

Acts 18:18-28

Explain the Way of God

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By the love of Christ, we are freed to love and to serve others

Introduction

This morning I am going to start our look into Act 18 in what might seem like an unexpected place. I'm going to quote for you **Jeremiah 17:9** "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*" God's word says, the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? Now, you might be thinking – what is the correlation to that and what we are going to look at in **Acts 18:18-28**? Just consider the two prominent figures we have in the text? From the Scripture reading we heard about Paul and Apollos. Let me ask you, prior to Paul's encounter with Jesus on the Road to Damascus would you say his heart was deceitful and desperately sick? He was persecuting the church, dragging Christians to trials, even approving of their being put to death. In doing so he was fully convinced he was doing right! But he was saved, indwelt with the Holy Spirit, basically lit on fire to share the gospel! He therefore stopped participating in the persecution of the church. Is **Jeremiah 17:9** still an accurate description of his heart? Deceitful – desperately sick? Because we will also look at this man Apollos today, I know he has just been introduced, but even from the Scripture reading you should have picked up on the confidence he arrived with in Ephesus – speaking boldly in the synagogue – fully convinced in what he was doing! So, what about Apollos? Was his heart deceitful? Desperately sick? To put this question on a face in the room, I was even thinking of myself as a young man, just left the shelter of my parents' house in the fall of 1996, and off to college I went. I was living in a college town, I was reading my Bible regularly, I was even attending an area church. I had accepted Christ 9 years earlier! Surely my heart could not have been deceitful or desperately sick, but that is what God's word says. At that time, I'm not sure I would have believed it, but looking back now I know it is true. I know it is true because I remember how I acted towards some of the men from the college and career group at the church I was attending, they wanted to engage with me in discipleship, meeting together, studying, praying – all wonderful things! But I didn't approach those times with as much humility as I should have, I didn't embrace the opportunities with openness. I would pick and choose what worked best for me and who it was that I preferred to get together with, completely missing that God had placed me there for his purposes – not my own! Yes, I had my own problems and hardships, just as I know you here have your areas of struggle that you are presently working through. *In fact, we often focus so much on our own difficulties that we completely miss opportunities to encourage others, or for that matter to even be encouraged. Our hearts are deceitful even sick!* When we rightly realize that it is God who heals the brokenhearted, when we realize God is the one who carries us along in this life we are freed to love and serve others in the love of Christ. If you boil this down to an easily describable idea, you have our God's truth for today – **By the love of Christ, we are freed to love and to serve others.**

Paul Strengthens the Disciples (vv18-23)

1.v18a "*After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria...*"

The passage starts with “After this” which in the narrative follows what was taking place in the first 17 verses of this chapter. Of great significance is that Paul had a thriving ministry in Corinth, and most scholars think with his length of time spent in the area that he probably had a thriving ministry to the surrounding areas as well.

a. As is the case with Paul, his ministry did not go unopposed! However, God had paid Paul a special visit one night in a vision. He spoke with Paul **vv9-10** “*And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, 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.”*”

We heard in last week’s sermon God’s word proved itself true when the Jews made a united attack on Paul; Paul was divinely protected. Not only did God protect Paul, but by Gallio stating that he refused to judge the matters the Jews were bringing against Paul, God was also protecting Christians in and around the Roman world. Gallio helped set a legal precedent by keeping the followers of “The Way” under the protection that was afforded by Rome, a protection specifically for Jews to exercise their religious practices.

a. Now however the time has come for Paul to leave Corinth. He is not being chased out, he is not being ushered out for his safety or that of others, he is leaving of his own accord.

b. His great love for the brothers in Corinth is unquestionable, but he knows he also has to be about the important task of strengthening the disciples, which necessitates his traveling once again.

i. Luke records his departure is for Syria, and the accounting of this can be difficult for us as we watch the journey unfold and Paul goes to Ephesus and then ends up landing in Caesarea, we think that is in modern Israel? Which is correct, but it was also in the province known as Syria.

c. We will look more at Priscilla and Aquilla in our third point, but they have purposed to travel with Paul from Corinth to Ephesus. Their companionship has to be a great source of encouragement for Paul as it is likely, though not known for sure, that they are now accompanying Paul while Timothy and Silas are attending to other matters of importance.

d. v18b “*At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.*”

What is this all about? When you hear about a vow you probably immediately think of something from Paul’s Jewish background. In Christianity, at least today in Christianity here in the west we don’t have a great grasp of this type of practice. The vow that Paul was under would have been coming to an end, signified by his hair being cut off, for a more appropriate image think of Paul having his head shaved.

a. Paul was so well cared for by God in Corinth that he likely put himself under a vow to demonstrate his thanksgiving and gratitude. The vow would have likely resembled the Nazarite vow such as described in Numbers 6. He would have likely refrained from strong drink, from touching anything dead, and visible to others would have been his hair growing longer and longer as no razor was to touch the head while under the vow.

b. What are we to make of such an action by Paul? That he thought he needed to put himself under such a vow to find favor with God? I don’t think that is what was going on here. Paul was a Christian, but he was a Jewish Christian. Everything he knew to be right about God though Judaism

became clearer by the revelation of Jesus. I believe he was able to go through some type of vow, most likely a Nazarite like vow, and do so to the glory of God without compromising his freedom in Christ.

i. Even considering this vow, helps us to understand Paul's gratitude and his reliance upon Christ as he sets out to strengthen disciples on this journey.

ii. This was a significant part of Paul's walk with the Lord. It was a vow that had visible indicators. Not only was Paul aware of what God was doing in his life, it provided an opportunity for him to talk with others about God's providence in his life.

iii. Consider what in your life today would cause others to take notice and ask about why your life looks the way that it does? Are you able to think of anything that causes you to stand out because of your Christianity? Are you ready to share your gratitude towards God when someone asks about it?

iv. **v19** *"And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned..."*

As they crossed the sea and land in Asia Minor, the stay is only to be brief for Paul, but that doesn't prevent him from doing what he has become well known for. Going to the synagogue and reasoning with the Jews. I hope you recognize that although in **v6** of this chapter, while in Corinth, he declared to go to the Gentiles, that wasn't a universal declaration but was rather a response to the local climate there in Corinth. Here in Ephesus he reasons with the Jews.

a. **vv20-21** *"When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. But on taking leave of them..."* He was therefore received with great enthusiasm by the Jews in Ephesus, but it was not yet time for him to invest heavily in that place personally. He was leaving his companions Priscilla and Aquila there and we will see their effectiveness later. But Paul was not to be delayed at this time.

b. **v22** *"When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch."*

c. This section of Scripture we are in seems like the author, Luke, is skipping over large portions of Paul's life. However, Luke is drawing the attention of the reader to those areas that seem to be the most significant. Paul is working through a series of visits that are meant to encourage and strengthen disciples.

d. Here for instance in **v22**, the reference to the church is the church in Jerusalem. Paul was not operating opposed to the church in Jerusalem, but was likeminded with the believers there and took time to go see them. This is also occurring at the end of his second missionary journey which is reminiscent of what he did at the conclusion of his first missionary journey (**15:2-4**).

e. Paul concludes his missionary journey back in Antioch.

f. **v23** *"After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region..."*

g. This is the heart of Paul showing forth from this section of the word. He is about the important task of strengthening the disciples.

h. It is not enough to share Christ and depart. We are called to make disciples (**Matt 18:19-20**). Making disciples takes time and a concentrated effort. Although not much text is dedicated by Luke to what Paul is about, I hope you clearly see he was focused on strengthening disciples in this first portion of our preaching passage.

i. He was gifted in this capacity, he was grateful for what God had done in his life, and he was making sure those whom he shared Christ with were continuing to find their joy in the Lord. Paul, as we know, never got over the grace that had been shown him by God. Paul **knew that by the love of Christ, he was freed to love and to serve others**. That is what his life had become all about.

Transition: Although these first verses have been largely dedicated to tracing Paul's journey Luke is intentionally looping the story back to what is taking place in Ephesus. We will focus back there now, specifically looking at the gifted man from Alexandria – Apollos.

Apollos Helps Believers (vv24-25,27-28)

a.vv24-25 *"Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man..."*

I am excited that we are here getting introduced to this man Apollos. Clearly well educated, gifted in the ability to convey ideas verbally, understanding the Jewish Scriptures in a strong and commanding manner. But the way he is described is also somewhat baffling. I am not the only one that finds the description given here as difficult to follow.

a. The portion of the passage that is most intriguing is v25 where it says. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. He was being fervent in the spirit. He taught accurately the things concerning Jesus. But, somehow he knew only the baptism of John.

b. Some may look at this collection of statements and immediately say, Apollos was a Christian but had some confusion concerning baptism and Jesus?

c. Some may look at this verse and say, no Apollos knew the Scriptures so well that he rightly was drawing conclusions about the Christ, which many in the world knew to be Jesus, but he was unaware of all that had happened following Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

i. This is what one commentator wrote: "What are we to make of v. 25? Is this a description of someone who knows some things about Jesus but is not yet a full-fledged Christian, or is Apollos described as a Christian who simply did not know about the practice of Christian baptism? J. Munck thought he was a disciple of John the Baptist; E. Schweizer argued he was simply a Jewish missionary; E. Käsemann suggested he was an unorthodox Alexandrian Christian; and finally various scholars have seen him as a pneumatic or charismatic Christian." B. Witherington.

d. Whatever was going on in this man's theology some intervention was required, and we will work through v26 and how that all transpired in our last point when we return to Priscilla and Aquila.

e.vv27-28 *"And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples..."*

Apollos had a tremendous gift to help people understand the Scriptures and he was well enough versed in rhetoric that when Christianity was being attacked by Jews he was able to publicly refute them.

a. After a time of being in Ephesus he desired to go to Achaia. This was the region that at the beginning of our Scripture passage today Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila had all started in.

b. He was at this point well connected with the Christians in Ephesus and they were excited to encourage Apollos to use his gifts to help other believers. They took the important step of writing him a letter of introduction for the disciples in that region.

i. If you spend any amount of time reading the NT epistles you know how frequently the warnings come up against accepting false teachers. These types of letters were a safeguard against the propagation of false teachers. This letter was a big endorsement for Apollos and should help us understand more clearly his orthodoxy by the time he left Ephesus.

ii. In this practice observed in the early church, we too should consider the recommendations that come to us. Who recommended the latest podcast to you? What about the book you are working through? Are those things you are subjecting yourself to coming from people you love and trust in the faith, or are they coming from somewhere else? This should be a normal part of our conversation as a church, if you are a young believer you should be especially attentive to the recommendations that are given to you by the people you know who have a proven track record in the faith. Don't hang on every word of someone who is here today but gone tomorrow never to be heard from again.

c. What we see in the passage here before us is that once Apollos arrived in Achaia, he greatly helped the believers there. He was undeniably gifted by God, he was instructed in proper doctrine, he was humble enough to change areas that he espoused wrongly, and when he was in Achaia, he continued to build up the believers there close on the heels of the work that had been done by Paul.

i. He knew that **he was loved by Christ, he was therefore freed to love and serve others.**

Transition: As we shift away from Paul and Apollos, I think what we will find in our look at Priscilla and Aquila is a great encouragement for us, those of us who are involved in the local church as couples and as families.

Priscilla and Aquila Love Generously (vv18-19, 26-27)

i. With the other two we looked at so far, we had some verses that marched along pretty well with their stories. We are now turning our attention to Priscilla and Aquila. What I hope you see by the end of this point is that because of this couple's involvement in the lives of Paul and Apollos their especially gifted and outspoken ministries were enabled by the generous love and hospitality shown to them by Priscilla and Aquila.

d. I want you to think of a beautifully designed high-rise building. Immediately we tend to think of everything that is visible. This couple had a ministry that acted like the driven piles deep beneath the above ground and visible structure those parts of the building that undergird and in fact hold up the rest of it.

e. The impact they had in Corinth, Ephesus, and in Rome I don't think will be understood by us until we meet the saints in heaven who were ministered to by Priscilla and Aquila.

f. You probably remember from last week that this couple was dislodged from Italy because the Roman Emperor Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome (2).

g. Usually such a hasty withdraw from your place of living doesn't leave you in the best of situations financially or frame of mind. Yet, they had resettled in Corinth and put their skills in tentmaking to work.

h. They didn't buckle under the desperation of their situation. Quite the opposite it seems. This couple engaged in the local community and in commerce and proved to be immensely helpful to Paul.

i. It is not clear as to why they leave with Paul from Corinth in the text, but they accompany the Apostle to Ephesus and once there, whether waiting for his eventual return, or they have purposed to start evangelizing a new area, or simply expanding their business venture they bring their full capacity to love with them. So, they are ready for whatever the Lord might have instore for them.

j.v26 *"He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him..."*

This is the record from Scripture of their involvement with Apollos. Talk about poise and confidence in doctrine. They hear Apollos and realize he is gifted in many ways, but that they have some key teaching about Christ that he has not yet received.

a. With care for Apollos, the two of them, Priscilla and Aquila take him aside and explain the way of God more accurately.

b. Believers, I hope this is exciting to you because this is what each of us here has the capacity to do! We may not be gifted in oration or overly charismatic. But we can do what this couple does. We can share the truth of the gospel in love, by simply drawing someone aside somewhere, or in the comfort of our own home, or even in the corner of a café.

i. This is discipleship and it is being carried out by a wife and her husband. Yes, the passage itself lists Priscilla first and then Aquila. Priscilla isn't preaching sermons in the synagogue but she is influential along with her husband in discipling a man, Apollos, who is capable to engage in that ministry arena.

ii. This is another gem of Christianity that we should not overlook. In the time of the writing of Acts women were not encouraged to learn or be involved in scholarly debates, yet we know that Lydia in Philippi and Priscilla in Corinth as well as along the way to Ephesus that both of these women were taught a tremendous amount by the Apostle Paul. They in turn were able to share effectively what they had learned with others, even men.

iii. We need to be careful now in the modern day to recognize the great benefit godly women are to the advancement of God's kingdom. We don't see in Scripture that women should hold the office of elder or should be pastors but don't think for one minute that means women don't influence and teach men in other ways. How many men here have had a Bible centered conversation with Natalie Bronson? I have no doubt if you have you learned from her more about theology or Christian living or the Bible. How many of you moms are training up sons in your home? You had better

be teaching them the Bible, and trust me they will likely remember a great deal of what you teach them about God's word.

c. The discipleship ministry of a godly couple can have a tremendous lasting effect. The strengths of the couple, the giftings of each one of them can resonate long after the evening has ended when they hosted a young man or woman in their home. I want to continue to encourage this here at Pillar Bible Fellowship because I know it is through our Priscilla and Aquila like outreach that our community is to be most influenced.

i. I hope this is no surprise to anyone here but you are all very enjoyable to be around. Vanessa and I would love to spend more time with any one of the families represented here this morning. You are likeable, easy to talk with, and you are equipped with solid Bible doctrine every week. This church body loves generously and because of that this body has the perfect balance of aptitude and resources to share and explain the way of the God more accurately in any number of scenarios. Do you believe that? It has been true since before Acts 18 and it will be true until Jesus returns: By the love of Christ, we are freed to love and serve others – it is my heart's strong desire that you will exercise your freedom for God's glory!

Transition: In eleven verses Luke has crisscrossed the map of the ancient world with the likes of Apollos and Paul, but in every city, in every place where Christians lived and gathered there were couples like Priscilla and Aquila who were faithfully following God's leading and ministering to the needs before them out of their generous love.

Conclusion

Friends, if you were to look into your heart and you were honest with what you saw you would have to say **Jeremiah 17:9** is accurate. You would have to say your heart is deceitful and desperately sick. I know many of you here though have been given a new heart. **Ezekiel 36:26** *"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."* We who know Jesus as our Lord and Savior have received this gift that Ezekiel prophesied about. Central to what we have been learning about from the book of Acts is the internal change from death to life when Christ saves us and gives us the Holy Spirit. We are enabled, we are empowered, to do any and all things through the working of God in us. For we have been set free. Christian you are no longer held by the bondage of sin like you once were, the chains are broken. By the love of Christ, we are freed to love and serve others. Let us do what we have been set free to do!

Prayer

Family

Table Talk

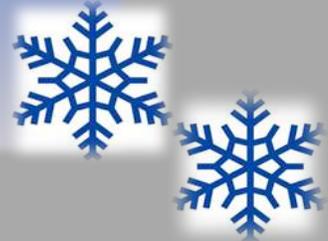


January 6, 2019



GOD'S TRUTH

By the love of Christ, we are freed to love and to serve others!



Key Verse

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)

TABLE READING

Lead your kids further into God's Word...

1. Matthew 28:19-20, 1 Corinthians 4:17, Hebrews 13:7-9

2. Acts 18:2-3, 18, 26, 1 Corinthians 16:19, 2 Timothy 4:19

3. 2 Timothy 1:1-7, Philippians 2:19-24, Proverbs 4:1-9



Scripture Memory: Acts 20:24

"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." - Deuteronomy 6:6-9 (ESV)

Family Discussion ?s

1. We know from the key verse that as Christians we are to be about the business of making disciples. What exactly does that look like in practice? Can you think of ways you are being made into a disciple of Christ?
2. Last week we met Priscilla and Aquila and we read about them again in the passage this week. How did God uniquely use them to impact the believers of their day? Do you see a similar ministry occurring in your home?
3. As a child, hopefully you are able to learn much from your parents. However, it would be good to talk with them about times when you might have to be ready to receive good and proper discipleship from someone else. What did you come up with?