

**The Ministry of Apollos  
Acts 18:23-28**

Let's turn to Acts 18:23-28, the end of chapter 18, and what this will do is start off our treatment of the third missionary journey of Paul - kind of gives us a moment to come up for air a bit and look at the book of Acts as a whole and where we've been. And the first half of the book of Acts, chapters 1-12, really focuses on Peter. The second half from chapter 13 onward focuses on Paul, the first missionary journey - the first time Paul goes out to Gentile areas to preach the gospel and establish churches. We've got chapter 13-14 as the first missionary journey. Then we go back to Jerusalem for the council of Jerusalem. Then, the end of 15, 16, 17, and most of 18, chapter 18 is the second missionary journey. And now for really the next several chapters, Acts 18:23-21:16, will be the third missionary journey and that will center on the city of Ephesus.

So, we are going to begin there, and we'll kind of take some diversions from there, but so much of this third missionary journey is focused around the city of Ephesus. We look at our passage this morning and we'll just start with verse 23, and that starts us with Paul and his travels. So, the care of Paul for churches that he had established is in verse 23. Antioch is where it starts, and that's coming from the end of chapter 18:22. Because we start from Antioch, we end at Antioch with each of the missionary journeys. So, verse 22 was the end of the second missionary journey, and then there's, most likely, the winter time with verse 23; "...having spent some time there..." The "there" is the city of Antioch which is sort of what Jerusalem was on the first half of the book; so much of the ministry was coming out from Jerusalem. Now the journeys are coming out from Antioch, a large city in north of Jerusalem, three hundred miles.

"And having spent some time there [this is Paul], he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples." So, Paul's third missionary journey begins with the same goal as the second missionary journey, which is to visit churches that he established on the first missionary journey which is in Lystra and Derbe and Iconium. In fact, if you look at a map, starting in Antioch on the very eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea, Paul travels through his home area where he grew up in Tarsus in the area of Cilicia, moves to Derbe, Lystra, the city in Antioch, Iconium. These places we visited during the first missionary journey and

saw the churches established there before he eventually arrived at Ephesus. We'll see him arriving at Ephesus which is on the far western side of what is now modern-day Turkey. It's along the Aegean Sea, and that route is him traveling, spending time at the area of Galatia and Fergia which is just to the west of the Galatian region, strengthening the disciples, these people that had been ministered to by Paul and had been in the churches that were founded during the first missionary journey.

The rest of our time this morning will be dealing with another fellow named Apollos; we can almost say meanwhile. So, all Paul's doing, this traveling, strengthening churches - we got a bit of parenthesis. And there's going to be some part of Acts dealt with Apollos and what happens with him. So, meanwhile (Paul is traveling, strengthening the churches), there is this fellow in Ephesus named Apollos, and we pick his story up in verse 24; "Now a Jew named Apollos..." And you can read in your Bible as I read in the New American Standard; "Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." So, just look at those three verses for the moment and note that this story of Apollos is really one of two episodes. They kind of mirror each other, and the second of the two episodes is in chapter 19:1-7, and both of these stories are dealing with people who are only familiar with the ministry of John the Baptist. The first is with Apollos, and then in Acts chapter 19, we have twelve men who are only knowing about the baptism of John, John the Baptist and his ministry. So, they kind of connect to each other through that, but Paul doesn't show up until Acts chapter 19.

This kind of thing where we've got people that are twenty years after John the Baptist, actually more than that, twenty years after the death and resurrection of Christ, we're probably about 53 AD now, so two decades later, we have people who are unfamiliar with Jesus, but they're familiar with the ministry of John the Baptist. And this seems to be kind of a conundrum; that you'd think the purpose of John the Baptist's ministry was to prepare people for the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who came. So, he said, John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30). He was pointing

people to Jesus Christ. So, somehow, some of these followers didn't finish the drill. They didn't get the final message here, and for two decades, they had been familiar and following the teaching of John the Baptist, but had not understood about Jesus. So, that kind of seems odd, knowing only about the ministry of John the Baptist after all that time.

It seems even odder to those of us in the information age where we know things almost instantaneously that happen. So, to kind of help you with this a bit... this is probably the most famous picture ever to be in a magazine. It's from Life magazine, and this is a sailor and a nurse that actually had just met each other on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1945, and they were in Times Square along with many, many, other people that day. In fact, I think this is still the most people... that day had the most people ever in Times Square. What were they doing in Times Square? They were celebrating, and what were they celebrating? They were celebrating the end of World War II; this was the day Japan surrendered. The official surrender would be three weeks later on Tokyo Bay and the USS Missouri, I think it is, but that was when they announced it, and people in the United States celebrated.

And what happened to the Japanese soldiers? Well, they laid down their arms when they found this out, but if you remember Japan had occupied much of the South Pacific. They were on islands everywhere, so it took some time for the Japanese soldiers to learn what had happened. These islands had people, over the months to come, that would learn that Japan surrendered; in fact, this would be over years to come. April of 1947, we find an island in the Pacific, thirty-four soldiers learning the war is over and surrendering. May of 1948, we find two more soldiers on the island of Guam surrendering. Two more Japanese soldiers on Iwo Jima in January, 1949, surrender. This goes into the 1950's. This island, the island of Anatahan, in the South Pacific - eighteen soldiers had been living there since 1945, unaware of the end of the war, and when they finally learned, then they surrendered. This in 1956, we find nine soldiers on an island in Indonesia surrendering, four more on an island in the Philippines surrendering. By the time we get to May 1960, fifteen years after the end of World War II, Private Minagawa surrenders on Guam along with, a few days later, his superior officer Sergeant Ito. 1972, Sergeant Yokoi was captured on Guam. He actually was aware of the end of the war since 1952. He was just a little ashamed to come out because he would be considered defeated. Then the last person that we'll talk about is Hiroo Onoda. Lieutenant Onoda was on

Lubang island in the Philippines, and he finally surrendered in 1974, March of 1974. His story is he was actually with fellow soldiers. One deserted them in 1949 and was repatriated.

The Japanese government didn't just leave these guys. They knew that there was these soldiers around, so they tried to communicate with them. They dropped leaflets, and Onoda and his other soldiers actually got leaflets, evaluated these leaflets and decided this was a trick by the American government, and they were not surrendering. They were given orders to not surrender, and they were carrying them out. Corporal Shimada, one of his companions, in 1954 was attacking because they're still fighting a war. They attacked Phillipian policemen and he was shot and killed. In 1972, another soldier, Kozuka, was shot and killed attacking Phillipian policemen, so Onoda had retreated back into the jungle, and a student eventually tracked him down, found him, and tried to explain to him that the war was over, 29 years later. What he did was refuse to surrender because he didn't believe him. So, what the fellow needed to do was to go back to Japan and get his superior officer, his commanding officer, to come to the island of Lubang in the Philippines where Lieutenant Onoda surrendered and brought his sword to the officials in the Philippines, March 1974. So, this kind of seems hard to imagine that these people would not know this for so long, but this happens when you don't get information to people. They plod forward, and some of them are very, very, dedicated in what they're believing.

So, hopefully that gives you a glimpse of why we have somebody named Apollos, twenty years after the death and resurrection of Christ, still following the baptism of John. He was from Alexandria, Alexandria by birth, and Alexandria was the capital of Egypt, and it was a large city. It was the second largest city in the Roman Empire, and it was the capital of Egypt, and it enjoyed a large Jewish population, by estimates, like, maybe one-fifth of this large city was Jewish. Remember the Jews had dispersed throughout the Roman Empire, and many of them have transplanted themselves to the city of Alexandria. So, it's not surprising we have a Jew from Alexandria, and now he comes to Ephesus. So, what else do we learn about Apollos? Well, we learn about his abilities. He was "...an eloquent man..." or, as some translations will have it, "...learned." You know, not just able to speak, but actually intelligent enough to know what he's talking about and communicating; "...mighty in the Scriptures." "...the Scriptures," of course, was the Old Testament. He was very familiar with the Old Testament and

able to communicate that well. He had the gift of teaching, and that ability that he had would be used by the Lord in the future to serve the church well. So, we'll learn more about him and that ministry to come.

What else? He was "...instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus..." You may wonder how was he accurately teaching "...the things concerning Jesus..." but he only knew about the baptism of John? Well, he was able to accurately teach about the Messiah from the Old Testament but was unaware that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, had fulfilled these prophecies about Him in the Old Testament. So, he was familiar with the Old Testament and the Old testament teachings about Jesus but did not know about Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection on the behalf of man. His information was incomplete. He did not know Jesus had come to fulfill the prophecies, including those of his death and resurrection. He did not know the gospel. He did not know that he was forgiven of sin by believing in Jesus Christ the Messiah. He did not know, specifically, of Jesus. He knew only of Jesus the Messiah as taught in the Old Testament. So, a person can be accurate in their teaching. This isn't to say he was teaching error. He was teaching accurately. He was just teaching partially.

A person can be accurate in their teaching but incomplete. In fact, this is what we do. We don't have all the information. There's more revelation that has not come to us, and even the revelation that has come to us in the Scriptures now, we study, and we understand as what we understand, but, hopefully, we don't stop learning. There's continually more knowledge that we have. So, we can teach without complete understanding and complete knowledge, but we can teach accurately, just with incompleteness. This is what Apollos was doing, and this is why he's described as "...mighty in the Scriptures." And he's not the only one like this. Similar to these disciples of John the Baptist in chapter 19, which we will read about in the future, Apollos was an Old Testament saint. In other words, an Old Testament believer, a follower of the God of Israel, who received the Holy Spirit upon learning about Jesus Christ. So, he was like these people in the Old Testament who were followers of Jesus, followers of the Messiah, followers of the God of Israel, but did not have the knowledge of Christ yet and because He had not come yet. This actually parallels the Ethiopian eunuch of the story of Philip when he goes to visit the Ethiopian eunuch. The Ethiopian eunuch had come from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel

and the feast there and had been traveling back. It also mirrors the story of Cornelius in Acts chapter 10. There's another fellow that was a Roman soldier, a centurion who was a follower of the God of Israel even though he was a Gentile, but he didn't know about Jesus either, and Peter came to him and taught him about Jesus, and he received the Holy Spirit.

So, we have these people who don't know about Jesus that become believers in Christ. They become Christians. They receive the Holy Spirit upon understanding, but before that, they were like the Old Testament saints who were faithful to the knowledge of God that they knew, and the God of Israel, and they were worshiping in an Old Testament context. We don't have the disciples of John the Baptist today, but we have people that we may know who have partial knowledge of Jesus Christ. There are many people, in fact, who have a partial understanding of Jesus, who we can serve by teaching them the Bible. They know facts about Jesus. They may even be in churches because just because you are sitting in a church doesn't mean you put it all together. Even at Valley Bible Church, you may be sitting in Valley Bible Church and you haven't put this together - that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. Jesus has come to sacrifice His life for our sin, and, if I believe in Him, I have my sin forgiven through His death on behalf of me, so I don't have to die, and I can live forever with Him. And that is so fantastic, that I'm not suffering eternal punishment but eternal life, I love Jesus, and I'm following Jesus, and I want to obey Jesus. Living that way, putting all that information together, doesn't just happen because you hear about Jesus, doesn't just happen because you're sitting in a church even. And so, we have an opportunity to help people who have partial understanding, who may be actually desiring to know more and to learn but just haven't had anybody explain it to them clearly. So, that's a wonderful opportunity we have and, hopefully, you're taking advantage of that in your life.

So, Apollos is teaching the synagogue, speaking out boldly, and "...when Priscilla and Aquila heard him..." (And remember, we learned about them in Acts chapter 18, and they were companions of Paul and Paul had just left them in Ephesus to minister to the Ephesians there.) Apollos is ministered to by them. They hear him; "...they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." And that's an opportunity for us to take people aside and explain "...the way of God more accurately." Maybe they will be like Apollos and actually be interested in learning. So, that's what happened to Apollos, and he believed in Jesus and desired to serve Him. So,

what did he do? He then is moving in commission to go to Corinth. Verse 27; “And when he wanted to go across to Achaia...” Okay, going across to Achaia means sailing the Aegean Sea to visit the Corinthian church founded by Paul in Acts chapter 18. That was the church that existed in Achaia... was in Corinth, a large city ten times the size of Athens at the time and the capital of Achaia. So, Ephesus, being on the western edge of what’s now modern-day Turkey... you’d sail across the Aegean Sea to Achaia which is the southern half of Greece. And in the northern part to the southern half of Greece is the capital of that area called Corinth.

This desire to do this... why is he wanting to do this? He’s wanting to do this because of Aquila and Priscila... because Aquila and Priscila, if you recall, came from Corinth. This desire to, for him, to go and minister to Corinth must’ve come from his relationship with Priscila and Aquila who could tell him about the Corinthian church from their eighteen months there. They were with Paul for eighteen months, ministering in Corinth, serving that church, and Paul left with them and left them at Ephesus while he went back to Antioch and then embarked now on his third missionary journey. As we continue to read verse 27, it speaks of the brethren encouraging him; “And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him...” The brethren were a participant in this. They participated in his ministry. They confirmed his ministry. I think this is important because the affirmation of the church is a necessary component of ministry.

No one should just determine for themselves what their formal ministry should do. I mean, yeah, we could help people as we come across them, but there’s people that, you know, they’ve gone to some school, or they’ve got some credential of some sort, and they view themselves as some minister person, and you know, we’re in America, and we’re able to act independently. We’re a free country. We have the spirit of entrepreneurialism, and so, there’s people that decide, hey, I’m going to go there, and I’ll just start a church, and I’ll start ministering to people and who knows if they have any ability to do that or be qualified either morally or doctrinally. The affirmation of the church was necessary. In fact, it was so necessary that it was happening even with Paul. Paul himself, the apostle Paul, when he left on the first missionary journey from Antioch, the church of Antioch sent him. The church of Antioch sent him by the commissioning of him and Barnabas in Acts chapter 13. The Ephesian church did more than this. If we keep reading, they also sent a letter; “...he wanted to go across to

Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him..." So, the disciples are writing to the Corinthian church to receive him, welcome him, sort of testify on his behalf. Paul even references this kind of thing.

This happens in the New Testament, and I'll just reference to you 2 Corinthians 3:1 where Paul is speaking of his ministry there and says, "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?" This was necessary for Apollos; that the Ephesian church could recommend him, and that would be good because no church should just receive people into ministry without having confidence that these people would have an ability to serve the Lord well. Or, as 1 Timothy 5:22 puts it, "Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share ... the sins of others..." You know, we should be careful. You would not want us, just because somebody had been in ministry someplace or had done some Bible study or something, to just say plug them in and say, oh, off they go. We'd like to make sure these people are doctrinally sound and morally upstanding and not going to be a blight on the church. So, this kind of confidence comes either through a period of time where we get to know people and assimilate them into the life of the church before we assign, and give them the opportunity to have ministry on behalf of the church, or we can have other people vouch for them that we have confidence in. And that's what's happening with Ephesus they are sending a letter of commendation to the church in Corinth.

The significance of Apollos' ministry was great because we can look at this in 1 Corinthians 1:12, and how helpful he was to that church. When you look over that verse in 1 Corinthians, and this is probably written, like, probably at least three, probably four years later, as we look at the chronology of this. Paul writes to the Corinthian church, and in that time, Apollos had a ministry there. And one of the challenges is the people had identified themselves with certain people, and this was a negative thing, and Paul's teaching against this, and in verse 12 he says, "Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul...'" Like they were maybe there when Paul founded the church, and they identified themselves with Paul. "...and I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." and then he speaks against this; "Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" Like, no! This is one church. This is not people following this guy, people following that guy.

That's horrible! One of the people the people were identifying was Apollos. That doesn't mean that Apollos was saying, hey, follow me. No. He was teaching about Jesus, but just like Paul and just like Cephas or Peter, he was having people view him more highly than they ought to.

So, this is this place that he held alongside Peter and Paul - a great ministry. And note also, when we get to the end of verse 27, about his powerful ministry there; "...when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace..." This testimony of God's grace in this ministry, you shouldn't miss. All ministry is the result of the grace of God. This wasn't just Apollos. This was God working through him. Apollos was the instrumentality of this, and there's another place in 1 Corinthians that testifies to this. This is 1 Corinthians chapter 3:6 where Paul writes to the Corinthians, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth." God causes the growth. We might have different roles, but nothing is happening. There is no growth happening apart from God initiating it and sustaining it, but it does teach you here what Apollos' role was in the church in Corinth. Paul preached the gospel there and founded the church. Apollos' ministry was one of edification and instruction; so he is instructing and teaching the believers there. So, this is why he says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth."

This ministry to believers is really the essential part of the church. This is so critical and what we do is to instruct and encourage one another and teach one another so that we can be learners. This happens beyond just now, beyond Sunday morning. There's many opportunities within our church to be learning and growing, and if you don't do this actively, if you just kind of come and listen to this, that's good. I'm glad you're doing this. I want you to continue to do this, but if you stop there, you're only availing yourself of part of the opportunity to grow here at our church. So, this ministry to believers is an essential part of our church, and you should be actively involved in this in order to grow. If you're not actively engaged with this, you're short-circuiting the work of God in your life and the growth of you, your spiritual growth, is being stunted. So, I'd encourage you to be an active participant in the ministries of our church, and you will be blessed.

Apollos taught them, and what did he teach them? He taught them what he had learned. He taught them what he had learned from Priscila and Aquila, and "...he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the

Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.” (verse 28). What he did was do the very thing that Aquila and Priscila taught him about Jesus being the Messiah, the Savior of the world, and what he did with that was he went to Corinth to “...powerfully [refute] the Jews ..., demonstrating ... that Jesus was the Christ.” This most certainly has to include the many Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah. There are, like, over three hundred prophecies in the Old Testament that speak about Jesus that He fulfilled. I think it’s helpful for us to be familiar with that, so I’m just going to give you a quick rundown of just a few of these. So, it’s going to be probably too much to keep up with and taking notes, but in the days of Google, you can easily get plenty of this.

There’s an ability to read the Old Testament, with help from people, to see what Jesus did and what fulfilled the Old Testament Scripture. For example, He was born in Bethlehem. Micah 5:2 said the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Guess what? The Messiah was born in Bethlehem - Jesus Christ. He was born of the tribe of Judah just like Genesis 49:10 said he would be. These two things are things that He couldn’t determine for Himself. Nobody could create that. You can’t decide where you’re going to be born or even what your ancestry’s going to be. This is something that He was as prophesied from Scripture, as ordained by God. The next couple of things are things that He did choose to do, like He choose to enter Jerusalem on a donkey. He was aware of the fulfillment of Zachariah 9:9. Or, when He was on trial, He remained silent as Isaiah 53:7 would have said. Those things He choose to do. He fulfilled the Scripture intentionally. And then, there’s other things that other people fulfilled the Scripture to Him with, like His being betrayed by Judas. He was betrayed by a close friend, Psalm 41:9 prophesied of that. Or, the amount of which His betrayal would be for, thirty pieces of silver, that can be found in Zachariah 11:12. So, all of this is something that was done that He didn’t participate in but was done by others. When His side was pierced, that was a prophecy from Zachariah 12:10 that was fulfilled. When His bones were unbroken while He was on the cross (which was not normal for people that were crucified), Psalm 34:20 was fulfilled. And the very crucifixion itself was seen in Psalm 22:16. Then, when even in His burial that fulfilled Isaiah 53:9, he was buried by a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea.

And the one thing that no one could have fulfilled but Jesus... you know, there was other people born in Bethlehem... there were other people that

rode donkeys into Jerusalem... there were other people that were crucified... but the one thing that only Jesus did was be resurrected. Only Jesus was resurrected from the dead, fulfilling Psalm 16:10. So, when we look at this verse that says about Apollos, "...he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ." This has to be the kind of things he was telling them and refuting them about and discussing with them. And the phrasing here is intensified; "...he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ." He had a very substantial ministry in Corinth dealing from the Old Testament, from the Scriptures, instructing people.

So, we should take a clue from this. We should teach what we learn in order to teach people, in order to refute error, in order to instruct people and to help people, we have to learn. We have to be a learner. That's what a disciple is; a disciple is a learner. So, if we're not actively learning, what happens when we stop learning? When we stop learning, we cannot grow, and when we don't grow, what we tell others will be stale. It will just grow old. That excitement that you had when you were learning about Jesus starts to then say, oh, yeah, I know this. And somebody may ask you a question, and you might know the answer to that question, but it will be stale because you're not continuing to learn. We must continue to be a disciple of Christ. What a disciple by definition is, is a learner.

So, I'd encourage you to not stop learning, to continue to grow, and in your growth what that will do is it will not only better equip you and enable you to serve people and help people who are in your circle that may not know completely about Jesus, that you can have an influence with, and I can't. Or that will be even opposing, and you can refute them as you learn. But most of all, you will not only have knowledge, you will have some enthusiasm, some excitement, that corresponds to that knowledge. You will think, not only is this true, but this is really important because it really is. What's more important than the truth about Jesus Christ? Everything else is meaningless compared to the Lord Jesus and the knowledge of that and Him and who He was and what He did and all the truth surrounding Him. So, if you're learning this, you become more excited about this, and the more excited you get about this, the more likely you might actually tell somebody else about it, and the more likely it is you might tell somebody about this, the more likely you'll be able to have a positive effect on their life and help them grow, and then, it could be said, God caused the growth, but that starts with

you. So, my encouragement to you is to follow the example of Apollos by learning and by sharing the truth of Jesus Christ, and if we're all doing all that, this church will be a vibrant place to be.