

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles  
Week Twenty-Three  
Acts 18:12-19:12

**Day One**

12 While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. 13 "This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law." 14 Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, "If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. 15 But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law — settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things."

v. 12 – Here again we see that the Jews, probably out of jealousy and certainly out of hatred, launched an attack on Paul. Again they tried to enlist the help of the Roman government in restricting Paul and his activities. This was a more serious and legal attempt than in Philippi, where the Jews simply stirred up a riot. This time, they approached what was called the *bema* or judgment seat of local government, trying to get a legal ruling.

v. 13 – While the Jews were more organized in their opposition, their charge against Paul wasn't one of civil interest, but religious. They simply accused Paul, not of undermining the Empire, but of undermining Judaism, which was a legal religion according to the law of Rome. This he was indeed doing. I would assume that because Paul's opposition had stirred up riots in other cities, they would then argue that Paul's religious activity was detrimental to the *pax Romana*—the peace of Rome.

v. 14 – Paul was accustomed to defending himself and was about to do so, when Gallio spoke first. What was about to happen was of monumental importance, for Gallio was about to set a legal precedent for other proconsuls to follow throughout the Empire. Gallio determined that the matter before him was not a matter of civil disobedience, but rather a dispute concerning the nuances of Jewish law and custom. And he ruled correctly! Perhaps Gallio knew the Jews who came before him. But more importantly, God used Gallio to provide some measure of protection from Rome for the work of Paul and the apostles. At least for a few more years, Rome was to see the work of Paul and the spread of Christianity as a branch of Judaism and of no concern to official Rome.

v. 15 – Gallio did truly have a good perspective on the problem before him. Paul's work was indeed a matter for Jewish interpretation and he threw the problem back where it belonged: to the conscience and scrutiny of the Jews. God was forcing each Jew to make a decision concerning Jesus, and at this time He was not going to allow them to hide behind the Roman legal system. For now, each Jew would have to deal with Paul's message straight up, with no legal involvement.

Paul must have been relieved that he didn't even have to open his mouth. God fulfilled His promise to Paul that he had nothing to fear, for God was with him in Corinth. **Are you fearful today? Do you have some promise that God gave you that is slipping from your confidence? Is it time today to settle in your mind that God is faithful and will do what He said He would?**

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11).

## Day Two

16 So he had them ejected from the court. 17 Then they all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and beat him in front of the court. But Gallio showed no concern whatever. 18 Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken. 19 They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

v. 16 – Gallio refused to hear any more and had the protesters ejected from before the judgment seat. It was not time for Rome to play any larger role in the spread of or opposition to the gospel:

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases (Proverbs 21:1).

But in later years, Rome would become an enemy of the gospel, just as these Jews were who opposed Paul.

v. 17 – Since the previous synagogue ruler had left to follow Paul, we can only surmise that Sosthenes, the replacement, had also converted and had been dragged into court as the accused. The Jews were so frustrated that they beat Sosthenes, not having received satisfaction from the proconsul. These Jews were not spiritual people, but rather ethnic zealots who wanted to preserve a way of life that God was undoing. Christians can be guilty of the same thing. **Are you trying to preserve a culture in which you are comfortable or to serve the Lord with gladness and joy? Are you nostalgic for the way things were or are you seeking to establish God's kingdom in the way He wants things to be? I find people resisting new forms of music and communication, not because those media are wrong, but because those media aren't according to the personal preferences of those who are opposing. Please don't be guilty of that.**

v. 18 – When Paul finished his apostolic work in Corinth, he set sail for Jerusalem. Before he did, he entered into a Nazarite vow. There are some, however, who believe that Aquila was the one who cut his hair to fulfill the vow. I don't know why Luke

would mention this when he has given us no information before or after this concerning Aquila. Plus Paul later cut his hair as recommended by the leaders in Jerusalem (see Acts 21:21-25).

Why would Paul do this? I think Paul needed to be refreshed and refocused on his work. We already saw that he was fearful at one point and now, in my opinion, he was going back to Jerusalem to get his bearings so to speak. Keep in mind that everywhere Paul went, he stirred up the Jews, whom he loved. Paul saw himself as the continuation of the prophetic voice that told of the coming day when the covenant would be extended to the Gentiles. I'm not sure Paul expected as much opposition from his people and I simply think he was going back to make sure he heard correctly. This is my opinion only—*please* feel free to disagree it. The text does not confirm this opinion.

v. 19 – Even though Paul was on his way to Jerusalem, he took time while in Ephesus to follow his custom and go to the synagogue. Notice that Paul reasoned with the Jews. Paul wasn't afraid to engage the mind as he did his work. **Are you engaging your mind? Are you growing in your knowledge of your faith? What are you reading? Are you taking any classes? Do you think doctrine matters? Do you know what you believe? I try to read one book every month that can help me understand my faith and help me teach it to others. These Bible studies are a part of my own development. My goal is to do one of these studies for every book in the New Testament. What is your plan to keep growing in your understanding of your faith?**

### Day Three

20 When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. 21 But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus. 22 When he landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch. 23 After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. 24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.

v. 20 – The Jews in Ephesus wanted Paul to spend more time, but he refused. There was something beckoning him in Jerusalem. When Paul made his mind up, he was resolute and determined to carry out his plan in the will of God.

v. 21 – I like what Paul said here. He wasn't sure if he was to return to Ephesus, so he said, "If it's God's will." This is another indication to me that Paul was on a mission *back* to Jerusalem so that he could go *forward* to the Gentiles. Sometimes you have to go back before you can go forward. Sometimes you have to retrace your steps before you can take new ones—know where you've come from so you know where you're going. And everything must be tempered by the fact that we aren't guaranteed tomorrow and that we can't ever perfectly know God's will for the future.

James instructed us to talk like Paul did when he wrote:

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil (James 4:13-17).

v. 22 – Paul was retracing the steps of his earlier ministry, which brought him back to Caesarea, from which he went to greet the church at Jerusalem. We are given no information as to what he did there.

From there, Paul went on “down” to Antioch, the place where Barnabas had brought his from Tarsus and the place where he had broken with Barnabas. Whenever a Jew left Jerusalem, no matter where they went, they went “down.” Jerusalem was the pinnacle of religious life for every Jew, even the believers.

I find it interesting that Paul never wrote about his work in Antioch and never wrote a letter to the church there. It may mean nothing, or it may be an indication that until Paul was on his own, he never felt settled or successful in what he was called to do. Paul was a strong, independent man and thinker, that's for sure.

v. 23 – Paul then set out again to strengthen the disciples in the areas where he had ministered with Barnabas. Paul was always looking for how to encourage the believers. He wrote back to Corinth at a later date:

So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church (1 Corinthians 14:12).

**Are you excelling at gifts that edify the church? Who is the church? It's the people of God. So are you seeking to edify people? How can you build someone up today with one of your gifts?**

v. 24 – Earlier we met Priscilla and Aquila. Now another important person is introduced and his name is Apollos from Egypt. Apollos was from Alexandria, home to excellent schools and a then-famous library. How this man was so learned yet had a name after one of the Greek gods is uncertain. But he knew the Word and God was about to adjust his thinking and use him mightily. This is why a knowledge of God's word is so important; God can use you more effectively when you are familiar with His word.

#### **Day Four**

25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. 27 When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to

welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. 28 For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

v. 25 – It is hard for me to imagine how someone could only know of Jesus through the ministry of John the Baptist, but that is the case with Apollos. But John must have taught more about Jesus—at least to his disciples—than we have on record. Apollos taught accurately, although incompletely, about Jesus. This is a classic example that if you use what you have, God will give you more. **Are you being faithful with what God has given you—money, insight, ministry opportunities and the like? If so, God will replenish what you give and then give you additional. But if not, then what you have is in danger of being taken away. What is the key? The key is giving it away to bless others!**

Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give (Matthew 10:7-9).

v. 26 – Apollos was a traveling teacher and did what Paul always did: he went to the synagogue to argue and reason that Jesus was the Christ. Priscilla and Aquila were also at the synagogue, where they heard Apollos. It seems that every believing Jew still frequented the synagogue, as long as the Jews weren't abusive. It was probably the only place in the area that wasn't worshipping a panoply of gods. At any rate, the godly couple took Apollos to their home and expounded the truth of Jesus more completely. Obviously, Apollos received it all, which only made him more effective in his work and ministry. **Are you more effective today in your work for Jesus than you were last year? Than you were five years ago? What can you do to be even more effective?**

It is of note that Priscilla is always mentioned first. She must have been the more dominant of the two. It is my opinion that the Church has been hindered in its work because it has often had to operate with only half of its gifts, women being discouraged and rejected by their male counterparts. The Church will never be all that it can be until it finds a way to release the Holy Spirit gifts in the lives of the sisters.

vs. 27&28 – Apollos wanted to go over to Corinth and was encouraged in this desire by the brothers in Ephesus—so obviously there were some additional believers there besides Priscilla and Aquila. They wrote letters of recommendation to Corinth and off Apollos went, being effectively used by the Lord to refute the Corinthians Jews in public debate. Paul highly valued Apollos' work:

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow (1 Corinthians 3:6-8).

Yet Apollos played an unwitting role in a division among the Corinthian believers, who began to identify with various of the Christian workers against the others:

My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos "; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:11-14).

Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their factions, and this tendency is still with us today. We have people who prefer the teaching of one man or school or teachers and thus the body is not only fragmented but also malnourished, for they are receiving only one perspective of spiritual teaching. I heard a man say once, "The Christian spirit is too big to only be fed by a few teachers."

**Do you only read or listen to those teachers with whom you agree? Do you only trust teachers that come from a certain school or expound a certain doctrine? Do you follow only one school of thought or doctrine? In my opinion, this is a limiting practice that is akin to what was happening in Corinth after Apollos visited. And I think it has limited the growth of believers and fueled many personality cults in the modern Church.**

I just came back from spending a week with R. C. Sproul, the Presbyterian theologian. While I don't agree with everything he teaches, I enjoyed hearing him and learned a lot. Last year I spent some time at Bill Hybels' leadership conference (Willow Creek Association, famous for seeker-sensitive strategies), and also listening to Adrian Rogers, the Southern Baptist dispensational pastor (with whom I would agree with very little). Right now I am reading Walter Brueggeman, who would be a minimalist where Old Testament history is concerned (he believes that the lessons of the Bible are true, but that the history is not to be taken literally). I am enriched for listening to them all, and you would be too.

### **Day Five**

19:1 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples <sup>2</sup> and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." <sup>3</sup> So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. <sup>4</sup> Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."

vs. 1&2 – Paul now returned to Ephesus, as he had indicated he would do—if it was God's will. Now he came upon some disciples and asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit. I find it fascinating that Paul found these men (presumably) who had not received or heard of the Holy Spirit. Could God have orchestrated Paul's steps in such a way as to bring his premier apostle to the Gentiles to these men? I think it is entirely possible and quite a testimony to God's grace and care. He did not leave these men in their incomplete state, just as he didn't leave Apollos in his. Instead, God saw their hunger for Him and satisfied their hunger with the full truth of the gospel.

"Consider carefully what you hear," he continued. "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you — and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him" (Mark 4:24-25).

**I have to assume that these men had done the most with what they had heard and now God was giving them more. Have you been faithful with what you've heard? Are you walking out the truth that you know? If so, then be certain that God will give you more. The process for me has been that God gives me insight or teaches me a lesson; then I am faithful to pass it on to someone else; then God gives me more insight and understanding.**

v. 3 – Here is another example of those who had received John the Baptist's teaching and baptism and had from that bore witness to Jesus being the Christ. That is quite a testimony to John's ministry! John had been clear in his teaching that he was not the Christ, as some supposed. God had honored his witness and here were some disciples, probably 25 years later, who were still walking in the truth of John's teaching—incomplete as it was.

v. 4 – Paul explained that John's baptism was one of repentance, which meant that the people were to turn from their sins toward God. As they did, they would come face to face with Jesus. Repentance literally means to turn around and walk in another direction. While repentance unto salvation is a once-and-for all act, repentance is a way of life for the believer. As God reveals to us attitudes and behaviors that are sinful, we are to turn from those attitudes and acts and walk in the newness of the life we have in Christ. I have had to repent many times of things that were part of my old nature; those did not affect my salvation, but they did affect my holiness.

**Do you have need to repent of some behavior or attitude? Don't be proud and resist God's grace. Ask God to forgive you and then by His grace, walk in another direction. You never outgrow your need to repent.**

### Day Six

5 On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. 7 There were about twelve men in all. 8 Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.

v. 5 – These disciples were re-baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. This certainly shows the importance that Paul placed on baptism for believers. I will not enter into a discussion of baptism, re-baptism, infant baptism or the mode of baptism here. That is beyond the scope of this study. I personally believe that baptism is at the point of belief, which excludes infant baptism. The word "baptize" literally means to submerge, so I don't see sprinkling as the proper mode. But what is more important to me is that someone is turning to Christ, completely and totally, and that this believer express the

Lordship of Jesus in his or her life by submitting to this act. Whether baptism is symbolic or sacramental is beyond my understanding, although I believe it to be more of the former than latter. But smarter men than me can make convincing cases for many interpretations concerning baptism. I was baptized as a baby by my Catholic parents, and then immersed as a new believer at the age of 24. How about you?

vs. 6&7 – Now we see another pattern that has raised much controversy in the body of Christ. **Is the Holy Spirit given in this pattern today, or was this only for that era of the Church? Should believers speak in tongues today? Should we follow this pattern of faith, baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit? Again, these questions are beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to say that I am baptized in the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues. I personally believe that this is pattern that God wants us to follow. Do I have to speak in tongues? Do you? My answer is no. I don't have to; I get to speak in tongues. It is a gift and I need all the help I can get as I try to follow Jesus. Do I judge you if you don't? No. That is between you and God. Would I recommend it as a practice to you? Indeed I would and I believe that this is what Peter had in mind when he said:**

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39).

Note here that there were only 12 men with whom Paul came in contact. Yet I would imagine that they became part of the tremendous harvest that Paul had in this region and city. The church at Ephesus became quite a pillar in the early Church, as we see from Revelation 2:1-7.

v. 8 – Paul stayed on for three months, doing what he did every place else. I am sure that he was in the synagogue arguing and preaching that Jesus was the King of the new kingdom or government of God in the gospel. While Paul relied on the Spirit and miracles to get the job done, he still worked hard doing what he did. There are some who I believe rely too much on the Spirit to do the work, when it is a partnership. I go, I write or speak and the Spirit produces the results. But I still must do my part. **Are you doing your part to see God work through you? Or are you waiting for God to do what only you can do?**

### **Day Seven**

9 But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. 10 This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. 11 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

v. 9 – True to form, some of the Jews refused to believe and became abusive. And true to his form, Paul withdrew and had daily meetings in a lecture hall of a teacher who had a name that is related to the English word tyrant. How would you like to sit in that man's classes? At any rate, Paul would have had use of this hall only when Tyrannus' school was not in session, which means they had to meet in the heat of the day. That required some commitment on the part of the disciples. But Paul was determined to work with those who were open and not invest time in those who were closed:

“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces” (Matthew 7:6).

**Are you giving your pearls to swine or what is sacred to dogs?**

v. 10 – Is this an exaggeration? Did all in the province of Asia hear the Word in two years? I would think that Paul did not restrict himself to this schoolhouse, but also traveled throughout the province. Once again we see that Paul did not wait for God to open doors; he went forth to see what doors God would open and where they would be. **Are you being active enough in pursuing and fulfilling the will of God for your life? What more can you do in the power of the Spirit?**

vs. 11&12 – God preformed miracles through Paul to attract crowds and attention so that the gospel could be preached and confirmed.

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

I am making an effort when I minister to do so in such a way that people are not trusting in me, my words or my ideas. Rather I need to have them focus their faith on God and His Word and power. It is so easy to make yourself the focus when you are before a crowd. It's also easy to start to think that it's your cleverness or work that is getting the job done. As you can tell from what I have said, I believe that we must be active in doing the will of God. We cannot be passive and expect the gospel to spread. At the same time, we must always keep in mind that it isn't about us (or me) but about Him.

*Oh God, help me to be a good steward and servant of Your work. Lord, help me to do that, for I don't want me to be the focus, but You. Amen.*