
Ministry of the Holy Spirit
Acts 18:18-28
Lesson 34 Anointed but Unfinished

Acts 18:18-28 (NIV)

¹⁸ Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken. ¹⁹ They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. ²¹ But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus.

²² When he landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.

²³ After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. ²⁴ Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.

²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.

²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. ²⁷ When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. ²⁸ For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

Discussion Questions

I. YOUR PLANS MUST REMAIN SUBMITTED TO GOD'S WILL

1. How can we distinguish between an opportunity that looks good and an assignment that is actually God's will for our lives? **Scripture: Acts 18:19–21; Proverbs 16:9**

Discussion: Paul had an open door in Ephesus, yet he chose not to stay. Have you ever pursued something simply because the opportunity was available, without first seeking God's direction?

2. What is the difference between asking God to bless our plans and genuinely submitting our plans to His will? **Scripture: James 4:13–15; Proverbs 3:5–6**

Discussion: Why do we sometimes struggle when God's direction contradicts our desires? How can we recognize when our determination has become resistance to God's leadership?

3. The sermon declares, "Sometimes God's 'no' isn't rejection. It's redirection." How should spiritual maturity change the way we respond to closed doors, disappointments, and unexpected delays?

Scripture: Acts 18:20–21; Romans 8:28

Discussion: Can you identify a time when something you initially considered a disappointment eventually became an opportunity for spiritual growth?

II. SOMETIMES YOUR ASSIGNMENT IS TO STRENGTHEN SOMEBODY ELSE

4. What is the difference between salvation and sanctification, and why is understanding that difference essential to spiritual maturity? **Scripture: Acts 18:23; Philippians 1:6; 2 Corinthians 3:18**

Discussion: Why do some Christians assume that being saved automatically means being spiritually mature? What areas of your character are still being transformed?

5. The sermon asks, "WHO IS STRONGER BECAUSE THEY KNOW YOU?" What responsibility do mature believers have in helping others develop spiritually? **Scripture: Acts 18:23; Galatians 6:1–2; Hebrews 10:24–25**

Discussion: Are the people around you becoming spiritually stronger because of your influence, or are they simply impressed by your gifts and accomplishments?

6. The sermon reminds us, "GOD'S WORK IS BIGGER THAN YOU." Why is it important to recognize that God's purposes do not depend entirely on our personal involvement? **Scripture: Acts 18:23–24; 1 Corinthians 3:6–7**

Discussion: How can our desire to be needed, recognized, or in control interfere with trusting God to work through other people?

III. ANOINTING DOESN'T ELIMINATE YOUR NEED FOR DEVELOPMENT

7. Apollos was knowledgeable, passionate, and effective, yet his understanding was incomplete. How can spiritual gifts and personal success sometimes become obstacles to continued growth? **Scripture: Acts 18:24–26; Proverbs 9:9**

Discussion: Why is it sometimes harder for experienced, educated, or successful people to receive instruction? How do we guard against becoming spiritually unteachable?

8. The sermon asks, "WHO HAS PERMISSION TO CORRECT YOU?" Why is accountability necessary for spiritual growth, and what happens when we surround ourselves only with people who agree with us? **Scripture: Acts 18:26; Proverbs 27:6, 17**

Discussion: Can you identify someone who has permission to challenge your decisions, attitudes, or behavior? How do you typically respond when that person confronts you?

9. Priscilla and Aquila corrected Apollos privately rather than embarrassing him publicly. What does their example teach us about the proper attitude and method of Christian correction? **Scripture: Acts 18:26; Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 4:15**

Discussion: What is the difference between correcting someone to help them grow and correcting someone to demonstrate our superiority? How can we practice accountability without becoming judgmental?

IV. GOD DEVELOPS WHAT HE INTENDS TO USE

10. The sermon declares, "God doesn't just want to work THROUGH us—He wants to work IN us." Why is character development just as important as spiritual gifting? **Scripture: Acts 18:26–28; Galatians 5:22–23**

Discussion: Is it possible to be highly gifted in ministry while remaining spiritually immature in personal relationships? What happens when our gifts develop faster than our character?

11. Apollos became an even greater help to the church after receiving additional instruction. How does private spiritual development prepare us for greater public effectiveness? **Scripture: Acts 18:26–28; Luke 16:10; 2 Timothy 2:15**

Discussion: The sermon says, "Sometimes we want God to enlarge the platform when God wants to deepen the person." Are you more focused on what God can do through you or what God is trying to develop within you?

12. The sermon concludes, "ANOINTED DOESN'T MEAN FINISHED!" How should recognizing that God is still developing us change the way we view ourselves and other believers? **Scripture: Philippians 3:12–14; Philippians 1:6; Jeremiah 18:1–6**

Discussion: What unfinished area of your spiritual life have you been avoiding? What would it look like to surrender that area to God's continued work rather than making excuses for it?

Takeaway Challenge #1: Identify Your Unfinished Area

"STOP CELEBRATING HOW GOD IS USING YOU WHILE IGNORING WHAT GOD IS TRYING TO CHANGE IN YOU." This week, spend intentional time in prayer asking God to reveal one area where you are resisting spiritual growth. Maybe it's your attitude, your pride, your temper, your unwillingness to forgive, your need for control, or your resistance to correction.

Your assignment: **Identify one specific area, find a Scripture that addresses it, and take one measurable action toward change this week.** Scripture: Psalm 139:23–24; Philippians 1:6

Personal reflection: What is God trying to change in me that I keep trying to justify?

Takeaway Challenge #2: Strengthen Somebody While You're Still Growing

"YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE FINISHED FOR GOD TO USE YOU TO HELP SOMEBODY ELSE."

Paul strengthened the disciples. Priscilla and Aquila strengthened Apollos. Apollos went on to strengthen other believers. This week, identify one person you can intentionally strengthen spiritually. Your assignment: Reach out to that person. Encourage them, pray with them, share a Scripture, offer wise counsel, or help them through something difficult. Don't simply tell them you're praying for them—take action that helps them grow.

Personal reflection: Who will be spiritually stronger at the end of this week because God used me?

Final Thoughts

"GOD IS NOT MERELY CONCERNED ABOUT WHERE HE'S TAKING YOU. HE'S CONCERNED ABOUT WHO YOU'RE BECOMING WHEN YOU GET THERE."

Don't allow your experience to make you arrogant, your accomplishments to make you complacent, or your anointing to make you unteachable.

Because being gifted doesn't mean you're finished. Being successful doesn't mean you're finished. Being used by God doesn't mean you're finished.

And the beautiful thing about grace is that God doesn't wait until we're finished to use us. He uses us while He's still shaping us!

Share your major takeaways from the Lesson/Sermon this week.

Commentary Notes

Jerusalem and Antioch, the Journey Back: The Heroic Christian, 18:18-22

(18:18-22) **Introduction:** this is a clear picture of the heroic disciple. In these few verses, the journey Paul struck out on and covered is over 1500 miles long.

1. (18:18) Self-Denial— Zeal: the heroic disciple struck out despite being comfortably settled. He did not have to leave Corinth. After the court trial and a favorable ruling by the new procounsel Gallio, Paul was able to settle down in a permanent ministry, coming and going and bearing witness and ministering freely. Scripture says he remained in Corinth for a good while, for many days. Ministering freely without the pressure and strain of open abuse and opposition was a real treat for Paul (see note—Acts 18:9-11 for the constant strain of persecution Paul had suffered up to this time). No man could blame Paul for settling down and carrying on a dynamic ministry in Corinth.

⇒ He was protected by Gallio's ruling. ⇒ He was having phenomenal results. ⇒ He was loved by many of the believers. ⇒ He was in a strategic city of commerce and trade which would assure the spread of the gospel far and wide.

But note a critical fact. God had not called Paul to be the minister of a local church. Paul was called to carry the gospel forth as an evangelist and a missionary. To remain in Corinth as a local church minister would be against God's will. Paul would miss God's great call for his life.

The point is this: being the heroic believer that he was, Paul...

- struck out because it was the only way to fulfill God's purpose for his life.
- struck out despite being comfortably settled.
- struck out to carry the message of the glorious gospel forth.
- struck out to reach men and women, boys and girls for Jesus Christ.

The striking and heroic courage of Paul is seen in that this journey covered over 1500 miles.

Thought 1. How many turn away from God's call because of...

- family and friends
- success and acceptance
- position and prestige
- possessions and materialism
- security and safety

The heroic believer refuses to miss God's will and call for his life. He denies himself and takes up his cross daily and follows Christ, no matter where it takes him.

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:23-24).

2. (18:18) Vows: the heroic disciple put himself under vows when needed. When Paul left Corinth he took some vow before the Lord, refusing to cut his hair until the vow was fulfilled. It was completed when he reached Cenchrea and he cut his hair. What was the vow? Was it a vow...

- of thanksgiving and praise for such a fruitful ministry in Corinth?
- of commitment to break away from such a comfortable and peaceful ministry in Corinth?
- of prayer for safety as he travelled back home to Antioch?

The answer is unknown. However, there is a great lesson for believers in the fact that Paul took a vow before the Lord. Vows are too often ignored and dismissed by believers just as fasting is. Yet Scripture teaches both.

"If a man vow a vow unto the lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth" (Numbers 30:2).

3. (18:18) Discipleship: the heroic disciple trained others. Paul took Priscilla and Aquila with him. Note two significant points.

1. Paul was committed to making disciples, to building dynamic witnesses and ministers. He trained those who were willing to go with him (see notes, Discipleship—Acts 13:5-6 for discussion).
2. Priscilla was named before her husband Aquila. This is significant, probably pointing to the fact that she was the stronger and more mature Christian of the two.

"Go ye therefore, and teach [make disciples of] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20).

"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

4. (18:19) Witnessing: the heroic disciple witnessed faithfully wherever he was. Paul's stay in Ephesus at this time was very brief. But he did not sit still. No matter where Paul was or the brevity of his stay, he bore testimony to the glorious salvation in Christ Jesus. Note that he reasoned with the Jews (see note—Acts 18:4 for discussion).

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

5. (18:20-21) Humility: the heroic disciple showed honor to other leaders. Note: even the Jews in Ephesus were open to Paul on this brief visit. They asked him to stay with them for a while, hungering for the Word of God. But he could not stay, not now. He had to go on to Jerusalem to keep the feast (probably Pentecost). He was leaving Priscilla and Aquila behind to teach the people. They would be in good hands.

The point to note is Paul's courtesy to the leaders who asked him to stay. The whole tone of Paul's answer was a gracious reply. He went to extra pains explaining that he *must*...

- bid them farewell,

- keep the feast,

...but he would return again if *God willed*.

Thought 1. We must show honor to other believers always, no matter...

- how important God's call.
- how significant our gifts are.
- how important people may view us.
- how busy we may be.

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:3-4).

6. (18:22) Church: the heroic disciple was attached to the mother church at Antioch. Note the words "the church." This is most likely the church at Jerusalem. Jews always spoke of *going up* to Jerusalem. Nothing is shared about the visit beyond the simple fact that he visited the church in Jerusalem. But note another fact: right after visiting the Jerusalem church he went down to the Antioch church, and nothing is shared about his visit there either. This is probably significant. Paul had just had a most glorious experience—carrying the gospel for the very first time into Europe itself. Bursting at the seams with the joy and the fulness of the Lord, he was bound to desire to share the glorious news with his mother church, Antioch. But he also longed to share with the mother church of Christianity, Jerusalem itself. He had experienced the fruits of Pentecost on his second missionary journey, and he wanted to share the glorious celebration of Pentecost with the apostles and those who had experienced Pentecost itself.

Note how attached the heroic servant of the Lord was to the mother church, how much he wished to share the glorious reports of God's grace with them. This helps explain his sense of urgency in rushing to Jerusalem.

Thought 1. Every believer needs such an attachment, such a sense of responsibility to his home church.

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

A. Ephesus, the Market and Religious Center of Asia Minor (Part I): Apollos—Preparing the Way, 18:23-28

(18:23-21:16) DIVISION OVERVIEW: Missions— Paul, Mission Journeys: this begins the third great mission of Paul (see **Maps of Paul's Journeys**). The mission includes...

- a revisit to all the churches Paul had earlier founded in GALATIA and Phrygia. This one verse is the only information given about his third visit to these churches (**Acts 18:23**).
- the ministry in Ephesus which lasted about three years (**Acts 19:1-41**).
- a return to Europe and Asia Minor (**Acts 20:1-5**).
- a return to Troas (**Acts 20:6-12**).
- a stopover in Miletus where he was visited by the Ephesian elders (**Acts 20:13-38**).

- the final miles to visit Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-16).

(18:23-28) **Introduction:** Apollos was one of the great servants of the early church. Note how he just burst upon the scene in this passage. He is a dynamic example of the strong disciple.

1. (18:23-24) Paul, Ministry: two great ministers of God, Paul and Apollos.

1. The first great minister was Paul, who is seen beginning his third great mission. The first leg of the journey was a revisit to all the churches in GALATIA and Phrygia. Note two points.

a. Paul was alone. So far as we know, no one was travelling with him. This is symbolic of his faithfulness and commitment to the Lord's call. Nothing could keep him from carrying out the Lord's great mission...

- not even the comforts of a home and the love of dear friends (Antioch).
- not the dangerous trips into frontier areas (see note, Lystra—Acts 14:8-20; Deeper Study #1, Derbe—Acts 14:21).
- not having to travel and minister all alone.

b. Paul's purpose in revisiting the churches was not to socialize or to enjoy good Christian fellowship. Although he and the disciples would have a wonderful time together, Paul's purpose was more specific: to strengthen the disciples in the Lord. Note he had not seen them for many months. He loved them and longed to see them, but seeing and being with them was not enough for Paul. There was more to life than just socializing and fellowshiping together. He wanted them to grow in the Lord, to be strengthened in Him.

2. The second great minister was Apollos. Apollos was a new minister appearing on the scene of Christian missions

2. (18:24) Apollos— Scripture— Minister: the strong disciple was an eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures. The term "eloquent man" (*anēr logios*^{PWS: 1245}) can mean either learned or eloquent. In this case it probably means both. But note the point: it was *the Scriptures* that Apollos...

- learned so well.
- spoke forth so eloquently or forcefully.

Apollos had learned the Old Testament Scriptures by memory and spent hours meditating on them. He understood and believed them, grasping the promises of the Messiah. Therefore, when he saw or heard the proclamation of John the Baptist, he was ready to receive the promises of the Savior and to proclaim them.

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

3. (18:25) Instruction— Teaching— Parents: the strong disciple had been instructed in "the way of the Lord." He knew that John had declared Jesus to be the "Lamb of God," the promised Messiah; but he had not yet

learned of Jesus' death and resurrection as the Savior of the world, nor of the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence and power. (See Deeper Study #2, Apollos—Acts 18:24-28 for more discussion.)

The point to see is twofold.

1. Someone had instructed Apollos, either his parents or some godly teacher who was genuine and faithful in his teaching responsibility.
2. Apollos was an obedient and faithful son and student.

Thought 1. This proclaims a loud message to all Christian parents and teachers and Christian children and students. A believer must be instructed in the "way of the Lord" in order to become a strong disciple of the Lord.

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

4. (18:25) **Zeal:** the strong disciple was fervent in spirit (*zeōn tō pneumati* ^{PWS:1473}). The word "fervent" (*zeōn*) means to be boiling, glowing, burning, passionate. His spirit was set aflame, filled with all fervency and zeal for God. He was burning with a holy fire to proclaim the glorious promise that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Lamb of God.

Thought 1. The strong disciple is *fervent in Spirit*. It is the command of the Lord.

"Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34).

"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

5. (18:25) **Teaching:** the strong disciple taught accurately, taught what he knew. As pointed out, Apollos knew only the baptism of repentance declared by John the Baptist (see Deeper Study #2—Acts 18:24-28; and note 3—Acts 18:25). The stress of this point is that he taught diligently (*akribōs* ^{PWS:1040}), that is, carefully and accurately.

⇒ He was true to the Scriptures, weighing carefully what they said.

"And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:4-5).

⇒ He proclaimed what the Scriptures taught and all that they taught, not neglecting subjects his listeners might not like to hear.

"For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law" (Proverbs 4:2).

⇒ He did not twist the Scriptures, adding to or taking away from them.

"For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: but as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness" (1 Thes. 2:3-5).

6. (18:26) Boldness: the strong disciple spoke boldly. Apollos followed a long train of faithful witnesses who proclaimed the truth *boldly*. Boldness is an absolute essential for effective witnessing, both boldness in seeking the presence of the Lord and in facing the men of the world.

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

"But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus....And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him....Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied" (Acts 9:27, 29, 31).

7. (18:26) Humility: the strong disciple was teachable, willing to be taught even by those of less learning. Apparently, Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos preach in the synagogue service. They could tell he had not heard the full story of the gospel, so they took him aside to share the full message of the gospel with him. Note how humble and receptive Apollos was. There was no air of haughtiness, of being above others. The young servant of God—so well educated, so well versed in the Scriptures, so capable as a preacher, so highly esteemed—was willing to learn from any who would teach him, even from two lowly tentmakers.

Thought 1. A strong disciple, one who is truly strong, is ever looking to be strengthened by *all* of God's people, no matter their position.

"And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:12).

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Romans 12:3).

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:3-4).

8. (18:27-28) Minister— Call: the strong disciple is faithful to his call. Apollos was called to preach and evangelize; therefore, as soon as he had the full gospel he was set afire and wanted to go to Corinth (Achaia) and share the gospel there. Apparently he felt the Ephesian church was in excellent hands under the leadership of Priscilla and Aquila and he could be more useful elsewhere. The Ephesian church encouraged him, even

writing a letter of recommendation for him to the church at Corinth (cp. 2 Cor. 3:1). A letter from Priscilla and Aquila would open the door to Corinth for him and assure his being received (Acts 18:1f).

The point to note is the fire to reach the world for Christ that burned in Apollos. And just think, prior to this he did not even have the full message of Christ. (What a dynamic example for us all!)

1. He burned to help and serve other believers. He helped them *much*, edifying, exhorting, watering what Paul had planted (1 Cor. 3:6).

"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Romans 14:19).

"Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification" (Romans 15:2).

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephes. 4:11-13).

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephes. 4:29).

2. He burned to reach out to the lost. The words used in this verse show how deeply he burned with the message of the Lord.

a. The word "mightily" (*eutonōs* ^{PWS: 2584}) means that he used the Scriptures with power, straining earnestly to prove that Jesus is the Christ, the true Messiah.

b. The word "convinced" (*diakatēlegcheto* ^{PWS: 791}) means confronted, argued down, refuted to the very last point, defeated in argument. And he did it publicly.

But note: he was not using human reason to argue; he was using the Scripture. And his purpose was to prove that Jesus is the Messiah. (See Deeper Study #2—Matthew 1:18 for discussion.)

"Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35).