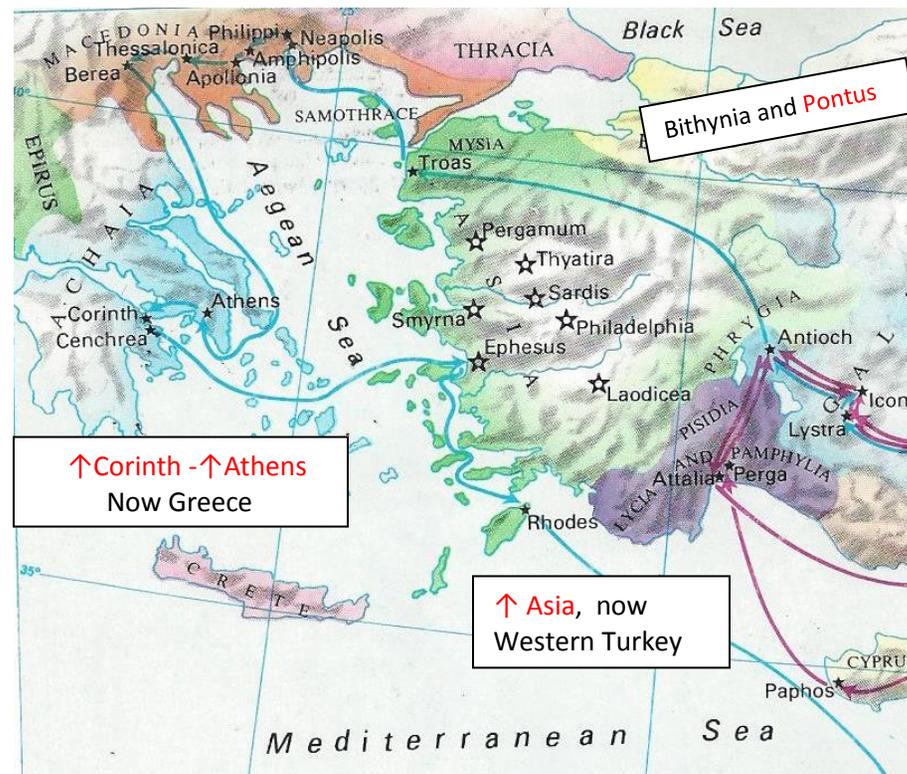
this city.'¹¹ So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God."

We feel better when we think that our work will produce positive results for God's kingdom.

Religious groups usually survey areas where they hope to establish churches.

They want to feel: "We are putting money and hard work into this mission.

We want good prospects for our success?"



The Holy Spirit sent Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey.

To my knowledge, no one did a survey or assessed prospects for succeeding.

Though many people accepted Christ, at Lystra in present Turkey, folks nearly killed Paul by throwing big stones at him.

Today's text tells of Paul's second missionary trip with Silas and other coworkers.

Paul traveled from Athens to Corinth.

"There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them."

Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla made tents, sails, and other leather products.

Verse 7 probably means that Paul began teaching in Titius Justus's home instead of in the synagogue; not that he no longer stayed with Aquila and Priscilla.

Wherever Paul preached, he faced resistance.

Opposition formed in city after city.

Virtually everywhere folks didn't just oppose Paul, they wanted him dead.

In Corinth, many people responded to the Good News, but Paul likely wondered when things would come unglued again.

But "the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: 'Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.' So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God."

Would a modern poll have indicated strong Christian potential in Corinth?

Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians tells us they suffered a serious shortage of something vital.



Agora of Ancient Corinth

What did they lack?

A four letter word describes that quality.

You hear the term a lot.

Preachers use it-- even in mixed company.

Nearly everyone likes hearing the word.

I like hearing it from Norma and also from all of the kids and grandkids.

It's usually the subject of the last thing Norma and I say to each other before we go to sleep.

You know I'm talking about "love."

Opinions vary on the subject.

Sylvester Stallone said love is, "the most ambiguous, delirious, illogical emotion there is."¹

According to George Jean Nathan,

"Love is the emotion that a woman feels always for a poodle dog and sometimes for a man."¹

The British writer Somerset Maugham offered:

"Love is what happens to a man and a woman who don't know each other."

These remarks suggest some of love's mystery.

- One relates to defining love.

Husbands say love is one thing.

Wives define it in other ways.

A Kansas tornado hit a farmhouse just before dawn one morning. It lifted the roof off, picked up the beds on which the farmer and his wife slept, and, gently set them down in the next county.

The wife began to cry.

"Don't be scared, Mary," her husband said, "We're not hurt."

"I'm not scared," Mary sobbed, "I'm happy 'cause this is the first time in fourteen years we've been out together."

Want more evidence of love's mysteries?



Those who believe in just wars define love one way.

Pacifists see love in an opposing way.

Educators often disagree over love's content.

- Here's another mysterious aspect.

Years ago I carried on a lengthy correspondence with a guy in federal prison, whom I visited once.

At times his insights profoundly impressed me.

Whether original to him or not, he wrote the following remarks about the riskiness of love.

"When you really know someone...and you learn to love that someone as a human being; as a person.

Sometimes this frightens me.

Because where will the man find himself who loves everyone? What defenses will he have left?"

This repeat offender expressed the fear that if he fully loved others, he'd be fully vulnerable.

We want love, but aspects of it frighten us.

We fear that the one to whom we've extended our deepest emotions will reject us.

Open your heart to someone.

That person might turn away and humiliate you.

Its first occurrence was so painful you don't want risk it happening again.

So you keep everyone at a distance.

¹ The Theater, the Drama, the Girls, 1921

Some advise us to take the risk anyhow:

"Better to be wounded, a captive and a slave, than always to walk in armor."²

Some of us wear heavy armor.

We set defenses against further hurts.

Some try to laugh away the "heart" pain.

That theme stands out in the opera *Pagliacci*, in which Enrico Caruso starred.

Of love the cynic Samuel Hoffenstein wrote:

"If you love me as I love you, we'll both be friendly and untrue."



What is real love?

How does it act?

What does it do?

To this same Corinth church group, Paul later wrote his famous chapter on love in *1 Cor.* 13.

The Corinthians' love had been deficient.

Remember: the Lord told Paul that he had many people in the port city of Corinth.

Their love needed godly guidance, directions, and patient training.

The Apostle John, who struggled to love early in life, exquisitely defined it.

What did John tell us about love?

"Dear children, let us not love with words or

tongue but with actions and in truth."³

Some persuade, charm, and enchant us.

John said: "Look past the fancy talk, the schmoozy language, the honey-coated words, and the carefully crafted sentences."

Love is more than finding someone who'll drink beer with you, likes the same movies you do, and "hangs" with you.

Love proves itself with honesty and actions.

John could define love because he saw it in Jesus.

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."⁴

When we won't give of ourselves, we likely don't love as we should.

Love seeks the good of others.

Jesus was always concerned about others:

Were they safe?

Was their love maturing?

Were they honoring God?

I let my family down a lot.

Too often my concern was how others might judge me rather than thinking about Norma's and the kids' needs.

Were they growing closer to God?

² Margaret Fuller, *Summer on the Lakes*, 1844

³ 1 John 3:18 NIV

⁴ 1 John 3:16 NIV

Were we maturing as a family?

I wish I could report more progress in my love for God and my love for others.

As John said, Jesus is our standard:

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

Jesus led a diverse gang of guys.

Some had bad tempers.

Some had trouble telling the truth.

At least one had been a tax cheat.

One might have been a terrorist.

Most of them wasted time fretting.

All showed impatient selfishness.

At times, all were dense.

Yet Jesus gave himself to God and to them, and that crude group grew to become productive in God’s kingdom.

To reiterate Scripture, Jesus is our standard.

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

What would a true assessment reveal about our tempers, our morals, our honesty, our thoughtfulness, our patience, our generosity, and our love for God and others?

Would it reveal a willingness to lay down our lives for others?

When they nailed Jesus to the cross, he suffered as much for our dishonesty, selfishness, anger, and immorality as for his contemporaries.

That’s why he laid down his life.

As Jesus expected the Apostles to grow in love, he wants us to fully mature.

All the people in our area need to know that Jesus, the Son God, laid down his life for them.

This week invite someone to hear this message.

Ask that person if he or she knows Jesus.

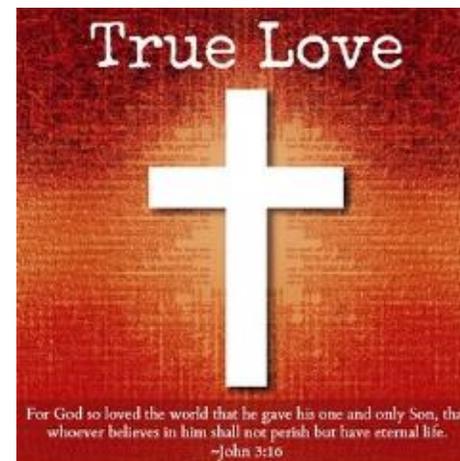
All are lost without him.

You’ll take a step toward demonstrating God’s true love.

He likely has many souls near you.

2 Corinthians 13:14 NIV

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”



**In case your Bible isn't conveniently nearby,
here is 1 Corinthians 13 (the Love Chapter):**

"If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

"Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! But when full understanding comes, these partial things will become useless.

"When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things.

"Now we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.

"Three things will last forever—
faith, hope, and love—
and the greatest of these is love."

New Living Translation

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