

## **Apollos: A Mighty Minister of Christ**

Acts 18:24-28; 1 Corinthians 2:1

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In our text today, we are introduced to a dynamic preacher by the name of Apollos. As we learned in the previous sermon, the time in which the apostles ministered was in some sense a transitional period of time, in which required obedience to the ceremonies of the Old Testament was abolished, and yet those ceremonies were used by the apostles to reach Jews with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not only were ceremonies caught in that transitional period of the apostles, but also people were caught in that transition period. Apollos was one of those people that was in transition and yet shines forth from the pages of Scripture as a mighty minister of Jesus Christ. We know so much about Paul from Acts and the inspired letters he wrote in the New Testament, but what about Apollos? What do you know about this hero of the faith?

Paul and Apollos were two different ministers of Jesus Christ mightily used by the Lord. Paul planted and established churches. Apollos watered the seed that had been planted and strengthened the faith of Christians in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was plain in his speech. Apollos was eloquent in his speech. Paul was the great teacher of Christian truth. Apollos was a great student and willing learner of Christian truth. Both were faithful ministers. Both were able ministers. Both were humble, Christ-centered ministers who despised divisions within the Church of Jesus Christ—divisions over who was greater—I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos. Let us consider how the Lord used Apollos to bless His Church. The main points from our text are the following: (1) Apollos Is Prepared and Equipped for the Gospel Ministry (Acts 18:24-26); (2) Apollos Ministers to Others with the Help of Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:27-28).

### **I. Apollos Is Prepared and Equipped for the Gospel Ministry (Acts 18:24-26).**

A. In previous verses of Acts 18, we saw that Paul had left Corinth where he had ministered at least 1 ½ years. Paul left with his dear Christian friends, Aquila and Priscilla, and cut his hair in the seaport of Cenchrea, fulfilling a Nazarite vow as a means of reaching Jews with the gospel (not as a divine obligation to which he was bound). Paul sailed east across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus, where he preached to Jews in the synagogue, and received a hearty welcome to continue his ministry there. He said he would return (if God willed it) and sailed for Jerusalem to be present for the feast of Passover or Pentecost where thousands of Jews assembled to whom he could preach the gospel. Paul then journeyed north to Antioch in Syria to report to the Church there that had commissioned him. He was not there long before he was off again for a third missionary journey, revisiting and strengthening Christians in the Churches of Galatia and Phrygia (Acts 18:23).

B. Luke takes our attention briefly away from Paul's ministry in order to introduce us to one of the bright stars in the constellation of Christ's ministry in the first century: Apollos. What do we learn here and elsewhere about this mighty minister of Jesus Christ?

1. **Apollos was a Jewish Christian from Alexandria, Egypt (Acts 18:24).** Alexandria had one of the largest libraries of the ancient world. Apollos came, therefore, from an intellectual center, which likely contributed to his training and rhetorical skills. It was also in Alexandria that the Old Testament translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek was accomplished between 300-200 B.C. (Septuagint=70 Jewish scholars) and was the version of the Bible used in synagogues outside Israel and used by early Christian Churches (Paul regularly cites Old Testament passages in his letters from the Greek Septuagint). Apollos (like Paul) was an educated man (unlike Peter and most of the other apostles, who spent three years in the seminary of Jesus Christ). College and seminary degrees do not necessarily qualify a man to be a minister if he is not taught

sound doctrine, pure worship, and faithful church government. When faithful seminaries have been few and far between, young men who preferred a faithful education over an academic degree have resorted to faithful ministers who have supervised their training (as an apprentice).

2. **Apollos is described as being “an eloquent man” (Acts 18:24).**

a. Eloquent refers to both his great learning as well as his refined oratorical skills in communicating his knowledge. He had the ability to keep listeners on the edge of their seats. Here was a man that was truly gifted by the Lord. There are and have been faithful preachers of the gospel who have similar gifts (and praise God for them), but there also those whom God has not so gifted and yet they are as called by the Lord to be His faithful ministers as those who are eloquent. It is not the eloquence in speech or the particular style used in preaching that should determine a man’s qualification to be a minister. He must be able to faithfully teach and preach God’s Word to the edification of God’s people—eloquence is not a qualification—it is a gift from the Lord. However, faithfulness is a qualification.

b. Moses makes clear he was not eloquent in speech (Exodus 4:10-12). Paul was also not eloquent, but was plain in comparison to Apollos (2 Corinthians 10:10—“contemptible” means “of no account or despised”; 2 Corinthians 11:6—“rude” means “unlearned” in rhetorical skills, probably in comparison to Apollos). Paul confesses to the Corinthian Church that he did not come to them with excellency of speech, but in the power of God’s Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:1,4). It is more likely that a lack of eloquence leads a minister to see himself entirely dependent upon the Lord for every word that comes from his mouth.

c. Here were two different ministers of Christ with different gifts and ministries, and yet there was no rivalry or competitive spirit between them; for they both realized to each was given their gifts to God’s glory and for the edification of God’s people (1 Corinthians 3:6). It was not Paul and Apollos who were promoting the divisions in the Church of Corinth over their respective ministries. It was immature Christians who allowed their preferences in style and presentation to bring dissension among them. Paul says such behavior is carnal (it proceeds from the flesh) rather than spiritual (proceeding from the Spirit) in 1 Corinthians 3:1. What is encouraging to see here is that neither Paul nor Apollos added fuel to the fire by encouraging this kind of sinful rivalry among faithful ministers—1 Corinthians 3:6; 1 Corinthians 16:12 (perhaps the unwillingness of Apollos to go to Corinth was due to these divisions).

d. Dear ones, comparing ourselves with one another by way of gifts and abilities in the kingdom of God is not profitable (2 Corinthians 10:12). It only produces either pride or jealousy. Rather we should rejoice in the gifts and graces of others, and compare ourselves to Jesus Christ before whom we all fall short and through whom we all receive grace upon grace to be used for His glory. God’s gifts to us are no reason for boasting in them or being ashamed of them, but we can and should challenge ourselves to use the gifts God has given to each of us (not hiding them, not despising them, not glorying and boasting in them—the Parable of the Talents). Our gifts only become evident in our wholehearted service to Christ, not as we sit around wondering what gifts God has given to us. If we spent more time in being concerned about exercising ourselves to godliness than we do in being concerned about gaining the approval of others through our gifts, we would use our energies in a far more profitable way. God wills that we be one in doctrine, worship, government, and discipline (“one faith, one baptism, Ephesians 4:5), and yet He wills that we be diverse in the gifts that He has given to each of us to use to advance His Kingdom (1 Corinthians 12:11).

3. **Apollos was “mighty in the scriptures” (Acts 18:24).**

a. He was *dunatos* in the Old Testament Scriptures (dynamite, dynamic). His might in preaching did not come from his eloquence in speech or from his educational background. His was a might that came from the power of God’s Word when it is preached with conviction and faithfulness. When the Word of God is so preached, it is clear that it is not the word of man, but is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. The hearers understand they are not merely listening to a preacher, but are listening to the living God declaring His Word through the mouth of the preacher.

b. His might in preaching the Scriptures was largely due to the fact that he “was instructed in the way of the Lord” (Acts 18:25—literally, “catechized” in the way of the Lord). Apollos had been taught line upon line (whether by his parents or by Christian teachers in Alexandria) the way (the doctrine and teaching) of the Lord Jesus (“the way of the Lord” is used 5 times in the New Testament and each time it refers to the way of the Lord Jesus—Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23; Acts 18:25).

c. Dear parents, do you convey in your speech and by your example that the Scripture makes you mighty and can make your children mighty? Do they see your example of spending time daily in the Word and in your loving obedience to God’s law (even if it is hard)? Do they hear from you in daily family worship your trust, love, and commitment to the Scriptures? Have you spent time catechizing your children so that they might be mighty in the Scriptures? If not, why not? If you hunger and thirst for the salvation of your children, catechizing them in the truth of Scripture ought to be at the top of your priorities along with prayer for them. Consider the words of Paul to Timothy (2 Timothy 3:14-15). It’s not too late for any of us to be faithful where we have grown lax.

4. **Apollos was also “fervent in the spirit” (Acts 18:25).**

a. He was literally, “burning, boiling, hot” in the spirit. Dear ones, the fervency of a minister in preaching the Word of God is contagious. When a minister preaches with conviction the truth of Jesus Christ, with all his heart (and not with a wishy-washy neutrality), the Holy Spirit grips the hearts of people. Jesus hates neutrality and lukewarmness in preaching and in living the Christian life (Revelation 3:15-16). Zeal is not a feeling (though it may be manifested in our emotions). Zeal is a devotion and wholehearted commitment to Jesus Christ and His truth. The Lord does not want the leftovers of our life—He is to be our life and reason for living. Fervency comes from spending time in the presence of the Lord and in His Word. Fervency is manifested in love and obedience to God’s Word regardless of the consequences (that’s not legalism, but freedom).

b. Zeal and fervency must not take the lead in preaching or in living, but must follow the truth of Scripture (Romans 10:2). John the Baptist is an example to us as preachers and to us as Christians—he was a burning and shining light (John 5:35)—he had both zeal and truth. Zeal without knowledge is to live in enthusiastic error. Knowledge without zeal is to live in dead orthodoxy. Apollos had this necessary balance.

5. **Apollos “spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord” (Acts 18:25).**

a. The word translated “diligently” means accurately. Apollos taught what was true concerning the Lord Jesus from his knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures and from his knowledge of what Jesus had accomplished. He was faithful and accurate in preaching. He was not a false teacher in leading the people astray, but rather pointed the way to Jesus.

b. How necessary it is that those who are ordained to be ministers, elders, and deacons be faithful in holding fast the truth of Jesus Christ (Titus 1:9). Holding fast means not compromising the truth when it comes to seeking a pulpit, or walking the fence between truth and error within the church (especially when your salary and pension are at stake). I will walk through a fiery furnace with those who stand without compromise for the truth, but those who will compromise it because it’s hard and difficult are not trustworthy.

6. **Apollos was in some respect deficient (not in error), but deficient in his understanding of the full extent of redemptive history: “knowing only the baptism of John” (Acts 18:25).** This notation from Luke by the Holy Spirit has raised some question about Apollos.

a. Was Apollos an Old Testament or a New Testament believer? This is where we once again get into matters related to this period of transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant (whether it be ceremonies and dietary laws, or whether it be people). Much depends upon what “knowing only the baptism of John” means. What did John preach about Jesus Christ, about the gospel, and to what did

the baptism John administered point? I am only going to give a brief summary today, but will elaborate further next Lord's Day (God willing) when we come to Acts 19 (the 12 disciples of John the Baptist).

b. I would submit that Apollos was a New Testament believer because John the Baptist preached Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world—not just the sin of Jews who trust Him, but the sin of Gentiles who trust Him (John 1:29-31). John's ministry is "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). John's ministry was one of salvation and remission of sins through faith in Jesus Christ (Luke 1:76-77). John's water baptism was essentially the same as to meaning as the water baptism on the Day of Pentecost—an outward sign of the gospel (Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38).

c. John knew that Jesus must suffer and die for the sins of His people. John knew that Jesus was the Son of God; therefore the grave could not hold him. Thus, John knew and preached the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and baptized in the authority of Jesus Christ. What John did not know and understand (nor did Apollos) was the expanded blessings of the Holy Spirit that were poured out by Christ on believers as gifts and signs of His exaltation. Apollos knew only of the water baptism of John, but not of the spiritual baptism of Jesus with all of the expanded and fullness of blessings. John's ministry is not placed in the pages of the Old Testament, but in the pages of the New Testament of Jesus Christ. John preached the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ was implied. He preached concerning the spiritual baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:11), but he lived not to see redemptive history realized. Thus, John and Apollos were New Testament ministers and believers.

C. Aquila and Priscilla hear Apollos preach and privately give him a more complete understanding of redemptive history (Acts 18:26).

1. These are the beloved friends of Paul to whom the Lord directed Paul when he was afraid and distressed in Corinth. This couple bonded to Paul and immediately showed their hospitality by bringing Paul into their home as a resident guest and minister of Jesus Christ (Matthew 10:41). Here they are once again showing hospitality, now to Apollos (Romans 16:3-5a). Opening your heart and your home to the brethren is gift of God and ministry for Jesus Christ.

2. Aquila's name is sometimes mentioned first, while other times Priscilla's name is mentioned first. We are not told why this is the case, but it would seem to be an inspired note of Priscilla's gifts in serving the saints. Together they were both "helpers" (co-laborers) in Christ (Romans 16:3). Priscilla did not take on some kind of public ministry or even minister to Apollos without her husband (contrary to 1 Timothy 2:12); however, the Holy Spirit wanted all generations to know that women can be very effective co-laborers for Jesus Christ even in their private service. It is not in public contexts that women are to find their service to the Lord (nor men that are not ordained), but in private contexts (Titus 2:3-5).

3. Together, Aquila and Priscilla, expounded to Apollos the way of God "more perfectly" (the same Greek word is translated "diligently" in Acts 18:25=accurately). They did not come in a condescending way, but added to his knowledge of redemptive history in that which he was deficient (the blessings poured out by Christ from heaven on the Day of Pentecost). And what speaks so well of Apollos is the fact that he received this instruction without taking offense (as if he was above being taught by these common tentmakers). Apollos was truly manifesting the wisdom which is from above (James 3:17). Dear ones, how well do you receive instruction or even correction? It is a sign of immaturity to take offense or to be defensive, but a sign of maturity and growth in Jesus Christ to receive it and learn from it.

## **II. Apollos Ministers to Others with the Help of Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:27-28).**

A. Observe the fruit that was borne in the life of Apollos by way of the instruction of Aquila and Priscilla and by way of the humble reception of truth by Apollos. He was sent with the blessing of the brethren

in Ephesus to Achaia (Corinth). God's blessings follow humility in those who teach and in those who receive instruction. Heartache follows those who resent and become angry because they are corrected or instructed.

B. Through the ministry of Apollos, there were those who "believed through grace" (Acts 18:27), and there were those Jews he "mightily convinced (refuted) proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the promised Messiah prophesied to come in the Old Testament Scriptures. The first group believed by God's grace. The second group were refuted by the Scriptures and likely hardened (Romans 9:16). Does this truth hinder a sinner from coming to Jesus Christ? Absolutely not! It is the only reason any of us come to believe in Christ. Our stubborn will must be overcome or none of us would come. If you won't come to Jesus Christ—it is your sin. If you do come—it is God's mercy and grace alone.

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