

Investing in Others Acts 18:24-28

Well, when you look at the passage we went through last time we were together and the Nazarite vow Paul took, and this passage about Apollos who really does not know the full gospel of Christ, and then the first paragraph of the next chapter which deals with these apostles of John who have never heard of the coming of the Holy Spirit, these are some of the hardest texts to interpret and really understand in all the Book of Acts. It really brings up questions — were any of these individuals saved? They seem to be serving God, looking for the coming of Christ, but at the same time have not trusted in him as far as his death and resurrection. Were they born again believers? It is amazing how there is not even a consensus on the answer to these questions in many of the best commentaries that are out there.

And these are tough passages. Let me just say a couple of things about these passages to keep in mind. First, although they are tough, we realize like all of Scripture these passages are given for our understanding and instruction. They are given for our edification that we might grow in the glory and in our trust of our great God. They are meant not to give confusion but to give light. And passages like this which really cause us to think, and think about what we already know about Christ and salvation and our great hope are good for us. God wants us to use our minds and the more we ponder texts like this, the more we see light and that cannot help us but grow in seeing and savouring our Lord and Saviour. Don't be afraid of hard texts.

Secondly, we often look at passages in our context. We have those who belong to the church — the body of Christ — and those who do not. But the problem of the time of the Book of Acts that so often we forget is that it is transitional. You are going from the time where God works chiefly through the nation of Israel, where truly godly born again people were looking for the coming of the Messiah, and urging others, especially their own countrymen to look for his coming. Then you have the coming of Christ. There is no mass communication. There is no internet where we know instantly what is happening in other parts of the world. So think of it, you have what we would call these Old Testament saints who have never heard of Christ. It is a unique age.

So the question becomes both in this paragraph and the opening of chapter 19, are these truly born again believers who have trusted in Christ, who have trusted in his coming and what he would accomplish but do not know that he has come and given his life as that perfect sacrifice for sin? And the only answer that I can give is how they respond to more light that is given. If they see the coming of Christ, like John the Baptist who said — behold the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world, but like John (who died before seeing or hearing) didn't know of his death and resurrection, if they respond to that further light than it is evidence that they are been trusting in that light. John MacArthur explains this of Apollos, **“He surely expounded with force and persuasion the Scriptures that pointed to Jesus. But he did not understand the significance of Christ's death and resurrection. Nor was he acquainted with the coming of the Spirit and the birth of the church on the Day of Pentecost. In short, he was a redeemed Old Testament saint; he was saved but was not able to be called a Christian yet.”** Again, this is a transitional period and absolutely unique in

history. We no longer have individuals who are coming out of that Old Testament age looking for the coming of Christ.

But the thing we miss in all the controversy is how God uses us in the life of the body, how he uses us to help others mature in the image of Jesus Christ. And the glory of that truth is that it has such a ripple effect. When you help someone mature in Christ and love Jesus Christ, they will take that knowledge and zeal of Christ and share it with others, who will live those truths and zeal of Christ and share it with others. We often think that God doesn't use us or uses us sparingly, but I think what should encourage our hearts is how much our great God truly does use us for his glory in the lives of others.

Speaking personally, God has used individuals in my life to shape my heart and head and direction that have long been dead. Much of the fruit of my life and ministry and maturity is not due to me being self-made but how the Holy Spirit has used others in such a mighty way. Do you recognize the spiritual impact that we each can have in the kingdom of Christ when we are growing and sharing those truths with others, when we intentionally enter the lives of others for the welfare of others and the glory of Christ? I want to encourage your heart to be active in the lives of others this morning and realize that through your life God is doing far more than you ask or think. I want us to see three things in the making of a servant of Christ. I want us to see the problem, the remedy, and the outcome.

1. We need to see the problem. Vv. 24-25

Wow, there is so much that we learn about Apollos in these verses, and most of it is so positive. He is the kind of individual we would want to be around and learn from. He really did have a love for Christ, and wanted others to have that love for Christ. But he did lack a fuller and complete knowledge of Christ as we see, and that would certainly hamper his effectiveness as a servant of Christ. Any preacher wants to have that fuller knowledge of Christ so that they can accurately make known Christ.

Now, we know so much again about Apollos here. We see that he is a Jew from Alexandria or what is known today as Egypt. It is amazing to see how the history of the early church really takes off in Northern Africa. And Alexandria is a place of learning and rhetoric and philosophy. And we see Apollos was a man of learning. And now he has come to Ephesus and of course he would go to the synagogue where other Jews would gather for learning. And verse 24 indicates, **"He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures."** Eloquent means that he knew how to speak and carry an argument and hold the attention of others. And competent in the Scriptures means that he had studied and knew the Old Testament. He could see not only the main thrust and message which is Jesus Christ, but also all the connections and made those connections when he preached. Now, the writer, Luke mentions this because it is a positive. He knew the Scriptures. It is such a tragedy that so many who have been Christians for so long have such an elemental understanding of the Scriptures yet it is through the Scripture that we know God, it is his revelation, and they are able to make us wise unto salvation, and can be used in the lives of others.

Now look at first half of verse 25, **"He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things**

concerning Jesus.” Again, this is all positive. “The way of the Lord” is a phrase that is used throughout the Old Testament for the instructions of the Lord, such as, God speaking to Abraham in Genesis 18:19, **“For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”** So he had this knowledge of God and it was coupled with a fervent spirit. There was soul fire and enthusiasm when he spoke and taught. This is not dry theology and how can it be when Apollos preached about this mighty God and his grace. And he talked with accuracy. This is what every Bible teacher wants is both fervency and accuracy. The preacher need to know the truths and feel the glory of those truths. The preacher needs to believe that these are the truths about Jesus that he needs to know, believe and cherish, and now his hearers need to hear.

And everything seems to be ideal until we read that last clause in verse 25, **“though he knew only the baptism of John.”** It is incredible how much light is in the Old Testament about Jesus. And he would have had some light about Jesus from other Jews that instructed him about John the Baptist’s ministry, which was very controversial and condemned by the religious leaders in Jerusalem. And the baptism of John is not just talking about that he immersed people in the Jordan river but the theology around why he did that activity. Now think about John’s ministry. The Angel said to Zechariah the father of John about the ministry of his soon to be born son in Luke 1:16-17, **“And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”** His ministry is all about preparing the hearts of the people for the coming of the Messiah. So now, think of his baptism. Luke 3:3 records, **“And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”** What is the message? Repent for the king is coming! Make your hearts ready. And he even knew that Jesus was already here, because John said in John 1:29, **“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”**

But Apollos doesn’t seem to know about the death and resurrection of Christ. He might have known this one had to die and rise again. He also would not have known about the formation of the church, and the coming of the Spirit in a special relationship to form and place individuals into the body of Christ. And think of it. He has an incomplete knowledge of the message. So, here is what our great God does, in his providence he sends people our way in order to give us a fuller understanding of the glory of Christ. God in his goodness has given to the church of Christ such a wide variety of teachers and preachers of the word of God from all different walks of life to really speak into our lives the truths of Christ.

2. We need to see the remedy. Vv. 26.

It is incredible to see the zeal and love of Christ among many who we can see the call of ministry in their lives. And they seek to even get further knowledge of the things of God through seminaries and Bible colleges, and we should be thankful for those institutions. But one of the ways, in fact I think one of the greatest ways that God

molds servants, creates mature servants, and gives them even a greater zeal for Christ is through the local church. It is through the patience of God's people seeking to speak truth, and live that truth of God in the lives of those who are younger for the glory of Christ. And it really is a shame that this so often is not taking place in the church of Christ, that those who are older in the Lord are not teaching and helping and guiding others toward Christ in a more fuller way. But what the writer of Hebrews says is certainly true of so many in the church of Christ in Hebrews 5:12-14, **"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."**

God's whole goal is to send older and more mature individuals in younger believers lives to instruct and help them see Christ. The whole goal of our Christian lives is maturity. It is not to stay an infant. It is to be able to think biblically for the glory of Christ, so we can see the significance of Christ — his death and resurrection — in our lives, marriages and families and discern the response that honours him. There are so many who never want to grow up and miss the glory of maturity because it not only causes us to reflect Christ but helps others reflect Christ — to know Christ and see Christ and revel in our great hope of the One who died and rose for sinners like us. Are you maturing? Many want this, but you cannot give what you do not have.

So, look at this verse again, **"He began to speak 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."** I love this because we can be so harsh and critical of others. We do encourage our young men to preach and teach, and seek to give them meaningful opportunities to minister the word. We see here that Apollos has a passion. He preached boldly and was not afraid to teach hard truths and call sinners to repentance. And yet there was something critically missing, and Priscilla and Aquila take him aside and explain to him about the coming of Christ, the accomplishment of the mission, the victory of the resurrection, and the formation of the church. And they did this privately and it seems very gently. There is a gentleness and a love that comes through in this verse of this couple displayed to Apollos.

And there are a couple of things we can say about this. One is the ministry that others can have in the lives of those who are younger to encourage them and help them in the things of Christ. We often talk about mentoring others. And it doesn't always have to be a weekly Bible study with someone but just normal interactions in the body of Christ. I think of the influence that others have had on me through maybe the purchase of a book, or a meal or coffee together and chat. I think of how people have been patient in my life especially when I was younger, and even now that I am older. Others were intentionally active in my life. And here is the outcome that we will look at in a second, the church is better served. Not only does Apollos grow but everyone he ministers to now grows. Again, there is that ripple effect.

Let me point out something else here. We realize that Priscilla is mentioned or named before her husband. It could be her status in the community, but it also could be her maturity and knowledge exceeded her husband. It does not mean that he was

slack spiritually or didn't love Christ as much, but maybe through work didn't have time to study as diligently as his wife, or maybe mentally he was not as sharp. Now, she has to be careful not to usurp the role and leadership of her husband. But Pricilla should use her gifts and talents that have given by God to his wife. And she might be the foremost one instructing Apollos privately. But the couple, however they interact with Apollos, certainly have a unity of purpose.

And God has always used the women in the ministry and life of the church. Paul speaks of the ministry's and usefulness of Euodia and Synteché. When there is strife in between them Paul writes in Philippians 4:3, **"Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."** God uses women and their intellectual abilities for the glory of God. He instructs older women to teach younger women. He talks about the godly influence women have on children. And these women were used in the lives of Paul. Think of it, in a private conversation along with her husband, Priscilla teaches Apollos a fuller understanding of the gospel of Christ. Many women have a profound love for Christ given by God, and also an understanding and maturity that the church absolutely needs. Encourage your heart that God can and does use your efforts for the glory of Christ and the welfare of his people.

The other thing to notice here is the willingness of Apollos to receive instruction. Certainly people can be mean and critical. But there are some who come alongside that you know really care. This is this couple! Here is Apollos -trained, educated, fluent in the Scriptures and trained under the greatest minds — is he going to receive instruction and be taught by a tent maker and his wife? I am so thankful for the theological education I have received but the greatest growth in my life has come through the interactions of the people of God in the church of God. And it is so instructional because in every generation it is so easy to look at those who are older as stuck, or unknowing, or even unwise. It is so easy to assume you know it all, yet all those years of trusting Christ, hearing the Word, and living through so many trials and seeing the faithfulness of God in trials — we all can learn so much from one another. Realize the importance of learning from those around you. All of us should be both giving instruction and be willing to receive instruction.

3. Let me end very quickly, thirdly, we see the outcome. Vv. 27-28.

The outcome here is a more productive ministry for the glory of Christ. As we mature and help others mature, the result is more productive ministry for the glory of Christ. We see that Apollos had a desire to be both a blessing to the people of God and also reach those who were outside of Christ. And the region he desired to go to was Achaia. And the brothers at Ephesus wrote letters of recommendation to welcome him into their fellowship and into their midst. The reason why is that his preaching and teaching were so beneficial to the saints at Ephesus, they knew he would have that same kind of influence and ministry at Corinth. And we see something of the effect this man had on the believers in that region at the end of verse 27, **"When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed."** I love the way this is worded, because salvation is by grace and grace alone. He says, "who through grace

had believed.” It is the total work of God. The reason why we believe is none other than the grace of God. That is the cause or the agent of our belief. How did we believe? Through his effective grace. He is the sovereign Lord of our salvation. These are the individuals Apollos ministered to, and we see he greatly helped. Whatever they were going through in the trials and difficulties of life he pointed back to the hope we as believers have in Jesus Christ. God used him in the lives of the people of Corinth to help them persevere and grow in their dependence and security in Christ.

Now look at the next verse, because it was not only those who believed that Apollos had a ministry to but also those outside of Christ. There is always that tension in Scripture both of God’s sovereign grace and our responsibility to make known Christ. Luke records, **“for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.”** His public debates with the Jews were one-sided. He powerfully through the Scriptures showed Jesus coming, crucified, and risen from the grave. God used him as a vehicle for his grace. And his ministry touched and convicted so many hearts for the glory of our great God.

But here is the thing about Apollos, do you have that ministry without the faithful ministry of Priscilla and Aquila? They could have wallowed in self-pity when they were forced out of Rome, but they trusted God and were active for Christ as they worked in tent making. God doesn’t waste tent making. They could have just by-passed Apollos and never invested in him, saying someone else can do it, yet they took the task of seeking to help him mature in Christ as a minister of Christ. And now his life has not only touched so many people in Ephesus but the whole region of Achaia. We never know how much God will use our personal ministry to others, but that ministry keeps multiplying. God really does far more than we ask or think. And as we seek to make much of Christ and build up others in the faith that ministry continues even beyond us. The truths of Christ and the zeal to love and follow him keep going.

It is so easy to look at the smallness of Emmanuel and think what can we do? What use it is to invest in a handful of people every Sunday? God can do far more than we ask or think. Only eternity will tell the full impact of this couple, and only eternity will tell the impact of how God used and is using such feeble creatures as us for his glory. We need to trust in him. We need to be active, knowing him, and intentionally invest in others, and trust God will use our efforts for his glory.