

Acts 18

Critical issues in ministry

(How are we to think about issues like, vocational ministry, church state relationships, the great commission, spiritual gifts and roles, etc.?)

Introduction:

- In this chapter Paul's ministry draws our attention to a number of important issues.
 1. When is it proper to specialize in ministry – targeting one type of audience, devoting one's full time vocation to ministry, etc.
 2. What is the ultimate objective in ministry?
 3. How do our differing gifts define our roles?
- While this chapter is descriptive (not prescriptive) there are other passages that expound on the issues illustrated in Acts 18.

1. Focusing the effort.

¹ After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, ³ and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent-makers. ⁴ And he was **reasoning** in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to **persuade** Jews and Greeks.

- **Tent-making** - Paul's tent-making vocation reflected his spirit of selfless service.
 1. **I Cor.4:12** "and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;"
 2. **II Cor.11:7** "Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of god to you without charge?"
 3. **II Cor.12:17** "Certainly I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I?"
 4. **I Thess.2:9** "For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God."
 5. **II Thess.3:6-15** "⁶ Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we {kept} working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you; ⁹ not because we do not have the right {to this,} but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. ¹³ But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. ¹⁴ And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame. ¹⁵ And {yet} do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

- Paul uses his “self supporting” style as a part of demonstrating his authenticity. This may have implications for ministry today.
- **Vocational ministry** - The NT teaches that the church should support those who minister the Word.
 1. **I Tim.5:17-18** “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.’ And ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’”
 2. **I Cor.9:3-18** “³ My defense to those who examine me is this: ⁴ Do we not have a right to eat and drink? ⁵ Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? ⁶ Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? ⁷ Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? ⁸ I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses, “ *You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.*” God is not concerned about oxen, is He? ¹⁰ Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher {to thresh} in hope of sharing {the crops.} ¹¹ If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? ¹² If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. ¹³ Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the {food} of the temple, {and} those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar? ¹⁴ So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. ¹⁵ But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things that it may be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one. ¹⁶ For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. ¹⁷ For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.”
 - In this passage Paul supports the principle of vocational ministry by appealing to “rights” vs.1-7 “Mosaic Law” vs.8-9, and logic vs.10-11.
 - It is important to note the larger context, which makes the point that Paul freely gave up his rights to authenticate his motives.
- **Humility** - The NT is also clear on the attitude that those in vocational ministry should have toward financial gain.

I Pet.5:1-4 “¹ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as {your} fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to {the will of} God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*”

5 But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul {began} **devoting himself completely to the word**, solemnly **testifying** to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. 6 And when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood {be} upon your own heads! I am clean. From now on I shall go to the Gentiles." 7 And he departed from there and went to the house of a certain man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue. 8 And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized. 9 And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid {any longer}, but go on speaking and do not be silent; 10 for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." 11 And he settled {there} a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

- At this point Paul makes two changes – He starts ministering to Gentiles in private and he started ministering full time. Up until now he had been working as a tent maker during the week vs.3.
- The fact that God would reveal to Paul comforting promises of protection in the way He does is interesting. God trusts that the Christian community will be faithful in supporting Paul.
- **Preaching** - We note again that it is the speaking of the message that is vital. There is certainly a need and place for demonstrating love and compassion but it is the proclaiming of the Gospel that is at the heart of the mission. This is an important challenge for the church today in that there is a tendency to move away from an emphasis on preaching and toward a posture of community service.

2. Counting the cost.

12 But while **Gallio** was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, 13 saying, "This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." 14 But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; 15 but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters." 16 And he drove them away from the judgment seat. 17 And they all took hold of **Sosthenes**, the leader of the synagogue, and {began} beating him in front of the judgment seat. And Gallio was not concerned about any of these things.

- **Persecution** - Here we have examples of believers paying a price for their faith along with the Apostles. The Gospel did not bring "material or temporal blessing" for some.
- **Jewish hostility** - This report seems to make the point that it was the Jews who were behind the persecution, rather than the Romans. There are major attempts in modern scholarship to deny this fact. The motivation seems to come from present day concerns about anti-Semitism more than honest scholarship.
- Paul's ministry did not disrespect human government but it was offensive to the religious community.
- This raises the question of the role of the state in repressing ideas. How does this effect the debate today over: human origins, sexual ethics, abortion, moral absolutes, etc. See apptoteach.org (theology files #807, #808) for more detailed information on this subject.

3. Clarifying the objective.

18 And Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow. 19 And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and **reasoned** with the Jews. 20 And when they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, 21 but taking leave of them and saying, "I will return to you again if God wills," he set sail from Ephesus. 22 And when he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch. 23 And having spent some time {there,} he departed and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, **strengthening all the disciples**.

- **Vow** - The cutting of Paul's hair was a part of a Nazirite vow that probably had to do with Paul's safe travel. Paul was free from the law but could choose to obey the law or customs as he found them helpful.
- **The Great Commission** - Paul's concept of "the Great Commission" was not focused only on conversion to the faith but also on maturity in Christ. Eph.4:11-16
 "11 And He gave some {as} apostles, and some {as} prophets, and some {as} evangelists, and some {as} pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all {aspects} into Him, who is the head, {even} Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."
- **Ministry emphasis** - Paul's ministry of strengthening the believers (In Acts, all believers are called disciples.) is defined by the content of his letters. There were two types of activity in Paul's ministry.

<p><i>Sharing the Gospel</i></p> <p>Acts Introducing the faith "Baptizing"</p>	<p><i>Strengthening believers</i></p> <p>Epistles Instructing in the faith "teaching them all things"</p>
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- **Epistles** - The emphasis of Paul's letters. Note what is not emphasized.

<p><i>What Christ has done for us. (worship)</i></p> <p>Our position "in Christ" Our security "in Christ" Our power "in Christ"</p>	<p><i>What Christ wants to do through us. (serve)</i></p> <p>Our calling to holiness Our freedom to love one another Our influence in the world</p>
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- What should be the focus of the church's worship service (outreach to non believers or building up the believers)?
- Is coming to faith in Christ the objective of God's program or just the first step?
- See apptoteach.org (theology files #805, #806) for more detailed information on this subject.

4. Respecting the roles.

²⁴ Now a certain Jew named **Apollos**, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. ²⁵ This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; ²⁶ and he began to speak out 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. ²⁷ And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he helped greatly those who had believed through grace; ²⁸ for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ."

- Here we have an example of a believer who is ministering with powerful results but is not yet baptized in the name of Jesus. What does this imply for us today?
- **Apollos** - Apollos is mentioned in I Corinthians and illustrates the diversity of Gospel ministry within the body of Christ. (See theology notes #604 in apptoteach.org)
 1. **I Cor.1:11-12** "For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people. That there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this. That each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ.'"
 2. **I Cor.3:1-9** "¹ And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. ² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able {to receive it.} Indeed, even now you are not yet able, ³ for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? ⁴ For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not {mere} men? ⁵ What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave {opportunity} to each one. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. ⁷ So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. ⁸ Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."
 3. **I Cor.3:21-23** "So then let no one boast in men, for all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God."
- **Ministry gifts** – There are a variety of spiritual gifts or passions that are designed to complement each other in Gospel ministry(See theology notes #604 in apptoteach.org).
 1. **Joel 2:28-29** predicted the outpouring of the Spirit in the "age to come". This was fulfilled at Pentecost in Acts 2:17-20.
 2. **Rom.12:6-8** encourages believers to exercise their gifts in proportion to their faith with humility and after they have died to their own interests in response to God's grace.
 3. **I Cor.12-14** teaches us that the variety of gifts come from one Spirit, are given to people with differing abilities, and are to be used to edify the one and same body with due respect for each other. Love is to govern the use of gifts. Tongues without prophecy are a judgment not a sign of blessing. We should seek to use gifts that edify the church.

4. **Eph.4:11** tells us that certain gifts are to equip the rest of the body for ministry.
5. **I Pet.4:11** teaches us to use our gifts with confidence.