

Compelled by the Spirit (Acts 18:1-11)^a

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Context

1. **Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke on what will become known as Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey**
2. **Paul leaves the others in Berea and sails south to Athens**
3. **Preaches in the synagogue, in the marketplace—eventually taken to the Areopagus where he corrects the Athenian's misconceptions concerning the nature of God and man and preaches Jesus and the resurrection from the dead**
4. **In today's passage, Paul leaves Athens and travels about 50 miles west to Corinth where he heads for . . . guess where? The synagogue!**

Passage (Acts 18:1-11)

[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.¹

- A. The expulsion from Rome is mentioned in pagan literature and dated to A.D. 49.²
- B. Paul's statement, "From now on I will go to the Gentiles" only relates to his intentions at Corinth. Upon reaching Ephesus, he is back preaching in the synagogue once again (Acts 18:19).

Compelled by the Spirit

1. “Paul was compelled by the Spirit . . .” (Acts 18:5)

2. Textual variation

A. NU (6.1%³) : **συνείχετο τῷ λόγῳ** [*syneicheto tō logō*]

- I. “devoted to the word” (NASB)
- II. “absorbed with the word” (NET)
- III. “occupied with the message” (HCSB)

B. MT (93.9%⁴) : **συνείχετο τῷ πνεύματι** [*syneicheto tō pneumati*]

- I. “compelled by the Spirit” (NKJV)
- II. “pressed in the spirit” (KJV)

C. One-word different: *logos* (“word”) or *pneuma* (“spirit”)

- I. NU - a very few older manuscripts from the region of Egypt are “best” (NASB, HCSB, ESV, NIV, NET)
- II. MT - the majority witness from a wider geographic region is the most reliable witness (KJV, NKJV)
- III. NU generally assumes: older is obviously better
 - a. What if one region has less favorable environment for the preservation of ancient documents (e.g., higher humidity) — such that originals of older versions with a different reading weren’t preserved?
 - b. Practice of destroying the original (or exemplar)
 - c. Not the place or time to discuss how best to interpret the manuscript evidence

3. Word study of “compelled,” **συνείχετο** [*syneicheto*]

- A. “to experience great psychological pressure and anxiety”⁵
- B. Describes how fear seized the people of the region when they heard how Jesus cast out legion of demons into the swine which were drowned (Luke 8:37)
- C. Describes how the multitude thronged and pressed upon Jesus during his ministry (Luke 8:45)

D. Describes the distress of Jesus until His crucifixion and death was accomplished (Luke 12:50)

E. Describes how sick Peter's mother-in-law felt due to a high fever (Luke 4:38)

4. **Passive voice: describes the pressure/influence of an external agent upon Paul**

5. **Whether Paul's compulsion was by the Spirit or concerning the Word, the effect is similar because the Spirit testifies by God's Word**

6. **Related passages**

A. David's attempt to restrain his speech before the wicked

I. *I said, 'I will guard my ways, Lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, While the wicked are before me.' I was mute with silence, I held my peace [even] from good; And my sorrow was stirred up. My heart was hot within me; While I was musing, the fire burned. [Then] I spoke with my tongue: (Ps. 39:1-3)*

a. In his own initiative, David preferred to keep silent

b. Yet, he was unable to in the end

B. Jeremiah - bearing the message of God's judgment to the southern kingdom of Israel

I. *"To whom shall I speak and give warning, That they may hear? Indeed their ear [is] uncircumcised, And they cannot give heed. Behold, the word of the LORD is a reproach to them; They have no delight in it. Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD. I am weary of holding [it] in. I will pour it out on the children outside, And on the assembly of young men together; For even the husband shall be taken with the wife, The aged with [him who is] full of days. And their houses shall be turned over to others, Fields and wives together; For I will stretch out My hand Against the inhabitants of the land," says the LORD. (Jer. 6:10-12)*

a. Jeremiah was reproached by his listeners for speaking what the crowd did not want to hear

b. He grew weary of trying to restrain what God had laid on his heart to communicate

c. Political correctness is not listed among the fruit of the Spirit!

II. *{i For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, "Violence and plunder!" Because the word of the LORD was made to me A reproach and a derision daily. Then I said, "I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name." But [His word] was in my heart like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding [it] back, And I could not. (Jer. 20:8-9)*

- a. He grew weary of being opposed and derided — and decided to stop testifying God’s message
- b. Ultimately, like David, he was unable to hold back — he was compelled by the Spirit of God within him: “And I could not”

C. Paul, writing later to the church formed from this visit to Corinth

I. *For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. (1Cor. 9:16-17)*

- a. Paul was under “compulsion” (NASB) to preach the gospel
- b. If he were to resist, he would also be denying a stewardship with which God had entrusted him
- c. Paul had at least *two* motivations: 1) a compulsion to fulfill his calling; 2) a recognition of the responsibility God had placed on him

D. Are you called?

- I. As an evangelist? As a teacher or preacher?
- II. Then you will be *compelled* to speak God’s truth in the midst of a God-rejecting world
- III. Don’t make the mistake of evaluating your call by God based upon your willingness or eagerness
 - a. The question isn’t, “am I willing?” but “am I able to resist the unktion of the Spirit?”
 - b. Who would dare compare themselves to Moses? Yet Moses expressed reluctance to do what God had asked of him
 - i. . . . *Moses said to God, “Who [am] I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (Ex. 3:11)*
 - ii. Later, . . . *Moses said to the LORD, “O my Lord, I [am] not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I [am] slow of speech and slow of tongue.” So the LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? [Have] not I, the LORD? (Ex. 4:10-11)*
 - iii. If you are called by God, reluctance and excuses will not prevail
 - c. A preacher no less than Martyn Lloyd-Jones observed:

Indeed it seems to be the case that the greater the preacher the more hesitant he has generally been to preach. Oftentimes such

men have had to be persuaded by ministers and elders and others to do this; they so shrank from the dread responsibility.⁶

7. As one writer eloquently expressed it, those called of God “. . . did not have the message but the message had them!”⁷

Our responsibility in evangelism

1. Desire to see others saved, reconciled to God

A. Those who know God have been given a ministry of reconciliation

I. *Now all things [are] of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (2Cor. 5:18-19)*

II. Reconcile

a. To restore relationship between individuals

b. Implies a fractured relationship: to change from enmity to friendship

B. Like God, our desire is for every individual to come to know God (2Pe. 3:9)

C. As Paul expressed it in regard to his fellow Jews

I. *I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, . . . (Rom. 9:1-4)*

D. Family members - heartache

I. Yet, Jesus taught of separation between believers and unbelievers within the family

a. *“Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father [his] child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. (Mat. 10:21-22)*

b. In spite of our best intention and heartfelt desire, God says there will be situations where two individuals within the same family will wind up on different sides of God

c. When Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the temple, Simeon prophesied

i. . . . *Behold, this [Child] is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against* (Luke 2:34)

- The fall and rising in response to Jesus will divide on every level: rich and poor, young and old, male and female, parent and child
- He will be spoken against with the result that some rise to find a place in heaven, while others fall, bound for hell

II. Especially painful within marriage

- a. Your closest companion of decades and decades may not find heaven
- b. *For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save [your] husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save [your] wife?* (1Cor. 7:16)
- c. The closest relationship in this life may be unalterably torn asunder at death over the issue of “who is Jesus and what is my responsibility before Him?”

2. Individual accountability before God

- A. “Your blood be upon your own heads” (Acts 18:6)
- B. God’s desire to bless, yet man rejects that which is most beneficial
- C. At the resurrection of non-believers, each person will stand *alone* in judgment before God — answering for his or her culpability regardless of the actions of others
 - I. Every person who ever lived will rise, as an individual, in one of two resurrections (John 5:29; Acts 24:15)
 - a. The resurrection of life, for the just — leading to heaven
 - b. The resurrection of condemnation, for the unjust — leading to hell
- D. The individual aspect of our accountability before God is related in the fearful passage concerning the Great White Throne Judgment
 - I. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. (Revelation 20:11–13)
- E. In this judgment, none will answer for the actions of another

- F. This passage conveys a “sobering aloneness,” a judgment without appeal to any fraternity, organization, or human relationship.
- G. One of the most disturbing aspects of this scene for those who are saved: an inability to answer for or mitigate the wrath of God on behalf of another.
 - I. There is only One who can pay the cost of redemption: Jesus
 - II. [No one] can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him—for the redemption of their souls is costly (Ps. 49:7-8)
- H. The separation over Jesus at death is comprehensive, immutable, and final.
 - I. For those who wind up with family members on the wrong side of God . . .
 - I. . . . an ongoing and difficult burden while they remain alive
 - II. . . . a potential existential crisis at their death
 - III. Where can we turn with such angst?

3. A partial answer is found in the words of Paul in this passage: “I am clean”

- A. Paul explained this concept more completely when visiting with the elders of the Ephesian church—knowing he would not see them again in this life
 - I. *“And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I [am] innocent of the blood of all [men]. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20:25-27)*
- B. Paul had met his responsibility — communicating the truth as the opportunity presented itself
- C. They were culpable for their own rejection of the truth — not Paul
- D. Paul had upheld his responsibility as a Christian—as Peter described it
 - I. . . . *sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always [be] ready to [give] a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. (1Pe. 3:15-16)*
- E. We are called to give a testimony, a witness to the reality and goodness of God, by how we live and through what we say
- F. We cannot control how that testimony is received—in the wisdom and design of God we cannot answer for anyone else but ourselves.

G. We must learn to embrace this truth and find peace in it—any other stance puts us in the roll of trying to play God.

H. Our responsibility ends with the presentation of the truth

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Endnotes:

1. [Acts 18:1-11](#), NKJV
2. [Ref-0063](#), 70
3. [Ref-1499](#), 418n5
4. [Ref-1499](#), 418n5
5. [Ref-0436](#), 314
6. [Ref-1369](#), 107
7. [Ref-0197](#), 150

Sources:

- Acts 18:1-11** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0063** Tim Dowley, ed., *The History of Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).
- Ref-0197** Erich Sauer, *The Dawn Of World Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, c1964, 1951).
- Ref-0436** Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, c1989). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.). New York: United Bible societies.
- Ref-1369** Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers and Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971). ISBN:[0-310-27870-8](#)^d.
- Ref-1499** Wilbur Pickering, *The Greek New Testament: According to Family 35*, 2nd ed. (n.p.: Wilbur N. Pickering, 2015). ISBN:[978-0-989-82737-9](#)^e.

Links Mentioned Above

- a - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/62_Acts_18_1-11/index.htm.
- b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.
- d - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?0-310-27870-8>.
- e - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?978-0-989-82737-9>.