

ACTS
A Halfway Christian
Acts 18:18-28

The title of this message, “The Halfway Christian,” probably is causing the blood to boil in some of you who are more theologically oriented. You are probably saying, “Anyone knows that there is no such creature as a halfway Christian. One is either a full Christian or no Christian at all.” That is a true statement if we are looking at salvation, for a person is either called or not, regenerated or not, justified or not and redeemed or not. However, a person can be called, regenerated, redeemed and justified and be ignorant of much of Christianity simply because in the sanctification process that person has not been exposed to truth. A true Christian cannot be half saved but he can be half sanctified. Due to lack of understanding, a Christian can be living a half ignorant life or a half vital life or a half fulfilled life. It is in this sense that we speak of a halfway Christian.

Apollos is a perfect example of a halfway Christian. He was truly saved but very ignorant of certain truths. He was brilliant but uneducated as to the full meaning of Christ. He was an Old Testament saint who accepted Messiah as taught by John the Baptist but knew nothing of Christ's life, death and resurrection as actually happening. He was saved but uninformed, regenerated but lacking in understanding. He was a Christian but only halfway in that he lacked knowledge about Christ and His work.

Before we can get on with Apollos, we must very briefly look at the last phase of the Apostle Paul's second missionary journey. Let's hold Apollos on the back burner until we make a few interesting observations about Paul's second missionary journey.

THE LAST PHASE OF THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY - Acts 18:18-22

Paul in Cenchrea (18:18)

“And Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him was Priscilla and Acquilla.” -- Paul remained in Corinth for eighteen months teaching and preaching the Word of God. Apparently, Paul left Corinth with a firm determination to reach Jerusalem in time for the Passover Feast which was soon to take place there. Paul took Priscilla and Acquilla with him as far as Ephesus where they stayed and he went on to Jerusalem.

“In Cenchrea, he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.” -- Cenchrea was one of the seaports for Corinth, and while in this place Paul either cut his hair after keeping a vow or he made a vow (by shaving his head) and would keep it until his hair grew back. Whatever, we know that Paul made some kind of religious vow. This vow was made for a certain length of time, probably thirty days, although Jews made some vows for a lifetime. During the time of the vow, there were certain restrictions and disciplines to perform. Christian scholars have violently disagreed on the whole issue of vow taking. Some think that a Christian should never take a vow of any kind at any time, basing their reasoning on James 5:12 which says, “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment.” This verse seems to speak of vows initiated by Christians to other people. This must be put in its historical context. Often Jews took oaths very lightly and superficially, for they would swear in the name of “heaven” and of “earth” in order to avoid using God's name because they felt only vows taken with the title of deity were binding. Therefore, the Jews thought they could break these oaths since God's name was not mentioned. Oaths among Jews were taken for almost any reason but carried no real weight. Oaths were made to men and God so cheaply with no real intention of keeping them. James 5:12 and Matthew 5:33-37 probably refer to making oaths to men and not to God. For a true Christian, an oath is not necessary when dealing with men since he should be totally honest, for he does not need to depend on oaths to verify his word. He needs only to give a simple yes or no. Still other scholars think it was permissible for Jewish Christians to take vows in the New Testament period until the destruction of Jerusalem

when the ceremonial law was done away with in practice. Therefore, vow taking is no longer valid today. Still others, and I am among them, feel that it is right to make vows to God. In Acts 18:18, Paul took a vow before God. A vow is a promise to God and an oath before God, regarding Him as witness and judge. A vow goes beyond ordinary Christian obedience and is to be reserved for some extraordinary occasion whereby certain self-imposed duties go beyond the normal requirements for Christian living. A vow may be one of thanksgiving or penitence. Perhaps a person vows to do something for God out of deep appreciation for God's grace such as in the case of Jacob.

“Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house; and of all that Thou dost give me I will surely give a tenth to Thee’” (Gen. 28:20-22).

Hannah vowed to dedicate her son to God if He would give her a son.

“And she made a vow and said, ‘O LORD of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thy maidservant and remember me, and not forget Thy maidservant, but wilt give Thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head’” (1 Sam. 1:11).

Still other oaths may be made after some fall into sin whereby a person promises God never to do something again. Still another vow might be someone promising to serve God if He would raise him from the sick bed. “I shall come into Thy house with burnt offerings; I shall pay Thee my vows, Which my lips uttered And my mouth spoke when I was in distress (trouble)” (Psa. 66:13, 14). Vows to God are legitimate but they must be kept.

“If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth” (Num. 30:2).

“When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay” (Eccl. 5:4, 5).

Oaths are never to be frivolous. How many people jokingly and half seriously say, “I swear on a stack of Bibles,” or “I swear to God it is true,” or “Honest to God.” Taking an oath of any kind is a solemn thing and God's name should never be used in a frivolous manner.

Vows should never be broken. Is there ever a time a vow could be broken? Yes, if the vow was made in ignorance of all the facts or if the vow will ultimately cause one to do something unlawful, unscriptural or sinful. For instance, Martin Luther vowed before God to stay single as a Roman Catholic monk, but later realized his vow was taken in sincerity but was not grounded in Scripture, so he broke his vow.

If you make an oath, there is great blessing if you keep it, but great misery if you break it. Think twice before you make a vow to God!

Paul in Ephesus (18:19-21)

“And he came to Ephesus, and he left them there.” -- A few years before, Paul had tried to go into Asia Minor and probably Ephesus in particular, but God would not let him go. But now was the Lord's timing to open up Ephesus to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Paul arrived at Ephesus, he left Acquilla and Priscilla there and went on to Jerusalem.

Ephesus was a magnificent city. It was famous for the Temple of Diana which was reckoned as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Pliny called Ephesus the ornament of Asia.

“Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.” -- As was his consistent plan of evangelism, Paul went to the synagogue first to reach Jews and Jewish proselytes who were Gentiles converted to Judaism. We know from secular history there was a large Jewish population in Ephesus.

“And when they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, but taking leave of them and saying, ‘I will return to you again if God wills,’ he set sail from Ephesus.” -- Apparently, the gospel was well received by many of the Jews at Ephesus, for they wanted Paul to stay. However, Paul left, which tells us that sometimes God leads His servants to leave what seems to be a successful ministry. The KJV says, “I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem,” which makes it clear Paul wanted to be in Jerusalem for the Passover Feast.

Notice Paul's consciousness of God's providential leading in his life. He did not say, “I will return to you.” He said, “I will return if God wills.” Paul clearly understood that his whole life was under the control of a sovereign God and he could not move one step without His leading. We don't know what the future holds but we know God who holds the future. Therefore, we can say, “If God wills.”

“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that’” (James 4:13-15).

Paul in Jerusalem (18:22a)

“And when he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church.” -- Caesarea was one of the seaports in Palestine close to Jerusalem. We assume Paul went to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. Why did he go to Jerusalem? 1) He may have desired to complete his vow in Jerusalem which was Jewish custom; 2) He wanted to attend the Passover which was part of his Jewish culture but he put a Christian emphasis to it; 3) He wanted to be with his Christian brethren in Jerusalem, and 4) He wanted another chance to convince the legalistic Christian brethren in Jerusalem that he was preaching the same gospel to Gentiles and Jews.

Paul did not stay long in Jerusalem. This has caused some to think that he was given a cold shoulder by the legalistic Christians there, but we cannot be sure this was so.

Paul in Antioch (18:22b)

“And went down to Antioch.” -- Paul, after being away for two or three years, went back to his home church, the church at Antioch, which originally commissioned and sent him out to be a missionary to the Gentiles. When Paul arrived at Antioch, this was the official end of his second missionary journey. There must have been a tremendous sharing time in the church at Antioch as Paul told of what Christ had done through him in reaching the Gentiles.

THE FIRST PHASE OF THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY - Acts 18:23-28

Paul in Galatia (18:23)

“And having spent some time there, he departed and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples.” - Paul stayed in Antioch only a short while and then left on his third missionary journey alone at about the age of fifty. He felt led of the Lord to go back through Galatia and visit the churches there, probably because there was much Jewish legalism and perversion of the gospel in Galatia.

How did Paul strengthen these Christians? By teaching them the Bible, by encouraging them to live a life of faith and by exhorting them on to deeper commitment and holiness of life. We are strengthened through the Word. “Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth” (Jn. 17:17). Knowledge of the Word and obedience to the Word makes strong Christians. This is why men and women, boy and girls, must be saturated in the Bible, for without the Bible there can be no real growth in Christianity.

Paul believed in follow-up. He did not leave his new converts in a vacuum. Through instruction, exhortation and correction, Paul desired to see every Christian strong in the Faith, living godly lives and able to carry on an effective ministry for Christ.

Apollos at Ephesus (18:24-28)

Dr. Luke takes a diversion from Paul's ministry to give us a little insight into a unique man, Apollos. Apollos was an Old Testament believer, converted under the preaching of John the Baptist. Yet, he was uninformed about the fact that Messiah had come, died for sinners and rose from the dead. We must remember that the Book of Acts is a transition book from the Old Testament dispensation to the New Testament dispensation. What happened to Apollos could not happen today because we are not in that transition period. Apollos is what we might call a halfway Christian. He had committed himself to the Messiah by faith but was ignorant of the fact that He had come. My personal conviction is that Apollos was a saved man because he had believed in the Messiah to come but he lacked information about the Messiah who lived, died and was resurrected.

A Jewish Man (18:24a)

“Now a certain Jew named Apollos, . . .” -- Apollos was a Jew by birth but lived in Alexandria, a Gentile city. We know there were large numbers of Jews in this city. We will find out that Apollos was a Jew who believed in Messiah to come and had deeply committed himself to the Messiah by faith. He was part of the Jewish remnant which John the Baptist called out to wait for Messiah.

A Brilliant Man (18:24b)

“An Alexandrian by birth, . . .” -- Apollos was from Alexandria in Egypt (North Africa) which was the greatest city apart from Rome in that day. Alexandria, founded by Alexander the Great, was one of the great centers of Greek culture. A large university was there and it had one of the finest libraries in the world, consisting of over one half million volumes. It was the greatest source of learning in the ancient world. This library was destroyed and all this learning was lost to the world.

Alexandria produced some of the finest men of history. Philo the profound philosopher mingled Jewish religion and Greek philosophy. Euclid, who developed the principles of plain geometry, and Archimedes, who performed his experiments with water and gave us specific knowledge about gravity, and Aristhosthenes, who discovered the formula by which the size of the earth was determined, these men all came from Alexandria. The Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, was made in Alexandria. In later years the hub of Christianity moved from Jerusalem and Antioch to Alexandria. It was from Alexandria that famous Christians such as Athanasius, Tertullian and Augustine came. This was a city where learned men lived, and Apollos was from that society, and he himself was undoubtedly one of these brilliant, educated men.

An Eloquent Man (18:24c)

“An eloquent man, came to Ephesus; . . .” -- Apollos was a golden-voiced orator, a Jewish Demosthenes or Cicero. The word “eloquent” also can mean “learned,” and this indicates that Apollos was a learned man of rhetoric and declamation. Apollos was the kind of speaker who was so smooth that a person may not agree with what is said but listens anyway because of the flow of speech.

A Scriptural Man (18:24d)

“And he was mighty in the Scriptures.” -- Apollos was well-versed in the Old Testament. What he knew he preached with power, but he did not know very much about Christ. He could only go as far as he himself understood, for no preacher can lift his congregation above his own spiritual experience.

A Zealous Man (18:25a)

“This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, . . .” -- The “way of the Lord” is a phrase used in both the Old Testament and New Testament and refers to the first coming of Messiah. It is a phrase of Messianic expectation (Isa. 40:3; Matt. 3:3). Apollos was a believing Jew who was faithfully waiting for Christ to come, even though Christ had already come twenty years before. Apollos felt what he preached and

taught, and he was able to persuade men. He was fervent in spirit.

An Uninformed Man (18:25b)

“He was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John.” -- Apollos was a true disciple of John the Baptist whose ministry was to prepare the elect remnant in Israel for the first coming of Messiah. John preached the message of an expectant Messiah.

“Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying, ‘THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!’” (Matt. 3:1-3).

Whether Apollos was in Jerusalem at the time of John the Baptist and left before Christ arrived on the scene of history, or whether someone who knew of John's ministry told Apollos of it, we know that Apollos had repented, believed in the Messiah, was anxiously waiting His coming, and was telling people about the Messiah. Apollos knew the prophecies of Christ but he did not know the fulfillment of these prophecies in Christ. He knew nothing of a historical Jesus who died and was resurrected.

Apollos was saved but ignorant. He was sincere but uninformed. He was a halfway Christian, limited because of lack of knowledge. Apollos confirms the saying that it is impossible to live by truth we do not know.

A Bold Man (18:26a)

“And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue.” -- When Apollos came to Ephesus, he spoke boldly to the Jews about the Messiah who was yet to come, explaining to them the ministry of John the Baptist.

A Teachable Man (18:26b)

“But when Priscilla and Aquilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more perfectly.” -- Apparently, Priscilla and Aquilla, converts of the Apostle Paul, were either attending the synagogue for worship or heard of this man Apollos preaching in the synagogue and went to hear him. What gracious people Priscilla and Aquilla were. When they heard Apollos preach, they did not mock him because he was twenty years out of date. They did not punch each other with the elbows because Apollos was ignorant. They did not carp and criticize or pass notes, telling how stupid he was. No, they were deeply moved by the zeal of this man who really lacked knowledge. They were kind, gracious and understanding. They probably had Apollos over for lunch or dinner and talked with him about how Christ had lived, died and was resurrected.

Aquilla and Priscilla were probably not more than eighteen months old in the Lord, but they were instructing the mighty Apollos. They were just laymen but they knew enough to instruct Apollos in the fulfilled prophecies about Christ. Some scholars feel that Priscilla did most of the instruction of Apollos because her name comes first, but this is pure conjecture, and it does not seem to be too Biblical to have a woman taking the lead in the instruction of a man. No doubt Priscilla had a real impact upon Apollos, but Aquilla was no spiritual dunce. Thank God for an Aquilla and Priscilla who with loving patience dealt with Apollos who desperately needed instruction. Once Apollos received the truth he immediately accepted it, indicating that he was a true believer.

We commend Priscilla and Aquilla, but we commend Apollos even more, for he was willing to humble himself and take instruction from these two laymen who were tent-makers by trade. The mark of a “big” man is that he is always teachable.

Women throughout the history of the church have been greatly used by God in evangelism and teaching. For instance, Abraham Kuyper was greatly influenced by a woman. Kuyper was one of the great preachers of all ages in the Netherlands and later on became the prime minister. One day after he had preached, as the congregation was leaving the church, they shook his hand and thanked him for his message. A woman in the church came by but did

not offer her hand. Kuyper said, "Don't you want to shake my hand?" She said, "No." "Why not?" "Well," said the woman, "you did not tell them the truth!" That really shook Kuyper. Later, he went to see her and it turned out that he really was not a Christian. This woman led him to Christ. Then he went on to become one of the greatest theologians and preachers of all time.

A Helpful Man (18:27)

"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: . . ." -- Apollos apparently felt led to go to Corinth in the province of Achaia in the country of Greece. We are not told why he wanted to leave, but he probably felt he needed time to digest all he had learned about Christ, and perhaps he wanted to go to a congregation which had been founded and instructed by the Apostle Paul. Notice that these Christians in Ephesus wrote a letter of commendation to the church in Corinth so Apollos would be accepted as a Christian in full standing. When Apollos arrived in Corinth, "And it came about that while Apollos was at Corinth, . . ." (Acts 19:1a), he helped greatly those Christians in Corinth who had been saved by God's grace. The grace here may refer to God helping Apollos, and could be translated, "He helped greatly through grace those who had believed." However, this is not the natural reading from the Greek text. It seems to indicate that salvation is all of grace, and even man's faith is due to God's sovereign grace.

We know that Apollos went to Corinth and had a great ministry among the Christians there. He helped, encouraged and strengthened them. In The First Epistle to the Corinthians, there are three mentions of Apollos and two of them concern a division that arose in the congregation about who they should follow--Paul, Apollos or Peter. "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.'" (I Cor. 1:12). With all of Apollos' brains, speaking ability and gifts of exhortation and preaching, it is no wonder he became very popular in the church at Corinth, but the church could not handle that situation, and they became followers of men. Paul said they were carnal or fleshly for being men followers.

"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. 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, 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?" (I Cor. 3:1-3).

Some of the Corinthians liked Paul the teacher, who could think logically and theologically, keeping the church in truth and free from error. Others preferred Apollos, the golden-tongued orator, who lifted the heart towards God in great praise. Still others liked Peter, the practical man, who knew how to motivate people to work for the Lord. These Corinthians were wrong in following men and not recognizing a multiplicity of gifted ministers to the church to direct them to the Living Christ.

"What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Cor. 3:5-8).

A Powerful Man (18:28)

"For he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ." -- When Apollos came to a full understanding of the person and work of Christ, he became a powerful evangelist for Christ Jesus. His problem was ignorance, but once he had knowledge he became very effective in winning men to Christ. Apparently, Apollos was a great defender of the Faith and was the leader of the Corinthian Christian Evidence Society. He who was a halfway Christian, operating on half-truth and half-power, became a dynamo for Christ when He understood fully about the historical Jesus, who lived, died for sinners and was raised from the dead, sending His Holy Spirit to give power to live the Christian life.

It should be noted that Apollos had many natural gifts of speaking and teaching, and after he came into full truth

about Christ, God used these natural abilities, coupled with the spiritual gifts of preaching and exhortation, to make him one of the great preachers in the first century.

CONCLUSION

Apollos was a halfway Christian because he was ignorant, but he had some spiritual evidences that he was a true believer in Christ. Yet, there are multitudes of church-goers who have far more intellectual knowledge about Christ than did Apollos but they are not saved. Sometimes it is very hard to grasp whether a person is a poorly taught believer or a well-taught unbeliever. What makes the difference? A poorly taught believer has made a commitment of his life to Christ, acknowledging Him as Lord and Savior. A well-taught unbeliever knows all about Christ but has never made a personal commitment to Him as Lord and Savior.

Where are you? If you are a poorly taught believer, repent of your ignorance and slothfulness and begin to read in, meditate on and study the Word of God. If you are a well-taught unbeliever, repent of your indifference to Christ and bow your will to Him as Lord and accept Him as Savior for your sins. Remember, a poorly taught believer will go to Heaven, losing many rewards. Yet, a well-instructed unbeliever will go to hell, losing his soul for all eternity. If you die as a well-instructed unbeliever, you will stand at the door of hell and give all the right answers concerning Christ, but Christ will not let you out of that place of torment because you never humbled yourself and accepted Him as Lord, giving Him the right to rule in your life, or received Him as your Savior in this earthly lifespan.

Do not procrastinate! Don't presume on God's mercy! Commit your life to Christ Jesus today! There may be no tomorrow!