

## Strengthening the Disciples (Acts 18:23-28)<sup>a</sup>

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### Context

1. **End of 2nd missionary journey: through Galatia, Asia minor, Macedonia (modern-day Turkey and Greece)**

A. A.D. 49-51<sup>2</sup>

2. **Start of 3rd missionary journey**

A. A.D. 52-55<sup>4</sup>

### Passage (Acts 18:23-28)

**[23]** After he had spent some time [there], he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. **[24]** Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man [and] mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. **[25]** This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. **[26]** So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. **[27]** And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; **[28]** for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.<sup>5</sup>

### Third missionary journey fundamentally different than previous two

1. **Not primarily about evangelism**
2. **“After [Paul] had spent some time [in Antioch], he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples” (Acts 18:23).**
3. **Paul is retracing his path on the second journey to establish and build-up the young believers**
4. **Military analogy - “beachhead”**

“A beachhead is a temporary line created when a military unit reaches a landing beach by sea and begins to defend the area while other reinforcements help out until a unit large enough to begin advancing has arrived.”<sup>6</sup>

A. WW2 - reclaiming French territory held by Germany by landing on the beach via the sea

“Operation Neptune began on D-Day (6 June 1944) and ended on 30 June 1944. By this time, the Allies had established a firm foothold in Normandy.”

B. Advancement is of little value unless the newly captured ground is also *held*

C. Advancing the gospel—the purpose of God on Earth—requires more than evangelism

I. Make no mistake: evangelism is critically important — without evangelism there would be no disciples!

II. As important as it is to be saved and avoid the judgement of Hell, God is not just concerned about salvation — the NT places great emphasis upon Christian growth beyond coming to faith: sanctification

III. The church is out to “convert the world,” but *to what* and *for what purpose*?

## Discipleship

1. The greater portion of the NT concerns **discipleship**: the process of sanctification after coming to faith
2. The most quoted *evangelistic* mandate in the NT, the Great Commission, is also on about **discipleship**

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, [even] to the end of the age.” (Mat. [28:19-20](#)).

A. The Church is to make disciples (from [μαθητεύω](#) [*mathēteuō*])

I. Imperative command: “you all make disciples!”

II. We are to “make committed students,” “make followers” - not just “make believers” but go beyond

III. How is the Church to accomplish this?

B. Teaching

I. The Church is to be the business of “Teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you” — as Jesus puts it

a. Teaching is from [διδάσκω](#) [*didaskō*] from which we get the word “didactic” - “to instruct”, especially with a moral purpose in view

- b. Primary purpose for the teaching: “to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Mat. 28:19).
- i. As followers of Jesus, we are to “observe and obey”
  - ii. “Observe” is from **τηρέω** [*tēreō*] which emphasizes *guarding, keeping watch over* - not just “looking”, but “carefully doing/following”
  - iii. These this are not optional, they have been commanded by Jesus!
    - Commanded is from **ἐντέλλομαι** [*entellomai*], meaning the things Jesus has ordered or given instructions concerning
- c. How do we show love of God?
- i. Primarily through our devoted obedience!<sup>8</sup>
  - ii. How mundane!
  - iii. “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).
  - iv. “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him” (John 14:21).
  - v. “He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me” (John 14:24).
  - vi. “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:14).
  - vii. “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it” (2Jn. 6).
  - viii. How do disciples demonstrate a lack of love for Jesus?
    - “But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).
    - If we say we love Jesus, but live in a way which denies His commandments, then we are deceived, deceivers or both.

### 3. Two sides to the discipleship equation

A. Teachers: Paul, Acquila and Priscilla

B. Disciples: Apollos

C. Teachers must faithfully *teach*, disciples must faithfully *learn* and *obey*

D. If either side “drops the ball” then the Great Commission suffers

E. The is analogous to the passing of the baton during a relay race

I. It doesn't matter how fast you run if the baton gets dropped during the hand-off — the team is disqualified

II. The “baton” in this case, is preserving and observing the teachings of Jesus, and God's Word in general

- III. Preserving requires not only retaining and promulgating His teachings, but properly interpreting and understanding what He taught
- IV. Observing His teachings means we are not free to drift wherever the culture leads (e.g., gender confusion, sexual relationships, moral teachings)
- V. The devil is at work on both fronts: subverting the proper understanding of Scripture and perverting the proper way to live in order to please God

#### 4. Seven attributes of the Christian disciple-maker

##### A. #1 Motivated

- I. Apollos, “being fervent in spirit, . . . spoke and taught” (Acts [18:25](#))
- II. “Fervent” is from ζέω [zeō], from which we get the zoo prefix of zoology
  - a. Living, filled with life — not passive, not coasting
  - b. Motivated in his spirit
  - c. As some have observed, “you can’t push a wet noodle”
- III. As a teacher: I’m more reticent than ever to “lay out all the goods”
  - a. Most often, the teaching just falls on the floor
  - b. Make the disciple demonstrate their own hunger, else move elsewhere

##### B. #2 Teachable

Apollos eagerly learned from Aquila and Priscilla concerning “the way of God more accurately” (Acts [18:26](#))

- I. Humility - open to instruction by others
- II. Respect/reverence - for those who God has previously equipped
- III. Learning for the right reason - not to puff up, gain a following, but to properly handle the Word and to serve Christ
- IV. My experience is that this is a rare attribute in our time

##### C. #3 Faithful

“You therefore, my son [young Timothy], be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy [2:1-2](#)).

- I. The passing of the baton: the things Timothy heard from Paul, in turn, were to be committed to others
- II. Not to those who are eloquent, brilliant, charismatic, or those who are good at emotional manipulation
- III. Something much rarer: faithfulness!
- IV. Again: seemingly mundane! Reliable persons

#### D. #4 Trustworthy - an aspect of faithfulness

- I. Understands the value of what is being handled
- II. Christian teaching is extremely, extremely . . . did I mention extremely valuable?
- III. The things Paul taught were to be *committed* (παράθου [parathou], “entrusted to”)
- IV. Like the Loomis armored guards who transport valuables, those who handle it must be trustworthy
- V. Put the valuables into the wrong hands (an untrustworthy disciple with the wrong motives who becomes a Judas) and you are inadvertently equipping a monster to undermine the faith of the next generation<sup>9</sup>
- VI. Lord knows we don't need more foxes in our already overcrowded Christian henhouse!

#### E. #5 Accurate - an aspect of faithfulness

Apollos “spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord” (Acts [18:25](#))

- I. “Accurately” is from “ajkribw’s” — “implying care and adequateness”
- II. As Paul wrote to young Timothy
 

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth.” (2Ti. [2:15](#), HCSB)
- III. How many heresies and screwball ideas have been birthed through sloppy handling of God's Word?
- IV. Apollos was *adequate* to the task, he “had been instructed in the way of the Lord” (Acts [18:25](#))
- V. Accuracy is costly — it takes preparation, energy, discipline, and many hours pursuing God through His Word

VI. But what a great reward for those who persevere! Here God's assessment of Apollos through the pen of Luke: Apollos is said to be "mighty in the Scriptures"

VII. One wonders how many young men today seek to be "mighty in the Scriptures"?

#### F. #6 Contender

I. Someone who is willing to take some heat, to fight for truth

Apollos "greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts [18:27-28](#))

a. Equipping with truth: building up the body of Christ

b. Refuting error: those who deny the truth of Christianity

II. Teaching truth while immersed in a kingdom of darkness is not for lightweights

III. As Jesus' brother, Jude said

"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude [3](#))

a. "Contending earnestly" is from [ἐπαγωνίζομαι](#) [*epagōnizomai*] from which we get our word "agonize"

IV. This gets back to *motivation* — how can you fight for something if you aren't motivated?

#### G. #7 Perseveres to the end

I. Fulfills his or her ministry

II. Writing to the church at Colossi, Paul spoke of "the stewardship from God which was given to me for you" (Col. [1:25](#)).

a. He understood his gifting and calling and his responsibility to fulfill it

III. His advice to Archippus was, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it" (Col. [4:17](#)).

IV. He gave similar advice to Timothy

a. ". . . stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (1Ti. [1:6](#)).

- b. “. . . be watchful, in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2Ti. 4:5).

#### V. Paul, near the end of his life

“. . . the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2Ti. 4:6-7) .

#### VI. Jesus, near the end of His life

“I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4).

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## Spiritual replication

### 1. Seminary photos

A. All Christians

B. Two types of disciple makers

I. Examples which kept the faith, finished the race

II. Examples which went AWOL (absent with out leave)

a. Maybe from the faith, maybe not

b. Great promise, great gifting, but failed to fulfill their calling

### 2. Death “graduation” chart

A. The dwindling list of giants in our generation

B. God will raise up the next generation

C. Question: are you willing to be used?

D. If he bought us, what claim do we have on our lives?

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## Endnotes:

1. [Ref-130](#), 342-345
  2. 1
  3. [Ref-130](#), 342-345
  4. 3
  5. NKJV, Acts [18:23-28](#)
  6. [Wikipedia](#)<sup>d</sup>
  7. [Ref-0164](#), (26:2) Fall 2015, 65-177, p. 175
  8. "It speaks to the current modern society which seeks to alter, discount, or disregard God's Word when it speaks to moral or social issues that are contrary to current cultural trends. [Bryan Murphy, *The Unalterable Word*]"<sup>7</sup>
  9. Witness New Testament "scholar" [Bart Ehermen](#)<sup>e</sup>.
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## Sources:

- NKJV** 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-0164** Richard L. Mayhue, ed., *The Master's Seminary Journal* (Sun Valley, CA: Master's Seminary). [[www.mastersem.edu](http://www.mastersem.edu)].
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## Links Mentioned Above

- a - See [http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts\\_by\\_Tony\\_Garland/65\\_Acts\\_18\\_23-28/index.htm](http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/65_Acts_18_23-28/index.htm).
- b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org> <<http://www.spiritandtruth.org>>.
- d - See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beachhead>.
- e - See <https://www.bartdehrman.com>.