

**7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. 8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9 He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. 10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”**

## Grace Plus Nothing

This discussion that took place at the Jerusalem Council, was incredibly significant in defining a core belief of the Christian church. There were opposing perspectives on whether or not the Gentiles, who were coming to faith in Jesus, needed to be circumcised. Circumcision was an important rite of passage for the Jews to indicate that they were a holy people, set apart for God and it symbolised their covenant relationship with God.

Some of the Jews believed that unless the Gentiles were circumcised they weren't truly saved.

Peter reminded the Jewish believers of their own failed attempts to fulfill the very rigorous religious laws and how Jesus, through his death and resurrection, made it possible for them to finally be in right standing with God, once and for all. It is grace, and grace alone, that saves them – Jew and Gentile.

The minute someone tells you that salvation comes from grace PLUS something else, like any religious act, you can confidently and graciously decline the notion to have to work for your salvation or the love and acceptance of God. It's a beautiful gift available to all.

The next time you find yourself trying to 'please' God with your works, don't waste a second before throwing that yoke right off and thanking Jesus for the magnificent gift of grace.

**23** “After they were severely beaten, they were thrown into prison and the jailer was commanded to guard them securely. **24** So the jailer placed them in the innermost cell of the prison and had their feet bound and chained. **25** Paul and Silas, undaunted, prayed in the middle of the night and sang songs of praise to God, while all the other prisoners listened to their worship. **26** Suddenly, a great earthquake shook the foundations of the prison. All at once every prison door flung open and the chains of all the prisoners came loose.

## A Posture of Worship

This passage shows a beautiful picture of the power in prayer and worship.

Paul and Silas, severely beaten and locked up in prison sitting in darkness in the middle of the night, started to pray and sing praises to God. Instead of being discouraged by their circumstances, feeling hopeless and fearful they responded with faith, praying and worshipping. They chose to remain in a posture of worship, putting their trust in God. In this story three miracles unfold, showing that miracles can happen even in the darkest and most hopeless situations:

1. In the text it says that while they were singing the other prisoners were listening. They didn't just hear the sound of worship, but they listened to them worshipping and lifting the Name of Jesus.

Worship changes the atmosphere as it ushers in the presence of the Holy Spirit. When we worship in the presence of God we allow those around us to also experience His presence making a way for them to encounter Jesus.

2. As they were worshipping, in a ‘*sudden moment*’, there was a great earthquake and the chains of every prisoner fell off setting them all free. It is significant that, in that moment, just as Paul and Silas were set free so were the rest of the prisoners.

Worship unlocks the power of heaven causing circumstances to change suddenly. It has the power to break strongholds and can bring sudden breakthrough, not only in our own lives, but also in the lives of those around us.

3. The prison guard, thinking that all the prisoners had left, wanted to take his own life. When he realised that they were all still there, he responded by committing his life to Jesus and inviting his family to do the same. Worship releases the supernatural power of God causing miracles to manifest in the sight of all. It creates an opportunity for others to see the power of Jesus and by that compelling them to find salvation in Him.

In your life, what atmospheres need to be changed, ‘*sudden moments*’ need to be experienced and miracles need to manifest through your worship?

**24 “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.**

## The Gospel Spreads

This chapter shows an account of the various places the good news of Jesus was preached and taught by Paul and his companions. First was Thessalonica, then Berea and finally Athens. With every city, a different response was given to Paul’s message about the gospel. The Thessalonian population was both receptive and radically resistant, the Berean’s were eager and inquisitive, and the Athenian population was at first sceptical then they were slowly convinced.

The chapter speaks to us today by likening our response to the gospel with the response of the three cities. As in the city of Berea, many were saved because of their eagerness and willingness to learn. Would ‘eager’ and ‘willing’ describe the way you approach the word of God today?

In the last few verses of the chapter Paul is speaking to the people of Athens. Athenian culture was built heavily upon the worship of idols and it formed an integral part of their identity. Paul tries to show them that God is nothing like their man made idols who have no power. It’s God, and God alone who creates us, sustains us, loves us and saves us.

Today, consider whether you’ve allowed your trust to be placed in something man made. If so, the Holy Spirit wants to gently and lovingly redirect your trust to the one who is actually trustworthy.

**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. **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.

## Along for the Journey

In chapter 18 we read about Paul's time in Corinth. Upon his arrival Paul met husband and wife, Aquila and Priscilla. They were tentmakers as well and Paul lived and worked with them while he was in Corinth. He taught the Jews and Greeks who believed first, every Sabbath, in the synagogues. The message clear and consistent; Jesus is the Messiah.

Paul took Aquila and Priscilla with him on the journey to Ephesus. Paul then continued with his travels and left the husband and wife in Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla heard about a man who knew the scriptures very well, Apollo. He would preach with boldness and great passion. However, Priscilla and her husband learned that he had only experienced the baptism of John (water baptism). They invited Apollo to their home to teach him more about God, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. How great that they didn't embarrass him by correcting him publically, but invited him into their home and privately helped to correct his theology and walk a journey with him, the way Paul had with them.

There are so many 'take-aways' from Acts 18:

**1.** We should continue to speak, teach, and preach the message of Jesus, we shouldn't be silent. (Acts 18:9)

**2.** God is always with us; He is our greatest comforter (Acts 18:10, John 14:26).

**3.** God honors and dignifies women (Priscilla was not only a wife, but a minister and teacher of the word)

**4.** Paul always took people along the journey and equipped them to spread the message of Jesus (Timothy and Silas in Macedonia, Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollo in Ephesus.) [Acts 18:18-19, Acts 18:23].

**5.** The Holy Spirit and the word of God are not mutually exclusive. We need the scripture and the Spirit.

**19** While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples **2** and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when[a] you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” **3** So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?” “John’s baptism,” they replied. **4** 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.” **5** On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

## The Believers Authority

In this chapter, Paul has travelled from Corinth to Ephesus. He then came across a few people that were already believers and had been water baptised but not Holy Spirit baptised. Paul, without hesitation took the opportunity to lay hands on them and pray that Holy Spirit would come upon them. Indeed, this happened, and the men prophesied and spoke in tongues.

Paul exercised his God-given authority. He seized every opportunity to speak of Jesus, to lay hands on them, boldly and without hesitation. Even when the people rejected the message, he continued, and for those who believed in Jesus and the message, Paul took them along the journey. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul performed miracle after miracle. Any material that Paul touched was placed on people and they were healed, because he was filled with Holy Spirit.

The last part of chapter is so good. Acts 19:13-21 speaks of how there were of group of people who tried to mimic the acts of Paul and using the name of Jesus, without the Holy Spirit. They tried to drive out a demon, but the demon did not recognize them. Evil spirits know if it is Jesus or not. The response of the people was incredible as well. After seeing this, it says that they feared the name of the Lord, which means they honored and revered it even more!

Acts 19 teaches us:

- 1.** We all have access to the Holy Spirit.
- 2.** We have the authority to baptise people in the Holy Spirit
- 3.** We cannot perform any Miracles without the Holy Spirit
- 4.** Nothing compares to the Power that is in the Name of Jesus
- 5.** Gather to scatter; once Paul had preached and taught the believers, he moved on to another part of the world.

**22** And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, **23** except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. **24** But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

## Come What May

When we are faced with uncertainty, we have two choices. Go back to what we are used to and what is safe, or we can face the unknown and move forward step by step, in faith. Paul faced this decision constantly. The book of Acts depicts his journey throughout Greece and Asia Minor, with every step inching him closer to the moment of his imprisonment. Yet he persisted, he continued to proclaim the good news and continued to pioneer the church in the heart of the Gentile countries. Acts 20 shows how Paul was unmoved by uncertainty, that he was willing to lay down his life for the gospel. He was not daunted with what lay ahead because his faith was founded in his love for God.

When we build our lives around Jesus, no amount of uncertainty can stop us from pursuing God's purpose for our lives. When our lives are built on the foundations of the gospel, we can face any challenge, with courage and perseverance. What was it about Paul that made him so relentless? It was none other, than a personal and powerful encounter with Jesus himself. When we intimately encounter Jesus, he commissions us with an irresistible calling.

What would you do today if you were not afraid of the unknown?

**10** After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. **11** Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'" **12** When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. **13** Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." **14** When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done. "

## Obedience Over Comfort

In Acts 21 we see Paul and his companions taking a journey to Jerusalem after having left Ephesus, which was not an easy parting for Paul as he had poured out his life and love into the leaders there. This shows us that the call to Jerusalem was out of Paul's comfort but yet he chose to follow the conviction of the Holy Spirit as a part of God's will.

On the way, Paul had been receiving multiple warnings not to go up to Jerusalem, for the danger that awaited Paul in Jerusalem. Now in the highlighted verses above we get to see Paul's insistence on going to Jerusalem despite the predicted danger that the Holy Spirit was revealing as a prophecy to people around him. Paul wasn't trying to rebel against the given predictions but rather he was being obedient to the command of the Holy Spirit in his heart. The warnings from the Holy Spirit were intended to prepare Paul, not stop him!

It can be easy to misinterpret what the Holy Spirit is saying to us and as a result we choose to stay in the luxury of our own comfort but Paul didn't do that. Like Jesus, Paul made or received three successive predictions of his coming suffering in Jerusalem and yet still chose to be obedient. Suffering doesn't necessarily mean you're on the wrong path.

Our journey to outworking the will of God isn't always the easiest and on a day to day basis we may find reasons that would make us choose comfort over obedience, but today dare to align yourself with His will and watch as your story lives beyond you.