

**“FEARLESS and
compelled by the Spirit”
- Acts 18 -**

**by Pastor Tim Dodson
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1 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius 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. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. 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. 6 But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." 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. 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. 9 Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; 10 "for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city." 11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. 12 When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, 13 saying, "This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." 14 And 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. 15 "But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters." 16 And he drove them from the judgment seat. 17 Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things. 18 So 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, for he had taken a vow. 19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; 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, 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." And he sailed from Ephesus. 22 And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch. 23 After he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. 24 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. 25 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 So he began 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. 27 And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; 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.



After the events of chapter 17, Paul left Athens and moved on to the city of Corinth. Corinth was a city approximately 20 times bigger than Athens with a population of 200,000. It was a seaport city full of commerce, trade, and all of the “*lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*” (1Jn 2:16) that invariably comes from such major metropolitan centers. In Athens, we know that Paul had limited success. The philosophical and intellectual pride that made most of the people there close-minded and self-sufficient had fundamentally “shut the door” to his ministry. God is all-powerful, but there is still the issue of free will. Thus Paul “packed it in” and moved to where the “fishing was better.” However, one could certainly doubt his choice of *where*.

In Corinth, immorality was the rule, and the worship of Aphrodite (also known as Venus, the goddess of fertility and sexuality) was the driving force. In classical Greek, to *act like a Corinthian* was to practice fornication, and a *Corinthian companion* was a prostitute. One ancient writer described Corinth as a town where only the tough could survive. Yet despite the darkness which surrounded him, **this** was the location where Paul penned the letter to the Romans, as well as 1st and 2nd Thessalonians. Thankfully, God’s presence and power is not limited by the dark side.

It was here in the city of Corinth that Paul began a long and blessed relationship with a couple by the names of Priscilla and Aquila. Together these three would go on to legendary ministry and would give themselves completely to the commission of Christ and kingdom. Aquila and his wife Priscilla possessed the same skills in secular trade as Paul did, and they clearly had the same missional passion, so it was a natural fit for them to join forces. It is important to note that Paul **did** had a secular trade...and that he often *worked secularly*. He did not spend his life in an ivory tower, removed from the world at large. For Paul it was the skill of tent making, and he obviously used it as much as necessary in order to pursue his real passion and calling and that was Christ.

Many pastors are still full time vocational workers while pastoring on the weekends and evenings. Certainly they are the unsung heroes of ministry. For their sacrifice they likely will never see worldly megachurch numbers and new state-of-the-art buildings. Paul never saw such worldly success. But for Paul, and a lot of other committed men around the world, ministry was not his vocation but rather his passion and calling. However, his vocation was no doubt a back-door blessing, just as it is for many pastors today, for such opens doors of ministry and insight are often not found behind the doors of the pastor's study.

Life's best revelations flash upon us while we abide in the fields of duty. Keep to your daily breadwinning and amid your toils you shall receive great benedictions and see glad visions. ... The shop or office or warehouse may become as the house of God. Do thy work and do it diligently: In it, thou mayest find rare soul fellowships, as did Aquila and Priscilla. (Dinsdale T. Young, "Neglected People of the Bible")

Faithful and consistent to the plan, Paul again found his way to the local synagogue where he taught the name of Jesus and the gifts of grace and salvation. And despite the seriously adverse spiritual conditions of Corinth, there were still lives that found redemption through the words of Paul. Yet it was not a matter of being a great public speaker...that was not the smoking gun. It was not the power of the words, or the gift of the orator. It was what it always is, and that is the supernatural power *behind* the words that changed lives!

Verse 5 tells us that Paul was literally *compelled* by the Holy Spirit. That word compelled means to "*hold together with constraint.*" The dictionary defines that word as "*to drive or urge with force. An 'irresistible' constraint.*"

Hmmmm. *Force? Constraint?* Sounds very different from the professional pastor of our day. For that matter, it sounds very different from average believer who generally seeks for a comfortable pew, professional church child care, and an easy to digest pulpit message.

Like some preachers that have followed him, he *had* to preach. He *had* to minister. That kind of commitment to duty and calling is a very rare thing today. It is part of what we have discussed in the past about those who will indeed change the world! Such is never accomplished by those who quit and run. It is those who stand in front of tanks that move the world. In 1 Timothy 1:12 Paul said "*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry...*" Paul clearly felt God did more than call; He *placed* him...He literally *inserted* him into his ministry.

The text of verse 6 is clear. There was not going to be a city-wide corporate "revival" amongst the Corinthian Jews. Like so many times before, and certainly after, the masses wholly rejected the message of our Lord's path to salvation. Verse 6 speaks of Paul's heart toward this rejection. In a biting rebuke, Paul essentially declared his innocence in the matter, for he had delivered the Word of God as the Lord instructed! "*Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.*" So much for the "meek-and-mild" ideal we seek to place upon men of God today!

Paul knew that he was not called to *save* men, but to *bring to them the gospel message*. That is a reality that every pastor must remind himself of regularly. In light of this certain rejection, Paul once again turned to the open hearts of the Gentiles. Like today, the hearts of the religious "old wine-skins" will never be softened. It is the "average joe" out on the street who has "ears to hear," as Jesus spoke of. So, it was *to the streets* for Paul.

These social “nobodies” would step up and take their places in service and positions in this new local church. In the world, *we* were nothing, destined to pass through this life without ever causing a wrinkle! But then there was Jesus. And suddenly, we were *alive* and we inexplicably became players on the winning team. May we forever remember that truth in **this** church...

Paul’s rejection from *within* the walls of the synagogue only emboldened him in spiritual “guerilla warfare” on the *outside*. Paul certainly could have quit once he was rejected by those in the synagogue, few of us would have blamed him, but he was discerning as to when to go and when to keep swinging. Such discernment is found only through the direct involvement of God’s Holy Spirit. It isn’t a “parlor trick.” It is a direct gift of the present Spirit of God.

Having been rejected, Paul was still unstoppable. He moves in with a Gentile believer by the name of Justus, who *conveniently* lived right next door to the temple! Paul then continued his evangelism from this strategic location and, *with patience and faithful ministry*, the ruler of the synagogue eventually comes to a believing faith. Many, *hearing the Word of God*, believed and were baptized. The philosophical debates of Mars Hill in Athens were gone. Paul went back to the simple word of God, and people responded!

Despite the advance into the enemy’s territory, Paul knew that Satan had not and *would not* surrender. There is no doubt that Paul was sensing that this was the “calm before the storm.” Verses 9-11 tell us “*Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”* I am comforted in knowing that the great “Paul the Apostle,” *even in times of victory*, still has some fear; and that God is so gracious that He does not scold us or reject us in our fear, but instead, He comforts us by backing us up. Note that He however gives no permission to run and hide, nor does He allow spiritual retirement. But He will “*walk through the valley of shadow and death*” **with us...**

Now the Lord doesn’t promise that He will speak to us in a vision as He did for Paul, but he always seems to find a way if we are listening! He has already spoke to us so loudly in His word if we will listen to it. God moves to not only *comfort* Paul, but to encourage him at the same time. But notice again that God didn’t however let him “bow-out” of his ministry because he was scared or uncomfortable. He just reminded Paul that He was with him and would protect him. No one gets to go “awol” because they are fearful! Many have tried, to their shame...

In verses 12-13...like a broken record, the liars once again come forward. If the proconsul ruled against Paul on this issue, he would set a precedent throughout Asia that would be the beginning of the end of the spread of Christianity; it would effectively outlaw the faith. But instead, the Lord immediately makes good on His word from verses 9-10. Paul didn’t need to defend himself; God stepped forward to do it for him. Gallio quickly sees through the ruse being laid down, and quickly decides that he wants no part of it. He not only nixes the whole issue, but puts the hammer down on these troublemakers, driving them from the hall. It seems God truly is the great attorney! (1 Jn 2:1)

However, not to be denied their revenge, these guys wait outside to exert some pain. All hyped up in their anger, it appears that these Jewish troublemakers organized a mob to do their dirty work. They were going to whoop somebody that day one way or another! They beat Sosthenes, the temple priest, in view of Gallio, perhaps to show their strength. But again they came up empty, for Gallio ignored this whole display!

Why their anger was at all leveled at this “Sosthenes,” we do not know. He was apparently the “new man” after Crispus became a believer and no doubt lost his job. According to 1 Cor 1:1, he also became a believer himself, and with synagogue leaders dropping like flies, the powers-that-be were losing it. Generally the rule of thumb is to blame the highest man on the ladder for any and everything that doesn’t go our way.

According to verse 18, Paul still stayed a long while in Corinth. However, being an itinerate preacher, Paul was not one to stay put too long. This verse 18 also speaks of what is known of as a “Nazarite vow”; generally a temporary vow of heightened commitment. It was like an act of sanctification or fasting. The person taking a Nazarite vow would shave his head, abstain from wine and all “fruit of the vine.” At the end of this set period, the hair was cut again and then burned along with other sacrifices as a symbol of offering oneself to God.

In chapter 16, God denied Paul entrance into Ephesus. Now here in 18 God opens that same door. We must note that God’s “no” is often, in truth, simply a “*not now*.” The task *and* the timing are both important to our Lord! Paul, haven taken this vow, was apparently gearing up for a serious missional assault. Not to be deterred or delayed, Paul does not stay any longer than to share the gospel, as he seemed to do in every city, and then he caught the next boat heading toward Jerusalem.

As Paul traveled on his journey, he continued to minister to the believers all along the way. But he kept moving, for apparently he had an important date to keep. Arriving in Jerusalem, he went up and “greeted the church,” and then returned Antioch. Back again to the church that had sent him out to begin with. Paul was always a man in authority but never forgot that he was also *under* authority. To God firstly, but also to the local church that carried his mission and sent him out.

Verse 23 may seem to be a rather unremarkable verse, but it is actually the beginning of what we know of as Paul’s *third* missionary journey. This journey begins with a broad sweep of his travels and tells us only that he *strengthened all the disciples*. This is notable because it shows us that Paul was not just concerned with evangelism and salvation, but also about discipleship. It was important to Paul that those who had come to know God’s saving grace would also grow in knowledge of that grace as well as the responsibilities and servanthood that were to naturally follow that salvation. Anyone can *start* a race. It is only those who finish that ultimately matter.

Verses 24-28 speak of this man by the name of Apollos. Apollos kind of came out of nowhere. What we *do* gather herein is that we already have the beginnings of a “second generation” of faithful servants/teachers that had been born again and had also begun to minister themselves.

The tent-maker couple Aquila and Priscilla were evidently fairly skilled in the Word. This was remarkable because they were not full-time evangelists/teachers, just a godly couple busy about the work of the Kingdom! How we need to make note of that fact and see it as a “shot across the bow.” It’s great to know God uses average men and women for His purposes, not just those with titles and positions. It is imperative that we all realize that we don’t need to be in the full-time ministry to be used by God.

The two of them apparently took Apollos aside and “straightened him out” a bit, and sent him on his way. There is no sign that they made a public display of their correction or embarrassed him in any way. They just quietly showed him his error, and he continued his ministry. It’s always best to handle things that way when possible. It should only be when a situation is entrenched that it is dragged out into the public forum. Such an act however is indeed called for at times and names are named. That is clearly a biblical precedent when an individual refuses to hear sound council.

The “brethren” supported Apollos, and backed him as he ministered to further the spread of the gospel. His herein was apparently a simple case of “zeal without knowledge,” and there was no major error on his part. Certainly a lot can be said about this Apollos. For sure it is evident that his pride did not stop him from receiving correction from brothers and sisters around him. Such “contact sports” are prerequisites for being greatly used by God! His humility opened to him the further doors of ministry. That’s the way it works. And rejecting such will just surely put you on a shelf.