

## **KNOW WHEN TO FIGHT OR TO GIVE UP!**

**Today's Text: Acts 18: 1- 23**

### **Extracts:**

**After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. ...And [there] he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. .. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." ...Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city." And Paul continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them [Acts 18: 1, 4, 6, 9-11].**

*I once heard the testimony of how God cured a Lagos (Nigeria) man of his bad temper. He had prayed fervently for the Lord to help him to deal with the problem which had cost him his marriage and a good job. One day, as he was coming from one of his fruitless searches for a new job, he accidentally stepped on the foot of a man while both of them were alighting from a bus. He apologized but the man cursed and pushed him. He held back an urge to avenge when he remembered his prayer. As he walked along the pavement to his apartment which was not far from the bus stop, the man followed behind him and continued to rain insults at him. He was very angry but he did not utter a word. His "assailant" continued to pour venom at him. Finally, the man opened the door to his flat and turning with a smile to the attacker, he asked, "What can I offer you?" To his surprise, the man replied, "Nothing, thanks. I am relieved." "What do you mean?" the man fired back in surprise. The man that had followed him all the way from the bus stop replied, "I was afraid that you were a ghost!"*

*Despite the extreme provocation that he had encountered, that man chose not to fight but to give up and bear all the insults. By so doing, he achieved what he had thought was impossible. You too can do that. There are many issues that you may be fighting right now. It could be injustice at home, in the office or church. It could be proposed changes that others had agreed with you but are now sabotaging. Should you fight or give up? How do you know what is worthwhile to do when your back is against the wall? In this week's Bible story, Paul ran into a brick wall trying to preach Jesus at Corinth. Out of frustration, he decided to leave there to go elsewhere. In the end, he wound up spending a year- and- half extra! Let us find out what kept him back and what we can learn from it.*

## 1. Background: Paul almost gave up!

There seems to be so much anger in the world today. As you watch television or read the newspapers, people are venting their anger on institutions and those who run them. The venom is worse in the social media where people hide under its seemingly harmless anonymity to scream and curse. People are hurting. Unemployment is high. Crimes and terrorism are climbing. Corruption is rife. Injustice wears a hat. At home, school and work, in the church, sports and business- there is no exception. Should you join them to fight? Yet, the Preacher has written, “Wisdom is better than weapons of war” [Eccl. 9: 18]. That suggests that we should know when to fight and when to give up if we do not want to offend God since the fear of Him is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Lord is understanding [Prov. 9: 10]. How then do you know when to fight or to give up? That is the question that we shall attempt to answer in this week’s study.

Our Bible story comes from Paul’s experience at Corinth. After his successful mission to Athens, where he had had a challenging encounter with Epicureans and Stoics, he came to Corinth where he found a certain Jew called Aquilla and his wife, Priscilla. They had recently returned from Rome, Italy, having been forced out (along with all other Jews) on the orders of Emperor Claudius. They were tentmakers, just like Paul. So, he felt at home, working with them while doing his missionary work [Acts 18: 1-3]. Let us follow Paul’s experience at Corinth from there:

### a) *Paul decided to quit a hostile environment*

Every Sabbath day, Paul went to the synagogue where he reasoned with both Jews and Gentiles (Greeks) and persuaded them to accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. When Silas and Timothy joined him from Macedonia, the Holy Spirit compelled him more strongly to testify to the Jews about the Christ [vv. 4-5].

However, ***the Jews did not only oppose him; they even blasphemed. So, Paul shook his garments and said to them,*** “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. ***From now on I will go to the Gentiles.***” He left them and went to the home of a believer, Justus, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed along with his household. So did many of the Corinthians who accepted Jesus as their Saviour and they were all baptized [vv. 6-8].

Have you been pushed to a point of giving up a just cause? For example, are you trying to cancel your wedding plans just because of an unproven allegation against your partner? Take heart! In spite of the hostile environment that Paul had just faced, even the head of that synagogue, Crispus, and members of his household believed. Many of the Corinthians

also believed. That was not a bad response at all. Take the story of a man whose mail from the post office arrived several months late. As he complained bitterly about it, his wife said to him, “Honey, look at the bright side of it- the system works!”

b) *But God instructed him otherwise*

As Paul ruminated about his circumstances, the Lord appeared to him that night in a vision and said to him, “***Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city***” [vv. 9-10]. Can you imagine Paul’s elation when he came to himself? Jesus had just assured him of maximum protection. He should stay and fight because no one could hurt him in that city. So, Paul “continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” [v. 11]!

***Paul’s head had told him to give up and leave but God told him to stay and fight.*** In the end, he stayed for another fifteen months- in a hostile environment! If God is for you, who can be against you [Rom. 8: 31]?

c) *And his detractors got disgraced!*

Of course, Paul’s stay and audacious preaching challenged the tolerance limit of the Jewish leaders. So, they dragged him for trial before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, accusing him of persuading people to worship God contrary to the law. As Paul was about to open his mouth in defence, Gallio stopped him and said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrong doing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters.” Then he drove them from the judgment seat! So, all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and “beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things” [Acts 18: 12-17].

The Lord had assured Paul that no one would attack him to hurt him, that He the Lord had so many people in that city. When Paul’s detractors brought him before a Roman judge, he did not need to speak at all because the judge told him not to. Instead, the judge pronounced judgment in his favour! In the end, it was his enemies that got beaten mercilessly. Jesus has said, “When they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say” [Lk 12: 11-12]. Therefore, the conclusion that we can draw from the above story is this: ***you can fight for the cause or calling that God has given you but not for yourself or your integrity.*** That is His responsibility.

## 2. Knowing when to fight or give up

From the foregoing analysis, we can develop some general principles that can guide us to know when to fight and when to give up or run from an issue. They are as follows:

a) *Identify the issue(s) at stake and how they affect you*

Perhaps the first thing to determine is knowing the issue(s) at stake and how they affect you. After all, why should you take analgesics for somebody else's headache? You may find, for example, that the matter is not worth fighting for. For example, when David was fleeing from Absalom his son's revolt, a man called Shimei from the family of the house of Saul came out, cursing David continuously and throwing stones at him and all his servants. He said to David, "Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue! The LORD has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned... So now you are caught in your evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man!" Abishai, one of David's generals, asked for the king's order to take off the head of "this dead dog" but David restrained him, saying, "Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the LORD has ordered him" [2 Sam. 16: 5-11]. For David, his son's rebellion was worse than his enemy's curse and he chose to ignore the attack, at least for that moment.

Compare that with Daniel's case when his faith was called to question by the order of Darius, instigated by Daniel's enemies, that no petitions be made to any god or man for thirty days except to the king alone. Any culprit was to be thrown into the den of lions. As soon as the king had signed the decree, Daniel opened wide his window in his upper room and facing the direction of Jerusalem prayed three times a day "as was his custom since early days" [Dan. 6: 4-10]. He had to fight because there was much more at stake than mere loss of his life.

Therefore, ***you must put your eye on the ball at all times***. Your detractors can only get you if they can hide the truth of their intentions from you. They can dribble you to play into their hands for as long as you cannot see the ball. But if you can see through their scheming, you can determine whether to fight or to give up or run.

b) *Find out God's position on the matter*

No matter what is at stake, it is very helpful for you to know God's position on the matter before you react. For example, if Jesus had not told Paul in a night vision to stay and fight, he might have left Corinth as he had proposed and be unable to accomplish his mission. So, ***let God guide***

*you on how to respond, otherwise you could think you are no match for your enemy or you could over rate them.*

***God may tell you to fight and He will show you how to go about it.*** For example, when the Philistines heard that David had been crowned king of Israel, they deployed troops to attack him in the Valley of Rephaim. When David asked God if he should attack and if He would deliver the Philistines into his hands, the Lord said, “Go up, and I will doubtless deliver [them] into your hands.” David did as he was instructed and defeated the Philistines. They regrouped and came back to attack David. When he enquired of the Lord again, He told David not to go up but to circle around behind them, and come upon them in front of the mulberry trees. He should not attack until he had heard the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees. As soon as he heard that, he should march quickly for the LORD would go out before him to strike the camp of the Philistines. David did as commanded and got a major victory [**2 Sam. 5: 17-25**].

***Sometimes, God may tell you to do NOTHING!*** Take the example of King Hezekiah when the Babylonians came to attack his kingdom, Judah. In spite of stripping all the treasures in the house of the Lord and the treasuries of the king’s house and giving all to Sennacherib the king of Assyria, he was not satisfied. He sent a great army under a general called Rabshakeh against Jerusalem. He spoke blasphemous things against the God of Israel and boasted that even if he gave horses to Hezekiah’s troops, he would not have enough men to ride on them. But we are told that the people of Judah “held their peace and answered him not a word; for the king’s commandment was “Do not answer him”” [**2 Kgs. 18: 9-36**]. The king’s confidence derived from the word of God through the prophet Isaiah that he should not be afraid because the Lord was going to send a spirit upon the Assyrian king. He would hear a rumour that would take him home where he would be killed because he had blasphemed God [**2 Kgs. 19: 6-7**]. One night, God sent an angel into the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 of the troops. The king ran home where his sons killed him [**vv. 35-37**]! Hezekiah merely held his peace and still won a decisive victory!

***Sometimes, God may tell you to give up or run.*** For example, as a punishment for their sins, God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah that the children of Israel would be carried into exile in Babylon and that they would be brought back and be restored to Israel [**Jer. 27: 22**] after seventy years [**Jer. 29: 10**]. But God specifically said to Zedekiah, the king, “If you surely surrender to the king of Babylon’s princes, then your soul shall live; this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live” [**Jer. 38: 17**]. In due course, after the fall of Judah, Zedekiah was

taken to Babylon while Jeremiah was released from his people's prison and treated very well by the enemy [**Jer. 39: 1-12**]!

From the foregoing, it is clear that *we may never know what should be the right reaction if we are relying mainly on human wisdom, such as wealth, position and power or satanic forces*. Our greatest mistake is to underrate our adversary. For example, Pharaoh underrated Moses, the fugitive from Egyptian justice and he paid dearly for it with his empire. *Therefore, whether you fight or give up is not as important as what God asks you to do. Run if He tells you to*. After all, did He not hide His Son in Egypt when Herod wanted to kill Him at birth [**Matt. 2: 13-18**]? *If He tells you to fight, hang in there, no matter how hard the going may be*. Paul spent a year and six months longer in a hostile place. *If He tells you to give up, do not fight it*. When Rehoboam, Solomon's successor tried to fight for the reunification of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, God sent a messenger to tell him, saying, "You shall not go up nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel. Let every man return to his house, for this thing [the split] is from Me" [**1 Kgs. 12: 21-24**].

### 3. Conclusion: Always give up when Jesus calls you!

Joshua relied on God's guidance to capture mighty Jericho [**Josh. 6: 1-27**]. But when he attacked tiny Ai, he failed woefully. Twice his troops attacked and twice they were beaten back. When he finally came to God in ashes and repentance, He told him that the children of Israel had become doomed because there was sin in their camp. They needed to destroy the accursed from among them [**Josh. 7: 1-12**].

It is possible that your relationship with God is the main battle that you are fighting right now. You used to be a firebrand practising believer. Then wealth, fame and power came and you got carried away by the cares of the world. Perhaps you are still quite active but you have begun to take God for granted, taking more credit for the success of your life, family or ministry. What has gone wrong with the peace of mind that used to be your trademark? Perhaps the time has come for you to stop fighting! The time has come for you to give it all up for Christ's sake. *When you are with Him, you will no longer need to fight at all! He already overcame the world for you two thousand years ago. So be of good cheer.*

Know when to fight or to give up.