

Apollos

“And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.” (Acts 18:24-28).

In these five verses of Acts 18 we have our introduction to a man named Apollos. Even though Apollos is introduced as a Jew, both his name and his birthplace indicate a Greek heritage. Coming from a city noted for being a hotbed of Hellenistic (Greek) thought, Apollos is nonetheless cited by Divine inspiration, not for his earthly wisdom or philosophical prowess, but for being “mighty in the scriptures.” Surely he had been influenced by the Greek scholars as well as the societal standards of his day. Still, he did not allow those to corrupt his devotion to the Word that God had delivered.

Luke’s first reference to Apollos’ qualities was in regard to his eloquence. Since eloquence suggests a person of advanced learning, this must have been included by the inspired writer to show forth Apollos as a man of letters. The Gospel is indeed for all, and even though some with their high degrees of education have chosen to misuse that knowledge and reject God (I Corinthians 1:26-29), Apollos was not of that number. He used his learning ability to grow closer to the Lord. He employed his speaking talent to teach “the things of the Lord” and to convince others of the Lord’s way by powerfully presenting the Word of God.

There is something impressive about the Holy Spirit’s description of this man named Apollos. Yes, he knew God’s Word and taught it, but notice the adjectives and adverbs that are added to describe Apollos and his work. He was “mighty” (“powerful, strong”) in the scriptures. He was “fervent” (“to boil with heat, be hot, zealous”) in the spirit. He taught “diligently” (“exactly, accurately”) the things of the Lord. He spoke “boldly” (“to speak freely, show assurance”). He “helped them much.” He “mightily” (“vehemently, forcibly”) convinced. In short, Apollos knew what he believed and taught it without fear or favor. He was confident in his knowledge of the Word of God and was not hesitant to show others the way of the Lord.

In the midst of this segment of sacred scripture regarding Apollos there lies a statement that must not be overlooked. Up until the final words of verse 25 we know Apollos to be a man of eloquence, knowledgeable of the Word of God and fervent and diligent in his presentation of same. However, as we see at the close of verse 25, to that point in his life he had only known of John’s immersion. He was not teaching the same message that Jesus had commissioned in Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-16, that immersion was to be in the name of (by the authority of) the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for the remission of sins. He was not preaching what Peter preached on Pentecost about immersion into Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). He was not advocating immersion into Christ for the forgiveness of sins as did Ananias to Paul in Acts 9 or Peter to Cornelius and his household in Acts 10. Why was he teaching only the immersion of John? Apparently the Gospel had not yet reached his ears. Remember, the Gospel in that day was still going forth for the first time in many regions of the world. Apollos evidently had not yet heard. How can such a conclusion be drawn? The response of Apollos to the teaching of the Gospel holds the answer. He was taught “the way of God more perfectly.” He was taught just like those men of Ephesus in the beginning of Acts 19. They only knew of John’s immersion as well. Like them, when Apollos was taught the Gospel, he turned from his former teaching and began “shewing from the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.” So now add to Apollos’ traits of fervency, diligence, boldness and might the trait of humility. Rather than be offended by the correction, because of his knowledge of the Word of God, he recognized the Gospel when he heard it and turned to it.

Apollos went on to become a tremendous influence for the Gospel, especially in the city of Corinth. Acts 19:1 says that he went there after his encounter with Aquila and Priscilla in the verses just considered. He is mentioned by Paul seven times in his first inspired letter to the Corinthians. Apollos' continued diligence in teaching God's Word is seen in Paul's simple statement in I Corinthians 3:6, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase."

Apollos bore many exemplary characteristics. Would that every Christian were "mighty in the scriptures." Would that every Christian "taught diligently the things of the Lord." Would that every accountable man and woman would humble themselves before God and change their course if they are not teaching or living according to the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ. Apollos' humility combined with his knowledge of the Word of God led to change. If you were shown from God's Word that your beliefs are not in agreement with the Gospel, would you be that willing to change?

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