

Acts 18:18-28

- I. 18:18-23 Paul's Journeys
- II. 18:24-28 Introducing Apollos

Introduction: Anyone out there ever failed at a New Year's Resolution? I believe it's better to set New Year's Goals. Not a vow, which usually means "all or nothing," but a decision to move in a certain direction to achieve a desired end. For example:

- A **resolution** might be "to work out every day." Then, two weeks in, you miss your workout. You feel defeated already. You missed the mark. You failed. Boo hiss. You're a loser.
- A **goal** might be "to get in better shape by working out." You start by working out every day, and then, just like in the previous case, two weeks in you miss your workout. The result is that you've still made progress toward your goal, because two weeks worth of workouts is certainly worth *something*. You can pick up where you left off and a year later, even assuming you miss a bunch of workouts, you're in better shape than you were a year earlier.

Now here's a good spiritual goal: To grow spiritually by cultivating a desire for God's Word.

*1 Peter 2:1-3 (NKJV) ¹Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, ²as newborn babes, **desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,** ³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*

In today's section of Scripture, we'll see several instructive examples: **Acts 18:18-28**

- I. 18:18-23 Paul's Journeys

A. 18:18 *Cenchrea* One of the ports near Corinth.

- i. *Had his hair cut off, for he had taken a vow* Nazirite Vow. (devoted, consecrated, separated) Like Samson who didn't cut his hair. While the vow was in effect, the Nazirite let his hair grow long, abstained from wine or anything made from grapes, and avoided all contact with dead bodies. When the time of the vow was completed the head was to be shaved and certain sacrifices were offered. (See Numbers 6:1-21.)
- ii. **Q:** Why would Paul do this? It seems so Old Testament! What's the point?

A: Let's not forget that Paul was still a Jew. We can certainly trust that this was not for any legalistic form of righteousness, but perhaps as an expression of thanks. Maybe, as an apostle, he wanted to set an obvious example of purity. Consider the following:

- Within Corinth's sinful environment, Paul may have felt the need to set a high standard, to make his separation from the debauched environment of Corinth totally obvious. This would speak not only to weak believers, who might easily fall into sin, but to the unbelieving Jews who opposed Paul. It would show that rather than sink to the awful standards of Corinth, he rose to the highest standards of Judaism – while at the same time preaching Christ.

- B. *Priscilla and Aquila* came along on the journey. They will remain in Ephesus while Paul continues on to Jerusalem and Antioch.
- C. 18:19-21 *Ephesus* The Primary city of Asia Minor. Paul wanted to go here in Acts 16:6, but the Holy Spirit forbid him to preach the word in Asia. In the next chapter Paul will come back and stay there for 2-3 years. We'll hear more about Ephesus then.
- D. *They asked him to stay* The Jews in Ephesus were eager to hear more. They had truly teachable hearts; a developed desire for the Word. They remind us of the Jews of Berea:

Acts 17:11 (NKJV) These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

- E. *I must ... Jerusalem* This sentence is not in some Bibles, but does appear in most of the existing ancient Greek manuscripts. We need not throw it out.
 - i. The feast was probably Passover or Pentecost; Jewish people still like to gather in Jerusalem for Passover. Moreover, if Paul took a Nazirite vow, then to complete it he still had to offer some sacrifices. He would need to do this at the Temple in Jerusalem. With or without the sentence about the feast, he needed to go there.
 - ii. *He sailed from Ephesus* But he left Priscilla and Aquila behind (See 18:19). Under Paul's teaching for about two years, their teachable attitude, their desire for the Word, had grown them to the point where he trusted them to maintain a solid Christian witness in that city until he returned. We'll look at some of their ministry in a moment.
- F. 18:22-23 This quickly ends Paul's second missionary trip and begins his third.
 - i. *Caesarea* was on the coast of Palestine.
 - ii. *Gone up* means that Paul *went up* to Jerusalem as he planned. Going to Jerusalem was always *going up*. Leaving Jerusalem was always *going down*.
 - iii. *Went down* to Antioch is consistent with this terminology. We would say *went up* from Jerusalem to Antioch, because it is moving to the north.
 - iv. *Galatia and Phrygia* would have been among those areas of today's Turkey that Paul visited on both his first and second ministry trips.

II. 18:24-28 Introducing Apollos

- A. 18:24 Apollos, born at Alexandria: This Jew with a Greek name was from the second largest city in the Roman Empire. Alexandria was a seaport on the northern coast of Egypt. Founded by Alexander the Great, the city was very cosmopolitan. Egyptians, Romans, and Greeks all lived there; over a quarter of the population was Jewish. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures had been produced in that city about 150 years before the birth of Jesus. The city was famous for its great library and was considered the cultural and educational center of the world. (*Nelson Study Bible*) See also [Alexandria on Wikipedia](#)

- i. The fact that Apollos would have a Greek name, and be an Egyptian Jew, mighty in the Scriptures, makes perfect sense in the historical context of this time.
- B. 18:25 John's **baptism** was a baptism of repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. ... Apollos was a disciple of John the Baptist. Apparently he did not know about the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit. (*Nelson Study Bible*)
- C. 18:26 In the synagogue, Apollos, like John the Baptist before him, would have been preaching repentance in preparation for the coming Messiah.
- i. Aquila and Priscilla, being fully instructed in the Word, would have brought Apollos up to date on the details of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Apollos was a receptive student.
- D. 18:27 Apollos desired to go to Achaia – the area of Corinth – the place that Priscilla, Aquila and Paul had recently left. The church in Ephesus approved, sending him off with a letter of reference. He had already developed a good reputation with the church.
- i. It's possible that Apollos wanted to go there to help the Corinthian church, having heard from Priscilla and Aquila about the need for a Bible teaching pastor for that flock.
 - In 1 Corinthians Paul verifies that Apollos's ministry is as much of the Lord as his own.

1 Corinthians 3:6-7 (NKJV) ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. ⁷So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

- E. 18:28 Most of the believers in Corinth were Gentiles and, therefore, unfamiliar with the Hebrew Scriptures. They didn't make it a point to grow, so this was not a very stable church. Paul refers to them later as “carnal”, meaning that they were immature, worldly. They tended to look at spiritual matters from a purely human perspective.

1 Corinthians 3:1 (NKJV) And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

- i. This church would have been easy prey for wolves, false teachers, especially if the teachers were of Jewish heritage. With a knowledge of the Word they could easily twist it to their own ends. The ignorance of the Corinthians would leave them defenseless.
- ii. It's easy to see how Apollos might have “helped those who had believed through grace.” He would offer just the sort of balance needed in that environment. As the text says:

Acts 18:28 (NKJV) for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

Conclusions:

- When Paul came into the synagogue in Ephesus, they asked him to stay and continue teaching. They had cultivated a desire for the Word. When they heard it they wanted more.
- Priscilla and Aquila were clearly lovers of the Word. Paul met them in Corinth about two years before. We know they were Jews, but we're not really sure they were Christians. After two years with Paul they were now a committed part of the ministry team.
- Apollos was "mighty in the Scriptures" on the day he arrived in Ephesus. Nonetheless, his desire for the Word was such that he was able to learn from Aquila and Priscilla the tentmakers. When they "took him aside and explained the way of God more accurately," he immediately saw the sense in it. Two verses later we find him in Corinth, helping the believers there.

Acts 18:28 (NKJV) for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

- Overall, however, the Corinthians were not a good example. When Paul writes his two letters to them we see him dealing with a variety of problems caused by their lack of maturity. They needed to hear what Peter said in our verses from the introduction:

*1 Peter 2:1-3 (NKJV) ¹Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, ²as newborn babes, **desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,** ³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*

Now here's a good spiritual goal for 2009: To grow spiritually by cultivating a desire for God's Word.

2 Peter 3:17-18 (NKJV) ¹⁷You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; ¹⁸but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.