

Acts 18
Acts 18
Tape # 8017
Pastor Chuck Smith

There were mixed reactions. Some of them mocked. Some of them said we will hear more of this later. And some believed. And that is pretty general for the reception of the gospel. There are some that believe. There are some that procrastinate and then there are those who receive it. And this was the case in Athens.

So *After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.* Now as we said this morning, Corinth was an extremely wicked city! Corinth is right there at the isthmus of Greece. From the Aegean to the Adriatic Sea, it is less than five miles. So that in those days when you were shipping goods from the east to the west, from the major centers of the east to Rome, it was much better, much easier to bring the goods to the port of Cenchrea, which was the port of Corinth. And to unload the ship, take the cargo the five miles overland to the Adriatic Sea. There, put them on another ship and thus take them onto Rome. It was several hundred miles to go around Greece. And you had to go through the cape of Melea, which an extremely treacherous bit of water to navigate. So if a sailor could keep from having to navigate the Cape of Melea, he would definitely prefer to do that. Of course it saved weeks of travel time. It was just a much better route to go. Nero attempted to build a canal to connect the two, but the stone was too hard. They gave up on it. But later a canal has been built by the engineers who did the Suez Canal. They went from the Suez Canal over and they did the Corinthian Canal. They carved out this great canal there that connects the Adriatic with the Aegean. And it is adjacent to the ancient city of Corinth. Corinth was noted for its wickedness and for its drunkenness. Whenever they would portray a man of Corinth in the dramas, he would always be drunk. It was just endemic to Corinth. They said concerning anyone who lived a very debased kind of life, that he lived like a Corinthian. It was sort of a proverb, almost. It was at this place that Paul now comes with the gospel.

²*And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius (the Roman emperor) had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.* ³*So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.* So in 49 AD Claudius expelled all of the Jews from Rome. Thus this couple, Aquila and Priscilla, came to Corinth from Rome. Paul arrived here at about the year, 54 AD. So shortly after the Jews were expelled from Rome. Aquila and Priscilla were an interesting couple. We meet them again at the end of the chapter when Paul leaves Corinth to go to Jerusalem for the celebration of one of the major feasts. He takes Priscilla and Aquila with him as far as Ephesus. They remained in Ephesus as Paul went on to Jerusalem. When Apollos came to Ephesus as we will get into at the end of the chapter, Priscilla and Aquila shared with him more fully the richness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he declares with those greeting them that Priscilla and Aquila greeted them. Later when Paul wrote to Rome, one year later, he tells them to greet Priscilla and Aquila, so ultimately they moved from Ephesus on back to Rome where they had originally sort of begun. And when Paul writes his last letter to Timothy, he tells Timothy to greet Priscilla and Aquila. So they were workers together with Paul in the gospel of Jesus Christ. But Paul when he came to Corinth, no doubt looked for a job. And he was by trade a tentmaker. Now in those days every rabbi was expected to have a trade. It was just always with a Jew, no matter what profession they might have, they were always taught a trade. The idea being that you could always fall back on your trade to support yourself. And so it was important to them that everyone have a trade. In the area of Tarsus from which Paul came, there was a goat that had a special kind of wool from which they made a material called cellilium, which was an excellent material for tents. And so it was only natural that Paul take up the trade as a tent maker when he was just a very young boy. Because he did leave in his teen age from Tarsus to go to Jerusalem to go to college. And so Paul had taken up the trade of a tent maker. And he was working with Aquila and Priscilla as a tentmaker there in Corinth.

⁴*And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.* There were many Greeks who would attend synagogue. They were attracted to the Jewish religion. Especially the women because it did espouse a purity. Now in the Greek culture the wives really didn't play an important part. According to the Greeks every successful man should have a girl friend to go with him in his social engagements. He should have a concubine for his sexual pleasures. And he should have a wife to bear his legitimate children. But that's what the wife was looked upon, just one to bear the legitimate children while the husband, you know, ran around. So, you know, someone has to watch the kids. So the husband looked upon the wife as just one that watched the children, bore his legitimate children so he can party around with his girlfriend. Thus the women were attracted to the Jewish faith which taught the faithfulness in marriage. And a commitment in marriage and that a husband should be faithful to his wife. They were drawn to that from the Grecian culture and the Roman culture which really looked upon a woman and a wife as just one step above a slave. They were considered sort a chattel, a possession. But they were without privileges. So they were attracted to the Jewish faith. And so in the synagogue there would be those Greeks who were looking for a higher standard of living as well as the Jews who gathered every Sabbath.

Now ⁵*When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.* He had been teaching every week in the synagogue. And now that Silas and Timothy have arrived from Macedonia. They had brought an offering from the church at Philippi unto Paul. When Paul wrote his letter to the church in Philippi, in the last chapter he thanks them for the offering that they sent to him. He mentions how that at the first none of the churches helped him except the church in Philippi. And how they were faithful in supporting Paul in his missionary journey. And Paul said I thank you for your support, not that I am in a particular need but I desire that fruit might abound to your account. And so when Silas and Timothy came with the offering from the church of Philippi, Paul then began in the synagogue to declare to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.

⁶*But when they opposed him and blasphemed (They got into big arguments with each other.), 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."* Paul always took the gospel to the Jew first. In Romans 1:16, he said I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ it is the power of God unto salvation to those that believe, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. So Paul went to the Jew first. When they rejected, he went to the Greek. In the twentieth chapter, we find Paul meeting with the elders of Ephesus on his way back to Jerusalem and there he speaks to them about being innocent of the blood of all men because (Acts 20:26) *Therefore I testify to you this day that I innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.* Paul looked upon himself as a debtor to Jesus Christ because of the gospel that he had received. Because of the power of the gospel. How it had transformed his life! He felt an obligation to share the gospel with all men. And felt that he had shared the gospel with them that he was sort of responsible. That their blood was upon his hand. But once having shared the gospel then they were responsible themselves.

Now in the Old Testament in the book of Ezekiel, God called Ezekiel to warn the people. Ezekiel 3:18-20, When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. [19] Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. [20] Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand.

So that was God's commission to Ezekiel but Paul took that himself, feeling the responsibility, I am a debtor he said. We don't seem to have that same sense of urgency of sharing the gospel with people. And yet Paul felt that tremendous urgency and that is the reason why he was probably so tireless in his efforts to share the gospel because he felt that obligation or responsibility. I am responsible to share the gospel with these people! And if I don't then their blood will be on my hands. I will be responsible for

their death and eternal damnation. So he was really pushed within to share the gospel because he felt that once I've shared it I have relieved myself from that obligation, from that debt. Now they are responsible to either accept or reject. But I have fulfilled my responsibility in witnessing.

Now the Lord said to his disciples that they were to go into all the world and they were to teach the gospel to every creature. And he who believed and were baptized would be saved. He that did not believe would be damned. But once we have share the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have fulfilled our obligation. God doesn't require us to argue people into a faith. God only requires that we share with people the truth of Jesus Christ. What they do with that is their responsibility. My responsibility is to share. Paul, having shared, fulfilled his obligation and responsibility. He said your blood is on your own heads. I'm going to the Gentiles. And that's the feeling that Paul had as far as that responsibility to share the truth of Jesus Christ.

⁷*And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue.* That is, it probably shared a common wall with the synagogue. He lived right next door to it. ⁸*Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.* So the Spirit of God was beginning to do a work there in Corinth. The chief ruler of the synagogue came to a faith with his household and also many people. And they were baptized.

⁹*Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, (telling Paul) "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; ¹⁰for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city."* I think that Paul had become a little wary of success because wherever Paul preached, if many people began to believe, especially the Greeks, the Jews would become jealous and stir up all kinds of strife against Paul. Go back to Lystra and to Derbe and to Iconium, to Philippi, to Thessalonica. It was the success that brought then these subsequent persecutions. To the extent that Paul began to be leery of success as a lot of people began to believe and be baptized, he thought, "Oh, Oh, you know, the enemy is going to really strike now." So as he began to be successful, he probably began to be fearful. In the places that he had been before, he had been stoned. He had been beaten and all. And as many people began to believe and were being baptized, the work was growing, Paul became a little fearful. And the Lord came to him at night and said, *Don't be afraid! You speak and hold not your peace because I will be with you and no one is going to lay their hands on you and hurt you.* So the promise of the presence of the Lord and in Corinth the protection that no one will be able to lay their hands on him to hurt him. So the Lord said for I have many people in this city. As we pointed out this morning, Corinth was probably the most unlikely place that you would ever expect there to be successful evangelism. God so often works in the most unlikely places. Some of the places, you think, Oh, that would be a great place you know, to go with the gospel, establish a church, and it isn't! Some of the places, you think, stay away from there. That's the last place in the world, you know, that you want to go and that's the place that God says I have many people. What we don't realize is that so often when a person is delving into alcohol or to drugs or to these things, that they are trying to fill an emptiness inside. They are searching for something that they can't quite define. In reality deep down inside of everyone, there is a thirst for God. As David the Psalmist said, My soul thirsteth after Thee, O God. And that's true of every man. God has put that thirst within. In the eighth chapter of Romans, Paul said that God made man, the creature, subject unto emptiness. And that by the design of him by Him who created him. God put that emptiness within so that man would seek after God, search after God, to find God and find the fulfillment to that emptiness. It was that emptiness that Jesus was addressing in John 7:37, when on the temple He cried and said, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. That thirst for God. Jesus said, come to Me. Drink, you'll be satisfied. You will find the answer to that thirst. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians (Eph. 5:28), he said be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Holy Spirit. He put together two very different things and we think why would he put those things together? You know a fellow drunk with wine and a fellow filled with the Spirit. What is the relationship? The relationship is the person who is filled with the Spirit has found what the person is searching after who

gets drunk with wine. That fulfillment. It's there in the Spirit and the life of the Spirit and so what we look upon is people who are far from the gospel are many times those who are closest to the gospel because they are aware of a need. And they are trying to fill that need. As I mentioned this morning with the hippies. They were advertising their search. All over their vans they had painted, peace, love and they were searching for peace and love. That is why they were so attracted to the gospel when it was proclaimed to them. The gospel of God's love and the gospel of peace. Peace with God through Jesus Christ. So the Lord assured Paul that I've got a lot of people in this wicked city of Corinth.

¹¹And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. ¹²When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia (he was appointed the deputy of that region), the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, There in the ruins of Corinth today, you can go to the judgment seat where Paul was brought by the Jews to face the governor Gallio. And they accused Paul before him, ¹³saying, "This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."

¹⁴And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. In other words if this guy really has done something wicked, something wrong, then reason says that I should listen to you and I should you know, judge in this matter. ¹⁵But 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." They really didn't have any legal case against Paul. It was just a matter of doctrinal belief. So Gallio refused to have anything to do with it. So the lecturers who were sort of the bailiffs *¹⁶And he drove them from the judgment seat.* (They probably were yelling and insisting that he do something about it and so the bailiffs that were there just drove them out.) *¹⁷Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue (He probably took over when Crispus believed in Christ.), and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things.* Now Gallio has gotten a bad rap because it says here well, you know, he didn't care. The guy is beaten right there in front of him. And he took no notice of those things. He doesn't deserve the bad rap. According to his brother Seneca, he was the kindest man who ever lived. He said if anyone deserved to be praised for their kindness and their generosity, it is Gallio. What is being said here is that he didn't care for the issues that they were bringing before him. They were insisting on it and thus he had to drive them out from judgment seat.

¹⁸So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, (Now Cenchrea was the port for Corinth.) for he had taken a vow. He is leaving to go back to Jerusalem, to Syria, and then on to Jerusalem. But he took this vow. It was the vow of the Nazirite. In Numbers, chapter six (Num. 6:2-21), it gives the rules for the vows of a Nazirite. When you want to show a special appreciation to God, thanksgiving for the blessings of God, you would shave your head and for a period of thirty days or whatever you had proscribed, you would not eat meat or you would not drink wine. And during this time, it was a time of commitment, full commitment to the Lord. The vow of the Nazirite was the vow of full commitment. At the end of the thirty days, you would shave your head again or sixty days or whatever time that you had allotted. You would shave your head again and you would burn on the altar the hair that had grown on your head during that period of time. And it was just a way of saying, I'm consecrating my life to the Lord for three months, six months, thirty days or whatever time. So Paul took this vow of consecration, the Nazirite vow. When he came to Jerusalem, he was planning to fulfill that vow. To shave his head again and burn the hair on the altar. It's interesting that there still even with Paul, who was so freed from the law, yet still that tradition and that obedience to some of the traditional aspects of the law. This vow of consecration is great.

Now you remember the story of Samson in the Old Testament, how the angel instructed his mother that he was not to have a razor come to his head all the days of his life. And during the time that she was carrying him she was not to eat meat or drink any wine or strong drink because he shall be a Nazirite unto

God from his birth. So he was to be consecrated to God throughout his lifetime. And when of course, his hair was cut he became weak as other men because his commitment to the Lord was broken.

When a person is totally committed to God they are people of strength. They are people of power. The power of commitment. Tremendous! The reason why communism was able to make such great strides, the commitment that people had to communism. The reason why the tree huggers are able to do so much is they are committed to their cause. They are in love with their trees. And they are committed to their cause. And thus they are able to do an awful lot because of their commitment. You know, they chain themselves to the trees so the foresters can't cut them down, you know. They are committed. There is a lot to be said for commitment.

So as they left Corinth, Paul took this vow of the Nazirite. He shaved his head. ¹⁹*And he came to Ephesus, and left them there* (Priscilla and Aquila); *but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.* ²⁰*When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent,* So Paul's first ministry there in the synagogue of Ephesus, they were interested. They wanted him to stay longer. But he was determined to get to Jerusalem for the feast so he did not consent. ²¹*but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing."* Ah, there it is! If God wills or if God is willing. James (James 4:13-15) sort of rebukes the people for saying well, we are going to do this and this and tomorrow we will do this and this. And he said it would be better for you to say, if the Lord wills. That should always be the criteria. If the Lord wills! This is what we are planning to do. This is what we will do if it is the Lord's will! But it is important to put that there. Paul said if God is willing or if the Lord wills, I will come back to you again. He was living by the will of God as we should be living by the will of God and seeking God's will in all of our activities. So he promised to come back if the Lord wills.

And he sailed from Ephesus. ²²*And when he had landed at Caesarea* (So, he sailed from Ephesus to Caesarea. We know Caesarea there on the coast.), *and gone up and greeted the church* (He saluted the church or greeted the church. He went to the celebration there at the temple for the feast. And then), *he went down to Antioch.* What happened? We don't know. It's covering a period of time and it's covering fifteen hundred miles. Certainly a lot of things must have happened in that time and on that journey of which we don't know anything. It will be interesting when we get to heaven and we have a lot of time to learn a lot of things—to find out just what exciting things happened to Paul on this particular journey back to Jerusalem. The events and all that took place. And then of course, you know, he wasn't very popular with the church in Jerusalem. Whenever he would get there it seemed like Paul had a way of stirring people up and getting them all rankled. It is sort of sad when we can live in peaceful coexistence with a world that is opposed with the righteous demands of Jesus Christ. The church is not strong when it is living in a peaceful coexistence in a sinful society. You are the salt of the earth. You put salt on an open sore and it smarts. But if the salt has lost its savor, it's really good for nothing. And thus the church is never at peace with sin.

²³*After he had spent some time there* (In Antioch, this is Paul's home church. He had begun his first missionary journey from Antioch. This is his home church. So he spent some time there. He didn't spend much time in Jerusalem. But he spent some time there.), *he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia* (That is the area where Paul went on both his first and second missionary journeys. The area of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and so forth. That whole area is called Galatia. So he went back through the country of Galatia and Phrygia.) *in order, strengthening all the disciples.* Going to the disciples and now ministering to them. Encouraging them. Strengthening them.

Now back at Ephesus, we read ²⁴*Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria* (Which was one of the cultural centers of the ancient world, the second largest city. A place of culture and education.), *an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures,* (This is he knew the Scriptures. He had a great working knowledge of the Scriptures.) *came to Ephesus.* ²⁵*This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord;* (The term *the way* is a term that was used for Christians in the early birth of the church in the

early years of the church. They called the Christians the people of the way. It was a reference to a way of life that Christians lived. Back in the ninth chapter when Paul was commissioned and empowered by the high priest to go to Damascus to haul into prison all who were of the Way. That is the way of Christianity or the way of the Lord. The people who were living this way of life. In the Book of Acts, the Christians were referred to as the people of the Way much more than they were referred to as Christians. That was sort of a moniker that was put upon them by the world because they were living like Christ. They were Christlike, and there was sort of the Jesus people media thing that was put upon them. But they were called the people of the Way. It's a glorious way of life living for Jesus Christ. And so that was what they were referred to.

So that was all he knew, the way of the Lord; *and being fervent in spirit*, This fellow was eloquent. He was well versed in the Scriptures and he was fervent in his spirit. And *he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John*. John said, I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. There is one coming after me mightier than I, the latches of whose shoes, I'm not worthy to unloose. He didn't know the fullness of the Spirit. He just knew the preaching of repentance from sin. Baptism. In Hebrews, chapter six, the writer of the Book of Hebrews said, lay aside the first principals of the doctrines of Christ, the repentance from dead works, baptism, the laying on of hands. Let's go on into maturity. Let's develop into maturity in Christ. Now, Apollos didn't know the life and the walk of the Spirit. All he knew was the first principle of the doctrine of Christ, the repentance from dead works. But he didn't really know what it was to walk in the Spirit. It's interesting that this was sort of reflected then in the lives of the believers for in the next chapter as Paul comes to Ephesus there is something missing in their Christian experience that Paul quickly discerns. Perhaps a lack of love. Perhaps a lack of joy. Perhaps a lack of excitement because these are things that transpire when a person is filled with the Spirit. There is joy. There is love. There is excitement about the things of the Lord. And they seemed to lack this, so Paul immediately said, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? We'll get that next week, but it's a thing that Apollos didn't know, about the Holy Spirit so he only instructed them in the first principle. He wasn't able to take them on into a real walk in the Spirit, real perfection in the Christian life.

²⁶*So he began (he came to Ephesus) to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.* They said, look, you know, Jesus rose again and He gave the gift of the Holy Spirit. And they were expounding to him the way of the Lord more perfectly.

²⁷*And when he desired to cross to Achaia (that is the area of Corinth, the southern area of Greece), the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him* (that is the disciples in Corinth and of course Priscilla and Aquila had come from Corinth, so he announced his intentions to move on to Corinth. So they wrote letters to the disciples there and encouraged them to receive Apollos); *and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace;* ²⁸*for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.* Great! He was mighty in the Scriptures. He was showing them and that publicly through the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah! An interesting sidelight on Apollos. When he got to Corinth and began to preach, because of the fact that he was well versed in the Scriptures. He was fervent in the Spirit, there were many in Corinth. There were many who were attracted to Apollos. And so there actually developed little factions. And sort of Apollos followers. Fans of Apollos. So in Corinth, there were those that said well, we are of Peter, indicating that Peter that had probably come to Corinth in the interim, between Paul's letters to the Corinthians. Some were saying we are of Apollos. And others were saying we are of Paul, others were saying, we're Presbyterians, some were saying we're Baptists, and we're Methodists. No, but it's that idea of sort of building little enclosures and building walls up around yourself in identifying yourself with a particular doctrinal persuasion or of a particularly popular leader. And so you begin to divide the body of Christ. And Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, rebuked them for that factionalism. He said that that was carnal. It was a mark of carnality. It was a mark of spiritual infancy that they couldn't just receive all men, glean from all and be committed unto Jesus Christ. Not unto man or to any particular man but their

commitment was to be to the Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul rebuked them. Paul said, that there at Corinth, I planted and Apollos watered, but God gives the increase. He who plants is nothing. He who waters is nothing. The one we should be attracted to and drawn to, is God. The One who gives and should receive the glory for He is the One who gives the increase. So Apollos had his ministry in Corinth, following Paul. He was mighty in the Scriptures and a good man. I am anxious to meet Apollos. I'm attracted to him. But I'm not of Apollos, I am of Jesus Christ! So it's interesting that here in Ephesus, Apollos planted and in the nineteenth chapter when Paul comes along, he watered. Sometimes God uses us to plant the seed. Sometimes God uses us to water the seed. In one place we might be planting and another place we might be watering. It doesn't make any difference who planted or who watered. The important thing is that it is God who works giving the increase. So to God be the glory! Great things He had done! Don't get tied up with a man and a personality. But get wrapped up in Jesus Christ and you'll be all right!

Father, we thank You for the blessedness of the ministry. Being able Lord to share the Word of God. To study the Word. To grow by the Word. Lord we thank You for these lessons from the early church, as You established for us a model. And Lord we pray that You will be with us. Guiding us, directing us, that we might recognize that Christ is the head of the body, His church. We are only here Lord as Your servants to do Your will. To bring glory and praise unto You. And so Lord thank You for what You have done and what You are doing. And Lord keep us in that place where You might be able to continually use us as Your instrument. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.