

MBC – 7/19/2020 – Pastor Doug Thompson  
**“Half-Way Christians”**  
 Acts 18:18-19:6

Pray . . . able to focus, able to hear God’s Word for what it really, the living, active, powerful Word of our living God. . .

We’re back in Acts this morning after taking a break to study Malachi. What a great time we had in that book! But because it’s been a few weeks, I want us to get our bearings so turn with me to Acts 1, where Luke is introducing his Holy Spirit-inspired history that we call The Acts of the Apostles—

- Acts 1:1–3 (Luke is speaking) <sup>1</sup>In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus *began* to do and teach, (that was his Gospel According to Luke) <sup>2</sup>until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>He presented himself *alive* to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. (Stop)

Whoever Theophilus was, he knew about the Gospel of Luke. It was all about “*what Jesus began to do and teach,*” until His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. Luke tells Theophilus that this work (Acts) will be an account of what Jesus *continued* to do and teach. Jesus was alive – He still is alive – and this is how He will *continue* His work—

- Acts 1:8 <sup>8</sup>But you (His disciples) will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Every other religion is based around some man who finished his ministry during his lifetime then kicked the bucket. Jesus *began* His ministry on earth during His lifetime – but in Acts, He continues His ministry from heaven, speaking, acting, saving, by His Holy Spirit, through His Apostles. Haven’t we seen Jesus, alive, working, on every page of this Book? It’s Jesus who heals, Jesus who raises the dead, and Jesus who saves His people. We should call this Book: **‘The Continuing Words and Deeds of Jesus by his Spirit through his Apostles.’**

And this is the good part: Jesus is still alive, and still working through His church, which includes you and me. You and I are Acts chapter 29! Jesus is finishing His work on earth, through His church, until His return!

So this morning in Acts 18, beginning in v.18. Paul is just beginning his third missionary journey, and we’re going to take it in sections—

- Acts 18:18–28 <sup>18</sup>After this, Paul stayed many days longer (he’s in Corinth) and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cench-reae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. <sup>19</sup>And they came to Ephesus, and he left them (Priscilla and Aquila) there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. <sup>20</sup>When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. <sup>21</sup>But on taking leave of them he said, “I will return to you if God wills,” and he set sail from Ephesus. <sup>22</sup>When he had landed at Caesarea, he went *up* (that always means *Jerusalem* at 2,600 feet) and greeted the church, and then went *down* to Antioch (his sending church). <sup>23</sup>After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

### I. Too busy for a haircut.

- Acts 18:18–28 <sup>18</sup>After this, Paul stayed many days longer. . .

V.11 tells us that Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half teaching God’s Word, but from what v.18 says, it was even longer, maybe as much as two years. Can you imagine having the Apostle Paul teaching you God’s Word for two years? But Paul was not called to be a local church pastor, but a missionary, so he wanted to head back to the ranch – his sending church in Antioch of Syria. They must have nagged him mercilessly to come back home and report all that God was doing. Don’t we love it when our missionaries come and visit us?

- . . . and then (he) took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria (that means Antioch, his home church), and with him Priscilla and Aquila. (We’ll come back to this couple) At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.

So they’re headed back to Antioch from Corinth, and they set sail from Cenchreae which was the port city on the Mediterranean. And Luke mentions Paul getting a haircut – “because of a vow?” What is that about?

Now he really was a busy man – but that’s not why he needed a haircut. Paul had taken a Nazirite vow. Let me read what that required—

- Numbers 6:2–5 <sup>2</sup>“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD, <sup>3</sup>he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried. <sup>4</sup>All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins. <sup>5</sup>“All the days of his vow of separation, no razor shall touch his head. Until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the LORD, he shall be holy. He shall let the locks of hair of his head grow long.

You notice that men and women could take the vow. It was completely voluntary – except for Samson and John the Baptist – and possibly Samuel, who were lifelong Nazirites. A person took a Nazirite vow to consecrate themselves to God for a period of time for prayer, or for seeking direction from God. It was a lot like fasting: a voluntary, temporary time of discipline and abstinence to focus your thoughts and prayers on God.

So Paul did that. Doesn’t say why, but he had plenty of reasons to seek direction and wisdom from God. The vow was usually for a month. At the end of the month, the person went through an elaborate ceremony of offering a sacrifice, shaving their head, and offering up the hair as a sacrifice. When Paul shaved his head at the end of his vow, he wasn’t in Jerusalem to go through all of this ritual, but Josephus (the Jewish historian) tells us that a person had one month from the time they shaved their head to get to Jerusalem to offer these sacrifices – which is going to explain something we read in v.22.

***\*Why did Paul take this vow?***

But you might be wondering: Why is Paul, the Christian, still taking a Jewish vow? Isn’t he done with all of this Old Testament stuff? Good question!

To be Jewish in the first century was about more than just religion – it was an established, distinct culture that touched on every aspect of their lives: who they socialized with, the food they ate, their ethics, politics – everything. So when a Jew became a Christian, it was a major life change: they were no longer

under the Law of Moses, but they struggled with lifelong habits and traditions. It was a hard thing for them to make the transition.

- In Romans 14, Paul dealt with Jewish-Christians in Rome who were still tied to their old culture. He called them the “weaker brothers” but he didn’t order them to stop circumcising their boys, or keeping the Sabbath, or even the dietary laws. As a matter of fact, he told the “stronger” Gentile believers not to judge them, or to rush them into some freedom that would end up violating their consciences. Instead he said—
- Romans 14:17 <sup>17</sup>For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

It was even tough for the Apostles to make the break: In Acts 3, we saw Peter and John still going to the Temple for the Jewish prayer times. In ch.10, God had to practically beat Peter over the head to get him to change his mind about unclean food and unclean people.

So back to this vow: Paul himself is a *man in transition*, step-by-step, trying to figure out how to be a *Jewish, New Covenant Christian*. He knows that he’s no longer under the Law of Moses – but he still feels the pull of the culture he was brought up in. So about this same time, he wrote to the Corinthians and said this about where he had landed—

- 1 Corinthians 9:19–22 <sup>19</sup>For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. <sup>20</sup>To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. <sup>21</sup>To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. <sup>22</sup>To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

Isn’t that good? Paul was free in Christ, but freedom for Paul wasn’t an excuse for indulgence, but more like a currency he could spend on the Gospel. This is why Paul took this vow: in some way, it was going to give him an “in” with the Jews for the Gospel – it’s just like what we saw earlier when he had Timothy circumcised. Scripture didn’t require it, but it was for the sake of gaining an audience with the Jews for the Gospel.

\*I hope this is the way you see your freedom in Christ: not as an opportunity for your flesh, but as latitude for the sake of the Gospel.

- Many, many years ago, I was going to visit my brother Tank who was in the AFB, and they were playing at Norton AFB down in San Bernardino. I took along Rick, a friend of mine from the Bible study I led. Rick was a Marine – a tough Marine. So we were in a cafeteria there on the base and we began witnessing to my brother – mostly Rick. After awhile, Rick stands up and says, “Man, I’m thirsty – who wants a beer?” I was shocked! At that point in my Christian life, Christians just didn’t drink alcohol – but Tank said, Great, thanks!” Rick got him a beer and went right back to the Gospel!

That taught me a lesson about getting out of my own comfort zone for the sake of the Gospel!

So Paul completes his vow, cuts his hair, and puts it in a zip-lock baggie to take it to Jerusalem—

Now I wish we could put up a map and show you everywhere Paul's going here, because Luke has compressed a whole lot of time and miles in these verses – over 1,500 miles – about half of it by foot. Paul is a machine. You never read about a vacation or even a break for this man. He lives to proclaim the Gospel and strengthen the churches by teaching the Word of God. It's his life. But he's about to get some major help—

## II. Apollos – the halfway Christian.

- <sup>24</sup>Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup>He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. <sup>26</sup>He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

This is fascinating! I said that Paul was a man in transition, but here we meet Apollos, and he was *really* a man in transition. He was highly educated, from Alexandria in Egypt, which was the intellectual capital of the world at that time. He was a Jew and it's very possible that he had been trained by the famous Jewish philosopher Philo, who taught in Alexandria. He was an expert in the Old Testament, and a powerful, passionate speaker. He had probably been schooled in oratory and rhetoric.

So he comes to Ephesus and starts preaching like nobody's business. But he's only a *half-way Christian* – you say, "What in the world is that?" Well look at v.25: "*He had been instructed in the way of the Lord*" – that means Jesus. And "*he taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.*"

What? The baptism of John was just the *beginning* of Jesus' ministry. Apollos must have travelled to Palestine to see John baptizing at the Jordan river. He heard him talk about this One who was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He heard John tell sinners that they must repent of their sins to be ready for this Jesus. He probably heard John quoting from Malachi that this One would suddenly come into His temple—

- Matthew 3:12 <sup>12</sup>His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

And maybe he actually met Jesus – maybe he was at the Jordan for His baptism – can you imagine?

And then he went back to Alexandria!. What? But – he didn't hear the rest of the story? Apparently not. It would be just like someone reading the first 3 chapters of Matthew and then stopping there. Now Apollos believed everything he knew, up to that point. And more than that, he had a grasp on what he knew – and taught it accurately. But what he knew was incomplete: apparently, he didn't know about Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. He didn't know that the New Covenant that Jeremiah and Ezekiel predicted, had come – in Jesus.

So was he a Christian? No. Was he a believer? Yes. Wait – aren't they the same thing? Yes, *now*. Now, "*there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved,*" Acts 4.12. But for a period of time, there were people who were devout Jews, they had truly believed God's Word in the OT, and they obeyed it, but Jesus had come – and they hadn't heard about Him yet. *So they were in transition: they were OT believers, but they needed to hear the Gospel of Jesus to become New Covenant Christians.* That's why I call Apollos a halfway Christian—

- And think: Isn't this just like Cornelius in ch.10? He was a godly, devout, Gentile, an obedient follower of Judaism. I believe that if he had died, he would have gone to heaven – as an OT believer. But God wanted him to come to heaven as a New Covenant Christian, so Peter came and preached the Gospel of Christ to him and he was saved!

### ***\*The amazing Priscilla and Aquila***

And it's here that God sovereignly brings Priscilla and Aquila to share the Gospel with this amazing man. We've already met them in Corinth at the beginning of ch.18. They were Jewish-Christians, tentmakers, like Paul. They apparently had no children, and they had money, so they were able to travel, and they even hosted church in the homes in several different cities.

Paul could *lean* on these servants of Christ. He said in Romans that they even risked their necks for him. They were a constant encouragement to Paul. And let me tell you, missionaries need constant encouragement. . .

- So he left them in Ephesus and one Friday evening – Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday), they are at a synagogue. They are there looking for opportunities for evangelism. And they hear this man, passionately preaching from the OT Scriptures about Messiah who is going to come and fulfill the Scriptures – and they must have been thinking, “Yeah, keep going. . .” and they realize, “Wait a minute, he doesn't know that Messiah did come – Jesus Christ – and He *did* fulfill the Scriptures!”

So they invited him over for dinner after church, right? They weren't judgmental or critical, but they both – *Priscilla too* – helped to finish the story: this Jesus that John spoke of did come, He is the Messiah. He did mighty miracles, lived a sinless life under the Law, then He was crucified as a Sacrifice for the sins of His people, and God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand. He is Lord over all, and is coming back to raise and judge the living and the dead. Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved!

And Apollos probably wept. He did believe it – all of it. He was a *believer*, but now he is a *Christian!* And without a doubt they baptized him, and he received the Holy Spirit.

- <sup>27</sup>And when he wished to cross to Achaia – (that would mean the city of Corinth), the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, <sup>28</sup>for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

### ***\*Epilogue in Corinth.***

And we can read about Apollos' ministry in Corinth, so turn with me to 1 Corinthians there – and I want to show you a fascinating story about this man. The church at Corinth had a slew of problems but the first one Paul dealt with was division—

- 1 Corinthians 1:11–13 <sup>11</sup>For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. <sup>12</sup>What I mean is that each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow Christ.” <sup>13</sup>Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

So the church was dividing up over personalities. They were turning Gospel preachers into rock stars! And specifically, there were two major parties: the followers of Paul and the followers of Apollos. Paul was brilliant in the Scriptures, but not glamorous. I think he could come across as too serious, professorial: “Sit down. Take notes.” Apollos was winsome and brilliant. He was a spellbinding orator. He would have the crowds in the palm of his hands. But here’s what Paul said about their little fan clubs—

- 1 Corinthians 3:3–7 <sup>3</sup>for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? <sup>4</sup>For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human? <sup>5</sup>What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. <sup>6</sup>I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup>So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

God! He gives the growth! Why would we play “Rate the pastor?” Pastors are just servants of Christ? They aren’t celebrities. Although I do have Bibles signed by R.C. Sproul and John MacArthur – and a genuine Spurgeon manuscript on my wall. But what we ought to rate is not how well certain men speak, but how well we *listen* to God’s Word!

I’m sure Paul heard the comments comparing him with Apollos – but there is no hint of jealousy. He never had anything but good to say about his brother. Turn to the end of this letter—

- 1 Corinthians 16:12 <sup>12</sup>Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity.

Here’s what was going on: Apparently the Corinthian church had asked if Paul would send Apollos to them. Maybe the “Apollos groupies” were clamoring for their hero to return. Put yourself in Paul’s place: how would you feel if the people you had labored over for more than two years, were now begging you to send the person they considered to be the better preacher? (“When is Tony Arnds going to preach here again? Shut up.”)

So what does it say about Paul that he would “*strongly urge*” Apollos to go to Corinth? It says that he was a humble, godly man who didn’t care about his own prestige or status—he just cared that God’s Word would go forth and prosper at Corinth—

- Philippians 1:15–18 <sup>15</sup>Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. <sup>16</sup>The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. <sup>17</sup>The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. <sup>18</sup>What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,

That’s the kind of man Paul was, and what kind of man was Apollos? He didn’t want to go! Why not? I believe, because he didn’t want to feed their flesh and risk further division. He could have said, “Hey, how can I refuse my fans?” But Apollos was a humble, godly man, like Paul. He was just a servant of Christ, and there was no place for ego. And by the way, we read this later when Paul writes to Titus in Crete—

- Titus 3:13 <sup>13</sup>Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. Isn’t that good? And finally, let’s look at—

### III. Believers without the Holy Spirit.

- Acts 19:1–6 <sup>1</sup>And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus (so he did come back). There he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup>And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” <sup>3</sup>And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” <sup>4</sup>And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” <sup>5</sup>On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup>And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.

This is a strange story: In Ephesus, Paul runs into 12 men who are called disciples – *mathetas* – but they weren’t disciples of Jesus. We usually say that they were disciples of John the Baptist. But I think they were actually disciples of *Apollos*. Their knowledge of John and Jesus seems to stop right where it did for Apollos. I think they had been with Apollos at the Jordan, with John, heard his preaching, and then for some reason, they all picked up and moved to Ephesus, and didn’t hear the rest of the story about Jesus, or the coming of the Holy Spirit—

- Acts 19:2 <sup>2</sup>And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

Now, they knew there was a Holy Spirit! What they meant was that hadn’t heard that the Holy Spirit had come as John and the prophets promised He would. When did the HS come? At Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus’ resurrection. They had only been baptized with John’s baptism of repentance, to prepare for Messiah’s coming – and that’s where they stopped.

- So these 12 guys were just like Apollos: *half-way Christians*. Men in transition. They believed everything they knew about the Messiah, from the OT, and from what little they learned from John. But they didn’t know the rest of the story – so just as Priscilla and Aquila did with Apollos, Paul filled in the missing information – which is, the Gospel.

So when they heard the Good News about Jesus from Paul, just like Cornelius, and just like Apollos – they believed. And they were baptized, because Christians are baptized.

And they received the Holy Spirit. That is the norm today for everyone whom God saves—

- Ephesians 1:13 <sup>13</sup>In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

This is why Paul asked his question: “Did you receive the HS when you believed?” Because, that’s the norm. There is no such thing today as a Christian without the Holy Spirit. But what about what Luke says next? “*and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.*”?

#### **\*Tongues today?**

Is that the norm for today? No. “Speaking in tongues” was the supernatural gift of speaking in a known human language you have not learned. And it was given as a temporary “sign” gift to the Jews. Listen to what happened in the house of Cornelius—

- Acts 10:44–47 [When Peter was at the home of the Gentile, Cornelius] <sup>44</sup>While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. <sup>45</sup>And the believers from

*among the circumcised (Jews) who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.* <sup>46</sup>For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, <sup>47</sup>“Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” (And later, in Jerusalem, Peter explained why this happened)—

- Acts 11:15–18 <sup>15</sup>As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them *just as on us* (Jews) at the beginning. <sup>16</sup>And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>17</sup>If then God gave the same gift to them (Gentiles) as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” <sup>18</sup>When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

**Get this:** What happened with these men was the Holy Spirit’s tangible proof that now, all who believe in Jesus, receive salvation and the Holy, Spirit whether Jews, Gentiles, or those in transition. They are all part of one body, one church, and there is no distinction. And those sign gifts that pointed to this great truth, have ceased. Because they are no longer necessary. But you and I read this and see it as proof that the Lord Jesus Christ is alive, building His church, and He is unstoppable, Amen?

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What stands out to me in this passage is how patient and loving we should be with those who need more information or need to be corrected in their faith: like the way Priscilla and Aquila were patient with Apollos. Like the way Paul was with these 12 men in Ephesus.

Paul exhorted Timothy later—

- 2 Timothy 2:24–25 <sup>24</sup>And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, <sup>25</sup>correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.
- That happened this week: some of us were talking with a person who is not from our theological persuasion – “not firing on all 5 cylinders,” if you get my drift. But instead of being critical or dismissive, we listened and responded with gracious words and patient instruction – because we are trying to win a person – not an argument.

Story of Latimer and Bilney from Boice’s commentary on Acts p.316.