

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #42

Acts 18:18-28

Many people grow up in churches in which they recite the Apostles Creed almost every Sunday morning. It was based on a “legendary” belief that the apostles composed a doctrinal creed with each apostle adding some clause to the whole. Scholars have now determined that this really wasn’t true. But the creed that many quote comes from about A.D. 700. One of the clauses that appears in this creed is that “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

Years ago a great theologian said the expression of “I believe in the Holy Spirit” is entirely foreign to the New Testament. What the apostles asked was not “Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?” but, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit?”

The Apostle Paul clearly taught “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him” (Romans 8:9). So the real issue of being saved is whether or not you have believed on Jesus Christ and received the Spirit of God. Here is one of those critical doctrinal points that is overlooked by many people and even overlooked in the Apostle’s Creed.

Paul was communicating God’s truth in a religious world that had all kinds of faulty doctrine and theology. Everywhere he went, he was in war because of his understanding of and communication of truth.

Sometimes when you are facing negative things and you don’t see much fruit, you can begin to wonder if you are accomplishing anything. Think about Paul for a moment. Every place he goes he ends up in some controversy and trouble. But the fact is God was powerfully using Paul everywhere he went and he continued to use him even when he left an area. That is never more evident than when you come to this text.

GOD WAS POWERFULLY WORKING THROUGH PAUL AND THOSE CONNECTED TO HIM AND THEY WERE USED TO TEACH GOD’S TRUTH TO A CONFUSED WORLD OF RELIGION.

Our responsibility is to teach God’s Word to this very confused religious world. When we do that, there will be times in our lives when we won’t be able to actually see God doing much of anything. However, in those moments we can know God still is at work. He may be using those we have influenced in ways we don’t even know. There are five ministry movements we want to observe:

MINISTRY MOVEMENT #1 – Paul leaves Corinth and goes to Cenchrea. 18:18

Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth and it was time for him to return to his home church, Antioch of Syria, and give them a report of missionary trip number two. So he left Corinth and went to Cenchrea. He had been used greatly by God in this Las Vegas-type city and a church had been established. To get back to his home church he needed to catch a ship out of Cenchrea.

Cenchrea is the eastern port of Corinth located 8-10 miles S.E. from Corinth. We know from Romans 16:1 that a church had been formed in Cenchrea. Obviously during Paul's eighteen months of teaching in Corinth, people from Cenchrea had come to Corinth and were taught by Paul and they formed a church. So Paul's eighteen month stay had been productive.

There are two facts brought out in **verse 18** with Paul's departure from Corinth.

Fact #1 - When Paul left Corinth, Priscilla and Aquila went with him.

Priscilla and Aquila were business people and they decided that Paul was so tuned into the truth of God that they were going to relocate their business and move with him. This actually will become very important in this very context.

Fact #2 - When Paul got to Cenchrea, he got his hair cut.

There is a lot of debate on this point pertaining to the pronoun "he." Some say it refers to Aquila who was a Jew and in word order is closer to the pronoun "he." Some say it refers to Paul, who had taken some sort of vow to minister to the Jews (i.e. Acts 21:24-26).

If it does refer to Paul, then Paul had made some vow in which he did not cut his hair for awhile and while he was in Cenchrea, he decided the vow was over and he got his hair cut. No one knows for sure just what this vow was. It wasn't strictly a Nazarite vow described in Numbers 6:5 because that vow required that you burn the hair on the altar at the doorway of the tabernacle (Numbers 6:18). Furthermore, Paul was traveling all over Europe preaching that they were no longer under the Law. So apparently, for some unknown reason to us, Paul had taken some sort of vow before God and decided in Cenchrea that the vow was over.

There is some flexibility in things in this Grace Age and there are times when believers may decide it is necessary to make some special commitment to God. For example, in Paul's letter to the Corinthians he spoke of husbands and wives deciding to refrain from intimacy for some special matter that required prayer (I Cor. 7:5). This must have been one of those moments in Paul's life. There will be private moments of special commitments to God in the life of every true servant of God.

MINISTRY MOVEMENT #2 – Paul leaves Cenchrea and goes to Ephesus . **18:19-21**

Ephesus was the capital of Asia and we may recall that earlier Paul had been prevented by the Holy Spirit from going to Asia to preach (Acts 16:6). Now the Spirit of God directed him right to Ephesus, but he would not stay there long at this time.

It was about 250 miles to sail from Cenchrea to Ephesus. David Thomas said in ancient times there was no voyage across the Aegean Sea that was more frequently made than the one between Corinth and Ephesus (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 300).

Now there are four facts brought out about Paul's ministry in Ephesus:

Fact #1 - Paul left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus. **18:19a**

Paul had spent a lot of time with this couple and they were well grounded in true Grace Age doctrine and theology. He knew he could leave them in Ephesus and they would be a real help to the area and a strong defender of God's truth. This couple embraced truth and they were loyal to Paul. Paul needed to move on, but he knew there was a couple he could trust to do God's work.

Paul was not a man who was afraid to travel alone. He had a pioneer spirit about him and he liked moving throughout the world and teaching the truth of the grace of God. He didn't need people hanging around him all the time. So he moved out and left Priscilla and Aquila behind to carry on the ministry.

Fact #2 - Paul reasoned with Jews in the synagogue in Ephesus. **18:19b**

Even though Paul did not intend to stay in Ephesus, he still looked for opportunities to reach out to the Jews first. That was his pattern. He would go to the Jewish synagogue and reason with the people there. Again, the words indicate he carefully functioned as an apologist defending and explaining the truth of God.

Fact #3 - Paul would not stay in Ephesus even though they asked him to stay. **18:20**

Now later, Paul will come back and spend a great deal of time in Ephesus and we must assume that this invitation is part of the reason why. Paul would not spend three years in a place that didn't want him. We have already seen he left Athens quickly and he shook the dust off his clothing and moved on when people didn't want his teaching, so this invitation for Paul to stay is something he will not forget. So even though he did not stay at that time, he will eventually.

Fact #4 - Paul left Ephesus and said he would return if God willed. **18:21**

Paul was not getting direct messages from God for every decision he made. He always left room for the will of God in everything.

MINISTRY MOVEMENT #3 – Paul leaves Ephesus and goes to Antioch. **18:21-22**

Paul's ship landed at Caesarea. Caesarea was located on the coast of the Mediterranean. Caesarea was the most convenient seaport that gave access to Judea and then Antioch. It was located about thirty miles north of Joppa and sixty miles northwest of Jerusalem.

Paul went up and greeted the church. In Greek the text reads "the church," which is probably a reference to the church of Jerusalem. We may recall that this was the church of the apostles and Paul went up there and greeted them and then went down in elevation and traveled about 300 miles north to his home church of Antioch.

So apparently Paul stopped by the church of Jerusalem and gave them a report of all that God had done and then he left the church and went 300 miles down in elevation to his home church of Antioch of Syria.

MINISTRY MOVEMENT #4 – Paul leaves Antioch and goes to Galatia and Phrygia. **18:23**

Paul spent a great deal of time in Antioch and then headed out on his third missionary journey. He focused on two regions; Galatia and Phrygia and he focused on strengthening all the believers in the things of God. Paul is not involved in some major series of meetings or putting on huge crusades. He is simply going from place to place to strengthen believers.

Now the emphasis of Paul's ministry is to "all" the believers. Paul taught the Word for all believers; older men and women, younger men and women, boys and girls. He taught those who were mature and those who were not mature. He taught those who were spiritual and those who were carnal. **He taught all the Word of God to all believers because it is the Word of God that strengthens all of God's people.**

MINISTRY MOVEMENT #5 – Paul's trained friends instruct Apollos in Ephesus. **18:24-28**

Now apparently at about this time when Paul is making these moves, there was some key action taking place in Ephesus and Paul's two friends Priscilla and Aquila were right in the heart of the action:

Action #1 - A certain Jew came to Ephesus. **18:24-26a**

We learn nine facts about this Jew:

(Fact #1) - His name was Apollos. **18:24a**

Apollos is the shortened form of Apollonius. He obviously came to Ephesus when Paul was gone.

(Fact #2) - He was an Alexandrian by birth. **18:24b**

Alexandria was the most "celebrated city in Egypt." It was named after its founder Alexander the Great. It was an intellectual center of the world of Greek and Hebrew learning that featured the largest library in the world. It is estimated that there were 500,000 books in the library of Alexandria at this time. Famous scholars came out of Alexandria such as Euclid, and the Jewish scholar Philo. Plus the famous rhetorician and orator, Quintillion, came from this city. It was here in Alexandria where the Septuagint was translated from Hebrew into Greek. Apollos was a scholar and he lived in a scholarly place.

(Fact #3) - He was an eloquent man. **18:24c**

Apollos was a very learned man and he knew how to beautifully communicate. The word "eloquent" means that Apollos was a very learned and scholarly man.

(Fact #4) - He was mighty in the Scriptures. **18:24d**

Apollos was well trained in the Word of God, especially the O.T.. He was a strong man of the Word of God. In fact, the Greek means he was very powerful and dynamic (δυνατος) in his understanding of Scriptures. He was very strong in his understanding and communication of Scriptures.

I read a story of John Broadus who was a founder of a seminary in the south. In fact, he wrote a book I have read called "On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons." Nine days before he died in 1895, he was lecturing his class and he paused and said: "Gentlemen, if this were the last time I should ever be permitted to address you, I would feel amply repaid for consuming the whole hour endeavoring to impress upon you these two things: true piety, and, like Apollos, to be men "mighty in the Scriptures." Students said he then paused and very slowly and distinctly said "Mighty in the Scriptures, mighty in the Scriptures, mighty in the Scriptures."

This is what we need today in our pulpits and in our people. We need men and women of God who are mighty in the Scriptures. They know those books of the Bible and they know those doctrines. They are strong and can communicate it. Apollos was a man like that.

(Fact #5) - He had been instructed in the things of the Lord. **18:25a**

He knew that John was the forerunner of Jesus Christ from passages like Malachi and Isaiah. He apparently knew about John's ministry, which was designed to introduce Israel to Jesus Christ. He knew that Jesus Christ was the only way to salvation and he knew that Jesus Christ was the only Savior, who had His hands and feet pierced, being wounded for our transgressions.

(Fact #6) - He was fervent in his spirit. **18:25b**

His spirit boiled in the things of God. He loved the Lord and he loved the Scriptures. He was passionate about what he said. His verbal communication was on fire. He passionately and fervently spoke about what he knew.

(Fact #7) - He was accurately teaching things pertaining to Jesus. **18:25c**

This man was fervent and strong in preaching that Jesus is the only Savior. He was preaching that Jesus Christ was the Messiah and the Savior and His resurrection proved it.

(Fact #8) - He was confused about baptism. **18:25d**

Apollos was right about many things, but he was confused about water baptism. Now Apollos knew of John's baptism of repentance. That baptism was so that a Jew would acknowledge his need of cleansing. We may assume that Apollos was telling Jews they needed to be baptized in water in order to be saved. **Contextually from Acts 19:3-5, his confusion concerns Spirit baptism.** He didn't know anything about Spirit baptism.

(Fact #9) - He boldly spoke in synagogues . **18:26a**

Apollos was not afraid to take the Jews head on. He would boldly go to the synagogue and preach Christ.

Action #2 - Priscilla and Aquila took him aside privately and accurately taught him. **18:26b**

Now why did God want Priscilla and Aquila to stay behind in Ephesus? What was behind it? In part, we get our answer right here. God had an important job for them to do. They would be used to straighten out the theology of Apollos.

Priscilla and Aquila recognized the tremendous potential in Apollos. They realized this man was very gifted by God and they also realized he was way beyond them in their abilities. But he needed to understand sound doctrine. So what they did is they did not embarrass him, but took him aside privately to give him careful theological instruction.

Apollos was a very teachable man and very open to truth and when he learned that these two had been trained by Paul, he wanted to learn from them. Even though he had come from the greatest educated background in the world, he still needed to carefully understand the grace of God.

You can come from the greatest schools in the world and still need to know God's truth. You may be highly educated and skilled in your field, but you still need to know sound doctrine. No one will ever be greatly used by God at maximum level until he is properly taught by those skilled in Grace Age truth. Apollos will become a great man of God, but he needed proper doctrine and theology.

Action #3 - Apollos travels to Achaia to proclaim the Word of God. **18:27-28**

Now there were some people from Corinth in Ephesus and they heard Apollos and they encouraged the believers to receive him because he was a powerful man of God. He was a great teacher of those who believed in grace.

He became a great ambassador for the grace of God. In fact, Martin Luther thought he was the one who actually wrote the book of Hebrews.

Now here is the point. Paul is traveling around and getting ridiculed and beat up everywhere he goes and sometimes there wasn't much fruit that he could see. But behind the scenes there was a lot of fruit. There were powerful things taking place in the lives of many people and many churches. It was all due to this apostles teaching and grasp of grace. When we accurately communicate truth about God's grace, we never know what God will do with it. Our job is to sow the seed, plant and water and it is God who will give increase.